

Introduction

Abhidhamma

The Abhidhamma, the Pāli term, is used for the profound dhamma or the higher teachings of the Buddha. Etymologically, “Abhidhamma” is the combination of two words, ‘Abhi’ and ‘Dhamma’. ‘Abhi’ here means higher or excelling and ‘Dhamma’ means teaching. Thus, the Abhidhamma can be understood as the higher or more detailed analysis of the teachings of the Buddha. In this context, the word “higher” does not imply that the teachings in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka are higher or superior to those taught in the Suttanta Piṭaka. The teachings in both the Suttanta Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka differ only in how they are approached and presented.

However, the dhammas in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka are minutely analyzed and distinguished from the teachings in the Suttanta Piṭaka, with regard to the method of treatment, thereby it excels the teachings in the Suttanta Piṭaka. The commentary gives the definition of the word “Abhidhamma” thus: the Abhidhamma is a treatise in which the dhamma is explored in greater detail and with a more analytical approach compared to the Suttanta.

The primary purpose of the Abhidhamma is to provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for understanding the ultimate nature of reality, the workings of mind, and the path to liberation (Nibbāna). By dissecting the teachings of the Buddha into more details and

categorizations, it enables practitioners to gain a more profound insight into the nature of existence.

There are seven treatises that compose the whole “Abhidhamma piṭaka”; they are as follows:

1. Dhammasaṅgaṇī - Classification of Dhammas
2. Vibhaṅga - The Book of Analysis
3. Dhātukathā - A Talk on the Elements
4. Puggalapaññatti - Designation of Individuals
5. Kathāvatthu - Points of Controversy
6. Yamaka - The Book of Pairs
7. Paṭṭhāna - Conditional Relation.

The Dhammasaṅgaṇī provides a well concise description of wholesome state, unwholesome state and so on, by analysing the ultimate reality. It categorizes mental and physical phenomena into various classifications, such as the five aggregates (khandhā), twelve sense bases (āyatana), and eighteen elements (dhātu) and four truths (saccā).

The Vibhaṅga further elaborates on the analysis of dhammas presented in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī with eighteen chapters such as aggregates, sense bases, elements, truths, faculties, dependent arising, foundations of mindfulness, supreme efforts, means to accomplishment, factors of enlightenment, the eightfold path, jhānas, illimitables, training rules, analytical knowledges, knowledge, minor points, and the heart of the doctrine.

The Dhātukathā provides a more detailed examination of the eighteen elements discussed in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī. It explores their characteristics, functions, and manifestations in greater depth.

The Puggalapaññatti focus on the diversity of sentient beings and classifies individuals based on their spiritual development and inclinations. Here, ‘puggala’ refers to man, woman, deity, all human, all sentient beings and so on, while ‘paññatti’ indicates Nāma-paññatti which means name-concept given to objects.

The Kathāvatthu emphasizes a polemical approach, addressing various doctrinal controversies expounded by the venerable Moggaliputtatissa. It is specified and added into the Tipiṭaka at the time of Third Buddhist Council.

The Yamaka employs a question-and-answer format to explore pairs of concepts. It is called ‘Yamaka’ because of its method of treatment which employs the dual grouping of a question and an answer. For instance, it is there stated: “Is matter the matter aggregate?” And “Is the matter aggregate matter?”. It contains ten chapters: roots, aggregates, sense bases, elements, truths, formations, latent dispositions, consciousness, phenomena, and faculties.

The Paṭṭhāna is a comprehensive exploration of the causal relationships that outlines twenty-four types of conditional relations, namely root, object, predominance, proximity, contiguity, conascence, mutuality, dependence, strong dependence, prenascence, postnascence, repetition, kamma, result, nutriment, faculty, jhāna, path, association, dissociation, presence, absence, disappearance and non-disappearance. In the Theravada Buddhism, it is considered as strong evidence of the Buddha's profound knowledge.

Dhammasaṅgaṇī

The Dhammasaṅgaṇī is primarily concerned with the meticulous collection and enumeration of the ultimate realities, employing a structured approach involving triads (tika) and dyads (duka) as outlined in its Mātika. The Dhammasaṅgaṇī first introduces the Mātikā, grouping into triads (tika) and dyads (duka). There are twenty-two tikas, hundred and forty-two dukas (100 dukas and 42 suttantikadukas) in the Mātikā. Each triad consists of three related categories such as kusalādharmā, akusalādharmā, abyākatādharmā, and each dyad consists of two related categories, for example, hetū dhammā, na hetū dhammā or bālā dhammā, pañḍitā dhammā.

