CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Origin of The Abhidhamma Literature

The Abhidhamma Pitaka - the third and the last section of the Tipitaka (three great divisions of the Buddhist Scriptures) contains the 'higher religion' or the 'higher subtleties of religion'.

Buddhaghosa, the famous Pali commentator composed some valuable commentaries and other works on Abhidhamma literature in Sri Lanka. Henceforward the research and works on Abhidhamma spread throughout the countries of Sri Lanka and Myanmar. It is said that Buddhaghosa became 'instrumental' in the spread of Buddhism throughout Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

It is found that Abhidhamma is highly venerated abroad, hence the purpose of this research work is to study carefully the importance of Abhidhamma as a popular literature in Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

This Chapter deals with the origin of the Abhidhamma literature. After the great demise of Buddha, the First Buddhist Council was held immediately after the Mahāparinibbāna of Buddha in order to draw up and present the canonical texts and the creed in their pristine form. Abhidhamma literature actually, did not figure in their discourses.

Next after one hundred year the Second Buddhist Council was held to declare some un-vinayic acts illegal practised by the monks of the Vajji Country, where the Vinavapitaka and Sutta pitaka were rehearsed also, but no mention was made of the Abhidhamma.

The origin of the Abhidhamma Pitaka was connected with the story of the Third Buddhist Council which is given in the Mahāvaṃsa (Chapter V). After two hundred

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and thirty-eight years of the demise of Buddha the Third Buddhist Council was held at Pāṭaliputta or Pāṭaliputra (near Modern Patna) under the aegis of the celebrated monarch, Piyadassī Asoka. The Third Council was convened to establish the purity of the Canon which had been imperilled by the rise of different sects and their rival claims, teachings and practices. One of the momentous result of this council was the compilation of a text namely Kathavatthu (one of the seven treatises of the Abhidhamma Pitaka) by Moggaliputta Tissa, the President of the Council. In the Mahāvaṃsa it is stated that Moggaliputta Tissa compiled the work Kathavatthu for the refutation of other sects. It is also stated that Mahinda, the preacher of Buddhist Dhamma in Srilanka, learnt the seven books of Abhidhamma, the five Nikāyas and the whole Vinaya from Moggaliputta Tissa. So the Kathavatthu of the Abhidhammapitaka is regarded as a work of Ashoka's time.

From the Pali tradition we learn that the Buddha first delivered the *Abhidhamma* to the Tavatimsa gods in the Tavatimsa Heaven during his visit to his mother there. He then preached it to Sāriputta who very often used to meet the Buddha. Then Bhadda got it from Sāriputta, Revata and others also received it through a succession of disciples. According to venerable Mārada Mahāthera, Buddha first preached the *Abhidhamma* to his mother Deva and others for three months as a mark of gratitude. The topics (Maṇīka) of the discourses were later rehearsed to the venerable Sāriputta who subsequently elaborated them and composed the *Abhidhamma-Pitaka*.

It deals with the same subject as the *Suttapitaka* but its treatment is more scholastic than the latter. G. P. Malalasekera says, "As far as the contents of the *Abhidhamma* are concerned, they do not form a systematic philosophy, but are a special treatment of the Dhamma as found in the *Suttapitaka*. Most of the matter is psychological and logical; the fundamental doctrines mentioned and discussed

are those already propounded in the Sutta, and therefore, taken for granted.

Ven. Manaponika Mahāthera gives an account of the Abhidhamma. He says that the Abhidhammapitaka, or the philosophical collection forms the third great section of the Buddhist Pali Canon (Tipiṭaka). In its most characteristic parts it is a system of classifications, analytical enumerations and definitions, without a discursive treatment of the subject matter. Particularly its two most important books, the Dhammasāṅgīti and the Patthāna, appear like huge collections of systematically arranged tabulations, accompanied by definition of the terms used in these tables. This is certainly a type of literature of which one will scarcely expect a high degree of popularity or appreciation. This is also the fact that though the Abhidhamma was, highly esteemed, and even venerated in the countries of Theravāda Buddhism, yet this attitude was not always imply a true understanding of the teachings concerned. He also said that in the 10th Century A.D., a king of Sri Lanka ordered a monk namely Kassapa the Vth to write the whole of Abhidhammapitaka on golden leaves and the copy of the first book i.e., Dhammasāṅgīti

