

***Process Consciousness and Process-free Consciousness in the Cognitive Process of
Buddhist Psychology: A Study***

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Abstract

In the Pāli *Abhidhamma*, one of the divisions of the Pāli Canon, the whole gamut of Buddhist psychological experience is presented with two streams of consciousness: process-consciousness (*vīthi-citta*) and process-free (*vīthi-mutta*) consciousness. The process consciousness refers to the active condition of the mind when it occurs in a cognitive process. The process-free consciousness refers to the passive condition of the mind when it is free from cognitive process. The second stream is also called door-free consciousness because it does not occur in any of the six sense-doors: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind. It is further observed that the process-free consciousness presents three different functions: (1) as constituent-becoming consciousness (*bhavaṅga-citta*), (2) departing consciousness (*cuti-citta*), and (3) re-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*). Among these three types of consciousness, it is to be noted that the *bhavaṅga* consciousness is closely connected to the cognitive process in the active condition of the mind. This paper examines the functions of process consciousness and process-free consciousness in helping to understand the role of consciousness in the cognitive process of Buddhist psychology. It will end by commenting on the views of several scholars such as Rhys Davids, and Ediriwira Sarachchandra who assert that the *bhavaṅga* is “unconscious” or “sub-conscious”. But, we will postulate that *bhavaṅga* is “consciousness” which object is *kamma* (action) that closely functions in the cognitive process. This paper is based on the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgha*, a masterly summary of the *Abhidhamma*. Reference will also be made from the *Nikāya-s*, the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa and the Commentaries to the *Abhidhamma*.

Keywords: Consciousness, Cognitive Process, Psychology, Unconscious

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Introduction

Early Buddhist psychological concept as presented in the abhidhammic texts is fashioned out of two basic principles of consciousness (*citta* in Pāli)¹: process consciousness (*vīthi-citta*) and process-free (*vīthi-mutta*) consciousness.² Though functions of these two principles are separately discussed, they are reciprocally generated from some basic orders. In the cognitive process, these orders are to be observed as the psychological experience of (1) an enduring process which does not qualify a permanent substance as an “agent”, and (2) the whole psychological activity is a continuum of mental stream in individual life experience. These orders are understood as the core principle of Buddhist psychological system which is conditioned by every immediately succeeding and preceding event in the activity of mind. This system is more comprehensible when the whole range of Buddhist psychological experience is explained in detail by two flows of consciousness: process-consciousness and process-free consciousness. Before dealing with these two concepts, let us first discuss what the consciousness refers to in early Buddhist discourses.

Consciousness is not a Substantial Agent

In Buddhism, consciousness has not been identified as a substantial agent, rather it is a mere function depending on conditional relations between the sense bases and their objects. To clarify this issue some contents of the *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta* in MN are consulted. In this *Sutta*, some of the Buddha’s disciples pointed out a monk named Sāti who held a view that the same consciousness runs along and wanders, and transmigrates from birth to birth: “this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the birth cycle, not another” (MN, I, p. 256).³ Here it should be discerned that monk Sāti had the view that the consciousness is a kind of substance which is a “permanent entity” that transmigrates without undergoing any change. Revoking Sāti, the Buddha taught that the consciousness always arises depending upon particular conditions based on duality. Duality is referred to the arising of consciousness which does not arise alone but dependently arising phenomenon that possesses a set of motion with regard to the sense bases and their objects. In the *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya*

1 Consciousness (*citta*) has broad implications in Buddhist psychology and philosophy. With this word two more Pāli terms, *viññāṇa* and *mano* or *manas*, are also occasionally used as synonyms to denote the conscious life. In the *Assutavantu Sutta* of the *Nidāna Vagga* in SN, one can find the synonyms, as: “that which is called *citta* and *mano* and *viññāṇa* arise as one thing that ceases as another by day and by night” (*yañca kho etaṃ vuccati cittaṃ itipi mano itipi viññāṇaṃ itipi. taṃ rattiyā ca divasassa ca aññadeva uppajjati aññam nirujjhati* (SN, II, p.95)). Generally, *viññāṇa* refers to consciousness, *citta* to thinking (*cittaṃ cintetha*, SN V 418), *mano* to the faculty of mind and the object of it is the *dhamma* (“dependent on the mind and mind-objects, arises mind-consciousness” *manañcā paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati manoviññāṇaṃ* (MN, I, p.112)). However, among them one can show considerable differences. G.A. Somaratne has shown differences by referring to the early Buddhist discourses of the Pāli Canon. He says, *viññāṇa* performs the central operational mind, and both *citta* and *mano* perform as the supportive passive and active applications of *citta*. He describes:

Citta represents that aspect of mind that mainly accumulates and carries *kammic* potentials and that, by such potentials activates *viññāṇa*. It also represents affective contents and functions that, for the most part, condition one’s character. *Manas* is the sense faculty by which one performs mental activities under the influence of the passive properties of *citta*. *Viññāṇa*, which is activated by the contents and functions of both the passive *citta* and the active *manas*, is both the rebirth linking factor and the conscious awareness in sense perception (Somaratne, 2005, p. 169).

2 The term *vīthi* literally means “street” (Bodhi, 2007, p. 151). It also means “a pathway” or “a process”. (Karunadasa, 2007, p. 1).

3 *yathā tadevīdaṃ viññāṇaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati, anaññanti.*

Sutta, the Buddha also stiffly taught that “consciousness to be dependently arisen, apart from conditions there is no arising of consciousness” (*Op. cit.*, pp. 256-57).⁴

What does it mean by dependently arisen? Dependently arisen in reference to consciousness is understood as the conditionality of consciousness that is dependent on the sense bases and sense objects. There are six sense bases: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind. They are also called faculties (*indriya* in Pāli). There are six sense objects: forms, sounds, smells, flavours, tangibles, and phenomena (mind-objects). In conditional relations, the sense-base eye is the subject as the visual organ and its object is eye-cum-visible objects, i.e., forms. So, when consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, in this case it is reckoned as eye-consciousness. Similarly, when consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the nose and smells, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and flavours, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness; and when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and phenomena or mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness. Hence, it is understood that arising of consciousness is reckoned by conditionality between sense bases and their objects as like the friction of two sticks produces fire. In the *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta*, arising of consciousness is compared to the arising of fire which occurs dependent on various conditions such as dry-wood, and here it is to be classified that when the “fire burns dependent on cow-dung, it is classified as a cow-dung fire” (*gomayañca paṭicca aggi jalati, gomayaggitveva saṅkhaṃ gacchati*), etc. In the same way, when consciousness arises depended on the eye and form, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness, etc. (*Op. cit.*, p. 260). Here, this causal relationship of consciousness should, therefore, be understood as not a representative of an immutable or eternal self, rather it is not-self as presented in Buddhist teachings .

In the *Pañcavaggiya Sutta* of the *Khanda Vagga* in SN, in a discussion about the not-self (*anattā*) with regard to the five aggregates - form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness –the consciousness, including other four aggregates, is explained as not-self (*viññāṇaṃ anattā*). As the consciousness is not-self, it is also impermanent, suffering, and subject to change (SN, III, pp. 67-68). Therefore, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue - consciousness, body – consciousness, and mind – consciousness are too impermanent, suffering, not-self, and subject to change.

The aforesaid consciousness is not an isolated phenomenon rather it is an aggregate existing in combination with the other four aggregates: form, feeling, perception, volitional formations. The consciousness cannot be separated from these four aggregates. In regard to this, in the *Upaya Sutta* of the *Khandha Vagga* in SN, the Buddha is said to have taught that it is impossible if someone says:

I will describe apart from form, apart from feeling, apart from perception, apart from volitional formations, a coming, and a going of consciousness, its

⁴ *paṭiccasamuppannaṃ viññāṇaṃ... aññatra paccayā natthi viññāṇassa sambhavoti.*

passing away or arising, or its presence, sustenance and expansion, or its proliferation (SN, III, p. 53).⁵

From the above passage, it is clear that any specific consciousness cannot be separated from the other four aggregates. But it is distinguishable by describing its various functions in the cognitive process of psychological experience. Yet, nowhere it is defined consciousness to be a permanent entity behind the cognitive process.

