

The Buddhist Perspective on mind and its Intrinsic Function

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Synonymous terms or equivalents used for the denotation of mind are '*citta*', '*mana*', '*viññāṇa*', '*manasa*' and '*hadaya*'. Out of these, in the Pāli canonical texts, the first three are often used to denote the mind. '*Citta*' is derived from √cit – to think¹, '*mana*' as well as '*manasa*' is from √man – to think and '*viññāṇa*' is from √ñā – to know. '*Hadaya*' is heart; as the heart is considered the seat of the mind, consciousness or mind is also understood by the word '*hadaya*'. However, the three terms, '*citta*', '*mana*' and '*viññāṇa*' are described mostly as synonymous. In this regard, Prof. P.D. Premasiri says thus,

"In the Pali Nikāyas three terms are frequently used to refer to what we understand by the term 'mind'. They are *citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa*. The range of application of these terms is not well defined in the Suttas. The meanings of these terms could be understood only by examining their contextual usage. There is no attempt to give precise and exclusive definitions of these terms. Some passages that mention all three terms together suggest that they are synonymous. However, it becomes clear, when their different contextual use is examined, that they cannot be used altogether interchangeably."²

Prof. P. D. Premasiri further says that *citta* and *mano* are considered as constitute of the human's psychological personality that can be developed and cultivated. The two terms *bhāvita* and *abhāvita* are used in compound forms with *citta* and '*bhāvita*' refers to the cultivated mind and '*abhāvita*' refers to the uncultivated mind. No instance in which such compounds are formed with *viññāṇa* can be found. *Citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* can be defiled or purified, restrained or unrestrained, corrupted or uncorrupted. *Mano* is recognized with the other organs of sense, eye, ear, nose, tongue that have a physical base to the extent that it is also sense faculty but *citta* and *viññāṇa* are not so recognized.³ Prof. O. H. De A. Wijesekara in his booklet, 'The Buddhist Concept of Mind' says regarding these three terms thus,

"*Mano* is employed generally in the sense of the instrument of thinking, that which cogitates, and, sometimes, in the sense of that which purposes and intends, *citta* has more or less the sense of "heart" (*hadaya*), the seat of feeling, and refers to the affective aspect of mind as experiencing. The term *viññāṇa*, usually taken as cognitive consciousness, has also a deeper connotation than the other two, and in certain contexts indicates the psychic factor, which is the cause for the rebirth of an individual after death. One may say that these particular shades of meaning are typical of these three terms in the early Discourses. There is no doubt that they all indicate some aspect of the inner, immaterial or subjective nature of man, and as such, they are all included in the Buddhist concept of mind, using that English word in a general sense."⁴

“Mind,” according to the Pāli canon, are *Citta*, *Mano* and *Viññāṇa* but *citta* refers to the common nature of mind, *Mano* refers to sense faculty and *Viññāṇa* to resultant consciousness. Ven. Narada mentions in Manual of Abhidhamma, the English translation of the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha,

“*Citta*, *Ceta*, *Cittuppāda*, *Nāma*, *Mano*, *Viññāṇa* are all used as synonymous terms in Abhidhamma. Hence, from the Abhidhamma standpoint no distinction is made between mind and consciousness. When the so-called being is divided into its two constituent parts, *Nāma* (mind) is used. When it is divided into five aggregates (*Pañcaskhandha*), *Viññāṇa* is used. The term *Citta* is invariably employed while referring to different classes of consciousness. In isolated cases, in the ordinary sense of mind, both terms *Citta* and *Mano* are frequently used.”⁵

Prof. Sumanapala Galamangoda in his journal mentions that *citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* are synonymous but refer to the common nature of mind, a sense-faculty and resultant consciousness respectively.⁶ Ven. Buddhaghosa, the great exegete of Pāli canon elucidates four meanings for *citta* or *mind*: (1) it is *citta* that thinks of its objects in a series by way of apperception in a thought process; (2) *citta* refers to the resultant thoughts accumulated by its intentional actions which are wholesome or unwholesome. Here, it is regarded as the store-house holding mental seeds in the forms of mental dispositions, proclivities, tendencies, and hidden forces; (3) *citta* denotes all mental activities – all classes of thoughts, and (4) the meaning of *citta* can be conceived also by virtue of its capacity to create a variety of effects.