was set with jewels. Then the work was compiled, the precious manuscripts were taken in a huge procession to a beautiful monastery and also deposited there. Another king Vijayabahu (11th Century A.D.) in early every morning before he took up his royal duties used to study the Dhammasangata and engaged in a translation of it into the Sinhalese language which, however, is not preserved to us. He describes further that according to the Theravada tradition, the Abhidhamma is 'the domain proper of the Buddhas (Buddhavisaya)' and is traced to the time immediately after the great enlightenment. It was in the fourth week of seven, spent by the Master in the environ of the Bodhi tree, that the Abhidhamma was conceived. These seven days were called by the teachers of old as 'the week of the Houses of Gems' (ratanagharasattaha). 'The Houses of Gems' is indeed a very fitting expression for the crystal clear edifice of Abhidhamma thought in which the Buddha engaged.

Kojo Mizuno also refers to the Abhidhamma. He states that there is reason to think that each of the early schools of sectarian Buddhism possessed at one time

14. ibid.
what corresponded to the Tipitaka of the Theravādins.

In the Buddhist texts which now exist in Chinese translation, we find most of the triple texts of the Sarvāstivāda School. According to Huien-Tsang’s itinerary, Huien-Tsang himself learnt the Abhidhamma of the Saṃmitiya School in the Parvata country of North-West India and that of the Mahāsaṅghika at Dhanakaṭaka in Southern India. And when he returned to China, he took with him the sacred Buddhist texts of various schools from India. Those included fourteen books belonging to the Theravāda, fifteen books to the Mahāsaṅghika, fifteen to the Saṃmitiya, twenty-two books to the Mahāsaṅgikā, nineteen books to the Kassapiya, forty-two books to the Dharmaguptaka and sixty-seven books to the Sarvāstivāda. Of those books what he translated, were mainly the philosophical books of the Sarvāstivāda, all the others remained untranslated and the original texts have been lost.

Again, according to the introductory remarks prefaced to I-tsing’s Travels on the South Seas, there were in India at that time four schools (the Mahāsaṅghika, the Sthaviravāda, the Mūlasaṅgivāda and the Saṃmitiya) which represented the eighteen schools (all four of them had the Tipitaka).

They consisted of either 300,000 or 200,000 verses.

In this case, what were called the Tipitaka of various schools were the fundamental books. The commentaries and the manuals were, as a rule, excluded. As for the philosophical books, the fundamental philosophical books (Mula-Abhidharma) regarded as sacred were the seven Abhidharma books of Pali Buddhism and the corresponding seven books of the Sarvastivada. The commentaries, etc., of later production were not regarded as sacred literature. That was the proper arrangement and Pali Buddhism followed it. As for the scriptures in Chinese translation, however, there is no such discriminatory arrangement. There we find that the commentaries and manuals, produced later than the fundamental books, and their sub-commentaries are equally ranked with the philosophical texts (Abhidhamma-Pitaka). Sometimes, we find later schools of Mahayana Buddhism, such as the Yoga School, using the name Abhidharma for books belonging to the School, without consideration of their contents, e.g., the Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra or the Mahayana Abhidharma Samuccaya.