The cognitive process in Buddhist psychology should be understood as not a mere immediate result of contact between sense bases and their objects, instead it is the result of continuum of event occurred by contact between sense bases and their objects. This is a process that begins from a sensory contact and gradually leads to the comprehension of the object. This whole process is interpreted as the mental event which is also called the “fixed order of consciousness” (*citta-niyāma*), or a natural order of the consciousness due to the conditional relations. Because when consciousnesses arise by cognizing objects at the sense bases or the mind base, they do not appear in separation, rather “as phases in a series of discrete cognitive events leading one to the other in a regular and uniform order” (Bodhi, 2007, p. 151).

It has been shown that the emergence of consciousness and human experience has been shown by presenting conditional relations. But the vital part of this experience is to be known as the perception in the early Buddhist discourses. For example, in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* of MN, sense perception is explained as:

Dependent on the eye and visible form, arises eye-consciousness. The meeting of these three is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels about, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one reflects about. What one reflects about, that one comes to be obsessed. With one is obsessed as the source, perceptions and notions assail him with respect to past, the future, and the present forms cognizable through the eye (MN, I, pp. 111 - 12).⁶

The above assertion is repeated with respect to other sense bases, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind. From the aforementioned description, it is understood that the sense bases and their objects play a vital role in conditioning perceptual consciousness in the cognitive process of human experience.

The Process Consciousness

Having clarified the most important aspect that consciousness is merely a function and not a substantial entity or entity itself, now we shall discuss the process consciousness and its functions. In the cognitive process of Buddhist psychology, the process consciousness refers to the active condition of consciousness because the activity of it possesses a set of motion with regard to the sense bases and their objects. Earlier we have discussed that consciousness is named after the sense faculties, not

⁵ *ahamaññatra rūpā aññatra vedanāya aññatra saññāya aññatra saṃkhārehi viññānassa āgatim vā gatim vā cutim vā uppattim vā vuddhim vā virūlhim vā vepullam vā paññāpessāmīti.*
⁶ *cakkhuñcāvuso pañca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhviññānaṃ. Tinnaṃ saṅgati phasso. Phassa-paccayā vedanā. Yaṃ vedeti, taṃ sañjānāti. Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi. Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti. Yaṃ papañceti tato nidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsankhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuvīññeyyesu rūpesu.*

after the sense object of faculties, i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mind. Each is also known as “door” (*dvāra* in Pāli), eye-door, ear-door, nose-door, tongue-door, body-door, and the mind-door, because they are known as media through which objects enter the range of mind in the cognitive process (Bodhi, 2007, pp. 150-51). In correspondence to these six doors of cognition, six cognitive processes are identified. Out of six doors, the first five are together called the “five-door-process” (*pañca-dvāra-vīthi*) because they are based on the physical sense bases. On the other hand, the sixth one which is the mind-door in the order is called the “mind-door-process” (*mano-dvāra-vīthi*). The essential conditions of the process consciousness in the cognitive process are four types which occur through each of the doors, as follows:

The five-door process

- (a) for an eye-door process – (1) eye-sensitivity, (2) visible object, (3) light, (4) attention;
- (b) for an ear-door process – (1) ear-sensitivity, (2) sound, (3) space, (4) attention;
- (c) for a nose-door process – (1) nose-sensitivity, (2) smell, (3) air element, (4) attention;
- (d) for a tongue-door process – (1) tongue-sensitivity, (2) taste, (3) water element, (4) attention;
- (e) for a body-door process – (1) body-sensitivity, (2) tangible object, (3) earth element, (4) attention;

The mind-door process

- (f) for a mind-door process – (1) the heart-base, (2) mental object, (3) the *bhavaṅga*, (4) attention (Bodhi, 2007, pp. 151-52).

