

ON COUNTING MATTER (*RŪPA*) IN ABHIDHAMMA

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Introduction

Abhidhamma speaks of four ultimate realities (*paramattha dhamma*). One of them is the analysis of *rūpa* (matter). *Rūpa* is called *rūpa* (matter) as it changes due to the impact of opposition forces such as cold and heat. This change, as observed by Y. Karunadasa (2010), does not apply to “two stages in the same *dhamma*” but to “the disappearance of one *dhamma* and the immediate emergence in its place of another *dhamma*.” It does not, as further observed by Karunadasa, refer to an “empirically observable change” but to a “never-stopping, infinitely graduated, incessant change” known as “incessant decay” (*avici-jarā*).”

Source material

The present study is mainly based on: *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭīkā*, *Atthasālinī*, *Vimuttimaggā* (*The Path of Freedom*), *Visuddhimaggā*

Methodology

The present paper is a qualitative study. Analytical and comparative methods were used to collect, analyze and present the relevant data.

Discussion

In the five aggregates of grasping, the aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhanda*) is the first one. The very use of the term “aggregate” (*khandha*) suggests, as pointed out by Karunadasa (2010), the further analyzability of the aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhanda*). Thus, the aggregate of matter is analyzed mainly into two, namely, great elements (*mahābhūta*) and dependent material *dhammas* (*upādāya-rūpa*). The first group consists of

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four great elements and the second group consists of twenty-four dependent material *dhammas*. What this analysis shows us is that the Ābhidhammikas have analyzed the aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhanda*) into twenty-eight (*aṭṭhavīsati*) material *dhammas*. The *Visuddhimagga* referring to this analysis states that twenty-eight is the exact number of the material *dhammas* and they all have come down in the canon. The subsequent exegetical works attributed to the Mahāvihāra also follow this analysis.

However, two authorities referred to anonymously as "some" (*ekacce*) and "others" (*apare*) in the Mahāvihāra exegetical works have analyzed *rūpa* (matter) into different numbers. According to the analysis presented by these two authorities, *balārūpa* (power as matter), *sambhavarūpa* (procreation as matter), *jātirūpa* (birth as matter), *rogarūpa* (sickness as matter) and *middharūpa* (torpor as matter) can be added to the list of the material *dhammas*.

The question arises in this context is whether the followers of the Mahāvihāra accepted the material *dhammas* referred to in the accounts attributed to the authorities introduced as "some" (*ekacce*) and "others" (*apare*). According to the Mahāvihāra exegetical works, *balārūpa* (power as matter), *sambhavarūpa* (procreation as matter), *jātirūpa* (birth as matter), *rogarūpa* (sickness as matter) do not exist as separate material *dhammas*. The wind element (*vāyodhātu*) includes the power as matter (*balārūpa*), and hence, there is no separate power as matter in addition to the wind element. The water element (*apodhātu*) includes originating as matter (*sambhavarūpa*). *Upacaya* and *santati* are included in birth as matter (*jātirūpa*). *Upacaya* means the initial production or accumulation of matter whereas *santati* means continuing of matter in the sense of a connected series. The first one refers to "the period from relinking until the arising of the decades, of the eye, etc." and the second one to continuation of matter which begins after "the arising of the decades, of the eye, etc." Sickness as matter (*rogarūpa*) is taken when decay of matter (*jaratā*) and impermanence of matter (*aniccatā*) are taken as material *dhammas*. There is no separate materiality called *rogarūpa* in addition to the latter two material *dhammas*. What we can see, according to these explanations, is that the Mahāvihāra exegetes have included *balārūpa*, *sambhavarūpa*, *jātirūpa*, and *rogarūpa* in the material *dhammas* that are included in their list, namely, the wind

element (*vāyodhāthu*), water element (*apodhātu*), birth as matter (*jātirūpa*), and decay of matter (*jaratā*) and impermanence of matter (*aniccatā*). However, they rejected the inclusion of *middha* (torpor) into the list of the material *dhammas*. What is important to note here is that *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga)* enumerates *middha* (torpor) as a material *dhamma*. The same idea was shared by the residents of the Abhayagiri, the liberal fraternity of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka. That is why they were called the proponents of torpor (*middhavādino*).

Conclusion

What is clear from our discussion is that the Ābhidhammikas have presented different views with regard to the number of material *dhammas* in Theravāda Abhidhamma. According to the exegetes, who followed the Mahāvihāra tradition, the exact number of material *dhammas* (*rūpa*) amounts to twenty-eight (*aṭṭhavīsati*). However, the authorities referred to as "some" (*ekacce*) and "others" (*apare*) do not agree with the Mahāvihāra exegetes in calculating the material *dhammas* as twenty-eight.

Keywords: Theravāda, Abhidhamma, ultimate reality, matter

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