In the Upanishads, mind is interpreted to mean soul and called ‘*nirāśraya vijñāṇa*’. In Western thought, mind is taken to mean soul. Nevertheless, in Buddhism, it is neither a soul nor a soul substance. Buddhist psychology found in the discourses of the Buddha and the analysis found in the later *Abhidhamma* treatises is a psychology without a ‘psyche’. The fact of its conditional nature is emphasized throughout the Suttas. Ven. Narada in Manual of Abhidhamma, the English translation of the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, says regarding *citta*,

“The first paramattha or reality is *citta*. It is derived from the root “*citi*”, to think. According to the commentary *citta* is that which is aware of (*cinteti* = *vijānāti*) an object. It is not that which thinks of an object as the term implies. From an Abhidhamma standpoint *citta* may better be defined as the awareness of an object, since there is no agent like a soul.”⁷

Mind which belongs to one of the six sense-faculties of human is an aggregate. Mind which is always connected with other sense-faculties never arises independently. Mind is a process but not an eternal or permanent entity as implied by the *Paṭiccasamuppāda-vibhaṅga Sutta* (Analysis of Dependent Origination)⁸

According to the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the three terms, *citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* denote the function of mind. Although these three terms are of interchangeability and same denotations, each term depicts distinct aspects as subjective, sensory and perceptive, and intellectual aspects. *Citta* represents the subjective aspect of consciousness. *Mano* is said to represent

the rational faculty of man. *Viññāṇa* represents the field of sense and sense-reaction, which is the sphere of sensory and perceptive activity. The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (States of Consciousness or The Soul Theory) describes the mind in terms of consciousness (*viññāṇa*).⁹

The individual is analyzed into *nāma - rūpa*. In this analysis, *nāma* refers to mind and its other mental factors. In the analysis of the individual into five factors as *rūpa* (form), *vedanā* (sensation), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental formations) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness), *viññāṇa* is mind while sensation, perception and mental formations are mental factors related to the functions of the mind. There is yet another analysis in which mental functions are classified in accordance with the sense faculties. In this classification of the individual into twelve faculties, eye (*cakkhu*), ear (*sota*), nose (*ghāna*), tongue (*jivhā*), body (*kāya*) and mind (*mana*), there are six kinds of consciousness by way of their relationship to sense faculties. Hence, mind becomes six fold thus making the classification twelvefold together with eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind consciousness.

The definition of '*cetasika* (skt. *caitasika* or *caitti*) according to the Manual of Abhidhamma – Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha is 'that which is associated with the mind or consciousness is *cetasika*.¹⁰ According to Abhidhamma, mind or consciousness is accompanied *cetasikas* (mental states) which enumerate fifty two (52).¹¹ According to Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, *nāma* denotes both consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and mental states (*cetasikas*).¹² One of them is *vedanā* (feeling). Another is "*saññā*" (perception). The remaining fifty (50) are collectively called *saṅkhāra*. The

whole group of feelings is called *vedanākkhandha*. So are *saññākkhandha* and *saṅkhārakkhandha*. The receptacle of these mental properties is *viññāṇa* (consciousness). In other words, mind or consciousness is accompanied by fifty-two mental states (*cetasikās*). Volition (*cetanā*) is the most important of them.

Cetanā, the generic term used in Buddhist psychology denotes the dominant conative function (conation) in mentation (mental activity). According to Prof. W. S. Karunaratna, different aspects of meaning embodied in the term are;

"Will, volition, intention, motivation, conation, drive, stimulus, disposition, determination, effort, choice, resolve, arrangement, organization, aspiration, purposive intellection, mental construction and formative tendency. In its more specific technical signification, however, *cetanā*, unless otherwise qualified, refers only to the self-centered, goal-directed and result-oriented volitional disposition which impels the worldly individual (*puthujjana*)."¹³

Ven. Narada in Manual of Abhidhamma, the English translation of the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha says,

"Both *Cetanā* and *Citta* are derived from the same root √ cit, to think. In the case of *Citta*—mind or consciousness—the root assumes the meaning of discernment (*viñānana*), while in *Cetanā* it is used in the sense of co-ordination (*abhisandhāna*) and accumulation (*āyuhana*). According to the Atthasālinī and Vibhāvinī Tīkā *Cetanā* is that which

co-ordinates the mental states associated with itself on the object of consciousness. (*Attanā sampayutta-dhamme ārammaṇe abhisandahati*). Like a chief disciple, or like a carpenter who fulfils his duties and regulates the work of others as well, so does *Cetanā* fulfil its own function and regulate the function of other concomitants associated with itself.”¹⁴

