

Early Buddhist Depictions of the Individual's Mind and Mental Functioning: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the Buddhist analysis of the mind and mental functions as presented in early Buddhism. Early Buddhism offers a holistic and mechanistic account of the process of mental phenomena. The research explores key Buddhist concepts, including the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*), the tripartite mental model of *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*, and the ethical

distinction between wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) mental states. It also investigates how defilements (*kilesa*) and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) perpetuate the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsārā*) and how mental cultivation leads toward liberation (*nibbāna*). The paper underscores the interdependence of mind and body and highlights the soteriological aim of mental training within the Buddhist path.

Keywords: *citta*, defilements, *mano*, *nibbāna*, *pañcupādānakkhandha*, *viññāṇa*

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Introduction

The study of the mind has been a central concern in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions (Flanagan, 1991; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Among these two philosophies, early Buddhist texts present a unique phenomenological and ethical analysis of mental processes, distinct from materialist and substance-based views (Kalupahana, 1992). To admit this, early Buddhism offers detailed descriptions of mental components and their functions, framed within the broader Buddhist goal of liberation from suffering. This research paper aims to systematically present the Buddhist perspectives of the mind as found in early Buddhism, emphasising its structural, functional, and soteriological dimensions. By examining key terms such as *citta*, *mano*, *viññāṇa*, and the five aggregates of clinging, this study seeks to clarify how Buddhism understands the mind's role in both perpetuating and transcending cyclical of existence (Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 1995).

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on Buddhist studies has explored various aspects of mental functioning, often focusing on comparative studies with Western psychology or philosophical analyses of specific concepts. Authors such as Hamilton (1996) have examined cognitive processes in early Buddhism, while Karunaratne (1995) has documented the functional aspects of *citta* in the *Samyuttanikāya*. Collins (1982) has analysed the concept of self

and personal continuity in Buddhist thought. Gombrich (2009) has explored how early Buddhist psychology developed within the broader Indian religious context. Previous studies have also addressed the relationship between mind and body in Buddhism, the nature of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), and the role of mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) in the process of rebirth (Bodhi, 1995; Ñāṇamoli, 1991). However, a comprehensive synthesis of the mind's structure and function as presented in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, integrating ethical, phenomenological, and soteriological perspectives, remains underexplored. This study is based on the opinions on Buddhist mental classification and its practical implications for mental cultivation (Ñāṇaponika, 1962; Nyanatiloka, 1980).

Research Problem

The Buddhist conceptual analysis of the function of *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa* has been interpreted and analysed in fragmented ways, leading to ambiguities in understanding their interrelationships and roles in mental processes. Hence, this investigative study aims to examine the existing gap in Buddhist analysis of the aforesaid concepts and how they are interconnected from the emergence of suffering to the development of liberation in the Buddhist soteriological path.

Research Objectives

To systematically study the outline of the Buddhist model of the mind as presented in early Buddhism, with focus on the clinging to the five aggregates

and the tripartite model of *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*.

To analyse the mental factors, such as feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) in shaping individual experience.

To examine the ethical dimension of mental states (*kusala/akusala*) and their impact on kamma and rebirth.

To explore the Buddhist methods of mental cultivation and their soteriological significance in achieving *nibbāna*.

Research Methodology

This is a Pali textual-based study focusing on the *Sutta Piṭaka*. The research also draws on classical exegetical works and modern scholarly interpretations to ensure contextual accuracy. A thematic analysis is used to categorise and synthesise Buddhist mental terms and concepts. The methodology is qualitative and interpretive, aiming to present a coherent and integrated understanding of Buddhist mental functioning within its doctrinal and ethical framework.

Result and Discussion

The study of the mind has a long history in both Western and Eastern religious and philosophical systems, but this study does not investigate the historical perspective on the concept of mind. Generally, the mind refers to all psychological capabilities, including feelings, perceptions, moods, behaviours, motivations, memories, thoughts, consciousness, emotions,

and learning (Schacter et al., 2011). In fact, according to neurological understanding, the mind has been reduced to the brain and its functioning (Damasio, 1994; LeDoux, 2002). In early Buddhist teaching, a structurally identified object or organ is not referred to as mind, but Buddhism offers a unique analysis of mind and mental phenomena (Wayman, 1974). However, the Buddhist terminology used to identify mental activities has special significance. Buddhism has formed its teachings according to its aims and objectives. Therefore, the Buddhist perspectives on mind and mental phenomena should be understood within the Buddhist doctrinal context (Rahula, 1959; Keown, 1996).

