

# The Origins of Theravāda Abhidhamma and its Philosophical Background: An Analytical Study

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## Introduction

It is controversial to say that the Abhidhamma is either a teaching of Buddha or a teaching of later development idea. “yo kho Ānanda mayā Dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto so kho mamaccayena satthā”. In the above mentioned part of the Sutta says that the Buddha preached only Dhamma and Vinaya. There are no any detailed accounts on Abhidhamma. Therefore, the most of Buddhist scholars do the researches to find out whether the Abhidhamma is a part of later development of Buddhism. The first Buddhist council is a main fact for this. It is recorded that the Bhikkhus recited only Dhamma and Vinaya. “mayā Dhammaṃca Vinayaṃca saṅgāissāma”. But we can find out the facts in early Buddhism to say that the Abhidhamma is a teaching of Buddha. “idhāuso sārīputta dve bhikkhu abhidhamma kataṃ katenti aññamaññaṃ pañhaṃ pucchi “ (Cūla Gosīṅga sutta, M) There is the word “Abhidhamma” in a precept which is preached to a Bhikkhuni in Mahāvagga Pāēi. It says that ‘is an āpatti if a Bhikkhuni ask about Abhidhamma or Sutta with a permission to ask about Vinaya. “idha bhikkhave ye te bhikkhu bahussuta āgatāgamā dhammadharā vinayadharā matikadharā te kalena kalam upasaṃkamitvā.” (A) Here “Mātikadharā” is a Bhikkhu who mastered about Abhidhamma. Theravāda commentaries give details about Buddha’s visiting to Tusita heaven and preaching Abhidhamma for three months. But there is no any idea of a complete Abhidhamma Piṭaka in any mentioned facts. The idea of Buddhist scholars about Abhidhamma is that was completed with the deep Dhamma in Suttas. “Abhidhamme nāmarūpa Vinetuṃ.” (Vin.A) There is evidence in the Sutta piṭaka to accept this idea. It is very easy to find the teaching of Skhandha, Dhātu, Āyatana, Nāma-Rūpa in Sutta. This research focuses on the analytical study of the Theravada Abhidhamma and its origins and later development as a philosophical teaching.

## Methodology

Data was collected referring library and E- library. The data from the primary and secondary sources related to the field collected through the libraries and discussed with scholars in the field. The data analysis method of the research is descriptive method.

## **Findings**

Abhidhamma is philosophical or the teachings on Ultimate Reality that was developed gradually and based on the Original Buddhism.

## **Discussion**

There are two main divisions of philosophical concepts of the origins of Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

01. Buddha's preaching
02. Later sources

Buddha's preaching

This is discussed under three types:

01. Method of Pariyāya desanā
02. Method of briefing and analyzing
03. Nītattha desanā

Method of Pariyāya desanā

This is an special preaching method of the Buddha. "*pariyāya desito kho mayā dhammo*" 'Pariyāya desanā' is preaching dividing the Dhamma into pieces. Because of this, Buddhism is said to be "Vibhajjavāda." The preaching which is cannot be divide into pieces is Nippariyāya desanā. Once there was a discussion about happiness between deities who visited the Buddha. Some said that association with good people is happiness. Some said that the correct way of living is happiness. Some said that good health is happiness. When this is came to Buddha, He agreed with them and said above all Nibbāna is the greatest happiness. All the happiness mentioned by deities here is Pariyāya desanā; Nibbāna is Nippariyāya desanā, because there is no any happiness which is equal or higher to Nibbāna. Buddha gave freedom to divide dhamma as Pariyāya in Vedanapariggaha Sutta.

The problem in between *thera* Udāi and carpenter Pañcakaṅga on feelings was the reason. When this is informed the Buddha by Venerable Ananda, Buddha said that the feeling is divided as one, two, three, six, eleven, eighteen, twenty one by himself and said that it can be divided as you wish.

According to this freedom given by the Buddha, Abhidhamma piṭaka was completed as a separated basket by later scholars.

### Briefing and Analyzing

Here analyzing method is dividing Dhamma. Briefing is inter-relation between Dhamma. i.e. Paṭiccasamuppāda – analyzing. Paṭiccasamuppāda – briefing. In sense datum, method of analyzing is dividing sense datum into eye, vision, eye conciseness, contact, feeling, perception, initial application, Inter-relation between these, is method of briefing. Analyzing of Three Characteristics is method of analyzing. The inter-relation between these is method of briefing. “*rūpaṃ bhikkave aniccaṃ yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ yaṃ dukkhaṃ tadanattā*”. Analyzing of Three wholesome acts is, method of analyzing. The inter-relation between these is method of briefing.

