



# The Origins and Development of Abhidhamma

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## Abstract

The teachings of The Buddha in the course of forty five years of His Buddhahood have been divided into three collections called *Tipiṭaka* in *pāli*, meaning ‘Three Baskets’ literally. The first collection is known as ‘*Sutta piṭaka*’. It is the conventional teaching (*Vohāra desana*) in which Buddha used common vocabulary to explain His teachings. Practical aspects of tranquility meditation and insight-meditation are included in this collection. The second collection is called ‘*Vinaya piṭaka*’. It is the authoritative teaching (*Ānā-desana*) in which Buddha used His authority over the monks to lay down rules and disciplines for them to follow. These disciplines embody the highest code of ethics and can surely purify one’s action, speech and thought, thus making one noble and respectful. The third collection is ‘*Abhidhamma piṭaka*’. It is the higher teaching of the Buddha.

The aim of this article is to study and present *Abhidhamma* is unique in Buddhism. It is one of the Tipitaka Pāli texts which explains dhammas in detail and in an analytical way. Regarding the explanation of dhammas, it does so in more detail than Suttanta. That is why the text is called “*Abhidhamma*”. *Abhidhamma* explains the process of birth and death in detail. In addition to defining consciousness, it also analyses and classifies thoughts mainly from an ethical standpoint. Various types of consciousness are also set forth in detail, as they arise through the six sense-doors. Modern psychology has begun to acknowledge that it comes within the scope of *Abhidhamma* for the reason that it deals with the mind, with thoughts, thought-processes, and mental states. Buddhism has, from the very beginning, taught psychology without a psyche.

**Key Words:** Historical, Abhidhamma, psychology, higher teaching of the Buddha.

## Introduction

The teachings of Lord Buddha in the course of forty five years of His Buddhahood have been divided into three collections called *Tipiṭaka* in *pāli*, meaning ‘Three Baskets’ literally.<sup>1</sup> The first collection is known as ‘*Sutta piṭaka*’. It is the conventional teaching (*Vohāra desana*) in which Buddha used common vocabulary to explain His teachings. Practical aspects of tranquility meditation and insight-meditation are included in this collection<sup>2</sup>. The second collection is called ‘*Vinaya piṭaka*’. It is the authoritative teaching (*Ānā-desana*) in which Buddha used His authority over the monks to lay down rules and disciplines for them to follow. These disciplines embody the highest code of ethics and can surely purify one’s action, speech and thought, thus making one noble and respectful. The third collection is ‘*Abhidhamma piṭaka*’. It is the higher teaching of the Buddha<sup>3</sup>. Here, the Buddha employed abstract terms to describe the ultimate realities (*paramatthas*) in the Universe and *Nibbana* which is the highest goal of Buddhism. Therefore, *Abhidhamma* may be regarded as the ultimate teaching (*Paramattha desanā*) of Lord Buddha<sup>4</sup>. The principles and the causal relations which Buddha expounded in *Abhidhamma* are so natural, so logical and so beautiful that they can pin-point the root cause of miseries in the world and the ways to eradicate these miseries. The most wonderful thing about Buddha’s teachings is that the teaching contain both theory and practice, and they clearly and exactly define the human values, the best moral code, the eternal peace and the Noble Eightfold Path leading to that peace. All these valuable teachings have been verified time and again by millions of *Ariyas*, i.e., noble persons who had trodden on the path, and can still be verified at any time any an able person who will earnestly and steadfastly follow the path<sup>5</sup>. In my assignment, I am going to give a details account of the origins and development process of the *Abhidhamma*.

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<sup>1</sup> Silva, C.L.A.De, *A Treasure on Buddhist Philosophy Abhidhamma*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. Page no. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Thera, Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies : Research in Buddhist Psychology*; Taiwan : Buddha Dhamma Education Foundation, 2002. Page no. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Mon, Dr. Mehm Tin, *Buddha abhidhamma*; Taiwan: Buddha Dhamma education foundation, 2002. Page no. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Thera, Narada Maha, *A manual of Abhidhamma (Abhidhamma Sangha)*; Taiwan: Buddha Dhamma education foundation, 2001. Page no. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Thittila, ashin, *Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures*; London 1986. Page no. 140.