Buddhism recognises that the mind plays a significant role in individual behaviour and admits it as something to be cultivated (Conze, 1962). When the mind is cultivated to its maximum level, it can positively affect the individual's existence. For instance, *Nibbāna*, the ultimate goal of Buddhists, is considered a peaceful state of mind achieved through the gradual cultivation of the mind. Once the Buddha addressed the monks and declared, "There is no other thing that affects the good of a person as much as the cultivated mind, and there is no other thing that is as harmful to a person as the uncultivated mind (A. I, 5). The first two stanzas of the *Dhammapada* illustrate that since the conscious mind is guided and controlled by intention, the consequences of physical or mental actions preceded by intention, whether good or bad, follow like the shadow behind the person and

the cart wheel behind the bullock (Dhp. 1-2). Furthermore, the entire Buddhist teaching is centred on the cultivation of the mind.

Buddhism identifies wholesome (*kusla*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) conditions as fundamental states of the mind (Ledi Sayadaw, 1999; Narada, 1956). However, according to Buddhism, most of the mental states experienced by an ordinary person in day-to-day life are associated with defilements (*kilesa*), which are identified as negative conditions of the mind (Ñāṇamoli, 1975). As a consequence of these defilements, the individual experiences numerous mental and physical discomforts. Buddhism explains that the *Upādhānakkhandā* (aggregates of clinging) are constantly fed by these defilements, and as a result, the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) will continue (Gethin, 2008). Buddhism holds that the cycle of rebirth is suffering. Therefore, Buddhism introduces nibbāna, a supreme state of mind, in which a person ceases all oppressive feelings of mind (Bodhi, 2011; Ñāṇananda, 1971).

According to the Buddhist analysis, one of the root causes of a person's mental complication is egotism (*eso me attā*). It is a deep-rooted tendency of the mind, generated by the process of sense perception. As a result, the individual naturally clings to the sensory objects he likes (*lobha*) and opposes those he does not (*dosa*). When this process continues, the individual experiences uncomfortable mental states such as fear, sadness, anger, hatred, disgust, etc. (Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, &

Wallace, 2005). Buddhism defines the individual as a combination of physical and mental phenomena, known as the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*). In other words, this is the physical and mental structure of the individual (S.III, 47), consisting of form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formation (*saṃkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), known as *nāma-rupa*.

The form (*rūpa*) refers to the physical aspect of an individual composed of the four elements as solidity (*paṭavi*), fluidity (*āpo*), temperature (*tejo*) and motion (*vāyo*) (Ñāṇamoli, 1991). This encompasses more than just elemental composition; it extends to complex organisms and their vital biological processes. (M, I, 185) and the senses (*indriya*), eye (*cakkhu*), ear (*sota*), nose (*ghāṇa*), tongue (*jivhā*), body (*kāya*), and mind (*mana*) are located in the form. Through these senses, the individual perceives the external world with corresponding objects (*ārammana*), such as sight (*rūpa*), sound (*sadda*), smell (*gandha*), taste (*rasa*), touch (*poṭṭabba*), and thought objects (*dhamma*).

Buddhism recognises six senses, including the mind (*mana*) and its corresponding object, the *dhamma*. But there is no mention of a place where the mind is located in the human body in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. But later Theravada scholars assumed that *mana* means the brain, and in the *Khuddakapāṭha*, there is a word, *matthaluṅga*, which represents the brain; since it is not found in the Suttas, this is considered a later development (Hamilton, 1996).

Moreover, Buddhism explains the mental processes of individuals using the terms *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*, which represent three aspects of mental functioning (S. II, 95). Here, the word *mano* is used to explain a mental state. However, there is no particular meaning for *dhamma* in early Buddhism, and it has been used in various meanings besides referring to the object of the mind. However, when referring to the functions of the senses, *dhamma* has been used as the objects perceptible to the mind. Accordingly, the mind is the gatherer of information, and *dhamma* is the unmixed raw information, i.e., the sense experience of the empirical world (Hamilton, 1996).

