

Re-examining Catupaṭisambhidā in the Pāli Canon: Analytical Knowledge, Wisdom, and Arahātship

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Abstract

This study examines *paṭisambhidā*, a Pāli term etymologically derived from *paṭi* (“separately”), *saṃ* (“thoroughly”), *√bhid* (“to divide”), and *ā* (feminine suffix), literally meaning “thoroughly separated categories.” It is conceptualized in classical Pāli literature and commentaries as analytic or discriminating knowledge (*ñāṇa*), emphasizing systematic understanding over mere cognition. Commentators, including those of the *vibhaṅga aṭṭhakathā* and *pācittyādiyojanapāli*, identify four interrelated domains of *paṭisambhidā*: result (*attha*), cause (*Dhamma*), language (*nirutti*), and knowledge (*paṭibhāṇa*). The Pāli Canon demonstrates the presence and application of this fourfold analytical knowledge (*catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*) across Sutta, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma texts, associating its attainment with the Buddha and chief disciples, notably Sāriputta and Mahākotṭhita. Through texts such as the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, *Khuddakapāṭha*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, and *Milindapañhā*, this study highlights its practical and pedagogical functions in discerning phenomena, clarifying meaning, analyzing language, and effectively communicating the Dhamma. The culmination of *catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* is *Sabbaññuta-ñāṇa* (“all-encompassing knowledge”), representing the complete, direct insight into all phenomena that constitutes the omniscient knowledge of a fully awakened Buddha. This research underscores *paṭisambhidā* as a systematic path to profound cognitive and spiritual realization.

Keywords: analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*), Arahātship, *catupaṭisambhidā*, Pāli canon, *Sabbaññuta-ñāṇa*

1. Introduction

Paṭisambhidā is a technical term in Theravāda Buddhism referring to analytical or discriminating knowledge. While *paññā* denotes general wisdom or intuitive insight into reality, *paṭisambhidā* represents structured, systematic analysis of phenomena. Together, they enable a practitioner to comprehend and articulate the dhamma with precision. This article re-examines *catupaṭisambhidā* in the Pāli canon, tracing its etymology, conceptual development, and application in canonical and commentarial texts.

2. Study Focus

Although *paṭisambhidā* is frequently mentioned in the Pāli canon, it has rarely been examined as an independent and systematic form of analytical knowledge. Scholarly discussions often subsume *catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* under general wisdom (*paññā*), leaving its doctrinal structure, practical function, and relationship to arahantship and *sabbaññuta-ñāṇa* insufficiently explored. This study therefore addresses this gap through a focused re-examination of *catupaṭisambhidā* in canonical sources.

3. Objectives

1. To clarify the meaning and doctrinal development of *paṭisambhidā* in the Pāli canon
2. To analyze the fourfold structure of *catupaṭisambhidā*: *attha*, *dhamma*, *nirutti*, and *paṭibhāna*
3. To examine its role in arahantship and its *culmination in sabbaññuta-ñāṇa*
4. To highlight its analytical and pedagogical significance in the teaching and transmission of the dhamma

4. Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis of selected Pāli canonical texts, including the *Anguttara Nikāya*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, and *Milindapañhā*, supported by relevant commentaries. A philological and doctrinal approach is used to examine key terms and concepts, with comparative analysis to distinguish *paṭisambhidā* from general wisdom (*paññā*).

5. Literature Review

Paṭisambhidā, derived from *paṭi* (“separately”), *saṃ* (“thoroughly”), *√bhid* (“to divide”), and *ā*, is conceptualized in the Pāli canon and classical commentaries as analytical or discriminating knowledge (*ñāṇa*), emphasizing systematic understanding over mere cognition (Ñāṇamoli, 1982; *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, 1905–1907). Classical sources and commentators, including the *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā* and *Pācittiyaḍḍhiyājanapāli*, identify four interrelated domains as result (*attha*), cause (*dhamma*), language (*nirutti*), and knowledge (*paṭibhāṇa*) which together form *catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* (Taylor, 1907; Mahānāma, 1979). This knowledge appears throughout canonical texts such as the Aṅguttara Nikāya, *Khuddakapāṭha*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, and *Milindapañhā*, associated with the Buddha and chief disciples like Sāriputta and Mahākotṭhita (Aṅguttara Nikāya, n.d.; Mingun Sayadaw, 1999).

Commentarial works, including the *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, and the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, elaborate on the cognitive and pedagogical functions of these knowledges, highlighting their role in discerning phenomena, clarifying meaning, analyzing language, and teaching the dhamma effectively (*Vibhaṅga*, 1904; Pe Maung Tin, 1920). Modern scholarship and Pāli sources provide philological and doctrinal support, emphasizing the practical and spiritual significance of *catupaṭisambhidā* for the development of analytical competence and its culmination in *sabbaññuta-ñāṇa* (“all-encompassing knowledge”)—the fully integrated wisdom of a Buddha (Buddhadatta, 1957; Kusalaguṇa, 2005; Wisdom Library, n.d.).

