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## AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF CITTA AND ITS CLASSIFICATION IN ABHIDHAMMA

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### ABSTRACT

Citta is one of the four ultimate realities (paramattha), Citta is translated as consciousness, in Abhidhamma, consciousness (citta) is the pure awareness of the object. Here awareness means just pure awareness, not the awareness we use in meditation. Awareness in meditation is actually mindfulness. In defining the word 'citta', awareness means just the bare awareness. It knows that something is there. It is something like that. Consciousness is the pure or bare awareness of the object. It is like water which is clear.

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## INTRODUCTION

Citta is one of the four ultimate realities (paramattha), Citta is translated as consciousness,<sup>1</sup> in Abhidhamma, consciousness (citta) is the pure awareness of the object. Here awareness means just pure awareness, not the awareness we use in meditation. Awareness in meditation is actually mindfulness<sup>2</sup>. In defining the word 'citta', awareness means just the bare awareness. It knows that something is there. It is something like that. Consciousness is the pure or bare awareness of the object. It is like water which is clear. There are synonyms with the words 'citta' is ceta, viññāna, nāma, māna, manasa, hadaya (heart). The word "heart" is a synonym for citta or mind or minds. For example, when we say: "One person has a good heart", that does not mean we're talking about the physical heart but we want to tell about that person has a good mental attitude. These are synonyms for the word "citta". When we want to depict consciousness 'citta' with three syllables, we can use the word "viññāna", when we need to describe two syllables, we use the words 'citta' or "māna". There are 89 citta or 121 citta were accepted in Abhidhamma.<sup>3</sup>

The ancient commentaries have used three different definitions about Citta (Consciousness):<sup>4</sup> The first chapter of the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* is devoted to an examination of citta, consciousness or mind, the first of the four ultimate realities. Consciousness is taken up for study first because the focus of the Buddhist analysis of reality is experience, and consciousness is the principal element in experience, that which constitutes the knowing or awareness of an object.

**Definition of Citta:** The first Paramattha or reality is Citta.<sup>5</sup> The Pali word 'citta' is derived from the verbal root "citi", to cognize, to know, to think. The commentators<sup>6</sup> define citta in three ways: as agent, as instrument, and as activity. As the agent, citta is that which cognizes an object (*ārammaṇam cinteti ti cittaṃ*). As the instrument, citta is that by means of which the accompanying mental factors cognize the object (*etena cintenti ti cittaṃ*). As an activity, citta is itself nothing

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Aung writes in his introduction to the Compendium, p.2. "The Grammarian's definition of term citta (mind) is *ārammaṇam cinteti ti cittaṃ* (thought = thinking of an object). Here the word *cinteti* is used in its most comprehensive sense of *viñānāti* (to know). Mind is then ordinarily defined as that which is conscious of an object. From 234. this definition we get our definition of *viññāna* (consciousness). Consciousness may therefore be tentatively defined as the relation between *ārammaṇika* (subject) and *ārammaṇa* (object)." There is no reason why such a distinction should be made between Citta and Viññāna.

<sup>6</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, p.27.

<sup>1</sup> Venerable Sayādaw U Silānanda, *Handbook of Abhidhamma Studies*, volume I, Senlangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society, Printed and Bound in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2012, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.40.

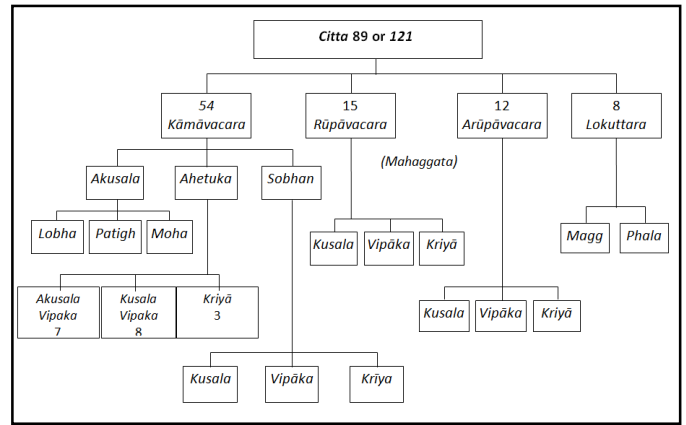
<sup>3</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, p.28