The second is the aggregate of feeling (*vedanākkhandha*) that represents the feeling phase of the individual. This refers to the feelings experienced by the individual through the six-fold senses (S. III, 59). According to Buddhism, when an internal sense contacts an external object, three types of feeling are experienced by the individual as pleasant (*sukha*), unpleasant (*dukkha*), or neutral (*adukkhamasukha*). The physical and psychological basis of this process is explained in the *Madhupinḍika Sutta* (M. I, 108). For instance, when the eye (*cakkhu*) and the form (*rūpa*) contact each other, there arises eye consciousness (*cakkhu viññāṇa*); as a result of these three, there arises contact (*passa*) and then feeling of the object (*vedanā*), and according to the feeling, there is the perception of the object (*yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti*). What one perceives one thinks about (*yaṃsañjānāti taṃvitakketi*) and what

one thinks about gives rise to *papañca* (*yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti*).

**Eye+ form + eye consciousness
+ contact > feeling> perception>
thinking > *papañca***

A deep analysis of feeling is found in the Suttas. 108 types of feeling have been explained in the *Vedanā Saṃyutta* (Bodhi, 2000). According to that explanation, *vedanā* is twofold as physical and mental feeling, as pleasant (*sukha*), unpleasant (*dukkha*) and neutral (*upekkha*). It is threefold, and it is fivefold as *sukha indriya*, *dukkha indriya*, *somanassa indriya*, *domanassa indriya*, *upekkhā indriya*, while there are six feelings that arise based on six senses. These six feelings divide again as *somanassa* (joyful), *domanassa* (sad), *upekkhā* (neutral), up to eighteen *vedanās*. By dividing these eighteen into *gehasita* (worldly) and *nekkamma* (renunciation) again, there are 36, and dividing all over again as past, present and future, altogether there are 108 types of *vedanā* (S. IV, 232). Accordingly, a very subtle analysis of feeling can be seen in the early Buddhist teaching, and a subjective aspect of feeling is explained through this analysis. However, the Buddha made this classification of feeling into 108 because of a debate between Udāyi thera and *Pañcakaṅga* over whether feeling is two- or three-fold (S. IV, 232). Feelings vary according to the individual's experience and are a very complex mental state, like emotions (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). According to the *Madhupinḍika sutta* (M. I, 108), contact (*phassa*) is the source

of all feelings. Therefore, contact is a basic requirement for feeling, and the physical basis is an essential part of mental functions, including emotions.

Saññāskandha (aggregate of perception) is a condition of the mind outlined in Buddhism that represents the cognitive aspect of mental functioning. In the *Khandha Saṃyutta*, *saññā* is described as recognition of blue, yellow, red, and white (S. III, 87). Pali English Dictionary lists the following meanings for *saññā*: sense, consciousness, perception, discernment, recognition, assimilation of sensations, and awareness (Pali English Dictionary, 1921, p. 743).

In the *Suttas*, *saññā* has been used in different senses, and according to the *Madhupinḍika Sutta*, *saññā* comes after feeling (*vedanā*). As stated in the *Khajjanīya Sutta*, *saññā* means an identification of the object according to the nature of feeling, such as pleasant (*sukha*), unpleasant (*dukkha*) and neutral (*upekkhā*). In the *Khandha Saṃyutta*, it is stated that *saññā* is based on the objects of the six senses, such as *rūpa saññā*, *sadda saññā*, etc. Contact (*phassa*) is the main source for the arising of *saññā*. *Saññā* is ceased by cessation of contact (*passa nirodha*), and the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo aṭṭaṃgiko maggo*) is recommended to be practised for the cessation of *saññā* (S. III, 60).

The fourth aggregate is the aggregate of mental formation (*saṅkhārakhandha*). The term *saṅkhāra* is declared in different senses in the canonical literature (Anālayo, 2012; Nyanatiloka, 1952). A long description of these terms

is given in the Pali English Dictionary, and moreover, the complexity of this term has also been strongly emphasised.