## The Significance of *Abhidhamma*

*Sutta piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma piṭaka* are collectively known as *Dhamma*; a *pāli* word meaning ‘the doctrine or the teaching’ of the Buddha<sup>6</sup>. *Dhamma* is the doctrine that can salvage persons who abide by *Dhamma* from falling into the four lower abodes (*apayas*) and that can purify the mind from defilements so as to achieve lasting peace and happiness. The prefix ‘*Abhi*’ is used in the sense of preponderant, great, excellent, sublime, distinct, marvelous, etc. Moreover, Traditional sources offer two explanations for the term *Abhidhamma*: “with regard to (*abhi*) the teaching (*dhamma*)” or the “highest or further (*abhi*) teaching (*dhamma*).” The subject of *Abhidhamma* analysis was, of course, the teaching (*dharma*) as embodied in the dialogues of the Buddha and his disciples<sup>7</sup>. However, *Abhidhamma* did not merely restate or recapitulate the teaching of the sutras, but reorganized their content and explicated their implicit meaning through commentary. In *Abhidhamma*, the specific content of the various individual sutras was abstracted and reconstituted in accordance with new analytical criteria, thereby allowing one to discern their true message. This true message, as set down in *Abhidhamma* texts, consists of the discrimination of the various events and components (*dhamma*) that combine to form all of experience. *Abhidhamma pitaka* is more preponderant, more sublime and more marvelous than *Sutta pitaka* in the sense that *Abhidhamma pitaka* contains more *Dhamma* groups (*Dhammakkhandhas*) than *Sutta pitaka* and *Vinaya pitaka* (*Abhidhamma* consists of 42,000 *dhammaskhandhas* whereas *Sutta pitaka* and *Vinaya pitaka* contain 21,000 *dhammaskhandhas* each). The Buddha used more numerous methods in expounding *Abhidhamma* than when He taught *Sutta Dhamma*; and In *Abhidhamma* Buddha analyzed mind and matter in minute detail in terms of the ultimate realities known as ‘*paramathas*’<sup>8</sup>. At a glance, *Abhidhamma* is a doctrine in as much as it deals with the most general causes and principles of things. It is also an ethical system because it enables one to realize the ultimate goal i.e. *Nibbana*. As it deals with the working of the mind, thoughts, thought process and psychic factors, it is also a system of

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<sup>6</sup>Thera, Narada Maha, *A manual of Abhidhamma (Abhidhamma Sangha)*; Taiwan: Buddha Dhamma education foundation, 2001. Page no. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Buswell, Robert E., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*; New York: Thomson Publications, 2003. Page no. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Thera, Narada Maha, *A manual of Abhidhamma (Abhidhamma Sangha)*; Taiwan: Buddha Dhamma education foundation, 2001. Page no. 3.

psychology. *Abhidhamma* is therefore generally translated as the psycho ethical philosophy in Buddhism<sup>9</sup>.

## The Origin and Historical background of the *Abhidhamma*

Theravada orthodoxy assigns that *Abhidhamma* was the authentic words by the Buddha himself. In accordance to the great commentary (*mahā aṭṭhakatha*), Ācariya *Buddhagoshosa* quoted that “*what is known as Abhidhamma is not the province nor the sphere of a disciple; it is the province, the sphere of the Buddhas*”<sup>10</sup>. The commercial tradition holds, moreover, that it was not merely the spirit of the *Abhidhamma*, but the letter as well, that was expounded by the Buddha during his life time. In below, I am going to describe how the *Abhidhamma pitaka* was originated through the Buddha himself, and the Buddha preaching of *Abhidhamma* to the *Devas* and human beings.

### 1. Contemplation of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*

In accidence to the *Atthasālinī*, in the fourth week after the Buddha’s enlightenment, while the Blessed One was still dwelling in the vicinity of the *Bodhi* tree, he sat in a jewel house (*ratanaghara*) in the northwest direction<sup>11</sup>. This jewel house was not literary a house made of precious stones, but was the place where he contemplated the seven books of *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, and also the Buddha was placed at his disposal by the *Devas* by *Iddhi* (supernatural) powers<sup>12</sup>. When the Buddha review the *Abhidhamma pitaka*, it was not till he delved into the depth of the most subtle and abstruse *Dhamma* in the *Mahā Paṭṭhāna* which deals with the twenty four causal circumstances or relations that invariably take place in any pleasurable interest amounting to rapture<sup>13</sup>. The psychological pleasure and happy feelings were so great that, as a result of the brilliant and sparkling condition of the blood associated with the heart-base, which occurred in the consciousness accompanied by joy

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<sup>9</sup>Thittila, Ashin, *Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures*; London 1986. Page no. 141.

