

## **Presupposition in Phenomenology: A Critical Examination in Theravada Buddhist Philosophy**

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### **Abstract**

By and large, there are at least two methods: deductive and inductive, human beings basically utilize to gain varieties of knowledge. On the one hand, in deductive method, the knowledge is logically acquired through inference to general law or principle. In doing this, one should try to find out such law or principle while making claim of knowledge. On the other hand, in inductive method, the knowledge is primarily produced by reference to the experimentation or observation wherein its result contains possibility. In this matter, one should find out the possible grounds of observation or experimentation while making claim of any knowledge. According to phenomenological study, the real knowledge is methodologically acquired through what things themselves demand. If so, there is no room for presupposition because it claims that presupposition leads to falsify the real knowledge. In this regard, it seems so obvious that there will be no room for those types of reasoning: deductive and inductive methods, in phenomenology because both by its very nature of reasons possess some aspects of presupposition. In this article, an attempt was critically made to argue that while making claim of knowledge to some extent there is certain presupposition in the method; human beings by nature cannot purely acquire knowledge in the way phenomenology does. In support of this claim, the Buddhist philosophical standpoints concerning human nature will be taken up for a clear-cut examination.

**Keywords :** Presupposition, Phenomenological study, Human nature

### **Introduction**

It is a well known fact that when it comes to study phenomenology as a subject matter in philosophical class, at the outset, the nature of phenomenology must be clearly realized by students whose backgrounds vary in terms of many subject matters they were familiarized with. In this matter, it is strongly believed and sometime even taken for granted that the usual way general students basically acquire their knowledge is through two types of techniques, deduction and induction. On the one hand, in deduction, (Pratoom Angurarohita, 2010 : 22-25) a conclusion is claimed to follow logically from its premises, this means that this technique must begin with the general and end with the particular through arguments based on laws, rules, or even other widely accepted principles. On the other hand, in induction, a conclusion is claimed to be more or less probable, but

no certain, this actually means that the arguments are generally made from observations or experiences whereby the particular or specific thing can be reasonably claimed as the ground for general.

This is diametrically opposed to the techniques mentioned above when phenomenology comes to be obviously and differently characterized as the unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears. (The Phenomenology Reader, 2002 : 1) It is further claimed that phenomenology is a rigorous science in the sense that knowledge that is basically acquired through this approach is without any presupposition as always were done by naturalism, scientism, and reductionism and other forms of explanation that draw attention away from the appearance of phenomena themselves. All knowledge acquired by means of those ways is somehow grounded upon some kind of presupposition and what is presupposed is what has not been proven in the form of false or truth yet and since deductive and inductive methods are by nature of reasoning connected with presupposition in some ways then this consequently showed that the traditional ways, deduction and induction, leading to what can be claimed to be any kind of knowledge somehow cannot be authenticated. In this regard, it can be said that as long as presuppositionlessness is utilized while acquiring any kind of knowledge on reality then the things themselves can be achieved. Viewed from this angle, it was found that the usual approach generally used by students has been giving rise to prejudiced look because those ways are tainted by scientific, metaphysical, religious or cultural presuppositions or even human beings' attitudes at the very beginning of the fundamental and essential features of human experiences.

### **Role of Intentionality in phenomenology**

A question is asked as to how is it possible to acquire knowledge of things as they really are? In answering this question, it requires looking at the main method of phenomenology. According to phenomenology, the meaning of man's experiences can be obtained through man's consciousness. In this matter, it is believed that all experiences that bear some type of meaning are conscious. It means that consciousness holds uninterrupted stream shifting and vacillating between manifold objects and attitudes. It can be said that when consciousness arises, it moves towards certain objects; it does not arise without moving towards any object. This is a kin to say that an act of consciousness comes to have any portion of the stream that has a single object as its content and consists of a single attitude towards that object. (Stephan Kaufer and Antony Chemero, 2015 : 32) Based on this consciousness, all meaningful experiences take place in acts, act of consciousness as such. Therefore, if we are directed to find out things as they are, it is necessary for us to look at this act of consciousness, not from other means. In searching for the things themselves as were claimed by many phenomenologists,

presupposition should be left behind. Only consciousness or pure consciousness is needed, consciousness itself can lead to such knowledge. Let's delve into the concept of man and then man's consciousness in Buddhist philosophical perspective before giving any support to phenomenological position.