"one of the most difficult terms in Buddhist metaphysics, in which the blending of the subjective, objective view of the world and of happening, peculiar to the East, is so complete that it is almost impossible for Occidental terminology to get at the root of its meaning in a translation. We can only convey an idea of its import by representing several sides of its application, without attempting to give a "word" as a definition." (Pali English Dictionary, 1921, p. 736)

In the *Khandha Saṃyutta*, *saṅkhāra* is defined as volitions arising from the six senses' objects (*rūpasāñcetana*, *saddasāñcetana*, etc.), and it is described as a mental state arising from contact (*phassa*) (S. III, 60). In the *Khajjanīya Sutta*, it is mentioned that *saṅkhāra* is called because the aggregates of *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are reformed (S. III, 87). Through the influence of *saṅkhāra*, the individual constructs the object he identifies according to his own preferences (McLeod, 2002). However, in the Twelvefold Dependent Origination Limbs (*dvādasanga paticcasamuppāda*), *saṅkhāra* is embodied as the second limb, and it means creating *samsāric* existence as an effect of conscious actions (S. II, 25).

The final aggregate is the Aggregate of Consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*). The term *viññāṇa* is found in many places in the *Tipiṭaka*, and the following

meanings have been given in the Pali-English Dictionary.

“a mental quality as a constituent of individuality, the bearer of (individual) life, life force (as extending also over rebirths), principle of conscious life, general consciousness (as function of mind and matter), regenerative force, animation, mind as transmigrant, as transforming (according to individual kamma) one individual life (after death) into the next.” (Pali English Dictionary, 1921, p.686)

Viññāṇa refers to the knowledge received through the six senses (S. III, 61). In the *Khajjanīya Sutta*, knowing the taste of sour, bitter, piquant, sweet, etc., is considered consciousness (S.III, 87). Consciousness is a significant mental condition directly related to the mental processes of the individual, as mentioned in the functioning of citta, mano, and *viññāṇa*. Moreover, at the place where *paṭisandhi viññāṇa* is used, the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) contributes to the existence of *saṃsāra*.

Therefore, the analysis of aggregates is one of the main teachings of Buddhism and clearly shows how the mind and body work together to form the individual's mental conditions (Santina, 1984). Buddhism does not recognize the mind as an independent unit that exists without physical connection. Both mind and body are interconnected and contribute to the individual's existence. In the *Nalakalāpa Sutta*, the interrelationship between the physical and mental aspects is clearly stated (S. II, 112).

In addition, Buddhism has used a few evaluative terms to clarify different mental states. According to the Sutta Piṭaka, these terms often represent different perspectives on the mental process. It has been stated that mental states named citta, mano and *viññāṇa* constantly arise and cease, as if a monkey moving from branch to another branch in the forest (S. II, 94).

Citta is a widely used term in Buddhist analysis of the mind. Regarding the word citta, derived from the Pali root cit, the following description has been given in the Pali English dictionary.

“Meaning: the heart (psychologically), i. e. the centre & focus of man's emotional nature as well as that intellectual element which inheres in & accompanies its manifestations; i. e. thought... The meaning of citta is best understood when explaining it by expressions familiar to us, as: with all my heart; heart and soul; I have no heart to do it; blessed are the pure in heart; singleness of heart(cp. *ekagga*); all of which emphasize the emotional & conative side or "thought" more than its mental & rational side (for which see *manas* & *viññāṇa*)... It may therefore be rendered by intention, impulse, design; mood, disposition, state of mind, reaction to impressions... That we are justified in applying the term "thought" in its technical sense. It needs to be pointed out, as complementary to this view, that citta nearly always occurs in the singular (=heart), & out of 150 cases in the Nikāyas, only 3 times in the plural(=thoughts). The substantiality of citta (*cetas*) is also evident from

its connection with kamma (heart as source of action), *kāma* & the senses in general.”(Pali English Dictionary, 1921, p. 299)

A single definition cannot be found on citta, but the nature and functioning of citta can be identified from the teachings scattered throughout the Pali canon. The nature of citta: citta changes quickly, and it is also difficult to explain in parables (A. I, p. 10), and citta is not a substance, but a process of events. The term citta is used to explain the mental process of Buddhism. W.S. Karunaratne (1995) says that the investigation of citta in Buddhism is the first empirical study of the mind. It is also said that the citta is radiant and it is polluted due to external defilements (A I, 10). Further, the nature of the mind is described in the Dhammapada: The fickle citta must be restrained with great difficulty (Dhp. 33); The citta flutters like a fish thrown out of water (Dhp,34); The citta clings to the perceived object and is difficult to control (Dhp,35); the *citta* is difficult to see (Dhp. 36); The nature of the mind has been described as having the ability to travel far, moving alone, having no body, hidden in a cave (Dhp. 37) etc.