Despite the extensive textual tradition, most studies examine *paṭisambhidā* in isolation, underscoring the need for a comprehensive analysis that integrates its etymology, canonical applications, commentarial interpretations, and role in arahantship. This study addresses this gap by re-examining *catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* as a systematic path to analytical, cognitive, and spiritual realization within Theravāda Buddhism.

5.1. Definitions and Etymology of Paṭisambhidā

5.1.1. Definitions in Dictionaries

Buddhist Dictionary—Manual of Buddhist Terms & Doctrines: ‘Analytical knowledge’ or ‘discrimination’ (Nyanatiloka, 1980, p. 258). Concise Pali English Dictionary (Buddhadatta, 1957, p. 177): Analytic insight; discriminating knowledge. PTS Pali–English Dictionary: Analysis, analytic insight, discriminating knowledge (Pali Text Society, 1921, p. 447). *Paṭisambhidā* [*paṭi* + *saṃ* + *√bhid* (Pali Text

Society, 1921, p. 447). “In detail at A ii.160; iii.113. 120; Ps i.88, 119; ii.150, 157, 185, 193; Vbh 293 —305; VbhA386sq. (cp. Vism 440 sq.), 391 sq. — See further A i.22; iv.31; Nd2 386 under paṭibhānavant; Ps i.84. 132, 134; ii.32, 56, 116, 189; Miln 22 (attha — dh°nirutti — paṭibhāna — pāramippatta), 359; VvA 2; DhA iv.70 (catūsu p — °āsu cheka). p°-patta one who has attained mastership in analysis A i.24; iii.120; Ps ii.202. Often included in the attainment of Arahantship, in formula “saha paṭisaṁbhidāhi arahattaṁ pāpunāti,” viz. Miln 18; DhA ii.58, 78, 93.” (Pali Text Society, 1921, p. 447).

5.1.2. Etymological Formation

The term ‘*paṭisaṁbhidā*’ is a combination of four elements, namely ‘paṭi’, ‘saṁ’, ‘√*bhid*’ and ‘ā’.

1. ‘Paṭi’ is a prefix that means ‘separately or individually’ (*visuṁ*)
2. ‘Saṁ’ is also a prefix which means ‘completely, thoroughly or well’ (*sammā*).
3. ‘√*bhid*’, is a verbal root meaning ‘to break, to split, to categorize, or to divide.’ In extended sense, it means to analyze or to distinguish.
4. ‘ā’ is a feminine noun-forming a suffix.

5.1.3. Literal Meaning

Paṭi + saṁ + √*bhid* + ā → paṭisaṁbhidā is “breaking apart, analysis”. In Buddhist texts, it denotes analytical insights or discriminating knowledge. In Buddhist texts, *paṭisaṁbhidā* means “analytical insight” or “discriminating knowledge.”

5.2. Common Translations

Paṭisaṁbhidā is commonly translated as “analytical knowledge”, “discernment”, or “special knowledge”. Thus, ‘paṭisaṁbhidā’ literally means ‘thoroughly separate category.’ In Buddhist philosophy, it specifically refers to a form of wisdom that enables a practitioner to precisely analyze and discriminate the true nature of phenomena in a deep, penetrating way. In the Abhidhamma and later commentarial texts, *paṭisaṁbhidā* is often classified into four distinct types:

1. *Dhammavicaya-paṭisaṁbhidā* – discernment of phenomena or teachings.
2. *Saññā-paṭisaṁbhidā* – discernment through perception.
3. *Ñāṇa-paṭisaṁbhidā* – discernment through knowledge.

4. *Anuruddha-paṭisambhidā* – discernment through confidence or clear comprehension.

Together, these are seen as qualities of an enlightened mind, helping one to see reality clearly and act wisely.

5.3. Classical Commentarial Definitions

The vibhaṅga aṭṭhakathā (VibhA), (*paṭisambhidākathā* section) defines it as “*paṭisambhidāti pabhedā*”, “*paṭisambhidā* means category”. It further clarifies: it is the ‘category of knowledge only, but not the category of anything else’ (*na aññassa kassaci pabhedā, ñāṇasseva pabhedāti veditabbā*) (Taylor, 1907, p. 432).

The pācittyādiyojanapāḷi defines “*paṭisambhidā*” as “*atthādīsū pati viṣuṃ sambhijjātī paṭisambhidā, paññā*” (Pali Text Society, 1882–1927, p. 620). That means, ‘*paṭisambhidā* is the knowledge that is categorized separately into attha, etc’ although the two definitions differ in style, they converge in implication. Despite the difference of the explanatory method, both describe the sense of knowledge category that can be divided into four knowledge sub-categories:

- (1) Result (*attha*)
- (2) Cause (*dhamma*)
- (3) Language (*nirutti*)
- (4) Knowledge (*paṭibhāna*)

5.4. Meaning in Translation

Paṭisambhidā (f.) “analytical knowledge,” “discrimination,” especially the four *paṭisambhidās*:

1. *attha-paṭisambhidā* – analysis of meaning
2. *dhamma-paṭisambhidā* – analysis of phenomena
3. *nirutti-paṭisambhidā* – analysis of language
4. *paṭibhāna-paṭisambhidā* – analysis of perspicacity/inspiration