### Nītattha Desanā

Nītattha desanā is paramattha desana. “*vohāra vacanaṃ saccaṃ loka sammuti karanam paramattha vacanaṃ saccaṃ dhammānaṃ bhūta karanam*”. Skhandha , Dhātu , Āyatana in early Buddhism is Nītattha desanā.

### Later sources

Abhidhamma is preached by Buddha himself according to Atthasālinī commentary. Buddha memorized Abhidhamma in the forth week while residing in golden chamber. According to Theravāda commentary Buddha preached Abhidhamma to his beloved mother in Tusita heaven during three months. The same preaching was done by Buddha to Sāriputta *Thera* again and venerable Sāriputta preached it to his 500 students. According to commentators, the Abhidhamma was continued by the Sāriputta tradition. Atthasālinī commentary provides a methodical explanation to prove the truth of the origins of Abhidhamma.

Q – What was the origin of Abhidhamma? (*ayaṃ Abhidhammo nāma kena pabhāvito?*)

A: - From the wisdom of Buddha (*Bodhi abhinīhāraṃ sandhāya pabhāvito*)

Q: - who understood it? (*Kenādhi gate?*)

A: - By the Buddha (*Sabbaññu budhdhena*)

Q: - Where did it examine? (*Kadā vicito*)

A: - Under the Bo – tree (*Bodhi maṇḍe*)

Q: - Where was it preached? (*Katha desito?*)

A: - In Tāvātimsa heaven (*Dewesu tāvatīmsesu*)

Q: - Whom did it preached? (*Kassatthāya desito?*)

A: - to gods (*devatānaṃ*)

Q: - Whose words? (*Kassa vacanāti?*)

A: - Buddha's (*bhagavato vacanaṃ arahato sammā sambuddhassa*)

Q: - Who did it continue? (*Kenāhato?*)

A: - teacher tradition (*ācariya paramparā*)

**(Sāriputta, - Bhaddaji, - Sobhita, - Pijali, - Piyadassī, - Kosiyaputta, - Siggava, - Sandeha, - Moggalīputta, - Visudatta, - Dhammiya, - Dasaka, - Sonaka, - Revata)**

Abhidhamma was brought to Sri Lanka by *Arahat Mahā Mahinda Thera*. It was described in *Kathāvatthupparāṇa* as follows.

*“Sammā sambuddho sattapakaraṇāni desento iti satthāra dinnayena ṭhapita mātikāya desitatta sakalampi etaṃ lakaraṇaṃ Buddha bhasitameva jātaṃ”*

Abhidhamma was also developed step by step as sutta and Vinaya piṭakas. If it is acceptable the Vinaya which is developed centering Pātimokkha, and if it is acceptable the Sutta which is also included Sāvaka desanā as the preaching of Buddha, the Abhidhamma also can be accepted as

Buddha's preaching. Because Mātika Pāṭha which is the foundation of Abhidhamma also a preaching of Buddha. *“tesu dvāvipattikā sataṃ dukāti ayaṃ āhacca bhāsītā jinavamanandata sabbaññubhāsiti sattānaṃ mātikā nāma”*

The origins and development of Abhidhamma can be seen as three periods according to later concepts.

01. The period of early Buddhism (time of Buddha) (First-period)
02. The period when it separated from Sutta and Vinaya (Middle period)
03. The period of writing commentary and Saṅgaha. (Last period)

But the most of scholars think that the Abhidhamma originated from Sutta and developed later. There are few points to prove this idea,

- First and second Buddhist councils were named as Dhamma and Vinaya councils.
- There is no anything about Abhidhamma in Sutta nipāta and Jātaka gāthā.
- It is mentioned about Buddha's special preaching but not about Abhidhamma piṭaka in preaching of Sutta
- Kathāvattupparāṇa is not accepted by some scholars as a Buddha's preaching.

## Conclusions

According to above all the facts, it is acceptable, that the Abhidhamma piṭaka was created later by the scholars taking special preaching of Buddha.

**Keywords:** Pariyāya desanā, Nītattha Desanā, Briefing, Analyzing, Nibbāna.

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