

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIRD BUDDHIST COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THERAVĀDA ABHIDHAMMA

KONTRIBUSI KONSILI BUDDHIS KETIGA UNTUK PERKEMBANGAN ABHIDHAMMA THERAVĀDA

Tri Saputra Medhācitto

Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Email: trisaputramedhacitto@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the contribution of the third Buddhist council for the development of Theravāda Abhidhamma literature. This research is carried out with library approach by collecting data mainly from canonical texts as well as its commentaries. The recent works written by scholars such as books, journals, and articles are used to elaborate the explanation. Having examined the data collected from the sources, it is known that the third Buddhist councils (*saṅgiti/saṅgāyanā*) which held during the 3rd century B.C. under the patronage of King Asoka, contributed significant results for the development of Buddhist literature, particularly in the context of Abhidhamma literature. One of the key outcomes of the third Buddhist council was the completion of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, by adding *Kathāvatthupparāṇa* which was composed by Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera at the end of the meeting. As result of that, *Abhidhamma Pitaka* consists of seven books, including *Kathāvatthupparāṇa*. In conclusion, the third Buddhist council marked a crucial point in the development of Theravāda Abhidhamma.

Keywords: Third Buddhist Council, History, Theravāda, Abhidhamma

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah kontribusi konsili Buddhist ketiga bagi perkembangan literatur Abhidhamma Theravāda. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan kepustakaan dengan cara mengumpulkan data utamanya dari Kanon dan Kitab Penjelasnya. Karya terbaru yang ditulis oleh cendekiawan seperti buku, jurnal, dan artikel lainnya digunakan untuk mengembangkan penjelasan. Setelah menelaah data yang dikumpulkan dari sumber-sumbernya, dapat diketahui bahwa konsili Buddhist ketiga (*saṅgiti/saṅgāyanā*) yang diadakan di abad ke-3 SM di bawah dukungan raja Asoka menghasilkan kontribusi penting bagi perkembangan literatur Buddhist, khususnya dalam konteks literatur Abhidhamma. Salah satu hasil utama dari konsili Buddhist ketiga ini adalah lengkapnya Abhidhamma Pitaka dengan ditambahkannya Kitab *Kathāvatthupparāṇa* yang disusun oleh Yang Mulia Mogaliputtatissa Thera ke dalam koleksi *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* di akhir pertemuan. Sebagai hasilnya, *Abhidhamma Pitaka* terdiri dari tujuh buku, termasuk Kitab *Kathāvatthupparāṇa*. Sebagai kesimpulan, Konsili Buddhist ketiga ini menandai peristiwa penting dalam perkembangan Abhidhamma. Theravāda.

Kata Kunci: Konsili Buddhist Ketiga, Sejarah, Theravāda, Abhidhamma

INTRODUCTION

Buddhist council (*saṅgiti* or *saṅgāyanā*) is a special meeting of community of monks for the purpose of settling certain disputes among monks on matter of rules (*vinaya*) or doctrines (*dhamma*) taught by the Buddha. Buddhist council was held firstly after three months of the demise of the Buddha (Vin. II. 283). The following Buddhist council was held hundred years after the demise of the Buddha (Vin. II. 299). The third Buddhist council was held hundred eighteen years after the holding of the second Buddhist council (Mhv. V. 276).

There were various results of the holding of Buddhist councils, especially for the development of Buddhist literatures. At the First Buddhist council, it produced the compilation of the Buddha's teachings as Dhamma and Vinaya (Vin. II. 286). The Second Buddhist council led to the division of saṅgha into two main sects known as Theravāda and Mahāsaṅghika (Mhv. V. 4). The third Buddhist council brought consequence to the complete collection of *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* by adding *Kathāvattthuppakarāṇa* composed by Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera, and the propagation of Buddhism with its literatures into various countries (Mhv. V. 278).