other than the process of cognizing the object (*cintanamattaṃ cittaṃ*). In terms of sheer activity, consciousness is regarded as the most adequate of the three, that is, *citta* is fundamentally an activity or process of cognizing or knowing an object. It is not an agent or instrument possessing actual being in it apart from the activity of cognizing. The definitions in terms of agent and instrument are proposed to refute the wrong view of those, who hold that a permanent self or ego is the agent and instrument of cognition. The Buddhist thinkers point out, by means of these definitions, that it is not a self that performs the act of cognition, but *citta* or consciousness. This *citta* is nothing *other* than the act of cognizing, and that act is necessarily impermanent, marked by rise and fall.

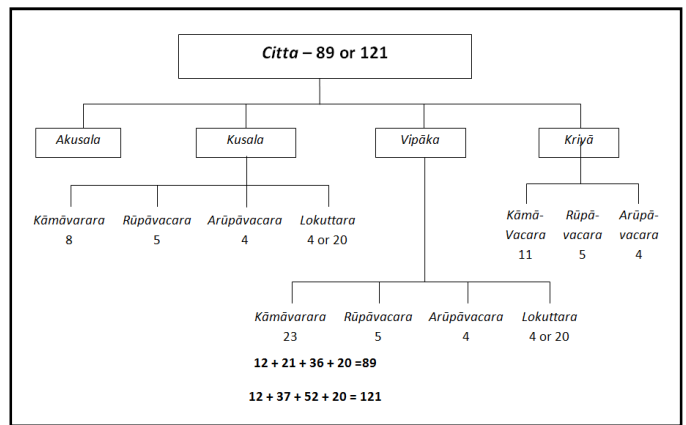
**Process of Citta:** Consciousness '*citta*' is always to be accompanied by objects; we cannot prevent our minds from grasping scene, even when we are sleeping. When asleep, we can still progress mind streams. And if there is mind, there will be the scene for that mind. That scene is blurred, so we are not aware of that scene. In fact, the mind '*citta*' always have a scene, that scene is purpose to let mind cling in. When we are sleeping, or when we passed out or even when we are anaesthetized, mind, consciousness still continuous persists. Consciousness never do not accompany scene. The mind or consciousness '*citta*' is always with us. Whether we are asleep or awake, or are we doing anything, we always have consciousness. If a person is unconscious, common parlance it is thought he had lost consciousness, but according to Abhidhamma, he still has consciousness, there is perception of scene. In this case, this is the perception of a scene blurred. Consciousness '*citta*' is never does not go along with scene, and the consciousness '*citta*' is always exist with us. Mind is always progress, but is not permanent. The flow of Consciousness "*citta*", or the progression of the mind '*citta*' is always exist. Mind '*citta*' is always appearing with us. Mind "*citta*" is always present with us.

**Overview of Various Cittas**

MUNDANE CITTAS	81
Sense-sphere cittas	54
Unwholesome cittas	12
(1)– (8): Greed-rooted cittas	8
(9) – (10): Hatred-rooted cittas	2
(11) – (12): Delusion-rooted cittas	2
Rootless cittas	18
(13) – (19) Unwholesome-resultant	7
(20) – (27) Wholesome-resultant	8
(28) – (30) Rootless-functional	3
Sense-sphere beautiful cittas	24
(31) – (38) Sense-sphere wholesome	8
(39) – (46) Sense-sphere resultant	8
(47) – (54) Sense-sphere functional	8
Fine-material-sphere cittas	15
(55) – (59) Fine-material-sphere wholesome	5
(60) – (64) Fine-material-sphere resultant	5
(65) – (69) Fine-material-sphere functional	5
Immaterial-sphere cittas	12
(70) – (73) Immaterial-sphere wholesome	4
(74) – (77) Immaterial-sphere resultant	4
(78) – (81) Immaterial-sphere	4
SUPRAMUNDANE CITTAS	8 or 40
Supramundane wholesome cittas	4 or 20
(82) or (82) – (86) Path of stream-entry	1 or 5
(83) or (87) – (91) Path of once-returning	1 or 5
(84) or (92) – (96) Path of non-returning	1 or 5
(85) or (97) – (101) Path of Arahantship	1 or 5
Supramundane resultant cittas	4 or 20
(86) or (102)-(106) Fruit of stream-entry	1 or 5
(87) or (107)-(111) Fruit of once-returning	1 or 5
(88) or (112) – (116) Fruit of non-returning	1 or 5
(89) or (117) – (121) Fruit of Arahantship	1 or 5