Moreover, it divides all dhammas (phenomena) into four main categories as follows:

1. Cittuppāda-kaṇḍa: this section discusses the origination of consciousness and delves into the various types of consciousness and their characteristics, especially in Kusalatika.
2. Rūpa-kaṇḍa: this section focuses on material phenomena, including the four primary elements (earth, water, fire, and air) and their derivative forms.
3. Nikkhepa-kaṇḍa: this section explores enumeration of the realities of Tika and Duka, and Suttantikaduka. Nikkhepa means discarding, that is, it does not follow or it discards way of detail enumeration as in cittuppāda-kaṇḍa and rūpa-kaṇḍa.

4. Aṭṭhakathā-kaṇḍa: this section elucidates the ultimate realities of all Tikas and Dukas except suttantikadukamātikā.

Specifically, the Cittuppāda-kaṇḍa and the Rūpa-kaṇḍa explain just the Kusala-tika (the wholesome triad) in detail, not other tikas. The Nikkhepa-kaṇḍa examines the kusala-tika in brief, and the other tikas as well. However, the Nikkhepa-kaṇḍa does not address all tikas and dukas for a thorough comprehension or with a detailed enumeration. The Aṭṭhakathā-kaṇḍa provides a comprehensive treatment of tikas and dukas with a wider enumeration, enhancing the student's understanding of these intricate concepts. Without studying the Aṭṭhakathā-kaṇḍa, one can find it more difficult to enumerate ultimate realities in tikas and dukas, that is, the learners of the Abhidhamma can be confused if they study enumeration of ultimate realities only with above three kaṇḍas.

For example, in the Nikkhepa-kaṇḍa, consciousness (citta) and mental concomitants (cetasikas) in the Vedanā-tika are collectively discussed by means of plane (bhūmi) or aggregates (khandhā). In the Aṭṭhakathā-kaṇḍa, a more thorough and detailed enumeration of mind and mental factors are elucidated, for example analysis of ultimate realities by means of feeling such as a consciousness accompanied by pleasure (sukhasahagata), physical pain (dukkhasahagata) and equanimity (upekkhāsahagata).

However, Suttantika-dukamātikā just concludes with the Nikkhepa-kaṇḍa, without extending to scrutinize it in the

Cittuppāda-kaṇḍa, the Rūpa-kaṇḍa, the Aṭṭhakathā-kaṇḍa, and other Abhidhamma treatises. In fact, venerable Sāriputtarā elucidated it by synthesizing teachings from Ekaka-nipāta, Duka-nipāta, Saṅgītisutta, and Dasuttarasutta found in the Aṅguttara-nikāya; he did not expound it on his own. He illustrated it aiming to alleviate the difficulty and fatigue experienced by Abhidhamma learners when studying the Suttanta Piṭaka.

The analysis of ultimate realities described in this book is composed in accordance with the book written by venerable Varatejo known as Bakara Sayadaw (1149, M.E.). In fact, various analysis books appeared in Myanmar according to the history of Piṭaka. The first analysis book was written by venerable Munindāghosa known as Taungphila Sayadaw in 900 (M.E.). Then, many Abhidhamma experts started writing about the analysis of ultimate realities for Tikamātikā and Dukamātikā. Some are as follows:

1. Taungphilamu written by Taungphila Sayadaw,
2. Nankyaungmu written by Nankyaung Sayadaw,
3. Taungbhilumu written by Taungbhilu Sayadaw,
4. Htantabinmu written by Htantabin Sayadaw,
5. Bakaramu written by Bakara Sayadaw,
6. Nyaungkanmu written by Nyaungkan Sayadaw and
7. Thaeinnmu written by Thaeinn Sayadaw.

Even though there were many analysis books for Tikamātikā and Dukamātikā in Myanmar, only the book written by Bakara Sayadaw is being used for learning in the present time. As a matter of fact, this book was also scrutinized and amended by an Abhidhamma expert group

led by venerable Masoyein Sayadawgyi (Abhidhaja-mahāraṭṭhaguru). Moreover, the group supplemented this book with valuable explanations in order to make it more perfect and easier to understand. Then, it was published by Myanmar Buddha Sasana organization for the promotion and propagation of Buddha Sasana in 1964.

In summary, as aforementioned, the Abhidhamma offers a meticulous and systematic analysis of ultimate realities. Its categorizations and classifications provide practitioners with a deeper understanding of the nature of existence and serve as a valuable tool for spiritual growth. Moreover, it supports ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice, helping individuals navigate the path to enlightenment with clarity and precision.