Furthermore, different functions of the citta can be seen in suttas. The citta is the forerunner to the moral and intellectual abilities of the individual. Feeling represents the affective aspect of the citta, the cognitive aspect of citta is depicted through perception, and the conative aspect of citta is represented as volitions (Ñāṇananda, 1994). More than 30 different functional aspects of citta have been found by W.S. Karunaratne (1995) in Saṃyuttanikāya. It is also

said that the world is led by the citta, and it holds overall authority, and by the citta, things are swept away (S. 1, 39). Psychology explains that negative thoughts have negative effects on the person, and Buddhism explains this in terms of defilements (*kilesa*). When the impurity of the citta increases, the individual deteriorates, and when the citta is purified, the individual becomes pure (S. III, 151). Moreover, due to the citta engaged in evil, a man does harm to himself that no one else could do to him (Dhp, 42). One of the main tasks of the *citta* is performing wholesome and unwholesome deeds (*Kusalākusala kamma*). According to Buddhist interpretation, *kamma* determines the pleasures and pains an individual experiences. In addition, kamma contributes to the arising of future existence. The citta primarily contributes to the making of these kammās. Intention (*cetanā* or conation) means the action accomplished by the citta in the creating of *kammās* (A. III, 410). The five hindrances are recognized as the main factors that defile the *citta* (*nīvaraṇa*) (Anālayo, 2003; Gunaratana, 1994). They are: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*) - strong desire to please the senses; Ill will (*vyāpāda*) - anger of the mind due to hatred; sloth and torpor (*thīnamiddha*) - the passive state of mind and body; restlessness and worry (*uddhacca kukkucā*) - restless state of mind; doubt (*vicikicchā*) - doubt in the mind. The bhikkhu freed from five hindrances experiences the delightful state of mind as if one is freed from debt, and one has come to an oasis by a fearful path (D. I, 47).

Furthermore, a distinctive feature of the citta is that it can be cultivated (Silva, 1991). Buddhism is distinguished from other religious and philosophical schools of thought because it teaches the way to develop the individual's thinking pattern. Moreover, Buddhism explains cognitive abilities in terms of the citta and by cultivating the citta, one can gain exceptional cognitive abilities recognized as *abhiññā*. The citta should also be developed for the wisdom that comes from the eradication of defilements. As a well-roofed house is protected from the rain, it is stated that a well-cultivated citta is not wetted by lust (Dhp. 14). The Dhammapada pointed out a few statements on *citta* as 'ujung karoti' - (straightening the *citta*) 'cittassa damatho' (controlling the *citta*) 'cittaṃ rakkhetha' - (protecting the *citta*) 'cittaṃ saññamessanti' (restraint of the mind) 'sammā panihitaṃ cittaṃ' - (applying the citta well) etc.

The citta is considered to be continuously contemplated by the individual. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* mentions various states of mind that occasionally arise and instructs to observe them in their true nature as they are. This includes the citta that is lustful, angry, or delusional; the citta that is contracted by sloth and torpor; the citta that is scattered; the citta that is formed, the citta that is not liberated and the citta without passion, hatred, or delusion, as well as the citta that is vast (*mahaggata*), unsurpassed (*anuttara*), integrated, liberated, etc. (D. II, 290).

As explained in Buddhism, 'mana' is another aspect of the mind (Piyadassi,

1963). The mana represents a different role than the function of citta in the process of the mind. Pali English Dictionary has given the following meaning for *mano*:

"*Mano* represents the intellectual functioning of consciousness, while *viññāṇa* represents the field of sense and sense reaction ("perception"), and *citta* the subjective aspect of consciousness... The rendering with "mind" covers most of the connotation; sometimes it may be translated "thought." As "mind" it embodies the rational faculty of man, which, as the subjective side in our relation to the objective world, may be regarded as a special sense, acting on the world, a sense adapted to the rationality (reasonableness, *dhamma*) of the phenomena, as our eye is adapted to the visibility of the latter. Thus it ranges as the 6th sense in the classification of the senses and their respective spheres (the *āyatanāni* or relations of subject and object, the *ajjhakkāni* & the *bāhirāni*... These are: (1) *cakkhu*... (6) *mano*, with the sensing (*viññāya*) of rational objects or cognisables (*dhamma*). Thus, it is the senses communist which recognises the world as a "mundus sensibilis" (*dhamma*). Both sides are an inseparable unity: the mind fits the world as the eye fits the light, or in other words: *mano* is the counterpart of *dhammā*, the subjective. *Dhamma*, in this sense, is the rationality or lawfulness of the Universe, Cosmic Order, and Natural Law. It may even be taken quite generally as the "empirical world"..." (Pali English Dictionary, 1921, p. 578)

