

Suttanta and Abhidhamma Analyses of the Ten Saṃyojanas in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha: A Reappraisal of Modern Interpretations

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Introduction

Saṃyojana (fetter) is one of the fundamental teachings that are relevant to Buddhist soteriology. Yet, its specific clarification still remains to be analyzed critically. Venerable Sāriputtarā explains saṃyojana with a clear example of a black ox and a white ox yoked together in a single harness. In this example, the black ox is not the fetter of the white ox, and the white ox is not the fetter of the black ox. Only the single harness that yokes these two oxen together is the fetter of these two oxen (S. IV 163). The term saṃyojana is generally translated as ‘connection’, ‘fettering’ (CDEP, 291), ‘bond’, and ‘fetter’ (PED, 656). Herein, the word ‘saṃyojana’ can be comprehended as the fetters which bind beings to the wheel of birth and death like a single harness that yokes the two oxen. According to Dipen Barua, in early Buddhist teachings, the term saṃyojana was utilized to indicate the meaning of intrapsychic bind. However, later on, its usage was developed in the context of existential binding to provide the concept of rebirth (Dipen, 2017, 171). Thus, saṃyojana plays a significant role in Buddhist soteriology.

The Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha explains the ten fetters sub-dividing into two sets: Suttanta analysis of fetters and Abhidhamma analysis of fetters. Of these two types, the ten fetters as described in the Suttanta analysis are as follows: the fetter of sensual lust (*kāmarāga-saṃyojana*), the fetter of lust for the fine material sphere (*rūparāga-saṃyojana*), the fetter of lust for the immaterial sphere (*arūparāga-saṃyojana*), the fetter of repulsion (*paṭigha-saṃyojana*), the fetter of conceit (*māna-saṃyojana*), the fetter of the wrong view (*diṭṭhi-saṃyojana*), the fetter of clinging to mere rules and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa-saṃyojana*), the fetter of doubt (*vicikicchā-saṃyojana*), the fetter of distraction (*uddhacca-saṃyojana*), and the fetter of ignorance (*avijjhā-saṃyojana*) (Abhs, 117). On the other hand, the ten fetters as reflected from Abhidhamma analysis are *kāmarāga-saṃyojana*, the fetter of attachment to existence (*bhavarāga-saṃyojana*), *paṭigha-saṃyojana*, *māna-saṃyojana*, *diṭṭhi-saṃyojana*, *sīlabbata-parāmāsa-saṃyojana*, *vicikicchā-saṃyojana*, the fetter of envy (*issā-saṃyojana*), the fetter of avarice (*macchhariya-saṃyojana*) and *avijjhā-saṃyojana* (Ibid, 118). of the above different

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lists, *rūparāga-saṃyojana*, *arūparāga-saṃyojana*, and *uddhacca-saṃyojana* described in the Suttanta division are not included in the Abhidhamma division. On the other hand, *bhavarāga-saṃyojana*, *issā-saṃyojana*, and *macchhariya-saṃyojana* as reflected in the Abhidhamma division are not incorporated into the Suttanta division. The remaining categories are stated in both divisions. Therefore, according to the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, the types of fetters differ between the Suttanta and Abhidhamma divisions.

Ven. Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) revealed this description in his Paramatthadīpanī that the first ten fetters can be observed in both Suttanta and Abhidhamma but the last ten fetters only in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. He discussed that Ven. Anuruddha utilized the word ‘Suttanta’ to distinguish the explanation of fetters between Suttanta and Abhidhamma. Furthermore, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi (1993, 269) also pointed out the similar notion in the comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma. Additionally, Ven. Janakābhivaṃsa (1900-1977) clarified Ven. Anuruddha’s justification that the Buddha taught these fetters separately in Suttanta and Abhidhamma. However, these two sets of all the fetters can be examined in both Suttanta and Abhidhamma.

Objectives

Hence, this research paper aims to critically examine modern scholarly interpretations of the two lists of ten fetters as reflected in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha and to propose a more accurate interpretation in accordance with Pali Buddhist texts.