After examining the history of Buddhist councils, most scholars agreed that Theravāda Abhidhamma has been developed. At the first Buddhist council, only Dhamma and Vinaya were settled. There was no specific discussing on Abhidhamma in the meeting. Even at the second Buddhist council, there was no indication that Abhidhamma was recited together. *Abhidhamma Pitaka* were completed after the third Buddhist council. Therefore, the third Buddhist council must be very significant to understand the development of Theravāda Abhidhamma. For this reason, this paper will deal with the third Buddhist council and the development of Theravāda Abhidhamma. This study is based on Buddhist primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources mean Pali canon and its commentaries, and also Sri Lankan chronicles written in Pali language long time ago. While secondary sources mean later treatises in form of books written by modern Buddhist scholars.

METHODOLOGY

This is a library research. Library research involves the step of gathering relevant data from books, essays, or journals and examines them to write a topic. This research was carried out by collecting relevant data mainly based on primary sources and secondary sources. The Canonical texts, Sri Lankan chronicles and its commentaries are considered as primary sources. Contemporary works authored by modern scholars are used as additional information to support the argument, and they are considered as secondary sources. In this study, a library approach methodology was employed to investigate the contribution of the Third Buddhist Council for the development of Theravāda Abhidhamma. As result of this research, it is known that Theravāda Abhidhamma has been developed in the Third Buddhist Council by adding *Kathāvattthuppakarāṇa* composed by Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera to the collection of *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Source Texts of the Holding of the Third Buddhist Council

The Third Buddhist Council was held during the 3rd century B.C. in the reign of King Asoka (Mhv. V. 276). According to Theravāda tradition, it is regarded as the last Buddhist Council which was held in India. Although actually there was another council held in India during Kanishka period in Kashmir, four hundred years after the demise of the Buddha, but according to Theravāda tradition, that is not regarded as council for Theravāda tradition because the Sri Lanka chronicles do not mention about the Theravāda delegation attending this assembly. Though the Third Buddhist Council is regarded as the great and important council for the history of Buddhism, but the source texts about the holding of this council can't be found in the Buddhist canonical texts. In fact, it is not mentioned in the *Cullavagga Pāli* of *Vinaya Pitaka*. The sources recorded the holding of this council only can be found in the Commentary of *Vinaya Pitaka* and the chronicles of Sri Lanka. The detail of this council can be found in the *Samantapāsādikā*, the commentary of *Vinaya Pitaka*. Some Sri Lankan chronicles like *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvāṃsa* and *Mahābodhivaṃsa* also reported about this council.

The Situation Before the Holding of Third Buddhist Council

As a result of the holding of the second Buddhist council, Buddhist Order was split up into two sects. *Mahāvamsa* gives an account that the heretical bhikkhus, subdued by the Theras who had held the second council, in all ten thousand, founded the school which bears the name Mahāsaṅghika (*Tehi saṅgītikārehi, therehi dutiyehi te; niggahitā pāpabhikkhū, sabbe dasasahassakā*) (Mhv. V. 2-3). Afterward, those sects again slit up into eighteen schools; twelve schools from Theravāda and six schools from Mahāsaṅghika (Mhv. V. 5-10). *Mahāvamsa* lists them as follows:

Table of Buddhist Sects

Theravāda	Mahāsaṅghika
Mahimsāsakā (Mahīsāsaka)	Gokulika
Sabbattha (Sarvāstivāda)	Paṇṇatti (Prajñaptivāda)
Kassapiyā (Kāśyapīya)	Bahulikā (Bahuśrutīya)
Samkantika (Sankrantika)	Ekavyahārika
Sutta (Sautrāntika)	Cetiya (Caitika)
Dhammaguptika (Dharmaguptaka)	
Vajjiputtiya (Vatsīputrīya)	
Dhammuttariyā (Dharmottarīya)	
Bhadrayānika (Bhadrayānīya)	
Chandāgārikā (Sannāgarika)	
Sammitī (Samitīya)	

The Holding of the Third Buddhist Council

This council was held 236 after the demise of the Buddha or 118 after the second Buddhist council. It was held in the Pataliputta as long as nine months, supported by King Asoka, and presided by Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera (Mhv. V. 279). There were thousand learned monks were chosen by Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thera to take part in this great council. *Mahāvamsa* further mentions that those thousand monks were endowed with the six supernormal powers, knowing the Tipiṭaka and versed in special science (Mhv. V. 276).