<sup>10</sup>Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society,1993. Page no. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Thera, Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies : Research in Buddhist Psychology*; Thaïwan : Buddha Dhamma Education Foundation, 2002. Page no. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup>Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Mendis, M.K.G., *The Abhidhamma Practice*; Access to date : 27 May, 2017. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/mendis/wheel322.html>)

and connected with knowledge, that the six coloured viz. indigo, golden, red, white, tawny, and dazzling; emanated from the body downwards penetrating the earth, water and air and upwards as far as the sphere of neither perception nor no perception and in the other eight directions endlessly as the four great essentials constitute the elements of the world. How this extraordinary and almost incredible phenomena took place is explained in this manner that the sparking and brilliant material qualities originating from the mind occasioned a similar condition of the skin by their diffusion. From that cause the colour of visible object which was occasioned by mind and physical environment, stood without the slightest movement covering a space of almost one hundred and twenty feet<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Preaching *Abhidhamma* to the *Devas*

The Buddha, whose compassion to all living beings alike was no less than the wisdom and the insight he had acquired by practicing the ten *Parāmitas* for no less a period than four *Asankheyya Kappas* (incalculable eons) and another *lakh* of *Kappas* (eons) since the proclamation by the Buddha *Dipankara* that the ascetic *Sumedha* would attain enlightenment and be known as Buddha *Gautama*, in the seventh year of *Buddhahood* performed “twin miracle” near the foot of the mango tree at *Gandamba* so called because it was planted by the gardener *Ganda*, not far *Sāvatti*, when five hundred men who in their previous existence were bats who had zealously listened to the recital and rehearsal of the *Abhidhamma* by two brothers of the *Sangha*, decided to become pupils of *Sariputta* and at a later stage were the first to learn without much difficulty all the *Dhamma* embodied in the seven books or *Prakaranas* of the *Abhidhamma*. The reason for performing the “Twin Miracle” by the Buddha was to dispel erroneous views and ideas that the Non-Arahants such as *Nighanta Nathaputta* and others head of themselves and with a view to conclusively proving that the *Tathagatha* had all the attributes of the Buddha<sup>15</sup>. The huge assembly present incidentally acquired great merit and thereafter his followers both the brothers and the laymen demonstrated greater zeal and faith and strenuously followed the Eightfold Noble Path to attain *Nibbana*. The enlightened one then out of compassion to the *Devas* and *Brahmans* repaired to the *Tavatimsa Devaloka* (Heaven of the thirty Gods) in three steps by *Iddhi* (supernatural power) and was seated in the *Paricchattaka Sailasana* (Sakra’s

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<sup>14</sup> Silva, C.L.A.De, *A Treasure on Buddhist Philosophy Abhidhamma*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. Page no. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 10-11.

rock seat) near the foot of the *Paricchattaka* tree where He preached the *Abhidhamma* for three full months to his deceased mother, who is now born as *Santhushitha Deva*, and other Devas and *Brahmans* who had assembled from the ten thousand worlds, in detail with the hope of making them realize the four Ariyan Truths, for which a knowledge of *Abhidhamma* is absolutely necessary, for the subject deals in the highest and ultimate sense of things springing into being as facts as abstracted from or divested of names<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. Preaching of Abhidhamma in the world of human beings

The Buddha daily visited *Uturukuru Dīpa* for the purpose of obtaining his mid day meals and partook of his meals near *Anotataha* lake in Himalaya and during this period of rest He took at *Handunavanaya*. Venerable *Sariputta* daily came to attend to the necessary requirements<sup>17</sup>. Thereafter *Māthikā* or the headings of the discourses preached to the *Devas* were intimated to Venerable *Sariputta Maha Thera*, who in turn preached the *Abhidhamma* in detail beginning from *Dhammasanghini* and ending in the *Mahā Paṭṭhāna* to the five hundred disciples<sup>18</sup>. By reason of the fact that these disciples in a previous existence, even as bats, had the fortune of hearing the recital and rehearsal of the *Abhidhamma* by two *Bhikkhus* and doing such moral acts as were conducive to the acquirement of knowledge, wisdom, intellect and insight in the round of births, these disciples with the greatest ease mastered the full *Abhidhamma pitaka* and were able to recite same from beginning till end<sup>19</sup>. From that time onwards the *Abhidhamma* was learnt by papillary descendants till the time of the *Arahant Upaliya*, *Dasakaya*, *Sunakaya*, *Sigavaya* and *Moggaliputta Tissa* etc. It was rehearsed and recited at the three convocations held under the leadership of *Maha Kassapa*, *Yasa* and *Moggaliputta Tissa*, and was preserved in its pristine purity<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Silva, C.L.A.De, *A Treasure on Buddhist Philosophy Abhidhamma*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. Page no. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 10-11.