54 + 15 + 12 + 8 = 89



To elucidate the nature of any ultimate reality, the *Pāli* commentators propose four defining devices by means of which it can be delimited. These four devices are: (1) its characteristic (*lakḥaṇa*), i.e., the salient quality of the phenomenon; (2) its function (*rasa*), its performance of a concrete task (*kiṭṭha*) or achievement of a goal (*sampatti*); and (3) its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*), the principal condition upon which it depends. In the case of *citta*, its characteristic is the knowing of an object (*viñānana*). Its function is to be a “forerunner” (*pubbaṅgama*) of the mental factors in that it presides over them and is always accompanied by them. Its manifestation the way it appears in the mediator’s experience is as a continuity of processes (*sandhāna*). Its proximate cause is mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), because consciousness cannot arise alone, in the complete absence of mental factors and material phenomena. Knowing means simply the awareness, the bare awareness, this bare awareness of the object is called mind (*citta*). Mind (*Citta*) can never arise without an object. Whenever there is mind (*citta*), there must be its object. Sometimes it may be a vivid object. Sometimes it may be a blurred object. There must always been object for *citta* to arise. *Citta* depends on the object to arise. While *citta* has a single characteristic as the cognizing of an object, a characteristic that remains the same in all its diverse manifestations, the *Adhidhamma* distinguishes *citta* into a variety of types. These types, also call *cittas*, are reckoned as 89 or, by a finer method of differentiation, as 121 (table 4&5) What we ordinarily think as consciousness is really a series of *cittas*, momentary acts of consciousness, occurring in such rapid succession that we can’t detect the discrete occasions, which are of diverse types.

**Classification of *citta* or consciousness:** In this paper, *Citta* is classified according to the planes of existence and its nature.

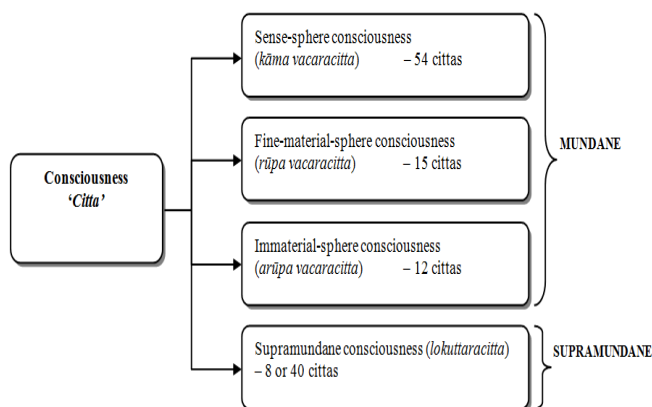
There are 89 or 121 *citta* in the *Abhidhamma*.<sup>7</sup> *Citta* is actually one with reference to its characteristic of knowing the object. But it is accompanied by different mental factors, so *citta* becomes many. First *Citta* is divided into mundane and supramundane. The mundane *cittas* are subdivided into sense-sphere *cittas* (54 *cittas*), and then there are form-sphere *cittas* or fine-material sphere *cittas* (15 *cittas*), and then next there are immaterial sphere *Cittas* (12 *cittas*). Sense-sphere *cittas* are again divided into subdivisions. They are unwholesome *Cittas* twelve, rootless *Cittas* eighteen, and sense-sphere beautiful *Cittas* twenty-four. Altogether we get 81 mundane *Cittas*. Then supramundane *cittas* are subdivided into two. First there are wholesome supramundane *cittas* four or twenty. Next there are resultant supramundane *cittas* four or twenty. So altogether there are 89 or 121 types of consciousness. The *Abhidhamma* not only distinguishes the types of consciousness, but more importantly, it also exhibits them as ordered into a cosmos, a unified and closely interwoven whole. To do so it employs several overlapping principles of classification. The first of these, introduced in the present section of the *saṅgaha*, is the plane (*bhūmi*) of consciousness. There are four planes of consciousness. Three are mundane: the sense sphere, the fine-material sphere, and the immaterial sphere; the fourth plane is the supramundane.