The reason for the holding of this council was due to the heretics who entered and polluted Buddhasāsana. The story begins with the converting King Asoka into Buddhism after listening to Dhamma preached by Sāmaṇera Nigroda (Mhv. V. 68). Being a Buddhist, King supported all requisites for monks. King also built vihāra for each one of eighty-four thousand sections of Dhamma (Mhv. V. 78). As a result of that, there were some heretics who entered to the Oder in order to enjoy all requisites provided by the king. They proclaimed their own doctrines as the doctrine of the Buddha and carried out their own practices even as they wished (Mhv. V. 230). This made a great confusion about the pure teaching of the Buddha. Therefore, there were a lot of misinterpretations of the Buddha's teaching. By the reason of the great number of heretics and their unruliness, the senior monks could not restrain them by the law. Therefore, the monks in Jambudīpa for seven years held no *Uposatha*-ceremony nor the ceremony of *Pavāraṇā* in all ārāmas (Mhv. V. 234-235).

Having seen this incident, the king ordered his ministers to call upon monks to hold *uposatha*-ceremony at his ārāma. The monks replied to the ministers that they would not hold *uposatha*-ceremony with heretics. The misguided ministers struck off the head of several theras who rejected their orders. They stopped after seeing the king's brother, Tissa, approaching them. Then they went away and reported to the king the whole matter (Mhv. V. 236-242). The king was troubled listening the behavior of misguided ministers. He wanted to know whether he responsible for it. With the advice of monks, King Asoka went to meet the most senior monk, Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thero. The king, with the instructions from Ven. Moggaliputtatissa, arranged a purification of Saṅgha from the misunderstanding of Buddha's teaching. King gathered a group of monks and inquired about their understanding on the Buddha's teaching. By doing this, sixty thousand heretical monks who expounded wrong doctrine, the

Sassata-doctrine and so forth, were expelled (Mhv. V. 270). The rest declared that they were *Vibhajjavādins*, the followers of the original teaching of the Buddha which Ven. Moggaliputtatissa declared to be original teaching of the Buddha. It is reported that there were 1.000 orthodox monks held the third Buddhist council at Asokārāma, Pāṭaliputa (Mhv. V. 275). The Tripitakas were rehearsed to establish the purity of the Canon. In the midst of this council, Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thera set forth the *Kathāvattihuppakarāṇa* refuting the other doctrines (Mhv. V. 278). Furthermore, it is said that king sent Buddhist missionaries to nine countries outside India (Mhv. XII. 1-8).

The Results of the Third Buddhist Council

The results of the Third Buddhist Council can be summarized as follows:

- Purifying of Buddhasāsana from heretical views by disrobing monks who hold heretical views
It is said that the reason of the holding of the Third Buddhist Council was due to the heretical monks. There were 60.000 heretical monks were disrobed and given the job by the king (Mhv. V. 270). The rest of that, there were 1.000 orthodox monks who called as *Vibhajjavādins* or the followers of the original teaching of the Buddha which Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thero declared to be original teaching of the Buddha (Mhv. V. 271-272).
- The completion of *Abhidhamma Pitaka* by adding of *Katthavattu* written by Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thero
After rejecting the heretic views and dispelling sixty thousand heretical monks, it is said that Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thero composed a book called as *Kathavattihuppakarāṇa*. It is usually known as a book of “Point of Controversy”. It deals with 216 controversies and is divided into 23 chapters. This book is included in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, the third section of Tipitaka. As result of that, *Abhidhamma Pitaka* consists of seven books, namely: *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-pakarāṇa*, *Vibhaṅga-pakarāṇa*, *Dhatukathā-pakarāṇa*, *Puggalapaññatti-pakarāṇa*, *Kathāvattihuppakarāṇa*, *Yamaka-pakarāṇa*, *Paṭṭhāna-pakarāṇa*.
- Spreading Buddhism into various countries
At the end of the Third Buddhist Council, the King Asoka sent Buddhist missionaries to nine countries to propagate the Buddha’s teachings. *Mahāvamsa* gives details about the name of monks and the nine places (Mhv. XII. 1-8), such as: Kashmir led by Ven. Majjhantika Thera, Mahisamandala led by Ven. Mahādeva Thera, Vanavasi led by Ven. Rakkhita Thera, Aparantaka led by Ven. Yona-Dhammarakkhita Thera, Maharattha led by Ven. Dhammarakkhita Thera, Yonaloka led by Ven. Maharakkhita Thera, Himavanta led by Ven. Majjhima Thera, Suvannabhūmi led by Ven. Sona and Uttara Thera, and Thambapanni Sīhaladīpa led by Ven. Mahinda Thera with 4 monks, 1 samanera, and 1 laypeople. (Itthiya Thera, Uttiya Thera, Sambala Thera, Bhaddasala Thera, Sumana Samanera, and Bhanduka upasaka (anagami).