Cetanā (volition) is conditioned by affective (*vedanā*) and cognitive (*saññā*) elements and functions as the consciously directed effort by individual or functions without deliberation by him. Prof. W. S. Karunaratna further says,

“*Cetanā* is not passive and reactive but active and creative. It stimulates and arouses persistent activity. It binds the individual to a specific pattern of conduct consistent with its general direction. It sustains activity of mind until it seeks and obtains the fulfillment of its purposes. In its drive towards a specific objective it also arranges and affects all other associated mental factors. It provides the motive force to the life of the individual in his perennial quest for the achievement of his self-serving ends.”¹⁵

Bhikkhu Bodhi comments on formations (*saṅkhāra*);

“In the context of dependent origination, formations (*saṅkhāra*) are wholesome and unwholesome volitions, or, in short, kamma. The bodily formation is volition that is expressed through the body, the verbal formation volition that is expressed by speech, and the mental formation volition that remains internal without coming to bodily or verbal expression.”¹⁶

Regarding *cetasikas*, Encyclopaedia of Buddhism¹⁷ gives a list of equivalents to the term ‘*cetasikas*’ that denote all aspects of mentation as psychic function-events, mental co-efficients, mental concomitants, mental constituents, mental factors, mental adjuncts, mental elements and mental faculties. Ven. Nyanatiloka in his Buddhist Dictionary – Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines, describing the term ‘*citta*’ says,

“*Citta*: ‘mind’, ‘consciousness’, ‘state of consciousness’, is a synonym of *mano* (q.v.) and *viññāṇa* (s. *khandha* and Tab. 1). Dhs. divides all phenomena into consciousness (*citta*), mental concomitants (*cetasika*, q.v.) and corporeality (*rūpa*). In *adhicitta*, ‘higher mentality’, it signifies the concentrated, quietened mind, and is one of the 3 trainings (s. *sikkhā*). The concentration (or intensification) of consciousness is one of the 4 roads to power (s. *iddhipāda*). *Citta-kkhaṇa*: ‘consciousness-moment’ is the time occupied by one single stage in the perceptual process or cognitive series (*cittavīthi*; s. *viññāṇa-kicca*). This moment is again subdivided into genetic (*uppāda*) static (*thiti*) and dissolving (*bhaṅga*) moment. One such moment is said in the commentaries to be of inconceivably short duration and to last no longer than billionth part of the time occupied by a flash of lightning. However that may be, we ourselves know from the experience that it is possible within one single second to dream of innumerable things and events. In A. I, 10 it said: “Nothing, O, Monks, do I know that changes so rapidly as consciousness. Scarcely anything may be

found that could be compared with this so rapidly changing consciousness.”¹⁸

The nature of *cetasikās* or mental states is described in the following stanza of the *Cetasikapariccheda* of Manual of Abhidhamma, the translated version of *Abhidhammattha saṅgaha* is as follows;

“*Ekuppādanirodhā ca, ekāmbanavattukā
Cetoyuttā dvipaṇṇāsa, dhammā cetasikā matā*”¹⁹

The fifty-two states²⁰ associated with consciousness arise and perish together with consciousness and have the same object and basis as consciousness. That means *cetasika* arises together with consciousness, perishes together with it, has an identical object with it, and has a common basis with it. No consciousness exists apart from its concomitants. The both consciousness and its respective co-adjuncts arise and perish simultaneously.²¹ Prof. Sumanapala Galmangoda cites in his journal regarding the mind thus,

“Mind is an aggregate and it is a process but not an eternal or permanent entity (*Saṃyuttanikāya*, iii, see Feer 1884 – 1904: 25). Mind never arises independently. It is always connected with other sense –faculties (*Nanamoli* 1956: 479 -546)”²²

