

Buddhaghosa Thera's Hermeneutical Arguments in *Aṭṭhasālinī* to Establish the *Abhidhamma* as the Authoritative Word of the Buddha

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Abstract

This study examines Buddhaghosa Thera's hermeneutical strategies in the *Aṭṭhasālinī* to establish the canonical authority of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* as the direct word of the Buddha within the *Theravāda* tradition. Through narrative, textual, and doctrinal arguments, Buddhaghosa responds to historical and sectarian challenges regarding

the *Abhidhamma*'s late composition and its inclusion in the canon most notably concerning the *Kathāvatthu*. The analysis highlights how *Theravāda* orthodoxy, reflecting broader Buddhist scholastic trends, sought to authenticate a systematically evolved body of teachings as *Buddhavacana*.

Keywords: *Abhidhamma*, Buddhaghosa, *Aṭṭhasālinī*, canonical authority, hermeneutics

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Introduction

The *Theravāda Abhidhamma* Piṭaka stands as a sophisticated and systematic elaboration of Buddhist doctrine, yet its historical origins and canonical status have long been subjects of scholarly debate. Unlike the *Sutta* and *Vinaya* Piṭakas, which are widely regarded as containing early teachings attributable to the Buddha and the early *Saṅgha*, the *Abhidhamma* represents a later stratum of scholastic literature, characterized by philosophical abstraction, categorization, and hermeneutical exegesis (Frauwallner, 1995; Norman, 1983). The development of *Abhidhamma* literature occurred significantly after the foundational period of Buddhism, with distinct traditions emerging independently within major schools such as the *Theravāda* and *Sarvāstivāda*, each producing its own corpus with notable differences in structure, content, and doctrinal emphasis (Willems, Dessein & Cox, 1998). This divergence contrasts sharply with the remarkable similarity observed in the *Sutta* collections across traditions, suggesting that the *Suttas* belong to an earlier, pre-sectarian layer of transmission, while the *Abhidhamma* reflects a later, school-specific phase of intellectual systematization (Sujato & Brahmali, 2014).

Within this historical context, the canonical authentication of the *Abhidhamma* within *Theravāda* orthodoxy presents a compelling case study in Buddhist hermeneutics and scholastic legitimization. The tradition itself acknowledges internal challenges

to the *Abhidhamma*'s authority, most notably concerning the *Kathāvatthu*, a text attributed to the elder Moggallāputta Tissa over two centuries after the Buddha's *parinibbāna* (Norman, 1983; Law, 1940). Such acknowledgements point to an ongoing, intra-traditional negotiation of canonicity, wherein later commentators were tasked with reconciling the *Abhidhamma*'s evident historical development with the doctrinal imperative to regard it as *Buddhavacana*, the authentic word of the Buddha (Collins, 1998).

Literature Review

The pivotal figure in this project of authentication is the fifth-century commentator Ven. Buddhaghosa, whose *Aṭṭhasālinī*, the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* serves as a primary source for understanding the *Theravāda* defense of the *Abhidhamma*'s authority (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). Buddhaghosa's work is not merely exegetical; it is also apologetic and polemical, designed to articulate and defend the *Mahāvihāra* tradition's position against skeptics, including those within the broader *Theravāda* milieu who questioned the *Abhidhamma*'s provenance and canonical standing (Collins, 1998). His hermeneutical strategies encompass narrative justification such as the account of the Buddha teaching the *Abhidhamma* in the *Tāvatiṃsa* heaven textual precedent drawn from the *Sutta* and *Vinaya* Piṭakas, and doctrinal classification that positions the *Abhidhamma* as the *paramattha desanā*, or ultimate teaching, integral to the threefold training of virtue,

concentration, and wisdom (Gethin, 2001; Frauwallner, 1995).