6. Critical Analysis on the Formation of ‘Paṭisambhidā’

“*Paṭisambhidā*” is a technical term in Theravāda Buddhism. In many dictionaries, it is defined as “analysis, analytic insight, discriminating knowledge” or simply “discrimination” (Bhikkhu Kusalaguṇa, 2005, p. 23). “analysis, analytic

insight, discriminating knowledge” (Pali Text Society, 1921, p. 447). “discrimination” (Childers, 1899, p. 366). In the Pāli canon, paṭisambhidā is often equated with ñāṇa (knowledge), for example: Aṅguttara Nikāya, book 4 (Catukka nipāta), Sutta 172 (in some editions) / 173, “Vibhatti Sutta” (or variant “Sāriputta Paṭisambhidā Sutta”) mention “atthe ñāṇaṃ *atthapaṭisambhidā*, *dhamme ñāṇaṃ dhammapaṭisambhidā*” – “the knowledge of result is the analytical knowledge of result; the knowledge of cause is the analytical knowledge of cause.” The statement “*attha ñāṇaṃ atthapaṭisambhidā*, *dhamme ñāṇaṃ dhammapaṭisambhidā*...” can also be found in the commentary Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā (the commentary on the Vibhaṅga of the Abhidhamma). Translation and commentary note that the term *atthapaṭisambhidā* is “analytical knowledge of meaning/result” and *dhammapaṭisambhidā* is “analytical knowledge of dhamma/cause”. However, as noted above, the meanings defined by ancient commentators are: “category or division” (*pabhedā*) and “that which is divided separately” (*pati visuṃ sambhijjati*). Moreover, the root √*bhid*—which is central to the word—does not imply “to know” or “to understand,” but rather “to divide, to break, or to categorize.”

7. An Overview of the Fourfold Paṭisambhidā (Catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa)

The Abhidhamma and later commentaries classify *paṭisambhidā* into four analytical domains:

Table i: Four Analytical Domains

Type	Focus	Function	Example
<i>atthapaṭisambhidā</i>	Meaning/ Result	Analyze significance and essence	Understand causes and Nibbāna
<i>dhammapaṭisambhidā</i>	Phenomena / Cause	Comprehend laws of causation	Analyze arising and ceasing of dhammas
<i>niruttipaṭisambhidā</i>	Language	Grammatical, philological understanding	Express dhammas precisely in Māgadhi
<i>paṭibhānapaṭisambhidā</i>	Knowledge / insight	Mastery of clear, effective communication	Teach Dhamma effectively to others

8. Functional Analysis

1. *atthapaṭisambhidā*: Discerns meaning, essence, and results of phenomena.
2. *dhammapaṭisambhidā*: Discerns causes and conditions, understanding causal laws.
3. *niruttapaṭisambhidā*: Discerns linguistic expression and clarity of communication.
4. *paṭibhānapaṭisambhidā*: Discerns and applies all three other types, enabling articulate exposition of Dhamma.

9. Catupaṭisambhidā in the Pāli Canon

The PTS Pali–English Dictionary mentions, “Always referred to as “the four branches of logical analysis” (*catasso or catu paṭisambhidā*), viz. attha analysis of meanings “in extension”; dhamma of reasons, conditions, or causal relations; nirutti of [meanings “in intension” as given in] definitions paṭibhāna° or intellect to which things knowable by the fore going processes are presented (after Kvu trsln).” (PTS Pali–English Dictionary 447).

The fourfold analytical knowledge (*catupaṭisambhidā or paṭisambhidā*) appears frequently in the Pāli Tipiṭaka—across the Sutta, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma Piṭakas.

In the Paṭisambhidā Sutta (Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.173), the Buddha states that one who has “*catasso paṭisambhidā sayam abhiññā sacchi-katvā*” (“the four analytical knowledges themselves directly realised”) is settled on the path. The sutta known as the “Catukka Paṭisambhidā Sutta” (Four Analytical Knowledges) in Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.172 (sometimes cited as 4.173/4.172), in which Sāriputta declares his attainment or mastery of the four *paṭisambhidās* (four analytic knowledges) with full clarity.

9.1. Catupaṭisambhidā in Vinaya Piṭaka

The fourfold analytical knowledge is not mentioned in the first four volumes of the Vinaya Piṭaka, but appears in Parivāra, its final volume. The Buddha instructs Upāli Thera that a monk should not converse with a nun if he is not endowed with the fourfold analytical knowledge and the mind that leads to emancipation.

Similarly, in the Nikāyas, the fourfold analytical knowledge is absent from Dīgha, Majjhima, and Saṃyutta, but occurs several times in the Aṅguttara and Khuddaka Nikāya.

In the first Nipāta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha declares venerable Mahākoṭṭhita as the most eminent among those who possess the fourfold analytical knowledge. Elsewhere, the Buddha describes his birth as the unique birth of supreme qualities, including the realization of the fourfold analytical knowledge:

O bhikkhus, the birth of one personage is the birth of great eye, the birth of great light, the birth of great illumination, and the birth of six supremacies. That is the realization of the fourfold analytical knowledge, the penetration of many elements, the penetration of different elements, and the realization of the fruition produced by emancipation and wisdom.