Dr. W. S. Karunarathne gives the meaning of the word *Abhidhamma*. He mentions that the term *Abhidhamma* is a propositional compound formed out of "abhi" and "dhamma" and the fact clearly suggests that its origin and emergence are subsequent to that of *Dhamma*. The term has obviously been coined to indicate a difference between what it denotes and the *Dhamma*, according to the commentator Buddhaghosa. "abhi" when prefixed to "dhamma" conveys the sense of "supplementary *Dhamma*" and "special *Dhamma*". This is well accorded with what we know about the nature and character of the *Abhidhamma* texts. Tradition itself has recognised a distinction in style between *Dhamma* and the *Abhidhamma*. Thus the *Suttas* embodying the *Dhamma* are said to be taught in the discursive style (*sapparīyādāsāna*) which makes free use of the simile, the metaphor and the anecdote. This is contrasted with the non-discursive style (*nipparīyādāsāna*) of the *Abhidhamma* which uses a very select and precise, and therefore, thoroughly impersonal, terminology which is decidedly technical in meaning and function. The same distinction is clearly implied in the separate mention of the two modes *Suttaṃ-panīyāya* and *Abhidhamma-parīyāya*. Buddhaghosa tells us how tradition recognised the

23. ibid., p.21.
distinctive character of each Pitaka. The Vinaya is the
discourse on injunctions (apā-desaṇā); the Sutta is the
Popular discourse (Vohāra-desaṇā) while the Abhidhamma is
the discourse on ultimate truths (paramattha-desaṇā). The term Abhidhamma used both as a neuter and as a masculine,
is already attested in the Vinaya and the Nikayas and much
more frequently in the post-canonical works. In its earlier
usage, it refers largely to the subject matter of the special
dogma and sometimes possibly to the distinct techniques
employed by the latter.

The Dīgha-Nikāya and the Majjhima Nikāya once refer
to the term Abhidhamma with Abhinikāya. Buddhaghosa, the
great Pali commentator, explains this term as Bodhi-
Pakkhīya Dhammas or the factors leading to Enlightenment.

R.C. Childers mentions the term Abhidhamma as
higher doctrine, transcendental doctrine, metaphysics.
It implies metaphysical as opposed to moral doctrine
(dhamma). T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede said that

24, W. Bhāvavannikā, Mahāthera Abhidhamma Philosophy, p. 44.
27. Nārada, Mahāthera, A Simple Introduction to Abhidhamma, P. 97.
28. ibid.
the term Abhidhamma is abhi and dhamma. It means "special dhamma" i.e., theory of the doctrine, the doctrine classified, the doctrine pure and simple.

Dr. Karunaratne gives an account of the Abhidhamma. He describes the title given to the third (and last) collection or Pitaka of the Buddhist canonical books; it is also a name for the specific method in which the Dhamma or doctrine is set forth in these books, the subject matter, thereof, and the literature connected with it.

H.G.A. Van Zeyst explains the meaning of the word Abhidhamma. He states that the occurrence of the word Abhidhamma in the Mahāvagga (Vin I,64) connected with instruction in the rules of monastic life (abhivinaya-vinaya) deprives the word of the special meaning given to it in later works. In the Vinaya texts Abhidhamma and abhivinaya do not refer to anything deeper than "what pertains to the dhamma and vinaya, the capability of teaching which is considered to be an essential requisite in any teacher-monk and which, therefore, cannot be taken as a profound study and exposition of psycho-analysis.

32. Ibid., p.39.
As Oldenberg says "The only passage in the Vinaya which really presupposes the existence of an Abhidhamma Pitaka is one in the Bhikkhunī-Vibhaṅga (Sutta vibhaṅga 95th Pācittiya) 'if a nun, having asked for permission to put a question regarding the Suttanta, would do so in regard to the Discipline or the Abhidhamma, there is an offence of expiation'. This view is supported by I. B. Horner, who says 'yet the very presence of the word gāthā (in connection with Suttanta) and abhidhamma, is enough to preclude the term 'abhi-dhamma' from standing for the literary exegesis of that name, for no reference to that third Pitaka as such would have combined a reference to part of the material, verses, which one of the Pitakas finally came to include'. The "only" passage in the Bhikkhunī-Vibhaṅga quoted above is then "unhesitatingly assumed to be an interpolation" by Oldenberg.