<sup>19</sup> Mendis, M.K.G., *The Abhidhamma Practice*; Access to date : 27 May, 2017. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/mendis/wheel322.html>)

<sup>20</sup> Silva, C.L.A.De, *A Treasure on Buddhist Philosophy Abhidhamma*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. Page no. 6.

## Doctrinal and textual Development of Abhidhamma Pitaka:

After the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana* (Passed away), elder *Mahakassapa Thera* other leading disciples wanted to collect and compile the whole teachings of the Buddha. When they had the first Buddhist council they compiled all the discourses delivered by the Buddha categorizing in to *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhīma Nikāya*, *Samyutta Nikāya* and so on. This was a great tasks completed by the senior monks in the first Buddhist council and the second Buddhist council also done the same thing. However, investigating the *pāli suttas* and *Abhidhamma* doctrine the earliest doctrinal development of the *Abhidhamma* philosophy started from the *suttas*, such as the *Saṅgīti sutta* and *Dasuttara Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*; explained doctrinal terms in the framework of a catechism<sup>21</sup>. Here, the doctrinal tenets explained by an impersonal technical terminology without literary embellishments or reliance on smiles, metaphors, and stories to illustrate them. In accordance to the *Saṅgīti sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, we see that *Sabbe Satta āhāritthika*; it means all living beings are depend on food, two doctrines : *Nāma* and *rūpa* or mentality and materiality, three doctrines such as *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha* and *alobha*, *adosa*, *amoha*, and four doctrines : *kāyanupassana*, *vedanānupassana*, *cittānupassana*, *dhammanupassana*<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, researching the *Abhidhamma pitaka*, the two main components of the *Abhidhamma* are *Nāma* and *rūpa* or mind and matter<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, *Dasuttara sutta* also includes a similar kind of lists of doctrines. It is important to note that these two discourses; the *Saṅgīti sutta* and *Dasuttara Sutta* were delivered by the Buddha's disciples. After passing away of the Jainism leader *Niganthanathaputta*, his disciples disputed over his teachings. The Venerable Ananda considering this incident asked the Buddha about the steps that should be taken if the same situation occurred after the Buddha's passing away<sup>24</sup>. Following the Buddha's advice the Venerable *Sariputta* delivered this *Saṅgītisutta* in order to prevent such disputes among the disciples<sup>25</sup>. And the *Dhamma* theory or *dhammavāda*, which is consider as a

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<sup>21</sup> Karunadasa, Y, *The Theravada Abhidhamma*; Hong Kong : Hong Kong University press, 2010.  
Page no. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Class Handout of Professor Tialk.

<sup>23</sup> Karunadasa, Y, *The Theravada Abhidhamma*; Hong Kong : Hong Kong University press, 2010.  
Page no. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Class Handout of Professor Tialk.

<sup>25</sup> Thera, Nyanaponika, *The Life of Sariputta*; Access to date: 27 May, 2017. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel090.html>)

new innovation of the *Abhidhamma*, the antecedent trends that led to its formulation and its basic ingredients can be traced to the early Buddhist scriptures which seek to analyze empiric individually and its relation to the external world<sup>26</sup>.

The seven texts of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, the third division of the *Tipitaka*, offer an extraordinarily detailed analysis of the basic natural principles that govern mental and physical processes. Whereas the *Sutta* and *Vinaya Pitakas* lay out the practical aspects of the Buddhist path to Awakening, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* provides a theoretical framework to explain the causal underpinnings of that very path. In *Abhidhamma* philosophy the familiar psycho-physical universe is distilled to its essence: an intricate web of impersonal phenomena and processes unfolding at an inconceivably rapid pace from moment to moment, according to precisely defined natural laws<sup>27</sup>. The seven treasures treatises of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* are namely *Dhammasaṅgañī*, *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhātukathā*, *Puggalapaññatti*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Yamaka* and *Paṭṭhāna*<sup>28</sup>. In below, I am going to describe the details of the *Abhidhamma* texts how it developed by the Buddha and His *Sravakas* (disciples).