Many suttas in the Aṅguttara Nikāya describe the fourfold analytical knowledge:

Vādī sutta: A monk endowed with the fourfold analytical knowledge never tires of expression (*byañjanato*) or explanation (*atthato*). Paṭisambhidāpatta sutta (A iii 113): A monk is loved and respected if he possesses the fourfold analytical knowledge and is diligent and skillful in works.

Paṭhamapaṭisambhidā Sutta (AN 7.38): Demonstrates that the fourfold analytical knowledge can be achieved if a bhikkhu possesses the seven factors of comprehension. Comprehension of sluggishness (1), of the internally constricted mind (2), of the externally distracted mind (3), comprehending the arising, existing and passing away of feeling (4), of perception (5), and of thoughts (6), and comprehension of the sign of what is proper and improper, inferior and superior, and defiled and purified (7). [A. II. 423]

Dutiyaapaṭisambhidā Sutta (AN 7.39): Associates the fourfold analytical knowledge with venerable Sāriputta, who is endowed with the necessary seven factors for its attainment. The venerable Sāriputta is declared by the Buddha there as the one who is endowed with the seven necessary factors for the attainment of the fourfold analytical knowledge, and as the one who, having realized, penetrated and entered upon the fourfold analytical knowledge, abides therein.

Vibhatti Sutta (AN 4.172): Sāriputta explains his mastery of the fourfold analytical knowledge and his ability to clarify doubts. He attains it by cause

(*odhiso*) and by letter (*Byañjanaso*) on the fifteenth day after higher ordination, and can expound, analyze, and explain it comprehensively. He reveals that he attains the fourfold analytical knowledge by way of cause (*odhiso*) and by way of letter (*Byañjanaso*) on the fifteenth day after his higher ordination, and could speak of them, expound them, make them known, make them arise, explain them, analyze them and make them occur with various methods.

Akuppā Sutta (AN 5.95) highlights the fourfold analytical knowledge as indispensable for Arahātship. The Buddha therein says that the monk who possesses the fourfold analytical knowledge, and reflects on the mind in accordance with liberation, not before long, penetrates the imperturbable state, the Arahātship.

Several texts Khuddaka Nikāya describe the fourfold analytical knowledge, some in brief, the other in detail.

In the Khuddakapāṭha, the fourfold analytical knowledge is illustrated in terms of ‘*paṭisambhidā*’ in the following verse: “*paṭisambhidā vimokkhā ca, yā ca sāvakaṇāma; paccekabodhi buddhabhūmi sabbam-etena, labbhati.*”

Similarly, in the Buddhavaṃsa, the fourfold analytical knowledge is found, again in terms of ‘*Paṭisambhidā*’, with reference to the chronicle of Dīpaṅkara Buddha in the verse: “*Kassaci deti sāmāññaṃ, caturo phalamuttame; kassaci asame dhamme, deti so paṭisambhidā*”, and then with reference to the chronicle of Sumana Buddha in the verse: “*phale cattāri sāmāññe, catasso paṭisambhidā; chaḷabhiññāṭṭhasamāpatti, pasāresi tattha vīthiyaṃ.*”

In the Mahāniddeśa, however, the fourfold analytical knowledge is described with regard to one who is possessed of intelligence by the spiritual attainment (*adhigama-paṭibhānavā*). It is said that only the possessor of the fourfold analytical knowledge is truly the possessor of intelligence.

In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the fourfold analytical knowledge is mentioned many times in different chapters:

1. Knowledge of five faculties (*indriya*), five powers (*bala*), seven enlightenment factors (*bojjhaṅga*), and eight path factors is the analytical knowledge of cause (*dhammapaṭisambhidā*).
2. Knowledge of functions of these causes is the analytical knowledge of result (*atthapaṭisambhidā*).

3. Knowledge of the language expressing these phenomena is the analytical knowledge of language (*niruttapaṭisambhidā*).
4. Knowledge of previous knowledge is the analytical knowledge of knowledge (*paṭibhānapatisambhidā*).

In the Milindapañhā, the fourfold analytical knowledge appears under the name of ‘*paṭisambhidāratanaṃ*’, the jewel of the fourfold analytical knowledge. The passage mentioned there appears to be similar in meaning but different in letter with the Vibhatti sutta seen above. Arahant Nāgasena Thera also makes clear that the monk possessing the fourfold analytical knowledge can resolve the questioner’s doubts, dispel his perplexity and delight him with clear explanation, as the hero warrior who can attack his enemy from far and near with five weapons.

As to the Abhidhamma pitaka, fourfold analytical knowledge is visible in the Vibhaṅga, Kathāvatthu and Paṭṭhāna. In the Vibhaṅga, the entire chapter on the ‘analysis of analytical knowledge’ (*Paṭisambhidā-vibhaṅga*) unfolds in detail the fourfold analytical knowledge from two aspects—Suttanta and Abhidhamma. The detail account of the fourfold analytical knowledge discussed in the next chapters is chiefly based on this treatise together with its commentary and sub-commentaries.