From the above discussion, one can observe that among the six cognitive processes, the five-door process may occur in succession to one another, and mind-door process may occur independently. Because, the mind-door process is a channel through which the *bhavaṅga* emerges. Sometimes, these two processes are called the “mixed door-process” (*missaka-dvāra-vīthi*) because they involve both a physical sense-door and the mind-door. Meanwhile, the processes that appear at the mind-door are called “base mind-door processes” (*suddha-mano-dvāravīthi*) because they occur from the *bhavaṅga* alone without the activity of a physical sense base (*Op. cit.* p. 152). But, in light of the activity of the mixed door-process in the cognitive process, the theory of cognition is closely connected with the *bhavaṅga*. Here, it is also noticed that though the *bhavaṅga* is separately discussed as a process-free consciousness or the passive condition of mind in the cognitive process, it has a proximate connection with the process consciousness or the active condition of mind in the cognitive process. Therefore, at this point it is useful to note that the description of the process consciousness and the mixed door-process consciousness are highly complex.⁷ This complicated psychological notion was developed with the development of the *Abhidhamma* texts, and detailed in the *Visuddhimagga*, and the Commentaries to the *Abhidhamma*. But, the discussion in this paper is mostly taken from the account of the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*.

⁷ I will examine this issue extensively in my PhD research being pursued at the University of Hong Kong (HKU).

The Process-free Consciousness

It was mentioned that the process-free consciousness performs three different functions, as: (1) constituent-becoming consciousness (*bhavaṅga-citta*),⁸ (2) departing consciousness (*cuti-citta*), and (3) re-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*). But it is observed that last two consciousnesses – departing and re-linking – have been discussed under the notion of *bhavaṅga* consciousness. In this arrangement the *bhavaṅga* can be classified into twofold: (1) as a stop-gap continuity of individual life from birth to death which is a duration of whole life, and (2) as departing consciousness and re-linking consciousness.

The first one is an uninterrupted flow of conscious existence which averts the possibility of any gap arising in the continuous stream of consciousness. The second notion is merely process-free consciousness. According to the *Abhidhamma* teachings, the departing consciousness functions as the last consciousness of a dying individual which object is the last cognitive process of that individual. The re-linking consciousness is clarified as the first consciousness to occur at the moment of rebirth which also has the object as same as that dying individual. When re-linking consciousness occurs, it is immediately followed by the *bhavaṅga* consciousness which performs as a stop-gap of continuity of individual from birth to death in birth cycle (*saṃsāra*). In this manner, the *bhavaṅga* performs the continuity of a person until the attainment of enlightenment. According to the Pāli tradition, the *bhavaṅga* consciousness ensures the continuity of life not only during a single existence but also in the rebirths in the birth cycle. A passage from the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* states:

At the end of life, having become the death consciousness [*cuti-citta*] in the form of passing away, it then ceases. Thereafter, the rebirth-linking [*paṭisandhi-citta*] and the others continue to occur, revolving in due sequence like the wheel of a cart until one attains Nibbāna (Bodhi, 2007, 228).

Bhavaṅga and Unconscious

Several scholars in Buddhist studies such as Rhys Davids (1936, p. 406), and Ediriwira Sarachchandra (1994, p.75) have discussed the concept of *bhavaṅga* either as sub-conscious⁹ or unconscious. Moreover, about the function of *bhavaṅga* as sub-conscious A.B. Keith presents a narrative, as:

⁸ The Pāli term *bhavaṅga* and its notion as presented in the *Abhidhamma* is a developed doctrine. The use of the term is greatly found in the *Paṭṭhāna* and later in the *Nettipakaraṇa*, the *Peṭokapadesa*, the *Milinda-pañha*, etc. According to Karunadasa, the term *bhavaṅga* occurs in the *Paṭṭhāna* and the *Milinda-pañha*, but it was in Commentarial literature that it came to be fully described (Karunadasa, 2007, p. 1). Rupert Gethin has done an extensive research on the *bhavaṅga* and rebirth as presented in the *Abhidhamma*. But, he has less shown the emergence of the concept in the Pāli Canon (Gethin, 2005, pp.159-81). Sarachchandra says, “the word *bhavaṅga*, borrowed from the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, meant originally a link in the Causal Chain or *pratītyasamutpāda*” (Sarachchandra, 1994, 79). L.S. Cousins has shown the origins of the term *bhavaṅga* within the *Abhidhamma* and post-abhidhammic texts (Cousins, 1981, pp. 22-46). O.H. de A. Wijesekera, however, has presented the term initially was appeared in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN, II, p. 79). As a source text, he has cited the Sinhala edition of AN (Wijesekera, 1976, pp. 349 – 50). About the origination and development of *bhavaṅga*, a detailed explanation will be given in my PhD dissertation being researched at HKU.