Abhidhamma has been translated as "special dhamma" both by E. J. Thomas and G. P. Malalasekara referring to

34. Ibid.
the mode of teaching found in the Abhidhamma Pitaka which is so different from the method employed in the suttas. The translation of P.L. Woodward as "extra doctrine" is not unwarranted owing to its connection with Abhi-vinaya which can only mean "pertaining to the discipline". And this applies also to his translation of Abhidhama as "further dhamma" in its with "further discipline" P.L. Here's translation "More dhamma" is also joined to the "More Discipline" and cannot, therefore, refer to the Abhidhamma Pitaka even though the commentary tries to explain it in that way.

Here also, therefore, the reference is not to more dhamma but just to "being questioned on what pertains to the dhamma and what pertains to the discipline".

I.B. Horner suggested that the word Abhidhama occurring in the suttas and vinaya although not indicating a complete and closed system of philosophy but intended to stand for something more than Dhamma and Vinaya.

Kogen Mima gives verbal definitions of the Abhidhama. He states that Abhidhama is translated in

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41. ibid., Vol.IV, p.267.
42. Horner, I.B. Indian Historical Quarterly, p.299.
43. ibid.
China as "great dhamma" "peerless dhamma" "excellent dhamma" and "the study about dhamma" or "facing dhamma? According to the commentary of the Sktottaragama Abhidhamma is the great dhamma. It is called great because it is great knowledge of the four truths and destroys wrong views, ignorance and delusion, and the eight forms of intelligence, ten forms of wisdom and the right view of purity help to surmount the obstacles of the three realms of sentient beings. So, it is called the peerless dhamma.

Vasubandhu also defines and explains it in his Abhidharma-kosa-stra. There he states that Abhidhamma means "facing the dhamma" and the dhamma designates Nirvana and the four truths as the law of the ideal.

Dr. W.S. Karunaratne discusses the origin of Abhidhamma. He states, that a critical study of the text of early medieval and modern Abhidhamma leads us to the conclusion that the origin and development of the Abhidhamma extended over a considerable period

44. Malalasekera, G.P. Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, p.39.
45. ibid.
47. ibid.
of gradual and systematic historical evolution. Reasons of orthodox, however, prevented the early Buddhists from cultivating or approving a strictly historical view of this development. The traditional claim shared alike by the Theravādins and Sāvāstivādins, ascribed the Abhidhamma both in regard to its historical origin as well as in regard to its literary form, to the Buddha himself.

In connection with the origin of Abhidhamma it may be stated that the Atthasālinī of the Theravādins describes the Buddha as the first Abhidhammikā (Sammāsambuddho va pathamataram Abhidhammiko) goes to the length of claiming that the seven treatises of the Abhidhamma Pīṭaka were themselves uttered by the Buddha. In the text it also refers in an interesting and valuable passage, speaks of a two-fold origin of the Abhidhamma, i.e., origin pertaining to its realisation and that pertaining to its exposition. In this connection, it answers as many as seventeen questions pertaining to the origin, purpose and continuity of the Abhidhamma. According to

50. ibid. p.31.
their answers, the Abhighamma was inspired by the earnest aspiration for enlightenment, matured through five hundred and fifty births, realised by the Buddha at the foot of the Bodhi-tree in the month of Vesakha. It was reflected upon by the omniscient Buddha, while he was on the seat of Enlightenment, during his week's stay at the Jewelled Mansion. It was taught in the heaven that is, in the realm of the thirty-three gods, for the benefit of the latter. The purpose of this was enabling them to get across the four floods of life. It was received by the gods, and is studied by the venerable seekers after perfection as well as by the virtuous worldly folk. It has been mastered by those who have extinguished their deprivities and is held high by those to whom it was meant. It is the word of the Buddha and has been handed down by the succession of teachers and their pupils. Through Sariputta it has been successively handed down by Bradda, Schita, Piyajali, Piyadassi, Kosiyaputta, Siggava, Sandha, Mogaliputta, Visudattam, Dhamiya, Dasaka, Sopaka, Revata and others up to the

51. ibid.
time of the Third Council and thereafter by their pupils. Through their traditional succession in India it was brought to the island of Ceylon (Srilanka), that is, by Mahinda, Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasala and again it was handed down in its new home by their pupils.