In the Kathāvatthu, Andhaka monks assert that all kinds of knowledge in an Ariya are supra-mundane and hence they are all analytical. Theravādin monks refute the opinion and assume that the supra-mundane knowledge is one and the analytical knowledge is another. In the Paṭṭhāna, it is said that the Path (*magga*) is a condition for the fourfold analytical knowledge by way of decisive support condition (*upanissayapaccayena*).

The above reports show that the fourfold analytical knowledge —*attha*, *dhamma*, *nirutti* and *paṭibhāna*—found in the Pāli Texts is closely linked with the Buddha and his noble disciples, and is mentioned and explained in several important texts of the Canonical Texts.

10. The Fourfold Analytical Knowledge (*Catuṣaṣṭhāyikā nāṇa*)

1. *atthapaṭisambhidā nāṇa*
Analytical understanding of the significance, essence and meaning of things.

2. *dharmapaṭisambhidā ṇāṇa*

Analytical understanding of the nature of the Dhamma, of the causation law, through language.

3. *niruttapaṭisambhidā ṇāṇa*

Analytical understanding within a philological approach of the Dhamma. Deep understanding of the mode of language expression that is being utilized in connection with reality (including grammar, etymology, sentence construction, etc.)

4. *paṭibhāṇapaṭisambhidā ṇāṇa*

Analytical understanding of effective, clear, and persuasive discourse designed to make the Dhamma easily understood by others.

Above information has been adapted from “*Catupaṭisambhidā* in Theravāda Buddhism (The Fourfold Analytical Knowledge in Pāli Literature) by Bhikkhu Kusalaguna (Le Xuan Do, 2005).

To the Buddha, the fourfold analytical knowledge is found in connection with him on several occasions, during forty-five years of his teaching career. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha once claims his birth as the birth of glorious qualities—the realization of the fourfold analytical knowledge is one of them: “O bhikkhus, the birth of one person is the birth of great eye, the birth of great light, the birth of great illumination and the birth of six supremacies. That is the realization of the fourfold analytical knowledge, the penetration of many elements, the penetration of different elements and the realization of the fruition produced by emancipation and wisdom.”

On other occasions, the Buddha describes the fourfold analytical knowledge with reference to his disciples such as the venerable Sāriputta, the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita and others, the detail of which is described in the following headings (Le Xuan Do, 2005, Ch. 01).

The venerable Sāriputta, the General of Dhamma (*dharmasenāpati*), was approved by the Buddha of being endowed of the fourfold analytical knowledge.

‘Endowed with seven factors, bhikkhus’, the Buddha said, ‘Sāriputta, having penetrated, having realized and having entered the fourfold analytical knowledge with direct knowledge, abides therein’ (*sattahi bhikkhave, dhammehi samannāgato Sāriputto catasso paṭisambhidā sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati*).

Concerning his attainment to analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*), the Venerable Sāriputta speaks of it in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (Fours, No. 172), where he says:

It was half a month after my ordination, friends that I realized, in all their parts and details, the analytical knowledge of meaning, the analytical knowledge of the Dhamma, the analytical knowledge of language, the analytical knowledge of perspicuity. These I expound in many ways, teach them and make them known, establish and reveal them, explain and clarify them. If anyone has any doubt or uncertainty, he may ask me and I shall explain (the matter). Present is the Master who is well acquainted with our attainments.

Another important figure who deserves such declaration, even more admirable, from the Buddha, is the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita. Amidst the Saṅgha, he was once declared by the Buddha to be foremost among bhikkhu noble disciples who attain the fourfold analytical knowledge. Here is the Buddha's Word: '*etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ paṭi-sambhidā-pattānaṃ yadidaṃ Mahākoṭṭhito*', that means, "O monks, of my bhikkhu noble disciples who attain the analytical knowledge, Mahākoṭṭhita is foremost."

It has been also observed that all Therās and *Therīs* mentioned in the Apadāna were endowed with the fourfold analytical knowledge. They declare at the end of their utterance the analytical knowledge together with the eight attainments and the sixfold direct knowledge: "paṭisambhidā catasso, vimokkhāpi aṭṭhime; chaḷabhiññā sacchikatā, katā Buddhassa sāsanaṃ" viz. "the fourfold analytical knowledge, the eight types of deliverance and the six-fold direct knowledge have been realized; the Buddha's teaching has been accomplished".

Moreover, when we read the stories related to many Therās during the Buddha's lifetime, and of the later period described in commentaries, particularly the Dhammapada commentary, we often see the passage "saha paṭisambhidāhi arahattaṃ pāpuṇāti", "he attains the Arahatsip together with the analytical knowledge".

Paṭhamapaṭisambhidā sutta fully elucidates the seven factors or causes that lead to the attainment of the fourfold analytical knowledge. At one time, the Buddha said: "O bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is endowed with seven factors, before long, he himself, having comprehended, having realized and having entered the fourfold analytical knowledge, abides therein" (*sattahi, bhikkhave, dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu nacirasseva catasso paṭisambhidā sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja vihareyya*)(AN 7.38).