Existing scholarship provides a robust foundation for examining these issues. Frauwallner's (1995) comparative studies on *Abhidharma* literature highlight the independent development of scholastic systems across schools, while Norman (1983) offers detailed historical and philological insights into the formation of the Pāli canon. Collins (1998) explores the ideological and narrative dimensions of Pāli commentarial literature, illuminating how traditions construct authority through textual and discursive means. Meanwhile, translations and studies of the *Aṭṭhasālinī* by Pe Maung Tin (1920) and analyses of the *Kathāvatthu* by Law (1940) and Aung and Rhys Davids (1915) provide direct access to the primary materials and their historical contexts. Despite this rich scholarship, there remains a need for a focused analysis that systematically examines Buddhaghosa's hermeneutical arguments in the *Aṭṭhasālinī* as a coherent response to the historical and doctrinal challenges surrounding the *Abhidhamma*'s canonicity. This study aims to address that gap by critically analyzing the strategies employed to authenticate the *Abhidhamma*, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of *Theravāda* scholasticism and the dynamics of canonical formation in Buddhist traditions.

Research Problem

Despite the *Abhidhamma*'s evident later development, the *Theravāda* tradition

asserts it as the Buddha's direct teaching. This raises a critical problem: how did *Theravāda* commentators, especially Buddhaghosa, hermeneutically construct and defend this claim in response to historical and doctrinal objections?

Research Objectives

To analyze the hermeneutical methods employed by Buddhaghosa in the *Aṭṭhasālinī* to authenticate the *Abhidhamma*.

To examine how *Theravāda* orthodoxy addressed challenges regarding the *Abhidhamma*'s late composition, particularly the *Kathāvatthu*.

To situate Buddhaghosa's strategies within broader Buddhist scholastic practices of textual legitimization.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research and this study mainly employs textual analysis of primary sources, chiefly the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, supported by critical editions and translations. A comparative approach is used to contrast *Theravāda* and *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma* traditions. Historical-critical methods assess the development of *Abhidhamma* literature, while hermeneutical analysis interprets Buddhaghosa's argumentative strategies within their doctrinal and polemical contexts.

Result and Discussion

The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, a separate literature belonging to the *Theravāda* tradition, was finalized and established

during the Third Council (Frauwallner, 1995). The development of this literature occurred significantly later than the material contained in the other two collections, the Sutta and Vinaya Piṭakas (Norman, 1983). Within the various Buddhist traditions, several schools developed *Abhidhamma* literatures, with at least two the *Sarvāstivāda* and the *Theravāda* preserving a complete *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Frauwallner, 1995).

A comparison of these two extant collections reveals differences in both content and structure. The *Theravāda Abhidhamma Piṭaka* consists of seven treatises (*pakaraṇas*): *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhātukathā*, *Puggalapaññatti*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Yamaka*, and *Paṭṭhāna*. In contrast, the seven core texts of the *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma* are: *Saṅgītiparyāyapāda* (which bears a close relation to the *Saṅgīti Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*), *Dharmaskandhapāda*, *Prajñaptiśāstra*, *Vijñānakāya*, *Dhātukāya*, *Prakaraṇapāda*, and *Jñānaprasthānaśāstra* (Willemen & Cox, 1998). The divergence in both names and philosophical content indicates that the *Abhidhamma* of these two schools developed independently over time, pointing to its sequential, later evolution within Buddhism.

In comparison, the *Suttas* across traditions are remarkably similar both in form and substance, suggesting they belong to an earlier, pre-sectarian period when the Buddhist community was undivided. They represent an original corpus of exposition common to both *Theravāda* and *Sarvāstivāda* (Sujato

& Brahmali, 2014). The *Abhidhamma*, however, constitutes a deeper, more systematic interpretation of the *Dhamma*. This systematic interpretation occurred later, and different schools developed their own distinct systems of scholasticism. Other *Abhidhamma* traditions may have existed but are now lost (Frauwallner, 1995).

Historical evidence suggests that while many Buddhist schools possessed an *Abhidhamma*, the ancient *Sautrāntikas* who considered the *Suttas* alone as authoritative and representative of the Buddha's direct words explicitly denied that the *Abhidhamma* represented the Buddha's doctrine and therefore did not recognize it (Willemen, 2001). At a later period, the *Theravāda* tradition made a concerted effort to claim the *Abhidhamma* for the Buddha himself, investing it with authority by asserting it was his word. This project of authorization is exemplified in the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, which presents the *Abhidhamma* as the official possession of the *Theravāda* (Pe Maung Tin, 1920).