The traditional account no doubt contains valuable historical information, specially with reference of its latter part. The orthodox view is, as already mentioned, that the Buddha not merely inspired the later growth of the Abhidhamma but was himself responsible for the literary form which the seven treatises have assumed within the Abhidhamma Pitaka. There is, however, internal evidence in the Buddhist texts themselves which militates against such a claim. It is very significant for instance, that there is reference, ever nominal, to the Abhidhamma in what are generally regarded as the earliest authentic texts.

52. ibid., p. 32.
53. ibid.
of early Buddhism such as the Sutta-nipata and the verse portions of the Jataka tales. And as has been mentioned already, even in those places in the Digha, Majjhima, and Anguttara Nikaya where the Abhidhamma occurs, the reference is not to a literary compilation or composition but to a distinct technique of analysing the Dhamma and there is a literary classification based on this technique. There is also a more positive mind of evidence which tends to confirm the critical opinion of modern scholarship in regard to the origin of the Abhidhamma. Buddhaghosa himself records that the ascription of the Abhidhamma to the Buddha has been questioned — even in the early days of Buddhism. The monk Tissabhuti of Mandalarasmi held the view that the Buddha did not preach the Abhidhamma and cited the Padesavihara Sutta as supporting him. While on the other hand, the monk Sumanadipa

tried to persuade his listeners about the Buddha's authorship of the *Abhidhamma* by citing the orthodox tradition. Critics raised the same questions at a later date in respect of the *Kathavatthu* Buddhaghosa quotes the *Vitandavādina* as saying that the *Kathavatthu* was composed by the Moggaliputta-Tissa two hundred and eighteen years after the death of the Buddha, and that, therefore, it ought to be rejected as having been spoken by the disciples. While being constrained to admit the truth of this historical event, Buddhaghosa, however, forestalls the objection by holding that in the case of this book the Buddha had laid down the list of subjects and the appropriate technique for their elucidation on the part of his disciple who was destined to be born over two hundred years after his own death.

It is generally accepted that the *Abhidhamma* originated and developed out of the *Dhamma*. The term *Dhamma* in its normative aspect bears the wildest meaning.

60, *ibid.*, p.3.
61, *ibid.*, p.4.
and comprehends the entire teaching of doctrine. The Dhamma was taught to composite audiences as and when occasion presented itself to the Buddha and the language used was largely non-philosophical with a fair admixture of the colloquial. As the understanding of the disciple became deeper, the necessity arose for a more precise statement of the nature of reality. The Dhamma was capable of being understood and grasped only by the wise even though it was presented frequently in popular discourse. Hence, there were occasions when the doctrine was not well-grasped by some disciples even after the Buddha had taught the sermon. On such occasions, as the Suttanta themselves record, it was customary for these disciples to betake themselves again either to the Buddha or to one of his initiated disciple, who thereupon undertook a further detailed exposition of the knotty problems involved. This detailed exposition and explanation actually took the form of a commentary and the beginnings of the Abhichamma can be partly traced back to it.

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Especially because of the fact that the greater part of the Dhamma was taught in a free style, the rich and varied contents of the Suttas lent themselves to a wide variety of interpretations. As the word of the Buddha gradually grew into a religion and philosophically pre­fessed by an increasing number of people the necessity arose for a precise and more categorical presentation of the doctrine. This was all the more necessary in view of the fact that other contemporary schools of religion and philosophy were turning out their own literature in which they attempted to present the doctrine precisely and sys­tematically. The richness of the philosophical content of the Buddha's discourses allowed for the possibility of divergence of opinion even among the Buddhist monks them­selves.