### **Nature of man in Buddhist philosophy**

According to Buddhist philosophy on nature of man, it basically refers to five groups of existence, Rūpa-khandha, Vedanā-khandha, Saññā-khandha, Samkhāra-khandha and Viññāna-khandha. When the word 'man' or 'Mr. A' is discussed, it actually means five aggregates of existence. In this section, the discussion is particularly focused on Samkhāra-khandha and Viññāna-khandha in order to be used as the ground in support of the claim.

#### ***Viññāna-khandha* is regarded as the Cognitive Aspect of Man:**

In Buddhism, It is generally held that the following words 'cittam' 'mano' 'manasam' 'hadayam' 'pandaram' 'manāyatanam' 'manindriyam' 'viññānam' 'viññānakkhandho' and 'tājāmanoviññānadhātu' are roughly synonymous term for English word 'mind' or 'consciousness'. Despite being interchangeability, one term can be used for another according to the need and fitness of the occasion. In *Abhidhamma*, *citta* is precisely defined as the first one of four basic principles or ultimate truth: *Citta Cetasika Rūpa and Nibbāna*. Therefore, it can be claimed that *citta* possesses the most important aspect in Buddhist philosophy as it becomes ultimate thing.

In Buddhist philosophy, consciousness is considered to operate like a stream and thereby is thought to be somehow transmitted from one life to the next, thus enabling Kamma causality over lifetimes. Such continuity of consciousness actually represents, in a sense, the man's identity. That is why it is held that consciousness is of essential quality in keeping the body alive and distinguishing animate being from inanimate elements. In this respect, when the word 'consciousness' (*viññāna*) is used, it means the cognitive function directed to its object. This is found in *Samyuttanikāya*, that such consciousness (*viññāna*) is defined as 'because it recognizes something, it is called 'consciousness' (*viññāna*).

As far as *Viññānakkhandho* is concerned, it is not an entity which is always existing called consciousness but an aggregate of consciousness arising out of conditions, and brought about contact (*phassa*) of sense organs (*indriya*) and sense objects (*visaya*). In Buddhism, the nature of consciousness is conditioned and it is termed as such according to whatever condition through which it basically arises, from an account of eye and visible form arises a consciousness, and by virtue of this it is called visual consciousness (*chakkhu-viññāna*). In the same token, from an account of ear and sound arises a consciousness, and it is called auditory consciousness (*sota-viññāna*), from an

account of nose and smell arises a consciousness and it is called olfactory consciousness (*ghāna-viññāna*), from an account of tongue and taste arises a consciousness and it is called gustatory consciousness (*jivhā-viññāna*), from an account of body and tangible objects arises a consciousness and it is called tactile consciousness (*kāya-viññāna*) and from an account of mind and mind-objects arises a consciousness and it is called mental consciousness (*mano-viññāna*).

With respect to the mentioned consciousness, the presence of internal sense-fields (*Ajjhattikāyatana*) and external sense-fields (*Bāhirāyatana*) and their contact becomes necessary to bring about consciousness. In *Majjhimanikāya*, it is said that if the eye that is internal is intact and external material shapes come within its range and there is the appropriate impact, then there is appearance of the appropriate section of consciousness. Let's see the example of eye consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāna*) first. This kind of consciousness will arise when eye is in contact with a visible form as its object, red, picture, for instance, thereby the eye consciousness can arise. Its function operates in the form of seeing.

Furthermore, consciousness is also held as *dhātu* (element; the ultimate constituents of a whole) called *viññāna-dhātu*. In Buddhist philosophy, consciousness does not recognize an object. The awareness of an object is its function, for example, when the eye is in contact with colour, blue, eye consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāna*) arises just in the way of awareness of the presence of an object; there is no recognition of colour, blue. What recognizes an object, blue, is by nature derived from the aggregate of perception. Other consciousnesses also function in this way. Suffice it to claim that consciousness plays a significant role in making the man's personality. Without functioning of consciousness man cannot be counted as man.