The Development of Theravāda Abhidhamma

The word of *Abhidhamma* is composed by two words, *Abhi* + *Dhamma*. Here, *Abhi* means higher, special, further, and e.c.t. and *Dhamma* means doctrine, philosophy. Therefore, *Abhidhamma* means the higher doctrine, special doctrine, or the further analyzing of Buddha’s teachings. Ven. Buddhaghosa, the great Theravadin commentator, in the *Atthasālini* describes *Abhidhamma* as that which exceeds and distinguished from the *Dhamma* (*Tattha kenatthena abhidhammo? Dhammāṭirekadhammavisesatthena*) (DhsA. 2). It is further described thus: “Because this book shows things that suffer growth, of proper attributes, to be revered, well-differentiated, and of worth surpassing, *Abhidhamma* is its name” (*Yaṃ ettha vuḍḍhimanto, salakkhaṇā pūjitā paricchinnā; Vuttādhikā ca dhammā, abhidhammo tena akkhāto*) (DhsA. 19).

Ven. Buddhaghosa Thera, in the *Atthasālini* also tries to distinguish between *Dhamma* and *Abhidhamma*. *Dhamma* or *sutta* is said to be discursive style “*Sappariyāya desanā*” which uses similes, metaphors and anecdotes. While *abhidhamma* is non-discursive style “*Nippariyāya desanā*” which uses

impersonal, terminology meaning and functions (DhsA. 153). Again, he distinguishes each Piṭaka, saying Vinaya piṭaka is the discourses on injunctions (*Ānā desanā*), Sutta Piṭaka is the popular discourses (*Vohāra desanā*), Abhidhamma is the discourses on ultimate truths (*Paramattha desanā*) (DhsA. 21).

According to tradition, it is believed that Abhidhamma was preached by the Buddha himself to his mother who was born as deity and other deities in the Tavatimsa heaven. Further, this summary of teachings was transmitted to Ven. Sariputta and his disciples (DhsA. 14-17). However, this story is argued by modern scholars for there is no any account regarding the story of preaching Abhidhamma in the Pali Canon. The history says that three months after the Buddha's passed away, the Buddha's teachings were collected and recited in the first Buddhist council. At that council, there is not mentioned about Abhidhamma. *Cullavagga Pāli* of *Vinaya Piṭaka* reports that the whole of Dhammas were settled by Ven. Ānanda and the whole of Vinayas were settled by Ven. Upāli (Vin. II. 286). Later it is added that Abhidhamma is one part of Tipitaka. Therefore, Theravāda Abhidhamma must have been developed.

Controversy in Abhidhamma

According to *Atthasālinī*, Buddha himself was the first *Ābhidhammika* (*Sammāsambuddhova paṭhamataraṃ ābhidhammiko*) (DhsA. 17). He contemplated the Abhidhamma in the fourth week after His enlightenment. Further, in his seventh *vassa*, he went to Tāvātimsa heaven to preached Abhidhamma to deities including his mother for three months. In the lunch time, He made self-created image of himself to continue the session and went to the human world for alms and transmitted Abhidhamma to Ven. Sariputta briefly (DhsA. 14-17).