### 1. *Dhammasaṅgañī*

The first book, the *Dhammasaṅgañī* is the fountainhead of the entire system. The title may be translated “*Enumeration of phenomena*”, and the work does in fact undertake to compile an exhaustive catalogue of the ultimate constituents of existence<sup>29</sup>. The *Dhammasaṅgañī* is opening with the *Mātikā*, the schedule of categories which serves as the framework, was spoken by the Buddha on the Ethio-Psychological law called *Abhidhamma*. This *Mātikā* forms the text matter of the whole *Abhidhamma pitaka*<sup>30</sup>. The *Mātikā* itself consists of three parts; namely, *Tika- Mātikā*, *Dutu- Mātikā* and *Suttanta- Mātikā*. Here, the *Suttantika- Mātikā* has been done by the Buddha’s one of the chief disciple Sariputta Thera by extracting portions from *Eka-Nipata* and *Duka-Nipata* in *Angutatra Nikāya* and from

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<sup>26</sup> Karunadasa, Y, *The Theravada Abhidhamma*; Hong Kong : Hong Kong University press, 2010. Page no. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Abhidhamma Pitaka :The Basket of Abhidhamma*; Access to date : 27 October, 2011. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/abhi>)

<sup>28</sup> Mon, Dr. Mehm Tin, *Buddha abhidhamma*; Taiwan: Buddha Dhamma education foundation, 2002. Page no. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

the *Saṅgīti Sutta* and *Dasuttara Sutta* in *Dīgha Nikāya*<sup>31</sup>. *Suttanta-Mātika* is still further explained and commented upon in *Nikkhepa Kānda* of *Dhamma-Sanganipakarana*<sup>32</sup>. Any person who has attained a thorough and critical knowledge of this *Mātika* ought to possess a complete knowledge of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.

## 2. *Vibhaṅga*

The *Vibhaṅga* is considered as the “*Book of Analysis*”, consists of eighteen chapters each a self contained dissertation, dealing in turn with the following: aggregates, sense-bases, elements, truths, faculties, dependent arising, foundation of mindfulness, supreme efforts, means of accomplishment, factors of enlightenment, the eightfold path, *jhanas*, analytical knowledge, kinds of knowledge, minor points, *dhammāhadaya* (the heart of the doctrine) and a psycho-cosmic topography of the Buddhist universe<sup>33</sup>.

## 3. *Dhātukathā*

The *Dhātukathā*, the ‘*Discourses on Elements*’, Explains the five aggregates in various ways, pointing out their connections with bases, elements etc., With this one for other four Commentary ‘*Pancappakarana*’.<sup>34</sup>

## 4. *Puggalapaññatti*

The *Puggalapaññatti*, “*Concepts of Individual*”; it has six sections dealing with the concepts of aggregates, bases, elements, truths, senses and individuals<sup>35</sup>. Here, only the concept of individuals is dealt with in detail. The author first gives a table of contents of the whole work, and then follows the method of the *Anguttara Nikaya* grouping human types first under one term, then under two and so on up to ten. Several of the sections are found, almost complete, in the corresponding Sections of the *Anguttara Nikaya* and others are found in the *Saṅgīti Sutta*<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Silva, C.L.A.De, *A Treasure on Buddhist Philosophy Abhidhamma*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. Page no. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> Class Handout of Professor Tilak.

<sup>35</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Class Handout of Professor Tilak

### 5. *Kathāvatthu*

The *Kathāvatthu*, “*Points of Controversy*”, is a polemical treatise ascribed to the elder *Moggaliputta Tissa*. He is said to have compiled it during the time of King *Ashoka*, two hundred and eighteen years after the Buddha’s *parinibbana*. The commentaries defined its inclusion in the canon by holding the Buddha himself, foreseeing the errors that would arise, laid down the outline of rebuttal, which *Moggaliputta Tissa* merely filled in according to the Master’s intention<sup>37</sup>.