### ***Samkhāra-khandha* is considered as the Socio-Moral aspect of Man:**

Etymologically, the *Pāli* term '*Samkhāra*' is generally translated into English as 'dispositions' or 'mental formations' or 'volitional activities'. Thus, it has different definition of meaning which should be carefully distinguished. The most frequent usage of term 'formation' may be applied to it, with the qualification required by the context used. Such a term may embrace the act of 'forming' or the passive state of 'having been formed' or both. K. N. Jayatilleke, while dealing with the term '*Samkhāra*', pointed to three senses by which the word is used. Firstly, when '*Samkhāra*' is associated with the sense of volitions as in the sentence '*avijjā paccayā samkhārā*', it shows that man's volitions are conditioned by their true or false beliefs giving rise to ignorance. In this regard, it arises when man sometimes thinks rightly and does a good deed or thinks wrongly and commits a bad deed. Man treads in *Samsāra* like a blind man with stick, who sometimes goes on the right and sometimes on the wrong route in trying to get his destination. Secondly, when "*Samkhāra*' is

used; it also refers to man's conative or purposive activities in particular. These volitions may be bodily processes and may include reflexive actions such as breathing (*assāsa-passāsa*) as well as conditioned behaviour, habits for instance. They may be verbal activities involving cognitive and discursive thinking in waking life or even in their dreams. Thirdly, it may mean the purposive thinking or ideation concerning impressions, ideas or concepts relating to feelings. (Jayatilleke, K. N., 2000 : 54-85)

As far as the term '*Samkhāra*' is concerned, it generally means the aggregate of dispositions or volitional activities (*Samkhāra*). In this way, the dispositions are an extremely valuable means by which human beings can cope with the experience of the world. (Kalupahana, D. J, 1987 : 19) They are the psychological compositions, which stand for the variety of qualities, embellishing the mind, good, bad or indifferent which are guided by intention (*Cetanā*). (Phra Prayudh, Payutto, 1995 : 16) In *Majjhimanikāya*'s definition, its aspect is active, 'forming' and signified kamma i.e., wholesome or unwholesome volitional activities of body, verbal and mind. It actually means that it is operated through the mentioned three actions. Hence, it is of three kinds in accordance with the channels through which it is performed: bodily formation (*kāya-saākhāra*), verbal formation (*vacā-samkhāra*) and mental formation (*citta-samkhāra*).

As far as the term 'volitional activities' is concerned, there are six classes of volitional states; namely, 1.volition concerning visible objects (*rūpa-sañcetanā*), 2.volition concerning audible objects (*sadda-sañcetanā*), 3.volition concerning odorous objects (*gandha-sañcetanā*), 4.volition concerning sapid objects (*rasa-sañcetanā*), 5. volition concerning tangible objects (*phoṭṭhabha-sañcetanā*) and 6. volitions concerning ideational objects (*dhamma-sañcetanā*). It is said that all activities connected with volition in this way. In this aggregate, the essential aspect of volitional activities is portrayed as method of justification on how good or bad a person is.

### Place of Citta in Buddhist Scriptures

In *Pāli* scripture, the term '*citta*' is literally derived from the verbal root '*citti*', it means cognizing or knowing. Three definitions of '*citta*' are shown by commentators: *citta* is defined as follows: 1) agent, 2) instrument and 3) activity. As regards the agent, it embraces recognizing of an object (*Ārammanam cintetī ti cittam*). In the definition of instrument, *citta* is that by means of which the accompanying mental factors cognize the object (*etena cintetīti cittam*). As regards the activity, *citta* is by itself nothing other than the process of cognizing the object (*cintanamattam cittam*).