In Western thought, mental activity is explained in terms of the brain, but in early Buddhism, it is not reduced to a physical process (Flanagan, 2006). However, the mental state of *mano* serves as a sense, as pointed out in Buddhism. In explaining the process of *kamma*, by *kamma* is meant the actions performed through body, word and mind (*kāyena vācāya manasā*) based on the *citta* (S. IV, 132). Here, *mana* refers to the functioning of the mind as a sense faculty. There are also places in the canon where the *mana* serves as a sense. But the *mana* is a special sense, as it works in coordination with other sense faculties (Collins, 1994). There are five faculties, such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, that have each separate field and domain, and do not experience each other's field or domain, but these five faculties depend on the mind, and the mind also experiences their field and domains (M. I, 292).

According to Buddhism, three requirements should be met together for sense consciousness.

1. The internal sense faculties are working properly
2. Respective external objects are present
3. Directing the attention of the mind

As a result, the corresponding consciousness arises. Similarly, in order to arise mind-consciousness, mind (*mana*) and *dhamma*, which are the mind's objects, should meet together. The Sutta explains that the mind should be unbroken for the mind-consciousness to arise. Therefore, the mind has been

referred to here as a faculty (M. I, 184). In addition, the mind (*mana*) is the primarily responsible faculty for logical thinking and memory (D. I, 1). Moreover, the idea of a subtle body, the *manokāya*, is found in the Suttas. When referring to *abhiññā*, it is said that the subtle body can separate from the physical body, as if it separates the pith from the grass, and the sword from its scabbard. Additionally, the Buddha is sometimes said to have appeared in the heavens and met his disciples in a subtle body (D. I, 47; D. I, 178; A. IV, 228; S. V, 276).

According to Buddhism, *viññāna* (consciousness) is another important aspect of the mind and various functions of *viññāna* are found in the Pali canon. *Viññāna* is the basic awareness of the objects. When a faculty encounters an external object, the relevant consciousness arises.

faculty (*indriya*) ➡ object (*ārammana*) ➡
consciousness (*viññāna*)

There are six forms of consciousness such as eye-consciousness (*cakkhuviññāna*), ear-consciousness (*sothaviññāna*), nose-consciousness (*ghānaviññāna*), tongue-consciousness (*jivhāviññāna*), body-consciousness (*kāyaviññāna*), and mind-consciousness (*manoviññāna*) that arise based on the respective objects (S. III, 61). It is stated that basic awareness arises when the senses encounter their corresponding objects, but there is also mention of another place where consciousness is said to go beyond primary knowledge. In there, the feeling in the form of pleasant, unpleasant and equanimity has been recognized as

the consciousness of knowledge (M. II). Further, the consciousness in the analysis of aggregates is meant to be knowledge of the senses.

Consciousness is recognized as the coordinator between realms in the process of rebirth, and if the consciousness does not descend into the mother's womb, *nāma-rūpa* will not grow (M. I, 256). Consciousness always causes a rebirth in the future (*viññāṇāhāro āyatin punabbhavāhi nibbattiya paccayo*) (D. II, 55). Furthermore, the consciousness of the liberated person is not reborn because it is not restored; this is called parinibbāna. Accordingly, nibbāna can be considered the vanishing of consciousness. The *Mahātanhāsāṅkhaya Sutta* further explains that the fire caused by wood is called 'wood fire', and the fire caused by garbage is called 'garbage fire', as well as the consciousness is different according to the objects; eye consciousness, ear consciousness, etc. (M. I, 256).