1. Knows correctly thus: ‘this is sluggish state in me’ (*‘idaṃ me cetaso līnattan’i yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*)
2. Knows correctly the internally constricted mind thus: ‘there is the internally constricted mind in me’ (*‘ajjhataṃ saṃkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘ajjhataṃ me saṃkhittaṃ cittaṃ’i yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*)
3. Knows correctly the externally distracted mind thus: ‘there is the externally distracted mind in me’ (*‘bahiddhā vikkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘bahiddhā me vikkhittaṃ cittaṃ’i yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*)
4. To him the feelings that arise, exist and pass away are comprehensible (*tassa viditā vedanā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbattham gacchanti*)
5. To him the perceptions that arise, exist and pass away are comprehensible (*viditā saññā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbattham gacchanti*)
6. To him the thoughts that arise, exist and pass away are comprehensible (*viditā vitakkā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbattham gacchanti*)
7. He clearly perceives, clearly takes a mental note of, wisely contemplates and penetrates with wisdom the sign of what is proper, what is improper, what is inferior, what is superior, what is defiled and what is purified (*sappāyāsappāyesu kho panassa dhammesu hīnappaṇītesu kaṇhasukkasappaṭi-bhāgesu nimittaṃ suggahitaṃ hoti sumanasikataṃ sūpadhāritaṃ suppaṭi-viddham paññāya*).

O bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is endowed with these seven factors, before long he himself, having comprehended, having realized and having entered upon the fourfold analytical knowledge, abides therein”.Adapted from “catupaṭisambhidā in Theravāda Buddhism (The Fourfold Analytical Knowledge in Pāli Literature) by Bhikkhu Kusalaguṇa (Le Xuan Do, 2005, Ch. 6).

11. Analytical Knowledge (catu-paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa) in Detail

The Buddha attained perfect enlightenment and became endowed with the four kinds of Analytical Knowledge.

i. *attha patisambhidā-ñāṇa*

Herein, attha means:

- (a) things that are dependent on conditions, i.e., understanding results of causes;

- (b) *nibbāna*;
- (c) meaning of words (Pāli);
- (d) resultant thoughts (vipāka) (i.e., mind and mental concomitants);
- (e) non-causative thoughts (kiriya) (i.e., mind and mental concomitants).

The Buddha became endowed with the above five kinds of attha (meanings, results) as soon as He attained Buddhahood. Being endowed with the analytical knowledge of attha, the Buddha knew discriminately and comprehensively about everything and was able to expound these to others.

The great non-causative consciousness (*mahā kiriya ñāṇa*) associated with the four kinds of knowledge that arises in the Buddha when His mind attends to the above five atthas, as well as the *magga-phala* that He knows when His mind attends to nibbāna, is called attha *patisambhidā-ñāṇa* of the Buddha.

This *attha patisambhidā-ñāṇa* of the ariyas who are still training themselves to attain arahatta-phala, such as that of the venerable Ānanda, consists of the great meritorious consciousness (*mahākusala-citta*) associated with the four kinds of knowledge that arise in them when their mind attends to those five Atthas, as well as the three lower *maggas* and *phalas* when their mind attends to *nibbāna*.

ii. *dhmma paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa (Discriminating and comprehensive knowledge about phenomena)*

Herein, *dhmma* means:

- (a) causes that produce results;
- (b) the four *ariya* Paths;
- (c) the spoken word of the Buddha (Pāli);
- (d) meritorious thoughts (i.e., mind and mental concomitants);
- (e) demeritorious thoughts (i.e., mind and mental concomitants).

The Buddha became endowed with the above five kinds of *dhmma* (causes) as soon as He attained Buddhahood. Being endowed with the Analytical Knowledge of *dhmma*, the Buddha knew discriminately and comprehensively about every *dhmma* and was able to expound them to others.

The great non-causative consciousness associated with knowledge that arises in the Buddha when His mind attends to the above five *dhmmas* is the *dhmma patisambhidā-ñāṇa* of the Buddha. In the case of ariyas who are still training themselves to attain *arahatta-phala*, such as the Venerable Ānanda, the Analytical

Knowledge of *dhamma* means the great meritorious consciousness associated with knowledge. (The same applies with regard to the next two kinds of Analytical Knowledge.)

iii. ***nirutti paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa (Analytical Knowledge of the natural language of the Ariyas — i.e., Māgadhī)***

This is the Analytical Knowledge of the natural language of the ariyas (i.e., māgadhī) concerning the five kinds of attha and the five kinds of *dhamma* (causes). The Buddha became endowed with the Analytical Knowledge of the natural language of the ariyas (i.e., māgadhī). Being endowed with the Analytical Knowledge of the words and grammar of the natural language of the Ariyas (i.e., Māgadhī), the Buddha was able to teach it to others.