⁹ The dictionary meanings of sub-conscious are (1) not clearly consciousness but capable of being made so; (2) pertaining to phenomena of either the preconscious or the conscious; (3) subliminal; (4) pertaining to what is in the margin of attention (Horace B. English and Ava Champney English, 1958, p.531)

The *bhavaṅga*, or stream of being, is a conception barely known in the Abhidhamma, and there not explained, but it evidently has already here, the sense of a continuum which is not conscious, but from which consciousness emerges, and which may therefore be reckoned as sub-conscious (Keith, 1923, p. 194).

Regarding the *bhavaṅga* in respect to the continuity of individual, Davids says, in each life the last thought moment which is “last subconscious” (*cuti-citta*) falls and appears again in the conception, and from conception again *bhavaṅga* occurs determining the continuity of an individual. To illustrate the *bhavaṅga* as unconscious in the continuity of individual existence, Davids takes the simile given in the Commentary (*The Atthasālinī*, pp. 271-72) on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, as:

A man lies asleep with covered head beneath a mango tree (stream of unconsciousness life or *bhavaṅga*). A wind stirs the branches (preceding *citta* 1 and vibrating *bhavaṅga*, 2, 3). This causes a mango to fall by him (arrest or disruption of unconscious life). The man is waked by the falling fruit (adverting, 4). He uncovers his head (sense-impression of fruit, 5), picks up the fruit (receiving, 6). Inspects it (investigating, 7), determines what it is (determining, 8), eats it (full perception, 9 – 15), swallows the last morsels (registering, 16, 17), re-covers his head and sleeps again (subsidence into *bhavaṅga*) (Davids, 1936, p. 407).¹⁰

Taking Davids and Sarachchandra’s understanding of *bhavaṅga* as unconscious, Wijesekera compares the Freudian Unconscious and *bhavaṅga*. He says Freud’s idea of the human psyche consisting of *id* is inherently originated in everyone in the somatic and psychological symptom. This *id* is an accumulation of the psychical forces which maintains all the conscious and unconscious natures of the human psyche. Later, Freud developed a theory with regard to mental life giving a name called “ego”. This concept is a part of *id* which has undergone development due to influence of the external objects. According to Wijesekera, it is the agency occurred in a result of the relation between sensory perception and dynamic action. He further traces Freud’s *id* concept connecting to the unconscious with a suggestion that the “ego” is closely associated with the consciousness. Wijesekera says, Freud’s unconscious theory is similar to the *bhavaṅga* which stands for *saṅkhāra* (mental formations) and *viññāṇa* in the five aggregates. He further builds argument by presenting the notion of *saṅkhāra*, a necessary condition for *viññāṇa* in the twelve links of dependent co-arising which appears in empirical state of mind as similar to

¹⁰The simile of the mango is given in the *Abhidhamma* literature to illustrate the cognitive process occurring in the sense-doors. The simile is further illustrated in the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* by clarifying each thought moment, as:

[T]he time of the man’s sleeping at the foot of the mango tree is like the time when the *bhavaṅga* is occurring. The instant of the ripe mango falling from its stalk and grazing his ear is like the instant of the object striking one of the sense organs, for instance, the eye. The time of awaking through the sound is like that of the five-door adverting consciousness turning towards the object. The time of the man’s opening his eyes and looking is like eye-consciousness accomplishing its function of seeing. The time of stretching out his hand and taking the mango is like that of the receiving consciousness receiving the object. The time of squeezing the fruit is like that of the investigating consciousness investigating the object. The time of smelling the mango is like that of the determining consciousness determining the object. The time of eating the mango is like that of *javana* experiencing the flavour of the object. The swallowing of the fruit while appreciating its taste is like the registration consciousness taking the same object as the *javana* phase. And the man’s going back to sleep is like the subsidence back into the *bhavaṅga* (Bodhi, 2007, 158).