The *Theravāda* tradition's account of the *Abhidhamma's* origin is presented in the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). According to this source, following his performance of the twin miracle, the Buddha ascended to the *Tāvātimsa Devaloka*. There, seated on the *Pandukambala* stone throne, the seat of *Sakka* at the foot of the *Pāricchattaka* tree, he taught the *Abhidhamma*, the basis of Buddhist insight, to the devas, including his mother reborn as a divine being. The commentary records:

“*Aparabhāgasmiṃ hi tathāgato tāvatimsābhavane Pāricchattakamūle pandukambalasilāyaṃ dasasahass-cakkavāḍadevatānaṃ majjhe nisin-no mātaraṃ kāyasakkhiṃ katvā...*” (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 15)

After teaching extensively in the divine realm, the Buddha descended to earth to attend to his bodily needs. While maintaining a presence in the Devaloka to continue teaching, he is said to have briefly conveyed the *Abhidhamma* to his chief disciple, *Sāriputta*, at Candanavana (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). The *Aṭṭhasālinī* narrates:

“*Dhammasenāpati-Sāriputtatthero pi tattha gantvā Sammāsambuddhasa vattaṃ katvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. Ath’ assa satthā nayaṃ...Sāriputtatthero pi Satthārā desitaṃ dhammaṃ āharitvā attano saddhivihārikānaṃ pañcannaṃ bhikkhusatānaṃ desesi. ...*” (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 16)

According to the commentary, the *Abhidhamma* transmitted by *Sāriputta* to the *bhikkhus* was later recited by Venerable Ānanda at the First Council (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). This claim stands in contrast to the account in the *Cullavagga* of the *Theravāda Vinaya Piṭaka*, which makes no mention of Ānanda rehearsing the *Abhidhamma* (*Cullavagga*, I, 284-86). The *Aṭṭhasālinī* asserts that the *Abhidhamma* Ānanda had learned from *Sāriputta* who heard it directly from the Buddha was presented and codified at the council, preserved within the *saṅgha*, and later brought to Sri Lanka by the missionary monk Ven. Mahinda (Pe Maung Tin, 1920).

Buddhaghosa, the compiler of this commentary, states that his task was to render the *Abhidhamma* tradition preserved by the *Mahāvihāra* school into clear Pali. He writes: “*Mahāvihāravāsīnaṃ dīpayanto vinicchayṃ...atthaṃ pakāyissāmi...*” (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 2) This passage indicates his reliance on the interpretations of the *Mahāvihāra* monks, whose authoritative tradition he sought to elucidate. In presenting this narrative, Buddhaghosa necessarily engaged with and sought to reconcile certain contradictions and varied accounts within the received anthological tradition concerning the history of the Buddhist teachings (Collins, 1998).

However, the *Theravāda* tradition maintains that the *Abhidhamma* constitutes the Buddha’s word. While the *Vinaya Piṭaka* references Venerable Ānanda’s authority regarding the *Dhamma* noting that questions pertaining to the Buddha’s words across all five *Nikāyas* were answered “*eteneva upāyena pañcapi nikāye pucci*” (*Cullavagga*, V, 398-399). *Theravādins* argue that although, its account of the First Council in the *Cullavagga* makes no mention the name of *Abhidhamma*, the statement ‘all five *nikāyas* were answered’ means *Abhidhamma* had been included into the *Khuddaka nikaya* and, a claim reflected in the introductory verses of the *Aṭṭhasālinī* which state it was recited at the first council (Pe Maung Tin, 1920).

Moreover, the entire corpus of the Buddha-vacana can be classified in various ways: threefold by *Piṭaka*,

fivefold by *Nikāya*, and nine fold by genre (*aṅga*). When explaining the fivefold classification (*nikāya vasena pañcavidham*), Buddhaghosa outlines how the Buddha's teachings are divided into the *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta*, *Aṅguttara*, and *Khuddaka Nikāyas* (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). He specifies what belongs to the *Khuddaka Nikāya* with the verse: “*Thapetvā caturo pete nikāye dīgha-ādike, tadanñam buddhavacanam nikāyo khuddako mato*” (“Apart from the four *Nikāyas* beginning with the *Dīgha*, the rest of the Buddha's word is considered to be in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*”) (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 26). This classification, however, may not represent a historical truth but rather a *Theravāda* attempt to trace the *Abhidhamma*'s authority to the Buddha's own time, thereby authenticating it as his direct word (Collins, 1998).

