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The Mind and its Procedure in Buddhism

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Abstract

The mind (nāma) and matter (rūpa) are the two great constituents of the beings. Nāma refers to the mental phenomena of the four aggregates vedanā, saññā, sankhāra and vijñān. The mind is a formless, shapeless, non-physical field that functions to store, perceive, and analyze information. It originates when the six senses; eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin and the mind get contact with their corresponding objects; form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental constituents respectively. The mind and the brain are completely different entities. The mind is an agent that carries the seed to have the next life. The rūpa is a physical phenomenon. It is the material form of the body and of the eternal world. Earth (prithivi dhātu), water (apo dhātu), fire (tejo dhātu) and wind (vayo dhātu) element are the four fundamental elements in our body and the outer world. Mental phenomenon and physical phenomenon are different but dependents on each other. The objective of this article is to examine the mind and its procedure. Both original texts of Buddhism have been used as primary sources and published books and articles have been used as secondary sources of information. Life is all about the continuous process of mental aggregates and physical matter. The mind links the earlier life to the present and for the future. Suffering and happiness are the two major state of a mind. The worldly mind is the source of suffering whereas the enlightened mind is the source of endless happiness. Buddhism is a way of achieving endless happiness i.e nirvana through the practice of the noble path.

Keywords: *cetasika, citta, nāma, rūpa, vijñān*

Introduction

Manopubbangamā dhammā, manosethā manomayā

Manasā ce padutthena bhāsati vā karoti vā

Tato nam dukkham- anveti cakkam va vahato padam. -Dhammapada-Verse-I

(Mind precedes thoughts, mind is their chief, their quality is mind, if with base mind one speaks or acts, through that suffering follows one, like a wheel follows ox's foot.) (Buddharakkita, 2014, p. 3)

According to Buddhism, the two major constituents of the sentient beings are mind (nāma) and matter (rūpa). The mind (nāma) is the mental phenomenon of the immaterial aggregates of vedanā, saññā,

sansakāra and vijñānān. It is a form-less and non-physical shapeless or formless field that functions to perceive, analyses, and store information. The mind is the cause that links the previous life to the new life after the physical death of the previous life. Rūpa is the material world which has form or physical phenomenon. The four fundamental elements in Buddhism are: Prithivi dhatu, Apo Dhatu, Tejo dhatu and vayo dhatu. The earth element is of solidity that gives the foundational support to other elements. The body, skin, flesh, bone, teeth etc are the earth elements of a body. Apo Dhatu or the element of liquidity has the characteristics of cohesion. Water, urine, mucus, sweat, saliva, tears, etc. are material dominated by apo dhatu. Tejo Dhatu is the warmth of heat. It helps to warmth and cools the body, maintain the body temperature along with digestion. Vayo Dhatu facilitates to move the body. It is seen in the wind blowing about and pushing against things. This dhatu pushes or moves other aggregate matter. We have various categories of wind elements on the basis of its movement within a body. These four element has the qualities of attractive and repulsive forces, energy, and relative motion. The material world in Buddhism is the combination of these qualities in ākāsa, space. Besides, secondary elements such as smell, taste, gender, color, sound etc. are derived form or depend upon the four great elements (Karunadasa, 1967, p. 15). The mind and matter originate interdependently. They are mutual causes of the origination.

Objective and Methodology

The Buddha before 2600 years investigated the human world as the cause and effect of the mind and matter. Buddha's eighty-four thousand teachings are for the purification mind that breaks the interdependent chain of mind and matter (Walshe, 1995). It's a very much vast subject to explore the relation between these two constituent elements of worldly beings. Thus, the objective of this paper is to examine the mind and its procedure. Original texts of Buddhism have been used as primary sources of data and various published books and articles from the library or internet sites have been consulted to write this article. Various religious philosophies examined the mind in various ways, but in this article, only the Buddhist way has been explored. In the text, Buddhist terminology in Pali language has been used and Theravada is the philosophical base of the article.

The Mind

Mind is a prime subject of learning and practicing in Buddhist religion and philosophies. So far, the Buddha was the earliest person who comprehensively analyzed the mind, its constituents and procedure. In Buddhist literature, the mind is understood by *manas or mano* (mental power or mental faculty), *citta* (mind or thought), and *viññāna* (consciousness faculty) (Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri, 2014, Pp 7-48). *Manas, viññāna, and citta* are used synonymously by Buddhaghosa in *Visuddhimagga* and Vasubandhu in *Treasury of Higher Knowledge as mental reality* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mind-indian-buddhism>). Here, *manas* is an aspect of mind which defined as “*manute iti mana:*” in Abhidhrama. This means it think, collect and recollect information. Similarly, “*cinotiti cittam*” means awareness of the object and “*vijanātiti vijññān*” or awareness of the basis or the foundation of knowing (ālamvana) is *viññāna*. (Vajra, 2006, p. 16).