“ego” or the “empirical agent” as presented in Freud unconscious theory (Wijesekera, 1979, p. 66).¹¹

Rupert Gethin, however, gives a convincing clarification that the expression of “unconscious” or “unconsciousness” for *bhavaṅga* is unhelpful. Gethin says “if *bhavaṅga* is to be understood as “unconsciousness”, it must be as a specific kind of unconsciousness.” In a tentative way, Gethin expresses, the term “unconscious” would ordinarily be used merely for an individual who is “asleep (whether dreaming or not), who is in coma, who has fainted, or who has been ‘knocked unconscious’, etc.” (Gethin, 2005, p. 159). In this connection, though Gethin does not refer to Freud’s unconscious theory as similar to *bhavaṅga*, he presents the interpretation of *bhavaṅga* as “unconscious” in relation to certain specific modern psychoanalytic theories which, according to him, is not only confusing, but even becomes more problematic (*Op. cit.*, p. 160).

Gethin defines *bhavaṅga* is truly a kind of “consciousness” which has object like other consciousness. In the *Visuddhimagga*, it is said *kamma* is the object of *bhavaṅga*, as follows:

When the re-linking consciousness has ceased, then, following upon that re-linking consciousness, that which is the same kind, being the result of that same *kamma* whatever it may be, streaming forward as constituent-becoming consciousness with that same object [*kamma*]; and again those same kinds. And, as long as there is no other kind of arising of consciousness to interrupt the continuity, they also go on occurring endlessly even in periods of dreamless sleep, until other others [consciousnesses] arises to transform it, like the stream of a river (*Visuddhimagga* 2, VRI, p. 20).¹²

Form the above passage, it is understood that *bhavaṅga* functions as a consciousness which object is *kamma*. In this setting, we largely agree with Gethin.¹³ Nevertheless, to understand *bhavaṅga* as consciousness we intend to briefly examine the function of it as presented in the cognitive process.

In the above discussion on process consciousness (*vīthi-citta*), it was observed that the *bhavaṅga* is occurred in the mind-door of cognitive process. With the given simile of mango, Davids only pointed out how mind goes back into *bhavaṅga* in a state of sleep, which according to her, is “unconsciousness”. But, if we take the evidence as presented in the *Visuddhimagga*, we can say even in deep sleep the *bhavaṅga*

¹¹ Padmasiri de Silva has done a comprehensive study on the Buddhist and Freudian Psychology. Chapter III of his book provides an excellent analysis on the unconscious in Freud and early Buddhism (Silva, 1978, pp. 34 – 75). More on this subject will be discussed in my PhD thesis.

¹² *paṭisandhiviññāne pana niruddhe taṃ taṃ paṭisandhiviññānāmanubandhamānaṃ tassa tasseva kammaṃ vipākabhūtaṃ tasmīññeva ārammaṇe tādisameva bhavaṅgaviññānaṃ nāma pavattati, punapi tādisanti evaṃ asati santānavinivattake aññasmim cittupāde nadīsoṭaṃ viya supīnaṃ apassato niddokkamanakālādīsū aparimāṇasaṅkhyampi pavattatiyevāti.*

¹³ Gethin argues some functions of the *ālaya-vijñāna* (store-consciousness) can be attributed to the unconscious theory. When some scholars have shown certain similarities with regard to the notion of *bhavaṅga* and *ālaya-vijñāna*, contemporary scholars in Theravāda Buddhism take these similarities to show the *bhavaṅga* with the unconscious theory. In this context, Collins’s observation is noteworthy. He says:

The modern comparison between *bhavaṅga* and the psychoanalytic unconscious must be developed as part of what one might call ‘speculative’ or ‘creative’ Buddhist philosophy, rather than by historical scholarship (Collins, 1999, p. 244).