Methodology

It is necessary to address the research question: why did Ven. Anuruddha explain ten fetters by sub-dividing into two categories namely Suttanta and Abhidhamma analyses? To formulate the above research questions, the method employed in this study is a qualitative method used in Humanities, and confined to Theravada Buddhism. The present study is partially a conceptual study. On this account, this research could be regarded as a library-based or purely textual-based method. This research is limited to Suttantic and Abhidhammic literature of Pali Buddhism, mainly focusing on the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, its sub-commentaries, the *Cūḷaniddesa*, and the commentary on *Dīghanikāya*.

Results

The following finding helps us comprehend how the interpretation of the Buddha’s teachings evolved systematically and organized analytically. Additionally, this discovery assists us to remove confusion about the two different

lists of fetters as occurred in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha. Further investigation of the Vinaya perspective on fetters still remains.

Discussion

There are still some controversial issues about the above division on the different lists of ten fetters. Herein, Venerable Ledi Sayadaw elaborates that the Suttanta division can be observed in both the Suttanta and Abhidhamma Piṭaka. However, the Abhidhamma division can be found only in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. He remarks on this point that the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha utilizes the word ‘Suttanta’ to distinguish the Suttanta division from the Abhidhamma division (Ledi Sayardaw, 1957, 343). Similarly, Bhikkhu Bodhi (1993, 269) also points out that the first set of these fetters is described in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma Piṭakas. Still, the last presentation is only in the Abhidhammā Piṭaka (Anuruddha, 2006, 269). Interestingly, about the above division of fetters, Venerable Janakābhivamsa (2004, 418) gives a remark that the two divisions of fetters are stated under the name of Suttanta division and Abhidhamma division in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha because they are separately described in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

Herein, we should examine why these two divisions of the above fetters are explained as two categories in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha. Accordingly, the above two sets can be observed in both the Suttanta Piṭaka and Abhidhamma Piṭaka (S. V 61; A. V 17; Vbh 377; MCNid. 283; Dhs. 247.). However, the last set of ten fetters is situated only in the Cūlaniddesa Pali of the Suttapiṭaka but not in other places of the Suttanta texts. In this regard, the commentary on the Dīghanikāya says that according to the Dīghabhāṇakas (reciters of the long discourses), the *Jātaka*, *Mahāniddesa*, *Cūlaniddesa*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, *Apadāna*, *Suttanipāta*, *Kuddakapāṭha*, *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Peṭavatthu*, *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* were inserted into the Abhidhamma piṭaka under the name of Khuddakagantha (smaller canonical books) (DA. I 15).

According to the opinion of the Dīghabhāṇakas, although the Cūlaniddesa Pali is included in the context of the Sutta-piṭaka, it is counted in the Abhidhamma piṭaka. Additionally, in a textual context, the Niddesa Pali pertains to the Khuddaka Nikāya, but following the Dīghabhāṇakas’ opinion, modern scholars also consider it in the Abhidhamma sense. The reason is that the compilation of the Niddesa Pali is similar to the Abhidhamma explanation (Dipen, 2017, 151). Based on the facts, it appears that Venerable Anuruddha might have noticed the last ten fetters are also revealed in the Cūlaniddesa Pali. However, he considered it in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka by following the Dīghabhāṇakas. Thus, he explains the previous set of ten fetters as reflected in the Cūlaniddesa Pali, taking into

consideration the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, and he discusses the last set as the Abhidhamma division.

Conclusion

Based on the above explanation, we can safely conclude that the two sets of ten fetters can be found in both the Suttanta Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. Unlike what Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, and Venerable Janakābhivamsa have suggested, there is no strict canonical division of these two lists between Suttanta and Abhidhamma analyses. The difference between them arises because the last ten fetters are described specifically in the Cūḷaniddesa, which is a later text of the Pali canon. Following the opinion of the Dīghabhāṇakas, this text is associated with the Abhidhamma analysis rather than the Suttanta analysis. Additionally, of them, it seems that the first ten fetters are earlier and more widely found in the early discourses. The last ten fetters should be understood as a later development found in the later canonical texts.

Keywords - Abhidhamma, Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha Misinterpretation, Suttanta, and Ten Fetters

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