Abhidharma Pitaka, the philosophical teachings of the Buddha deal the mind as a combination of *citta* (consciousness) and *cetasika* (mental factors or *citta sankhāra*). *Citta* means awareness of an object. It is a complex unit of awareness (consciousness) of an object and group of mental factors called *cetasikas*. Each *citta* as a conscious event has its own object of awareness and each *citta* is distinguished by ethical quality, function and peculiar combination of mental factors (Bhikkhu, 1999, p. 76). In Abhidharma *citta* is defined as “*citoniti cittam*” or *citta* collects and selects the characteristics features of the physical phenomena or the mental phenomena (Vajra, 2006, p. 16). *Citta* is said to be the precursor of *cetasikas*. *Cetasikas* is a phenomenon arising on the mind which captures a particular quality of an object like color and size. We can say, the mind is like a screen in cinema whereas the mental factors are the images projected on the screen (Tsering, 2006, p 564-568). The Theravada tradition counted fifty-two types of *cetasikas* including the mind. If the *citta* arises with beautiful *cetasikas*: non-attachment, non-hatred, non-delusion, *alobha* and *advasha*, then the *citta* is called beautiful *citta* of *shovana citta*. And the opposite of these are of unwholesome *cetasikas*, and then it is called an unwholesome *citta*, an unwholesome consciousness. Actually, it is the *cetasikas* that differentiate one type of consciousness from another (Berzin, 2002). *Cetasikas* are mental factors that arise, develop, decay, and cease together with *citta*. Thus, *cetasikas* depend on *citta* for their arising. (Vasubandhu, 1988, p. 188). For example: A cup of tea can be compared to *citta*; pure water in it consciousness, tea, sugar, spices etc are mental factors. Therefore, *citta* and *cetasikas* influence the mind to be bad, good or neutral. It arises together with *citta* (consciousness), it dies together with *citta*, it takes the same object which *citta* takes and it shares a common physical base with *citta*. (Bodhi, 2007, p. 16). The mind recognizes and perceives an object as a whole and *cetasika* are short-lived *citta* that give individual information to the mind. *citta* is an agent (*ārammanam cīneti ti cittam*) that cognizes an object. *Citta* is the process of knowing an object. (Tenzin, 2005, p. 134). The process of cognition and recognition, data storing, analyzing, filtering, etc. are also the function of the mind.

The mind is a form-less and non-physical shapeless field that functions to perceive, analyses, and store information. It is a continuous flux of consciousness or awareness that flows from moment to moment continues beyond death. The flux of consciousness is not blocked by any physical objects. The mind depends on its components moment to moment so it is not static nor fixed as *atma* as defined in *vedic* religion. (Anacker (trans), 1984, p. 187). Through the sense organs, mind determines how people interpret the events that happen to them. The mind commands the physical, mental, and verbal actions.

In Buddhist literature, the body of the living being is compared to a guest house and the mind as a guest who lives at the guest house but leaves it a day and goes to another place. Therefore, the physical body of the being decays, dies, and further unites into the corresponding elements. However, the consciousness never vanishes until it gets liberation. The consciousness revolves into the six realms on the basis of its karma.

The mind and brain are different things. The brain is the physical object which has mass, weight, and structure while the mind is the non-physical phenomenon of cognition, recognition, and analyzing, memorizing, storing aspects of our brain. The mind seems to be within our brain but it diffuses throughout the whole body. Mind is the series of consciousness, cognitions, act of knowledge, momentary,

instantaneous which as soon as they arise, vanish and are replaced by other of consciousness, cognitions and act of knowledge. The series of consciousness comes from a beginning less (*anādi*) eternity flowing like a river which has no source (Churchland, 2002, p. 279). The mind of sentient beings has been categorized into the defiled mind of the worldly beings that contains three major poisons; greed, hatred, and ignorance and the enlightened or pure state of mind that does not have any defilement. The worldly mind is the source of suffering while the enlightened mind is the source of endless happiness. Thus, Buddhist teachings are to cultivate limitless wisdom and happiness by transforming the worldly mind into an enlightened mind.