Encyclopedia of Buddhism says that *cetanā* clearly is the causative form of *citta* (*cinteti* >*ceteti*, *cetayati* >*cetanā*) and that the effective aspect (*vedanā*) refers to the feeling aspect of *citta*; the cognitive aspect (*saññā*) is concerned with knowing, believing, reasoning and perceiving; and the conative aspect (*cetanā*) is concerned with acting, willing, striving, and desiring. These three aspects do not function separately. All

three aspects as mental processes operate all at once by way of concurrent action and inter-action.²³

Mind occupies the pre-eminent place in the Buddhist course of training of developing the mind, as mentioned in Manual of Abhidhamma – *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, mind has been classified into eighty-nine varieties in accordance with the planes of existence:²⁴

1. Fifty-four kinds of Consciousnesses pertaining to the sensuous sphere (*kāmāvacara*)
2. Fifteen kinds of Consciousnesses pertaining to the sphere of forms (*rūpāvacara*)
3. Twelve kinds of Consciousnesses pertaining to the formless sphere (*arūpāvacara*)
4. Eight kinds of Supra-Mundane Consciousness (*lokuttara*).

In Abhidhamma, the term ‘*citta*’ for mind or consciousness which usually deals with the subjective aspect of mind is used. This classification brings to light that the purpose behind the classification is purely moral. It is in conformity with the Buddhist theory of thirty-one planes of existence, which is sometimes introduced by some Western scholars as Buddhist cosmology. There is yet another importance of the classification; it brings into focus the Buddhist teaching on *kamma*, rebirth, meditative absorptions and the realization of *Nibbāna* as the Supreme Bliss.

Intrinsic Function of Mind

Mind’s functions of feeling, perceiving, conation and cognition can be seen in many instances. It includes all

sensory, perceptive, rational and subjective aspects of mind. In analysis, the intrinsic function of the mind can be recognized in Buddhism as three functions – (1) Affective, (2) Conative and (3) Cognitive. In terms of Buddhist psychoanalysis, these three different aspects of activities that *citta* performs are (1) affective aspect (*vedanā*), (2) conative aspect (*cetanā*) (mental actions having to do with striving, including desire, volition, and purpose) and (3) cognitive aspect (*saññā*) (of or pertaining to the mental processes of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning, as contrasted with emotional and volitional processes). The affective aspect and the cognitive aspect are mental states dependent on *citta*. In other words, the (1) affective aspect of the mind refers to the function of feeling that mind engages in. (2) The conative function of the mind is acting, willing, striving and desiring and (3) the cognitive aspect deals with the functions of knowing, believing, reasoning and perceiving. In Pāli, different functions of the mind with a number of verbs coined from $\sqrt{nā}$ – to know can be cited and many verbal forms have been used to denote the function of knowing:

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| <i>Jānāti</i> | knows |
| <i>Vijānāti</i> | knows with discrimination |
| <i>Sanjānāti</i> | recognizes |
| <i>Pajānāti</i> | knows with wisdom |
| <i>Parijānāti</i> | knows comprehensively |
| <i>Abhijānāti</i> | knows with extra-sensory perception |
| <i>Ajānāti</i> | learns or grasps |
| <i>Paṭijānāti</i> | admits or approves |

Ven. Pategama Gnanarama Thero mentions in his book the following definitions of the multifaceted functions of the mind reveal its operations or functions in different contexts as appeared in the Pāli canon where the active and passive characteristics of the mind are revealed.²⁵

1. It gives pleasure, propitiates and convinces (*ārādheti*).
2. It stretches forth, holds out, takes up, exerts, strains and vigorously applies in relation to its objects (*paggaṇhāti*).
3. It disposes, collects, brings together, heaps up, gathers, arranges, focuses and concentrates in numerous ways (*upasaṃharati*).
4. It bends, directs and applies (*namati*).
5. It springs forward, jumps onto, takes to and rejoices in its object (*pakkhandati*, *pasīdati*, *santiṭṭhati*).
6. It calms down and quietens (*passambhati*).
7. It agitates, disturbs, crushes, harasses and upsets an individual (*matheti*).
8. It shakes, unsettles, wavers and is in doubt (*vikampate*).
9. It holds back, obstructs, restrains and forbids (*nivāreti*).
10. It can strike, kill, destroy and beat down (*pahaññati*).
11. It aspires, longs for, prays for and intends (*paṇidahati*).
12. It clings to and gets bound up with its objects (*sajjati*, *gayhati*, *bajjati*).
13. It defiles, corrupts and tarnishes (*vyāsiñcati*).