It is strongly held that such *citta* is regarded as an agent and as an instrument and it is deliberately assigned to refute the wrong view of those who are of the views that a substantial self is the agent and instrument of cognition. In fact, in Buddhist philosophy, it is *citta* or consciousness that acts

or performs its duty as it says that fundamentally *citta* is an activity or process of cognizing actual being in itself apart from the activity of cognizing. As far as *citta* or consciousness is concerned, the word '*citta*' in *Visuddhimagga* of *Viññānakkhandhakathā* is obviously classified into three groups, namely, unwholesome (*akusalacitta*), wholesome (*kusalacitta*) and indeterminate (*abyākata-citta*). However, due to being slightly different with its term, it should be divided into four classes: unwholesome (*akusalacitta*), wholesome (*kusalacitta*), resultant (*vipāka-citta*) and functional (*kiriya-citta*) in order to distinguish them clearly: 1) Akusala-citta refers to unwholesome mind (*akusala-citta*) and it is accompanied by one or another of the three following unwholesome roots, greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). 2) Kusala-citta refers to wholesome mind (*kusala-citta*) and it is accompanied by the following wholesome roots: non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*) and non-delusion (*amoha*). 3) Vipāka-citta means the resultant mind and it is the third class of *citta* being distinct from the former two, a class that comprises both the results of unwholesome *kamma* and wholesome *kamma*. 4) Kiriya-citta refers to the function of mind and it is what is named *citta*. This kind of mind is neither *kamma* nor *kamma* result. Despite performing action, this type of mind is not yielding any kammically result. Only a person who reached the last state of ideal life (*Arahant*) can possess this capacity of mind.

From the above discussion, it showed that *Samkhāra-khandha* plays important role in making social and moral aspects of man. Let us elaborate this point further.

According to *Abhidhammattha Samgaha*, there are four groups of mental properties (*cetasika*) as follows: 1) There are seven common properties which are common to all classes of consciousness (mind) called '*sabbha cittaka*'. It means that the following mental properties are always present with mind. Every man has these mental properties. 2) There are six particular (*pakinnaka*) mental properties which are invariably entering into composition with consciousness; these categories of mental properties are not always dominating the moment of mind; some such as initial application of man (*vitakka*) may dominate whereas some may not. 3) The following fourteen mental properties are called '*akusala cetasika*'. They determine the immoral aspect of man. When these unwholesome mental factors are present with mind (*citta*) then mind (*citta*) becomes kammically immoral consciousness (*akusala citta*): 4) There are twenty-five moral mental properties called '*kusala cetasika*' (wholesome mental factors). They determine the moral aspect of man. When these wholesome mental factors are present with *citta* (mind), then mind (*citta*) becomes kammically wholesome consciousness (*kusala citta*).

All these mental properties come to play considerable roles in gauging how good or bad he is. Furthermore, they also come to influence upon man's mind in many manners. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to take a closer look if

phenomenologist method is proposed to be real way in seeing things as they really are. Let's have a critical examination on it.

### **A critical examination on the presupposition in phenomenology**

As far as the mental capacities are concerned, what is necessary for taking up in account is the two groups of mental factors: wholesome factors (*kusala cetasika*) and unwholesome factors (*akusala cetasika*) because when mind (*citta*) is accompanied by them, they act as determining action on whether such an action is kammically good or bad. Those types of capacities of man (*cetasika*) clearly represent different qualities of man which will bring about the result either kammically good or bad. It actually means that if man's action is determined by wholesome mental factors such as non-greed (*alobha*), his action is considered as good action on the one hand and if his action is determined by unwholesome mental factors such as greed (*lobha*), his action is considered as bad action on the other hand. A clear-cut explanation of this matter will be clear if nature of man's consciousness is discussed in great detail.

This clearly shows that there is a relation between man's nature and man's consciousness and such consciousness whether it yields pure or impure result is exclusively dependent upon the nature of man; when man's consciousness is wholesome then his consciousness is pure and vice versa, suffice it to say that man's consciousness is determined and governed by his nature. That is why Buddhism always exhorts men to purify their mind. In other words, it means purification of one's own nature makes one's action kammically wholesome. According to Buddhism, (Dan Lusthaus, 2002 : 4) to see things as they are actually becoming (*yathābhūtam*) is to be Enlightened or Awakened (Bodhi) and in this matter Buddha is qualified as a person who can see things as they really are.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is claimed that to gain the things themselves as were obviously claimed by many phenomenologists through description of consciousness whereby meaning of experience is taking place may contain difficulties by virtue of the following reasons: 1) as far as the nature of man is concerned, man's consciousness is accompanied and bound by either wholesome or unwholesome, consequently, it possesses the possibility of mixing up with any of them, 2) since the nature of man's consciousness cannot purely exist then the presupposition yielded by such nature is also present.

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