Later scholars continue to debate the legitimacy of these legends. Numerous factors raise doubts about whether the Abhidhamma can be considered as the actual words of the Buddha. Those are:

- Before his passing away, the Buddha told to Ven. Ananda that *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* should be the teacher after his passing (D. II. 155). Abhidhamma is not mentioned.
- At the first Buddhist Council, Abhidhamma is not mentioned to be recited. It is recorded that *Dhamma* was recited by Ven. Ananda, and *Vinaya* was recited by Ven. Upali. Even, in the second Buddhist council also (Vin. II. 286).
- The story of preaching Abhidhamma in the heaven is not mentioned in any sutta. Even, the story of the Buddha ascending to heaven to teach Abhidhamma is not mentioned in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka itself, but in the later commentaries.
- Abhidhamma is not mentioned as one of nine branches of teachings (*navaṅga-buddha-sāsana*). There are only mentioned *suttaṃ*, *geyyaṃ*, *veyyākaraṇaṃ gāthaṃ udānaṃ itivuttakaṃ jātakaṃ abbhutadhammaṃ vedallaṃ* (A. III. 86).

Due those reasons, there are arguments among scholars that Abhidhamma is not Buddhavacana, but as later teachings of prominent disciples of the Buddha in order to explain the Buddha's teaching into further. They approve it that the *Kathāvatthupparakaraṇa* is written by Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera at the end of the third Buddhist council. However, *Atthasālinī* recognized this matter. Ven. Buddhaghosa in the *Atthasālinī* discussed that Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera expounded *Kathāvatthupparakaraṇa* not by his own knowledge, but according to table of contents laid down, as well as by the method given, by the Buddha (*Moggaliputtatissattheropi idaṃ pakaraṇaṃ desento na attano ñāṇena desesi, sathārā pana dinnanayena ṭhapitamātikāya desesi*). He concluded that all entire books of *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* became the word of the Buddha (DhsA. 6).

However, there are arguments supporting the idea that Abhidhamma teachings are based on the Buddha's own words. The method analysis such as *Pañcakhandha*, Six *Dhātus*, Twelve *Āyatana*, 18 *Dhātus* are taught and analyzed by the Buddha himself. Basing on the Buddha's methods, Abhidhamma

had been developed by analyzing further Buddha's teachings into detail. Another reason is the term of Abhidhamma is mentioned in various suttas, although not as Piṭaka. Though in the Canon it is said that Abhidhamma was not recited in the first Buddhist council, but there are *mātikas* which were included in the Dhamma. Those *mātikas* are considered to have served as a major basis for the development and origin of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*.

The Buddha preached his teachings in various way (*anekapariyāyena*) (D. II. 41). He used various kinds of similes, methods, and expositions in different way according to the ability of listeners. The Buddha understood and classified them into four persons: one who understand quickly (*ugghaṭitaññū*), one who understand through elaboration (*vipañcitaññū*), one who needs to be guided (*neyyo*) and one for whom the word is the maximum (*padaparamo*) (A. II. 135).

The whole of the Buddha's teachings was not collected systematically. Simply, all were called as Dhammavinaya. The Buddha also suggested that Dhammavinaya should be the teacher after his passing away (D. II. 155). Taking this important task, senior disciples were thinking to protect the whole of Buddha's teachings or Dhammavinaya. Three months after the demise of the Buddha, at the First Buddhist Council, all Buddha's teachings as well as prominent of his disciples were collected and classified according to the matter. Thus, collection and classification had been very important tasks probably during the first and second Buddhist council (Galmangoda, Sumanapala. 1998: 21).