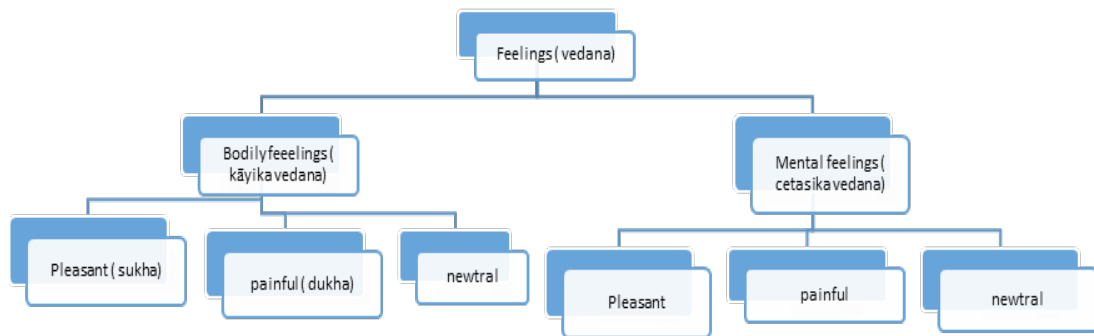
Mind; Aggregates of *Vedanā*, *Saññā*, *Sankhāra* and *Vijñān*

The word *vedanā*, feeling or sensation comes from the Sanskrit root *vid*, which means knowledge or to experience. (Vasubandhu, 1988, p. 427). *Vedanā* arises when the six sensory faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin, and mind) come to contact with its corresponding objects. Therefore, *vedanā* is the actual experience of the sense organs.

The process of arising *vedanā* is shown as follows in Abhidharma.

A sense organ, suppose an eye when comes to contact (*sparsa*) with its objects i.e form (*rūpa*) in presence of consciousness, arises eye consciousness or *chakshu vijñān* (Bodhi (trans), 2000, p. 204-250).

eye → form + consciousness → Eye Consciousness → *vedanā* (feeling). When *vedanā* arises the mind immediately categorized into three aspects as shown in figure.



When the *sukha vedanā* arises, our mind wants to attach with the object or situation. Similarly, when *dukha vedanā* arises, the person wants to be away from the situation in which he/she is getting suffered. The third one the indifference feeling means the neutral or neither pleasant nor painful *vedanā*. The neutral feeling is the point of the disappearance of the unpleasant or pleasant falling in the middle position. This is called equanimity in the Visuddhi Marga text. Similarly, other senses organs; ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind when contact with their objects; *śavda*, *gantha*, *rasa*, *sparsa*, and *dharma* respectively corresponding *viññāna* arise called *śota viññāna*, *ghāna viññāna*, *jivhā viññāna*, *kāya viññāna* and *mano viññāna*. (William S., 2003, P. 53). Thus, the *viññāna* is an aspect of perceiving the

qualities of an object, the act of distinguishing, a way of knowing, life force and re-linking seed.

Saññā (cognition or perception)

The grasping feature of a mind is called *saññā* or cognition. *Saññā* recognize the objects whether it is physical or mental. *Saññā* is the psychological process that happens through the contact of the six senses with the external world. Sense organs when grasp their objects, *cetasika dharma* or mental factors arises. These mental factors cognize an object on the basis of particularly qualities such as the color of an object, its shape, size, name, odor, taste and so on.

Saññā also react as a memory. It is *saññā* that facilitate one to recognize an object that has once been perceived by the mind through the senses. Without *saññā* nobody would remember names, parents, wives, children, houses, etc. The whole group of perception in past, present, future, one's own and external is designated *saññā skhandha*.

Volition (sankhāra)

Sankhāra is called the volitional effort or volitional action. When *saññā* arises due to *vedanā* volition arises. Volition is the mental factor that directs the mind in a particular direction. Volition is the act of forming, having been formed, or to both (Dev, 1956). Volition is also called *karma*. Buddhism classified karma into three major types.

- Physical (any activity) or bodily formation is bodily volition
- Verbal (speech, scolding, etc.), the verbal formation is verbal volition
- Mental or behavior (proliferating thoughts, cultivating thoughts of compassion, analyzing, practicing mindfulness, etc), the mental formation is mental volition.

Vijñān

Being conscious of something is *vijñān*. In *citta*, its characteristic of knowing of an object is called *vijñānā*. *Vijñān* is the knowing a sensory stimulus (visual, tactile, olfactory, auditory, or taste) or a thought (concerning the past, present, or future) (Vajra, 2006, p. 19). The mind is a flow that undergoes changing on the basis of six sense doors. These doors are eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. These are the medium through which the mind interacts with the objective world. the Six sense doors and the six *vijñān* are as follows.

chakshu vijñān or: A sense organ (eye) when consciously falls into a form(matter) arise eye-consciousness or visual consciousness. It is way of being aware of physical form and its phenomenon through the sensory cell of the eye. Similarly, other five consciousness; *śota viññāna* or ear-consciousness, *ghāna viññāna* or nose-consciousness, *jivhā viññāna* or tongue-consciousness, *kāya viññāna* or body-consciousness and *mano viññāna* or mental-consciousness function when the organs associate with their objects (Vajra, 2006, p. 19).