### 6. *Yamaka*

The *Yamaka*, in the form of questions and answers, deals with the same subjects such as aggregates, bases and elements, pointing out their interconnections. It includes pairs of questions, hence the name “*Yamaka*”<sup>38</sup>.

### 7. *Patthāna*

The *Patthāna*, the “*Book of Conditions relations*”, is the most important work of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. Thus, it is traditionally designed the “Great Treatise” (*mahapakarana*)<sup>39</sup>.

## In Depth Studies and Popularity of *Abhidhamma Pitaka* in the Buddhist Countries

*Abhidhamma Pitaka* not only developed by the Buddha and His disciples, it also developed by some Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar. It is believed that *Abhidhamma* was introduced into Sri Lanka when Venerable *Mahinda*, a leader of the *Asoka* mission, arrived on the island. During the earlier period, the study of *Abhidhamma* could be through the *Pali* text and its commentary, *Mahā aṭṭhakathā*. Before or at the time of Venerable *Buddhaghosa*, there appeared celebrated Abhidhammic scholars in

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<sup>37</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Class Handout of Professor Tilak

<sup>39</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 12.

Sri Lanka<sup>40</sup>. Their names and views are found here and there in the commentaries of Venerable *Buddhaghosa*. They are *Tipiṭaka Cūlānāga*, *Moravāpivāsi Mahādatta*, *Tipiṭaka Mahādhammarakkhita*, *Tipitaka Cūlābhaya*, and *Abhidhammika Godatta*<sup>41</sup>. They are believed to be senior to Venerable *Buddhaghosa*, the new commentator. Their *Abhidhammic* views are referenced significantly in his books. Actually *Abhidhamma* is so profound that it is hard to understand. Students need easy access to that subject. Therefore, the *Abhidhammic* scholars in Sri Lanka tried to write concise books on *Abhidhamma*. Venerable *Buddhadatta*, a contemporary of Venerable *Buddhaghosa*, wrote two books: *Abhidhammāvatāra* (An Approach to *Abhidhamma*) and *Rūpārūpa-vibhāga* (The Analysis of Mind and Matter)<sup>42</sup>. In about the ninth century A.D., there appeared an *Abhidhammic* scholar in Sri Lanka. He is Venerable *Anuruddha* who came from Southern India to Sri Lanka. He wrote three books on *Abhidhamma*: *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*, Compendium of *Abhidhamma*, *Paramattha vinicchaya*, the Clarification of Reality, and *Nāmarūpa-pariccheda*, the Analysis of Mind and Matter. Through these books the study of *Abhidhamma* flourished and is kept alive<sup>43</sup>.

Moreover, Buddhism could have been introduced into Myanmar earlier than the Asoka mission that arrived in *Suvaṇṇa bhūmi*, a part of Myanmar. When Buddhism was introduced, the *Tipiṭaka Pāli* texts could have been brought. During the reign of King *Manuhā* in early 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D., there were Buddhist monks who were well-versed in *Tipiṭaka* in *Suvaṇṇa bhūmi*<sup>44</sup>. When King *Anawratha* united the entire Myanmar people into one kingdom, Buddhism became more prevalent. The king brought *Tipiṭaka* books from *Suvaṇṇabhūmi* as well as from Sri Lanka and established a library to keep them. The study of *Abhidhamma* started to become popular in Myanmar. At the time of King *Navapati Seethū*, 1173 A.D., Venerable *Saddhammajotipāla*, well known as *Sappada* (*chappada*), was back from Sri Lanka after having made a long-term study. He wrote two books on *Abhidhamma*, namely *Saṅkhepa vaṇṇanā* (Concise Explanation) and *Nāma cāradīpaka*

<sup>40</sup> Silva, C.L.A.De, *A Treasure on Buddhist Philosophy Abhidhamma*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. Page no. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Karunadasa, Y, *The Theravada Abhidhamma*; Hong Kong : Hong Kong University press, 2010. Page no. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Nandamalabhibhivamsa, *Abhidhamma : Part 1*; Myanmar: Mahasudhayon Monastery, 1997. Page no. 13.