The collection of discourses initiates scholastic approach to Buddhist philosophy. In order to protect the early Buddha's teachings, leading disciples were afraid of the danger of its philosophical matters. Language embodied in the discourses could be interpreted in various ways. The leading disciples understood the danger of such a form of language because there was a possibility of misinterpreting the discourses. For this reason, they made an attempt to abstract the doctrinal aspects from the discourses and composed new sutra called *Dharmasutra* – discourse on Dhamma (Galmangoda, Sumanapala. 1998: 22). *Saṅgīti Sutta* and *Dasuttara Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* are the example of *Dharmasutra* found in the Pāli Canon.

After composing Dharmasutras, they still had task to give technical term for each dharma for purpose to avoid new views and interpretations. The leading disciples made use of a highly technical form of language to define and explain those doctrines. By the time of the third Buddhist Council, there had been a considerable amount of such definitions and explanations supplied to those *dharmasutras* (Galmangoda, Sumanapala. 1998: 25). For this literature is different with the sutta, therefore by adding suffix “*Abhi*”, it became “*Abhidhamma*” or special doctrine. In the third Buddhist council, Ven. Mogaliputtatissa Thera composed a book named *Kathāvatthupparakaraṇa* refuting the heretic views which later included in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

Theravāda Abhidhamma Literatures

Scholars reckon that the process of evolution of Abhidhamma seemed to have occurred in three stages: (i) classification, (ii) analysis, and (iii) the definition of the dhammas (Kalupahana, 1953: 71). Accordingly, they arose a range of literature in addition to the abhidhammic canon viz. the commentaries, the compendium (or manuals - *saṅgha*), sub-commentaries (*tika*), the commentaries on the sub-commentaries (*anuṭika*) (Galmangoda, Sumanapala. 1998: 29).

Theravāda tradition has seven books of Abhidhamma Piṭaka, namely:

1. *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (The Classification of Dhamma)
2. *Vibhaṅga* (The Analysis)
3. *Dhatukathā* (The Discourses on Elements)
4. *Puggalapaññatti* (The Designation of Individual)
5. *Kathāvatthu* (The Book of Debate)
6. *Yamaka* (The Book of Pairs)
7. *Paṭṭhāna* (The Book of Conditional Relation)

The commentaries (*Atthakatha*) of *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* were written by Ven. Buddhaghosa in 5th century AD, namely:

- *Aṭṭhasālinī* (The commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgani*)
- *Samohavinodanī* (The commentary on the *Vibhaṅga*)
- *Pañcappakaraṇaṭṭhakathā* or sometimes also called *Paramattha-dīpanī* (The commentary on the remaining five books; *Dhatukathā*, *Puggalapaññatti*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Yamaka*, and *Paṭṭhāna*)

The compendium (*saṅgahagantha*) of *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, are:

1. *Abhidhammāvatāra* (an introduction to *Abhidhamma*)
2. *Saccasaṅkhepa* (an explanation of truth)
3. *Abhidhammattasaṅgaha* (compendium on the *Abhidhamma*)
4. *Mohavicchedani* (destruction of ignorance)
5. *Nāmarūpapariccheda* (an analysis of mind and matter)
6. *Nāmarūpasamāsa* (a summary account of mind and matter)
7. *Rūpārūpavibhanga* (analysis of mind and matter)
8. *Paramatthavinicchaya* (an inquiring to ultimate truth)
9. *Nāmacārādīpani* (on the behavior of mind)

CONCLUSION

The holding of Buddhist council played pivotal role for the development of Buddhism and its literature. During the First Buddhist Council to the Third Buddhist Council, various challenges arose as efforts were made to preserve the original teachings of the Buddha. During that period also, Buddhist literatures became systematically arranged and the whole of the Buddha's teachings was collected into baskets called Tipiṭaka. By increasing number of interpretations and potential misunderstandings on the Buddha's profound philosophical teachings, prominent disciples sought to provide clarity by composing Dharmasutras. During the transition from the Second to the Third Buddhist Council, significant explanations were added to those Dharmasutras in order to explain the deep teaching of the Buddha, giving rise the name *Abhidhamma*. Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thera composed *Kathāvatthupparakaraṇa* and added this to the collection of *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* which consist of seven books on *Abhidhamma*.

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