functions as consciousness which object is *kamma*. Moreover, when we clarify *bhavaṅga* within the mind-door process in active condition, it seems *bhavaṅga* functions momentarily¹⁴ between each process consciousness. In this process, we interpret *bhavaṅga* as consciousness. Therefore, it is to be noted that the notion of *bhavaṅga* in the cognitive process implies a broader notion which is followed by a series of continuous nature of conscious experience. Here, this conscious experience is understood as the process consciousness. In this activity, the flow of *bhavaṅga* consciousness begins to take part as a continuity of an individual's mental base upon which the whole conscious experience in cognitive process is emerged. Though here the distinction between process consciousness and *bhavaṅga* as process-free consciousness is discernible, *bhavaṅga* should be considered as a function of consciousness. In this process, the *bhavaṅga* is not “unconscious” or “sub-conscious” rather it functions as “consciousness”. It also seems that the function of *bhavaṅga* can only be defined until the arahatship. This consciousness does not arise in a living arahat. In this connection, we understand *bhavaṅga* as *viññāṇa* (consciousness) which arises dependent on conditional relations. This *viññāṇa* has close relationship with the notion of “I” a false person-hood (*atta-bhāva*) with regard to the five aggregates, which is key factor for becoming or rebirth in life cycle. And, cessation of this *viññāṇa* is *Nibbāna* as presented in early Buddhist discourses: “One is freed by the destruction of craving, through the cessation of consciousness (*viññāṇassa nirodhena taṇhākkhayavimuttino*) (AN, I, 236).¹⁵

Conclusion

The above description of consciousness in the cognitive process of Buddhist psychology received a comprehensive analytical treatment in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. The initial purpose to analyse the whole range of consciousness in the *Abhidhamma* texts was to categorize and classify the various states of consciousness in detail. Though the categorization of consciousness is thoughtful in the early Buddhist discourses of the Pāli Canon, the attempt to the enumeration of consciousness at each moment led to further development in the *Abhidhamma*. This systematic classifications cause philosophical problems and to solve these problems convincingly Buddhist thinkers found difficulties in some of the issues, i.e., how rebirth occurs, etc.

In the *Abhidhamma*, so far the attempt to categorize the nature of consciousness into different types is discernible, such as process consciousness and process-free consciousness. Out of these two streams of consciousness, the process-free consciousness is seemed more complex in the Commentaries to the *Abhidhamma* and other abhidhammic texts. In this enumeration, the attempt to explain the function of *bhavaṅga* consciousness in the experience of cognitive process compelled to examine the consciousness in a frame within which consciousness occurs. In this process,

¹⁴ In AN, there are three characteristics are presented relate to the arising (*uppāda*), passing away (*vaya*), and continuation or change of what endures (*thitassa aññathatta*) (AN, I, p. 152). This theory is very much similar to the momentariness. According to Y. Karunadasa, the doctrine of momentariness was not peculiar to the *Sutta*-s. It was later developed within the books of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and afterwards it was further developed in the Pāli Commentaries and subsequent Buddhist texts (Karunadasa, 2003).

¹⁵ In AN, a kind of consciousness known as *pabhassara citta* (luminous mind or brightly shining mind) is used to describe the mind which is naturally pure (AN, I, p. 10, 257, etc.). The Commentary to AN states *pabhassara citta* is a pure mind which is similar to *bhavaṅga citta*, because it is without defilements. As I am still researching the notion of *bhavaṅga*, here I am not offering a conclusive answer about this concept but expecting to discuss further in my thesis.

though all Buddhist thinkers maintain the explanation of consciousness with the early discourses of the Pāli Canon that represents a bare function dependent on the sense organs and their objects with a view to disproving the existence of substantial agent or identity, later it has been observed that *bhavaṅga* consciousness was treated in term of metaphysical theory which streamed from previous life to this life, again to next life until the attainment of Nibbāna.

Therefore, it is to be noted that later the purposes of classifying the consciousness have been taken in slightly different form which though reposes an agent behind the cognitive process, somehow developed a metaphysical theory with the notion of *bhavaṅga* consciousness. This metaphysical theory in empirical level is mixed up with a kind of agent which lies behind in the whole cognitive process of individual experience. In this understanding, it seems that several Buddhist thinkers have interpreted the *bhavaṅga* as “unconscious” without caring to look its historical context. To me, *bhavaṅga* is not “unconscious” rather it is “consciousness” which object is *kamma* and closely functions in the series of mind-door process of active consciousness. It is also understood that *bhavaṅga* consciousness only functions until the attainment of Nibbāna. This consciousness does not arise in a living arahat. Since this study is on progress it may be too early to draw a conclusion. I expect to discuss them in detail in a forthcoming paper.

Abbreviations

MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
AN	<i>Anguttara Nikāya</i>
VRI	Vipassana Research Institute

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