*Tattha cittaṃ tāva catubbidham hoti:*

(i) *kāmāvacaraṃ*; (ii) *rūpāvacaraṃ*; (iii) *arūpāvacaraṃ*; (iv) *lokuttarañ cāti*.<sup>8</sup>

Of them. Consciousness, firstly, is fourfold:

#### Four planes of consciousness ‘*citta*’



The word *avacara*, “sphere”, which qualifies the first three planes, means “that which moves about in, or frequents, a particular locality.” The locality frequented is the plane of existence (also *bhūmi*) designated by the name of the sphere, that is, the sensuous, the fine-material, and the immaterial planes of existence. However, though the three spheres of consciousness have a particularly close connection with the corresponding planes of existence, they are not identical. The spheres of consciousness are categories for classifying types of *cittas*, the planes of existence are realms or worlds into which beings are reborn and which they pass their lives.

A definite relation nevertheless exists between the spheres of consciousness and the planes of existence: a particular sphere of consciousness comprises those types of consciousness that are typical of the corresponding plane of existence and that frequent that plane by tending to arise most often there. Consciousness of a particular sphere is not tied to the corresponding plane but may arise in other planes of existence as well; for instance, fine-material and immaterial sphere *cittas* can arise in the sensory plane, and sense-sphere *cittas* can arise in the fine-material and immaterial planes. But still, a connection is found in that a sphere of consciousness is typical for the plane that shares its name. Moreover, the kammically active *cittas* of any particular sphere, the *cittas* that generate *kamma*, tend to produce rebirth into the corresponding plane of existence, and, if they succeed in gaining the opportunity to generate rebirth, they will do so only in that plane, not in any other plane. Hence, the tie between the spheres of consciousness and the corresponding planes of existence is extremely close.<sup>9</sup>

**i) Sense-sphere consciousness (*kāmāvacaracitta*):** The word *kāma* means both subjective sensuality, that is, craving for sense pleasures, and objective sensuality, that is, the five external sense-objects - visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. The *kāmabhūmi* is the sensory plane of existence, which comprises eleven realms - the four woeful states, the human realm, and the six sensuous heavens.<sup>10</sup> Sense-sphere consciousness includes all those *cittas* that have their proper domain in the sensory plane of existence, though they may arise in other planes as well.

**ii) Fine-material-sphere consciousness (*rūpāvacaracitta*):** The fine-material sphere is the plane of consciousness corresponding to the fine-material plane of existence (*rūpabhūmi*), or the plane of consciousness pertaining to the states of meditative absorption called the *rūpajjhānas*. Any consciousness that mostly moves about in this realm is understood as belonging to the fine-material sphere. The *rūpajjhānas* are so called because they are usually attained in meditation by concentrating on a material object (*rūpa*), which may be a device such as the earth-*kaṣiṇa*, etc. or the parts of one’s own body, etc. Such an object becomes the basis on which the *jhānas* are developed. The exalted states of consciousness attained on the basis of such objects are called *rūpāvacaracitta*, consciousness of the fine-material sphere.

**iii) Immaterial-sphere consciousness (*arūpāvacaracitta*):** The immaterial sphere is the plane of consciousness corresponding to the immaterial plane of existence (*arūpabhūmi*), or the plane of consciousness pertaining to the immaterial absorptions - the *arūpajjhānas*. Any consciousness that mostly moves about in this realm is understood as belonging to the immaterial sphere. When one meditates to attain the formless meditative states beyond the *rūpajjhānas*, one must discard all objects connected with material form and focus upon some non-material object, such as the infinity of space, etc. The exalted states of consciousness attained on the basis of such objects are called *arūpāvacaracitta*, consciousness of the immaterial sphere.

<sup>9</sup> Mahāthera Nārada, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2006, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> The six heavens are, in ascending order, the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, the Yāma Heaven, the Tushita Heaven, the Heaven of Enjoying the Conjured, and the Heaven of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others.