The five kinds of attha and the five kinds of dhamma require a wealth of words. For each *dhamma* item, a wide range of vocabulary, grammatical forms, and nuances of the natural language of the *ariyas* (i.e., Māgadhī) were at the facile command of the Buddha. For example, a single *dhamma* factor, *phassa* (contact), is expressed in its various forms—such as *phasso* (contact), *phusanā* (being in contact), *samphusanā* (full contact), *samphasitattha* (contacting well)—to bring out its various intrinsic meanings.

Likewise, *lobha* (greed) is explained in more than a hundred terms (refer to *dhammasaṅgaṇī*, para. 456).

iv. ***Paṭibhāna paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa (Analytical Knowledge of Insight or Readiness of Expression)***

This is the analytical knowledge that attha *paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* has discriminative and comprehensive knowledge about results; that dhamma *paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* has discriminative and comprehensive knowledge about the five dhammas; and that *nirutti paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* has analytical knowledge about words and grammar.

Briefly put, it is the knowledge about the three kinds of analytical knowledge the knowledge which has all knowledge as its object and considers them discriminately. The Buddha became endowed with this knowledge about the kinds of knowledge as soon as He attained Buddhahood. (*nirutti paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* and

paṭibhāna paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa, like the previous *paṭisambhidā-ñāṇas*, are the great non-causative consciousness associated with knowledge *mahā kiriya mahā kusala ñāṇa*.)

The fourth of the four *paṭisambhidā-ñāṇas* discriminately knows the functions of the three other Knowledges but is not able to discharge those functions itself. It is like a preacher who, though well versed in the scriptures, lacks a good voice and therefore cannot preach as effectively as another who, though possessing a pleasant voice, has little scriptural knowledge.

Two bhikkhus once learned the art of preaching. One was poor in voice but intelligent; the other had a good voice but lacked intelligence. The latter made a great name everywhere he preached. The audience had a very good impression of him and said: “From the way this bhikkhu preaches, he must be one who has committed to memory the Three Piṭakas.”

When the learned bhikkhu with the poor voice heard these remarks, he became jealous and said: “Well, you will find whether he is a master of the Three Piṭakas when you hear him preach next time.” (He implied: “You are going to hear much the same material again.”) Yet, whatever he might say about that popular preacher, he himself was unable to preach as well as the one with a good voice, who could captivate the audience. Similarly, *paṭibhāna paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* discriminately knows the functions of the three other Analytical Knowledges but cannot discharge those functions itself. This has been explained in the *commentary on the vibhaṅga*.

12. Distinction between Paṭisambhidā and Paññā

The distinction between *paṭisambhidā* and *paññā* in Buddhism is subtle but it is of great importance. *Paṭisambhidā* refers to the analytical or discriminative knowledge that breaks down experience into its components, enabling clear insight into phenomena. *Paññā* (wisdom), on the other hand, is the intuitive understanding of the true nature of reality, especially impermanence, suffering, and non-self. In short: *paṭisambhidā* = analytical discernment; *paññā* = deep intuitive wisdom.

12.1. Paññā (Wisdom / Insight)

Meaning: General wisdom or insight into reality, especially into the three marks of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).

Function: Recognizes the truth of phenomena and penetrates their real nature.

Example: Seeing that all emotions, thoughts, and experiences are impermanent and not-self.

Think of *paññā* as the intuitive insight that knows “what things truly are.”

12.2. *Paṭisambhidā* (Analytical Discernment / Specialized Knowledge)

Meaning: A more refined, analytical, and discriminating knowledge.

Function: Breaks down experiences or dhammas into their constituent parts, allowing for precise understanding and classification.

Example: Not just seeing impermanence, but being able to distinguish the impermanence of mind vs. matter, or of one feeling vs. another, or understanding the precise conditions leading to suffering.

Paṭisambhidā is sometimes described as the “scientific mind” of the Buddha, capable of detailed analysis and understanding of phenomena.

12.3. Relationship between *Paṭisambhidā* and *Paññā*

Paññā gives you the direct insight into reality. *Paṭisambhidā* applies structured, analytical knowledge to deepen, verify, and articulate that insight. Together, they lead to perfect understanding, like seeing a mountain (*paññā*) and then being able to describe every rock, path, and slope precisely (*paṭisambhidā*). *Paññā* is seeing clearly and *paṭisambhidā* refers to knowing clearly, analyzing clearly.

The four kinds of *paṭisambhidā* and how each *Paṭisambhidā* functions in practice are as follows. These four are traditionally described in the Abhidhamma and later commentaries:

i. *Dhammavicaya-paṭisambhidā* (Discernment of Dhammas / Phenomena)

Meaning: The ability to analyze and distinguish the nature of mental and physical phenomena (*dhammas*).

Function: Recognizes the true characteristics of things, such as impermanence, suffering, non-self, and the causes behind them.

Example: Seeing that a thought arises due to a specific cause, persists for a short time, and then passes away.

This is the analytical mind of insight—breaking down experience into understandable components.

ii. *Saññā-paṭisambhidā* (Discernment through Perception)

Meaning: The ability to discern through perception or mental awareness.