Flow of Mind

The mind is created by our actions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions in a linear way due to cause and effect. It is a flow of present feelings, thoughts, emotions due to the result of previous moments and the

present feelings, thoughts, and emotions that give rise to the future mind. The flow of cause and effect on the mind is influenced by *karma* (Thera, 1977, p. 348). Thus, the mind does not inherit our parents or any of others but arises on us due to our *karma*. The mind works on the basis of information supplied by or the five senses, the input devices of a mind. Previously stored *saṅkhāra* into a mind is also serves as the input device for the origination of mind. The mind or the present *citta* originates when the sense organs contact with their objects as shown.

senses organs	senses objects	conscious arise	the locus of origin
Eye	form (visible colors and shape) and consciousness	Visual awareness	visual system
Ear	sound	Auditory awareness	auditory system
Nose	smell	Olfactory consciousness	olfactory system
tongue	taste	Gustatory consciousness	gustatory system
body	touch	Tactile consciousness	tactile system
mind	mental constituents (dharma)	Mental consciousness	cognitive system

Thus, the mind is originated into the bodily and mental system within the body. For instance, eye-consciousness or visual awareness arises when an object gets contact with the eyeball in presence of *vijñān* (Shakya, 2003, p. 269-283). Similarly, body-consciousness arises through the medium of body, tongue consciousness arises through the medium of the tongue, and so on.

The process of origin of consciousness and thought, and emotion on the mind takes a very short time. For example, billions of thought-moment can occur and complete with the time of twinkling of an eye. Three major steps i.e arising (*uppāda*), static or development (*thiti*), and cessation or dissolution (*bhanga*) exists in a thought process. These three steps can be compared to birth, decay, and death. Series of thought-process in a mind continued throughout the whole life from birth to death. Immediately, after the cessation of the first thought-moment, the subsequent moment of *uppāda* is raised without any interruption like a flow of a stream. *Uppāda* → *thiti* → *bhanga* → *Uppāda* → *thiti* → *bhanga*..... continue... . Thus, after the dissolution of pervious consciousness (previous *citta*), the new consciousness (new *citta*) arises which is affected by the earlier one. Thus, it is called *citta santāna*. The space or time or mental state between these two *cittas* is called *bhavanga citta*. Millions of *bhavanga* rises and decay after the origination of new *citta*. Each subsequent unit of consciousness is affected by the previous thought-moments. In this way, flows of consciousness rise and fall on the mind. Abhidharma explains that, one complete cycle of a thought has seventeen thought moments in uniform order. This thought order as follow is called *citta-niyāma*, psychic order (Vajra, 2006, p. 107).

Consciousness Links the Previous Life to a New Life

Buddhism deals that the *citta* or the consciousness of a living being never dies at its physical death. The cycle of birth and death is a synonyms *samsara* or suffering. This cycle is considered to be *dukkha*, unsatisfactory and painful (Harvey, 2002, p. 32). At the moment of physical death, the consciousness departs from the body is called *chyuti citta* or the departed consciousness. Due to previous karma, *chyuti citta* accumulates the seed to have new life in *samsara*. The last *citta*, *chyuti citta* undergoes

various changes and seeks a new safe cave. The safe cave is nothing but a womb. The *chyuti citta* enters into a womb at the moment of copulation of parents. Thus, changed *chyuti citta* transformed as *pratisandhi citta* that links the previous consciousness to a newly conceive life. The mental state at the moment of death determines the future life and what will be the beings arise. How the person has lived in the past constitute the present and future. In this way, the *viññān* is the cause of the further development of mind (*nāma*) and matter (*rūpa*). It is the *Viññān* that links among earlier life, present to the future existence. Thus, the stream of consciousness goes on until existence ceases.

Conclusion

Life is all about the continuous process of mental aggregates and physical matter. The mind is the prime aspect of which controls all the physical and mental actions. It links the earlier life to the present and for the future. Suffering and happiness are the two major state of a mind. The worldly mind is the source of suffering whereas the enlightened mind is the source of endless happiness. Thus, Buddha's teaching is a way of cessation of all types of physical and mental sufferings of the samsara and to achieve ultimate and endless happiness i.e nirvana through the practice of the noble path.

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