In the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, the process of the consciousness stream has been well explained. No matter how strong our state of mind is, if our senses are not functioning properly, we will not have the chance of forming mental concepts (M. I, 108). As the *Mahāhattipadopama Sutta* states, three factors must be present for eye consciousness (*cakkhu viññāṇa*) to arise as a healthy sense faculty: the eye, the external object of the form, and mental attention (M. I, 184). When these three come together, eye-consciousness arises. Then, through the identification of the form (*rūpa*) with the contact (*phassa*)

and field of feelings (*vedanā*), thinking (*vitakka*) and conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) take place. Consequently, mental states associated with this eye consciousness and other faculties are created in relation to the past, present and future. Accordingly, due to the influence of *papañca*, the mind becomes entangled (Ñāṇananda, 1974). This entangled mind covers the true nature of the objects and, as a result, prolongs the cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*) (M. I, 108). Therefore, the stream of consciousness that arises through the senses has a deep psychological basis.

Since Buddhism accepts the existence of an afterlife, one can question whether the concept of punabbhava does not involve a doctrine of *viññāṇavāda* (idealism). However, it is not possible because it has been confirmed that, even though consciousness arises through a mental formation process with causal relationships, it is merely a process, not a substance (Pande, 1957; Kalupahana, 1975). Although Buddhism rejects the concept of soul (*ātmavāda*), it does not mean that everything is annihilated after death. However, Buddhism rejects the idea of a permanent, enduring soul and accepts the existence of a process of consciousness until the attainment of nibbāna (Tulku, 1977). The mental formations developed through the sensory objects are related to our unconscious mental processes. At this point, the mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) with intentions (*cetanā*) make a significant impact. Consequently, after death, the accumulated mental formations determine in which realm the individual will be born again (Anālayo,

The goal of the Buddhist path of liberation is to prevent the creation of mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) that can lead to future consequences (Gethin, 2008). *Saṅkhāra* means the karmas accumulated by the individual according to the nature of feelings that he experiences through the process of consciousness. They are stored in the mind as anusaya, deeply rooted mental traits and tendencies (Anālayo, 2018; Ñāṇamoli, 1975). As a consequence, these tendencies influence the individual's behaviour until a complete transformation through wisdom occurs. Therefore, Buddhism introduced a gradual path consisting of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) to eliminate those mental tendencies. These are the sequence of actions that begin through the behavioural changes leading to mental transformation. Liberation means being free of the mind from all inherent unwholesome tendencies. At this time, the individual's mind is freed from all consequential mental processes that are formed through the *saṅkhāra*.

According to Buddhism, the physical basis plays a significant role in mental formation, and it has been clearly stated that consciousness, name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) manifest with mutual support for the existence of the individual.

"if two bundles of reeds exist because of each other, so consciousness exists because of name and form, and because of consciousness, name and form exist."

However, all the psycho-physical components (*nāma-rūpa*), including consciousness, are composed of constituent things which are subject to constant change. Therefore, it is impossible to expect an eternal substance. But according to Buddhism, the mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) formed through an individual's long-term practice become habits and flow along with the stream of consciousness, and sometimes they can influence future existences. According to the Kukkuravatika Sutta, a human practicing bodily behaviors similar to those of a dog may be born among dogs after death (M. I, 387), and also, according to the Tevijja Sutta, one can be born among Brahmas by practicing the Four Sublime Abidings (Brahma Vihāra) (D. I, 325).

Conclusion

This study has presented a systematic analysis of the mind and mental functioning as articulated in the early Buddhism, revealing a sophisticated and integrated model that is both descriptive and prescriptive. Buddhism does not posit a static, substantial mind but instead presents a dynamic, interdependent process composed of the clinging of five aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) and three functional aspects (*citta, mano, viññāṇa*). The mind is viewed as inherently malleable, where wholesome qualities (*kusala*) directly shape mental well-being, karmic trajectories, and the cycle of rebirth. The findings of the research are included: The mind and

body are co-dependent (*nāma-rūpa*), with consciousness (*viññāṇa*) serving as a connecting thread across lifetimes; Mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) play a critical role in perpetuating saṃsāra, yet they can be transformed through intentional practice; The cultivation of the mind through morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) is central to the Buddhist path, leading to the cessation of defilements and the realization of nibbāna.

This research contributes to a clearer understanding of early Buddhist teachings on the mind as a coherent system oriented toward liberation. It also invites further exploration into contemporary applications of Buddhist mental training in fields such as psychology, ethics, and contemplative science. Ultimately, the Buddhist analysis of the mind remains a profound resource for understanding human experience and the potential for transformative freedom.

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