(the Exposition of Mind Appearance)<sup>45</sup>. During the reign of King *Kyaswā*, 1234 A.D. the people of *Bagan* were interested in *Abhidhamma*. The king and other members of the royal families earnestly studied *Abhidhamma*. The king wrote a small book, *Paramattha vindu* (A Spot of Reality). Some of the women in Bagan, it was said, even those who had children, learnt a section of *Patthāna* by heart. It was recorded that there was a minister who was well-versed in *Tipiṭaka*. When the era of *Pinya* (1312 A.D.) started the study of *Abhidhamma* continued to be propagated. At the time of King *Thiha Thura* (1350- 1359 A.D.) Ven. *Ñānakitti* wrote the two books on *Abhidhamma*, namely, *Atthasālinī-yojanā* and *Sammohavinodanīyojanā*. In “yojanā” book it gives Pāli to Pāli explanation. When the era of *Inwa* (726 A.D.) dawned, the study of *Abhidhamma* flourished in Myanmar. The list of *Abhidhamma* texts that were studied<sup>46</sup>. During the reign of King *Thalun* (1629-1648 A.D.), *Abhidhamma* was declared as a compulsory subject. Therefore, the study of *Abhidhamma* was prevalent among Buddhist monks in Burma. A large number of books on *Abhidhamma* either in Pāli or in Burmese appeared in this period. During the *Konbaung* period (1753-1885), the study of *Abhidhamma* continued to be popular. In monastic examinations, *Abhidhamma* was a compulsory subject. In Myanmar there are a large number of *Abhidhamma* texts that are edited and printed. There are seven *Abhidhamma* treatises which are of Indian origin. The commentaries and sub-commentaries which were written in Sri Lanka, number 26. In reference to those Pāli and Commentaries, *Abhidhammic* scholars in Myanmar wrote numerous books that dealt with *Abhidhamma*. Those which are written in Pāli number 43, those written in Pāli and Burmese number 112, and those that give general information on *Abhidhamma* amount to 333 books, according to the list of “*Abhidhamma History*” in Burmese<sup>47</sup>.

## Conclusion

Finally, to sum up, *Abhidhamma* is unique in Buddhism. It is one of the *Tipiṭaka* Pāli texts which explains dhammas in detail and in an analytical way. Regarding the explanation of dhammas, it does so in more detail than *Suttanta*. That is why the text is called “*Abhidhamma*”. *Abhidhamma* explains the process of birth and death in detail. In

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Page no. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

addition to defining consciousness, it also analyses and classifies thoughts mainly from an ethical standpoint. Various types of consciousness are also set forth in detail, as they arise through the six sense-doors. Modern psychology has begun to acknowledge that it comes within the scope of *Abhidhamma* for the reason that it deals with the mind, with thoughts, thought-processes, and mental states. Buddhism has, from the very beginning, taught psychology without a psyche<sup>48</sup>.

In the Theravada tradition, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is held in the highest esteem, revered as the crown jewel of the Buddhist scriptures. As examples of this high regard, in Sri Lanka King *Kassapa V* (tenth Century A.C.) had the whole *Abhidhamma Pitaka* inscribed on gold plates and the first book in set in gems, while another king, *Vijayabahu* (eleventh century) used to study the *Dhammasaṅgāti* each morning before taking up his royal duties and composed a translation of it into Sinhala<sup>49</sup>. On a cursory reading, however, this veneration given to the *Abhidhamma* seems difficult to understand. The reason the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is do deeply reversed only becomes clear as a result of through study and profound reflection, undertaken in the conviction that these ancient books have something significant to communicate. *Abhidhamma* also helps the student of Buddhism to fully comprehend the *Anatta* (No-Soul) doctrine which forms the crux of Buddhism<sup>50</sup>. To a person who reads this book in a superficial manner, *Abhidhamma* appears as dry as dust, but to the wise truth-seekers, it is an indispensable guide as well as an intellectual treat. The reader who reads this book with deep thinking cannot fail to find it with plenty of food for thought and which will help him tremendously to increase his wisdom so essential for leading an ideal Buddhist way of life, and the highest realization of Ultimate Truth, *Nibbāna*.

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<sup>48</sup> Thera, Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies : Research in Buddhist Psychology*; Thaïwan : Buddha Dhamma Education Foundation, 2002. Page no. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*; Colombo: Buddhist Publication society, 1993. Page no. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Thera, Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies : Research in Buddhist Psychology*; Thaïwan : Buddha Dhamma Education Foundation, 2002. Page no. 2.

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