The *Abhidhamma* represents a particular *Theravāda* scholastic perspective on the correct interpretation of the *Dhamma*. This agenda is clearly observed in the *Aṭṭhasālinī*, where Buddhaghosa both describes the content of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and defends its canonical status (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). He refers to its textual division “*pakaraṇa paricchato*,” enumerating the seven treatises (*pakaraṇa*): *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhātukathā*, *Puggalapaññatti*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Yamaka*, and *Paṭṭhāna* (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 3).

Buddhaghosa also addresses contemporary debates, noting that some critics, even within the broader *Theravāda* milieu, raised questions about the canonicity of certain texts (Pe

Maung Tin, 1920). A direct challenge came from the *Vidaḍḍhavādins*, who objected: “*Kathāvatthu kasmā gahitaṃ?*” (“Why was the *Kathāvatthu* included?”) (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 3). Their objection highlighted the historical complication that the *Kathāvatthu* is traditionally attributed to Venerable Moggalīputta Tissa, who composed it more than two hundred years after the Buddha's parinibbāna during the reign of King Aśoka (Law, 1940). The *Theravāda* tradition itself acknowledges Moggalīputtātissa as the author, creating a doctrinal tension between the text's late composition and its inclusion in the canonical *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Norman, 1983).

It is clear from the *Kathāvatthu* that it catalogues divergent opinions that arose within the Buddhist tradition itself, addressing controversial interpretations such as the claim that “all phenomena exist in the three times” (*sabbaṃ atthi*), that an Arhat is not free from moral intoxicants (*āsava*), or that the Buddha did not suffer ordinary human ailments (Shwe Zan Aung and Rhys Davids, 1915). From the *Theravāda* perspective, these positions are presented as erroneous views requiring refutation (Law, 1940).

The *Kathāvatthu* was compiled by Venerable Moggalīputta Tissa to meet the contemporary need of countering the proliferating doctrines associated with the eighteen early schools (Norman, 1983). This reflects the historical development of the Buddhist tradition, wherein Theravādins sought to establish and defend what they considered the

correct interpretation of the Buddha's teaching. By systematically examining and refuting views they deemed heretical, they produced a text that was subsequently included in the *Theravāda Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Norman, 1940).

As a text representing the orthodox Theravāda standpoint, the *Kathāvatthu*'s canonical status became a doctrinal issue within the tradition. Critics, referencing its authorship two centuries after the Buddha, argued it should be classified as *Sāvakabhāsita* (spoken by a disciple) rather than *Buddhabhāsita* (spoken by the Buddha), and thus excluded from the canonical *Abhidhamma*. *Theravādins*, however, strove to establish the entire *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* as *Buddhabhāsita* (Pe Maung Tin, 1920).

Buddhaghosa addresses this dilemma directly. His solution is to assert that the Buddha, possessing foresight, originally taught the outlines (*mātikā*) for all seven *Abhidhamma* treatises, including the *Kathāvatthu*, in anticipation of the sectarian debates that would later arise (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 4). Therefore, while Moggalīputta Tissa elaborated the text, he did so based on the method and framework provided by the Buddha. The *Aṭṭhasālinī* states: "Moggalīputtatissa did not do this of his own knowledge... it was taught on the basis of the method given by the Buddha" (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). By maintaining this position, Buddhaghosa overcomes the objection regarding the text's late composition and secures its place as part of the authentic *Buddhavacana*. From this critical standpoint, what is Buddhaghosa attempting to achieve? His objective is to

defend the accepted *Theravāda* position that the entire *Abhidhamma* possesses the authority of the Buddha's own word. To counter arguments that Moggalīputta Tissa's authorship of the *Kathāvatthu* undermines its canonical status, Buddhaghosa employs a hermeneutical precedent found within the *Sutta Piṭaka* itself (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). He references the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, noting that while the Buddha presented the doctrinal principle in brief, the detailed exposition (*veyyākaraṇa*) was provided by the elder Mahākaccāna (Pe Maung Tin, 1920, Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995). This exposition is not rejected as non-canonical; rather, it carries the Buddha's authority because he endorsed Mahākaccāna's competence to elaborate. The *Aṭṭhasālinī* cites this precedent:

"*Madhupiṇḍikasuttantasmim hi bhagavā: Yatonidānaṃ bhikkhu purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti ettha ce n'atthi abhinanditabbaṃ abhivaditabbaṃ ajjhositabbaṃ es'ev'anto rāgānusayānan ti mātikaṃ tha-petvā uṭṭhāyāsanaṃ vihāraṃ pāvisi. Dhammappaṭṭigāhakā bhikkhū Mahākaccānattheraṃ upasaṅkamitvā dasa-balena ṭhapitamātikāya atthaṃ pucchimsu.*" (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 5)

Buddhaghosa draws a direct parallel: just as Mahākaccāna elaborated upon the Buddha's brief outline (*mātikā*), so too did Moggalīputta Tissa elaborate the *Kathāvatthu* based on the framework established by the Buddha (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). This argument serves to authenticate the *Abhidhamma* within the *Theravāda* tradition of Buddhaghosa's

time. From this traditional viewpoint, it would be considered an offence to claim that the narrative of the Buddha preaching the *Abhidhamma* in the *Tāvātimsa* heaven is merely a later textual invention to confer authority (Collins, 1998).

This strategy of authentication is not unique to Theravāda. Other Buddhist traditions employed similar methods to legitimize their texts and interpretations. For instance, Mahāyāna traditions, as seen in texts like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, assert that their doctrines represent a higher, more profound teaching (*dharma*) intended for devotees with special capacity those following the *Bodhisattva* ideal and were not initially disclosed to those of lesser understanding, whom they associated with the *Śrāvakayāna* (The Lotus Sutra, 23-40). Similarly, the Theravāda tradition sought to invest the *Abhidhamma* with supreme authority by positioning it as the paramattha *desanā*, the ultimate teaching of the Buddha (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). Its initial delivery not to ordinary humans (*puthujjana*) but to the devas in heaven underscores its profundity and transcends the grasp of the unenlightened, thereby elevating its status within the canonical hierarchy.

The *Aṭṭhasālinī* provides another significant instance to demonstrate the *Abhidhamma*'s authenticity (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). It describes a scenario in which the Buddha teaches the *Dhamma*, classifying faculties (*indriya*) into wholesome (*kusala*), unwholesome (*akusala*), and indeterminate (*avyākata*) categories a tripartite division that

mirrors the *Tikamātikā* framework central to the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). This classification, foundational to the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*'s analysis of mind and matter, asserts that all phenomena can be categorized as *kusalā dhammā*, *akusalā dhammā*, or *avyākatā dhammā* (Dhammasaṅgaṇī, 1).

A monk, hearing this exposition, raises an objection: “*Dhammakathika*, to what kind of sutta do you refer?” (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 28). The expositor replies that it is an “*Abhidhamma Sutta*.” The questioning monk then challenges why another sutta preached directly by the Buddha is not cited instead, implicitly denying that the *Abhidhamma* constitutes the Buddha's word. When pressed by other monks “By whom was the *Abhidhamma* taught?” the objector declares, “*Neso buddhabhāsito*” (“This is not spoken by the Buddha”) (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 28).

This exchange reveals that within the *Theravāda* tradition itself at least by the fifth century CE, when Buddhaghosa was composing his commentaries there was significant debate regarding the *Abhidhamma*'s canonical status (Norman, 1983). The orthodox position, which the commentary defends, held that the *Abhidhamma* is the essence of the Buddha's word.