<sup>7</sup> Mahāthera Nārada, Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2006, P.28

<sup>8</sup> Mahāthera Nārada, Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2006, p.27

**iv) Supramundane consciousness (*lokuttaracitta*):** The word *lokuttara*, “supramundane,” is derived from *loka* = “world” and *uttara* = “beyond, transcending.” The concept of “world” is threefold: the world of living beings (*sattaloka*), the physical universe (*okāsaloka*), and the world of formations (*sagghāraloka*), that is, the totality of conditional phenomena, physical and mental. The notion of world relevant here is the world of formations, that is, all mundane phenomena included within the five aggregates of clinging. That which transcends the world of conditioned things is the unconditioned element, *Nibbāna*, and the types of consciousness that directly accomplish the realization of *Nibbāna* are called *lokuttara citta*, supramundane consciousness. The other three types are called, in distinction, *lokiyacitta*, “mundane consciousness.” Consciousness (*citta*) can also be classified on the basis of other principles besides plane. One principle of classification that plays an important role in the Abhidhamma philosophy is kind or nature (*jāti*). In the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, consciousness (*citta*) is divided into four classes: unwholesome (*akusala*), wholesome (*kusala*), resultant (*vipāka*), and functional (*kriyā* or *kiriya*).

**Unwholesome consciousness (*akusala citta*)** is consciousness that is accompanied by one or another of the three unwholesome roots - greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Such consciousness is called “unwholesome” because it is mentally unhealthy, morally blameworthy, and productive of painful results.

**Wholesome consciousness (*kusalacitta*)** is consciousness that is accompanied by wholesome roots — non-greed (*alobha*), or generosity (*dāna*), nonhatred (*adosa*), or loving-kindness (*mettā*), and non-delusion (*amoha*), or wisdom (*paññā*). Such consciousness is mentally healthy, morally blameless, and productive of pleasant results. Both wholesome and unwholesome consciousnesses constitute *kamma*, volitional action.

**Resultant consciousness (*vipāka citta*):** The *cittas* or states of consciousness, which arise through the ripening of *kamma* are called “resultants” (*vipāka*). These constitute a third class of *citta* distinct from the former two, a class that comprises both the results of wholesome *kamma* and the results of unwholesome *kamma*.

It should be understood that both *kamma* and its results are purely mental. *Kamma* is volitional activity associated with wholesome or unwholesome *cittas*; its results are other *cittas* that experience the maturation of *kamma*.

**Functional consciousness (*kriyā* or *kiriya citta*):** According to the division by way of nature, is called in Pāli “*kiriya*” or “*kriyā*,” rendered here in English as ‘functional’. This type of consciousness is neither *kamma* nor *kamma* resultant. It involves activity, yet this activity is not karmically determinate and thus is not capable of producing karmic results. Resultant consciousness and functional consciousness are neither wholesome nor unwholesome. Instead, they are classified as indeterminate (*abyākata*), that is, consciousness that cannot be determined in terms of the dichotomy of wholesome and unwholesome. According to the *Abhidhamma*, there are 31 planes of existence.<sup>11</sup> Eleven planes belong to sensuous realms (or sensuous spheres). Sixteen belong to form-spheres. Form here means fine-material. Four belong to formless or immaterial spheres. Altogether there are 31 planes. Human beings and lower celestial beings belong to the eleven sensuous realms or sensuous spheres. Consciousness that frequents these realms is called consciousness of sensuous sphere. In Pāli that is *Kāmāvacara*. That does not mean these types of consciousness do not arise in other realms. They do arise in other realms, but their primary location of arising is the sensuous realms.

They are called *cittas* pertaining to the sensuous sphere. Out of the sixteen form-sphere realms, one realm is the abode of mindless beings. There is no mind in that realm. Consciousness belongs to mind. Therefore, that realm has to be left out. The types of consciousness, which arise mostly in those fifteen realms are classed as form-sphere consciousness. There are other higher types of consciousness, which mainly belong to or which mainly frequent the four formless realms. We get three groups - the first belonging to sensuous sphere, the second belonging to form-sphere or fine-material sphere, and the third belonging to formless or immaterial sphere. There is another sphere, which is called supramundane. That one goes beyond these spheres or three kinds of realms.

<sup>11</sup> Mahāthera Nārada, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, 2006, pp.186-187.