14. It is drawn to, feels attached to, is inclined towards and indulges in its object (*adhimuccati*).

As these functions of the mind are not separable and detectable individually due to simultaneous actions and interactions, the mental process becomes complicated, involved and complex. According to the definitions of the multifaceted nature and function of the mind, it is quite evident that Buddhism recognizes three functions of the mind; viz. (1) affective, (2) conative and (3) cognitive.²⁶

“The affective aspect of the mind refers to the function of feeling that mind engages in. The conative function of the mind is acting, willing, striving and desiring and the cognitive aspect deals with the functions of knowing, believing, reasoning and perceiving. As these functions of the mind are not separable and detectable individually, due to simultaneous action and interaction, the mental process becomes complicated, involved and complex.”²⁷

Conclusion

The mind, the most dynamic force in the world can either bring peace and happiness or unhappiness and destruction to oneself, society and the world because it is endowed both with frailties, infirmities, shortcomings, weaknesses etc. as well as strength, potentiality, power, capability, aptness etc. Mind is defined in Buddhism as a non-physical phenomenon which perceives, thinks, recognizes, experiences and reacts to the environment. The mind has two main aspects: clarity and knowing; this means that the mind is clear, formless and

allows for objects to arise in it, and that the mind has awareness, consciousness which can engage with objects. The mind is not something permanent but changes every moment. viz., mind is an ever changing, constant, quick-moving process.

Endnotes

- 1 Dhammapada, Ch. 3. V. 33. pp. 35 – 36.
- 2 Malasekara, G.P. (2003), (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), Encyclopedia of Buddhism Vol. VII., p. 1.
- 3 Op. cit. p. 1 – 2.
- 4 Wijesekara, O.H.DE A., The Buddhist Concept of Mind, BPS, Bodhi Leaves, No. A 9.
- 5 Narada, (1979) Manual of Abhidhamma –Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, BMS, Fourth revised ed., p. 24.
- 6 Galmangoda, Sumanapala, (2010) Asian Concepts and Practices of Mental Culture as an Approach to Global Recovery through Mental Well-Being, SARRC Journal Vol. 1. p. 15.
- 7 Narada, (1979) Manual of Abhidhamma –Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, BMS, Fourth revised ed. p. 24.
- 8 The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikāya), Ch. I 12.2 (2), WP. pp. 534 – 535.
- 9 The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha Nikāya), 9 WP. p. 159 / DB, 9 PTS. Vol. II. PTS. pp. 246 – 253.
- 10 Narada, (1979) A Manual of Abhidhamma –Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, BMS, Fourth revised ed., p. 97.
- 11 Op. cit.
- 12 Op. cit. p. 23.

- 13 Malasekara, G.P. (1979) (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. IV. – p. 86.
- 14 Narada, (1979) A Manual of Abhidhamma –Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, BMS, Fourth revised ed., p. 107.
- 15 Malasekara, G.P. (1979 – 1989) (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. IV., p. 91.
- 16 The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjima Nikāya), Notes to Sutta 9. 131. WP. p. 1187.
- 17 Malasekara, G.P. (1979 – 1989), (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. IV., p. 97.
- 18 Nyanatiloka, *BDMBTD*, BPS. p. 85 ff.
- 19 Narada. (1979) A Manual of Abhidhamma –Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, BMS, Fourth revised ed., p. 97.
- 20 Malasekara, G.P. (1979 – 1989) (founder Editor–in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. IV. , p. 100.
- 21 Narada, (1979) A Manual of Abhidhamma –Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, BMS, Fourth revised ed., p. 97.
- 22 Galmangoda, Sumanapala, (2010) Asian Concepts and Practices of Mental Culture as an Approach to Global Recovery through Mental Well-Being, SARRC Journal Vol.1., p.15.
- 23 Malasekara, G.P. (1979 – 1989) (founder Editor –in-Chief), W.G. Weeraratne (Editor–in-Chief), Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. IV. , p.87 ff.
- 24 Op. cit. p.100 ff.
- 25 Gnanarama, Pategama, Ph.D. (2000) Essentials of Buddhism, p. 120. ff.
- 26 Gnanarama, Pategama, Ph.D., (2000) Essentials of Buddhism, p. 121.
- 27 Op. cit. pp. 121 – 122.