Function: Distinguishes between different perceptions, feelings, and mental objects with clarity.

Example: Knowing the difference between a painful feeling caused by heat and one caused by emotional stress.

This sharpens mindfulness, helping one to accurately categorize experiences as they occur.

iii. *ñāṇa-paṭisambhidā* (Discernment through Knowledge)

Meaning: Discernment based on knowledge and understanding, especially in meditation.

Function: Allows one to know the exact truth about phenomena, their arising, ceasing, and conditions.

Example: Understanding that attachment arises due to craving, which arises due to ignorance.

This is the direct cognitive knowing that supports insight and wisdom.

iv. *Paṭivedha-paṭisambhidā* (Discernment through Penetration / Direct realization)

Meaning: Sometimes called Anuruddha-paṭisambhidā in some texts. It is the ability to penetrate phenomena and directly realize their ultimate truth.

Function: Provides the confidence of direct realization in meditation and insight.

Example: Experiencing impermanence directly in meditation, not just understanding it intellectually.

This is the culmination of analytical knowledge, integrating perception, analysis, and realization.

Table ii: Summary

Type	Focus	Function	Example
Dhammavicaya	Phenomena	Analyze nature of things	Seeing causes of a thought
Saññā	Perception	Distinguish perceptions	Noticing difference between mental and physical pain
Ñāṇa	Knowledge	Understand truth	Seeing craving → suffering chain
Paṭivedha	Direct realization	Penetrate phenomena	Experiencing impermanence first hand

12.4. Relationship between Paṭisambhidā and Paññā

Table iii: Paṭisambhidā and Paññā

Aspect	Paññā	Paṭisambhidā
Meaning	General wisdom / Intuitive Insight	Analytical, discriminating knowledge
Function	Direct insight into reality	Structured analysis and categorization
Example	See impermanence directly	Distinguish impermanence in mind vs matter or different mental state

In synthesis, paññā provides the intuitive “what is,” while paṭisambhidā provides the analytical “how it is,” enabling mastery and effective teaching.

12.5. Four Kinds of Paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa in Practice

- i. *Atthapaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*: Analytical understanding of results and meaning.
- ii. *Dhammapaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*: Analytical understanding of phenomena and causal relations.
- iii. *Niruttipaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*: Analytical understanding of language and effective expression.
- iv. *Paṭibhānapaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*: Analytical understanding of all three other knowledges and their application in teaching.

The key insight is that only a fully enlightened Buddha possesses these four types of knowledge to their highest degree, culminating in *sabbaññuta-ñāṇa* (all-encompassing knowledge).

13. Catupaṭisambhidā and Arahātship

- Canonical references indicate that attainment of catupaṭisambhidā correlates with Arahātship.
- Expressions such as “saha paṭisambhidāhi arahattaṃ pāpuṇāti” (attaining Arahātship along with analytical knowledge) demonstrate the essential role of analytical knowledge in full spiritual awakening.
- Noble Disciples like Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Mahākotṭhita Therās exemplify the practical attainment and application of this knowledge.

14. Results and Discussion

The four types of *paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*—*attha*, *dhamma*, *nirutti*, and *Paṭibhāna*—together form *catupaṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*, a cognitive and pedagogical framework progressing from understanding outcomes, to causes, to language, and finally to teaching. Canonical references and examples of the noble disciples like Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Mahākotṭhita show that this analytical knowledge supports progress toward Arahātship. Full mastery of all four, however, is unique to a fully enlightened Buddha, culminating in *sabbaññuta-ñāṇa* (all-encompassing knowledge). In short, the fourfold *Paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa* enables understanding, precise expression, and effective teaching of the Dhamma.

These findings demonstrate that *catuṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa* provides a systematic path for insight, integrating comprehension of outcomes, causes, language, and teaching. Its fourfold structure functions as both a cognitive and pedagogical tool, supporting clear understanding and communication of the Dhamma. While noble disciples may attain aspects of these knowledges, full mastery is exclusive to a Buddha, resulting in *sabbaññuta-ñāṇa*. Thus, the fourfold *ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa* represents an integrated system of wisdom, where understanding, expression, and pedagogy converge to guide beings toward liberation.

15. Conclusion

The fourfold *ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa*—*attha ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa*, *dhamma ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa*, *nirutti ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa*, and *paṭibhāṇa ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇa*—together constitute a supreme system of analytical wisdom, fully perfected only in a Fully Enlightened Buddha. With these four interrelated modes of knowledge, the Buddha comprehended phenomena, their causes, their linguistic expression, and their interrelations in their entirety, enabling Him to teach the Dhamma with flawless understanding, precise articulation, and boundless skill for the welfare and liberation of beings. While noble disciples (*ariyas*) may attain aspects of these knowledges according to their spiritual development, such realization remains partial, whereas the Buddha possesses them in their highest, most complete, and fully integrated form. Thus, the four *ṣṭaṣambhidā-ñāṇas* stand as the ultimate expression of the Buddha's incomparable omniscient wisdom (*sabbaññuta-ñāṇa*), which penetrates all phenomena and perfectly guides others toward liberation.

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