The defenders of orthodoxy then question the objector's training: “*Kim pana te, āvuso, vinayapiṭakam uggahitaṃ?*” (“Friend, have you studied the *Vinaya Piṭaka*?”) (*Aṭṭhasālinī*, 28). He admits, “*Na uggahitaṃ*” (“I have not studied it”). They retort that

his ignorance stems precisely from this lack of disciplinary training: “*Avinayadhāritāya maññe tvaṃ ajānanto evaṃ vādesi*” (“It seems because you are not versed in the Vinaya that you speak thus, not knowing”) (Aṭṭhasālinī, 28). The objector then concedes, “*Vinayamattameva, āvuso, uggahitaṃ*” (“Friend, I have studied only a little Vinaya”). His opponents dismiss even this: “*Tampi te duggahitaṃ... parisapariyante nisinno va niddāyanto uggahitaṃ*” (“That little you have learned poorly... you learned it while sitting at the back of the assembly and nodding off to sleep”) (Aṭṭhasālinī, 28). This pointed rebuke highlights the Theravādin strategy of asserting that a proper understanding of the *Vinaya* necessarily validates the *Abhidhamma*.

The orthodox monks escalate their criticism, suggesting that the mentors who ordained such an ill-prepared individual committed a grave error (Pe Maung Tin, 1920). They conclude by citing a canonical proof-text from the Vinaya itself: For this has been said: ‘There is no offense if, not wishing to disparage the discipline, one says: “Go to, friend, master first the *Suttanta*, or the *Gāthās*, or the *Abhidhamma*, and afterwards you will master the Vinaya.”’ Having obtained permission regarding the *Suttanta*, he asks about the *Abhidhamma* or the *Vinaya*. Having obtained permission regarding the *Abhidhamma*, he asks about the *Suttanta* or the *Vinaya*. Having obtained permission regarding the *Vinaya*, he asks about the *Suttanta* or the *Abhidhamma*. [But the elders say to him]: ‘You, however, do not know even this much!’ (Aṭṭhasālinī,

28). *Theravādins* thus argue that since the term “*Abhidhamma*” appears authoritatively in the Vinaya Piṭaka, its authenticity as part of the Buddha’s teaching should be beyond doubt. The very fact that some bhikkhus questioned it only revealed their own deficient training (Pe Maung Tin, 1920).

The Buddha’s original teaching adopted an analytical method, with the Buddha himself characterized as a “*vibhajjavādi*,” an analyst (Jayatilleke, 1963). From a critical and historical perspective, scholars observe that certain suttas within the *Sutta Piṭaka* exhibit a distinctly *Abhidhamma* character, concentrating on the systematic analysis of doctrinal concepts like mind and matter (Gethin, 2001). Examples include the *Salāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 137), and other *vibhaṅga* (analysis) suttas such as *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga*, *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga*, and *Saccavibhaṅga* (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995). The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*’s own *Vibhaṅga* text formalizes this method, providing exhaustive analyses of *khandha*, *dhātu*, *āyatana*, *paccaya*, and *indriya* (Thiṭṭila, 1969). This focus on analysis, synthesis, and logical presentation highlights the *Abhidhamma*’s distinctive technique.

In his *Aṭṭhasālinī*, Buddhaghosa distinguishes between three modes of the Buddha’s teaching. The *Suttas* employ conventional discourse (*vohāra desanā*), adapted to everyday language. The *Vinaya* constitutes injunctive teaching (*ānā desanā*), skillfully laying down rules. The *Abhidhamma*, however, represents the

ultimate teaching (*paramattha desanā*), dealing with absolute truth. He further correlates each Piṭaka with a facet of the threefold training (*tisikkhā*): the *Vinaya* cultivates virtue (*sīla*), the *Suttas* cultivate concentration (*samādhi*), and the *Abhidhamma* cultivates wisdom (*paññā*) (Frauwallner, 1995). From this orthodox Theravāda viewpoint, the *Abhidhamma* is not merely an analytical recitation of phenomena but is intrinsically linked to the profound discernment of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda*) (Collins, 1998).

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing analysis, we can conclude that the *Abhidhamma* does not represent the direct, historical words of the Buddha but is the product of a gradual scholastic evolution. This is evidenced by the significant divergences between the *Theravāda* and *Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma* traditions, in contrast to the substantial concord found in their respective Sutta collections. Nevertheless, the official Theravāda position sought to authenticate the entire *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* as Buddhavacana. The commentator Buddhaghosa played a pivotal role in this project, systematically employing narrative precedent, *Vinaya* citations, and hermeneutical arguments in his *Aṭṭhasālinī* to establish the *Abhidhamma* as the authoritative word of the Buddha, thereby securing its canonical status within the Theravāda orthodoxy.

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