That this was actually so is indicated by the early history of the emergence of the Buddhist schools. Each

63. Ibid., pp. 413-414.
school tried in its own way to render explicit what was only implicit in the earlier discourses of the Buddha. This process was probably accelerated after the council of Vesāli which was exclusively devoted to the discussion of ten points of monastic discipline. It was at the council of Pātaliputta, in Asoka's reign, that controversial points were settled and incorporated in the canonical texts under the name *Kathāvatthupakarana*. It would appear, therefore, that the various schools with schismatic tendencies had their origin between the two later councils. In the Pātaliputta council, i.e., third Buddhist council, the dispute was no longer about rules of discipline, as at Vesāli but about the finer points of psychology and logic. These divergences were naturally reflected in the abhidhamma works that were in process of being compiled or composed at the time.

This also explains the reason that led to the

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64. Ibid.
convention of many assemblies and councils for the purpose of determining the exact meaning of "points of controversy". The differences came to be more exaggerated when each school held its own closed sessions to decide the import of the doctrine. The earlier life of eremitical mendicancy gave place gradually to one of settled monasticism and as a result of the geographical expansion of early Buddhism, monasteries came to be established in scattered places, remote from each other. The life of leisure thus secured induced the monks to engage themselves in philosophical and literary pursuits and the geographical isolation of the monasteries resulted in the growth of independent schools of thought. This explains at once many of the disparities between the various schools in regard to the Abhidhamma. This also contrasts with the position relating to the Dhamma, whereas there is a remarkable degree of agreement among the early schools on the interpretation of the early teachings included in the Dhamma, there is a marked lack of such agreement in regard to the doctrines contained in the Abhidhamma. The
Pharma was shared in common by all Buddhists prior to their division into schools and their geographical separation from one another. In view of the differences among the schools on the subject of the Abhidhamma each felt the need for the compilation of separate Pitaka for the special and elaborated doctrine. Even from the point of view of literature, it is noticed that the contrast between the Dhamma and the Abhidhamma remained. There is a complete correspondence between the Sutta Pitaka of early schools, as the available versions in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan show, but in the case of the Abhidhamma Pitaka there is not even correspondence in name in regard to the titles of the canonical Abhidhamma texts, let alone agreement in doctrine. This disparity in literary works is clearly illustrated by a comparative study of the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda. So, it can be said that while the Dhamma belongs to the period of undivided Buddhism of the earliest days, the Abhidhamma belongs to the period of divided Buddhism. From its very inception and throughout the medieval and modern periods, the Abhidhamma evolved and developed in the isolation of the
According to the H.G.A, Van Zeyst, the Buddhist Philosophy is not a mere speculation on mental analysis. It is no doubt analytical through and through, so that the Theravāda school, whose system of philosophy is now under discussion was earlier known as vipaṭṭavāda, the analytical school. But it is analysis with a purpose and the purpose is ethical. And thus, it has a psychology of conduct as well as a moral code based on mental analysis.

Will (Chanda), Volition (Cetana), adjustment of attention (Cetaso abhinirupana) of aspiration and intention (Sankappa) show the working of the mind as it inclines with craving to either unwholesome or the so-called good. And that is exactly the content of that compendium of mental states, the Thammarakkant, the first book of the seven which constitute the collection of philosophical works, the -

67 Abhidhamma Pitaka.

66. ibid., pp. 42-43.
67. ibid.
It is obvious that the Abhidhamma as a whole and the Dhammasangaha in particular are works of serious study. And in this it is found the great difference in style and composition, in method of exposition and argument and even in the basic approach to the subject between the Sutta Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka. For the suttas are expositions in the form discussions and discourses, giving details of circumstances and of the people taking part therein, whereas the Abhidhamma teaching is entirely devoid of explanation (nirvairya). It is certainly not a handbook for beginners and a fair amount of at least acquaintance with the subject-mater is presupposed. Neither does it essentially add to the knowledge of the Buddha-dhamma which could be gleaned from the suttas. But whereas this doctrine is found scattered, incoherently throughout the many thousands of suttas, the same doctrine is methodically arranged and systematically explained in the various books of the Abhidhamma, without historical detail regarding persons or occasions. It was written frequently in the academic form of question and answer. A summary at the end of a chapter adds to its scholastic
appearance, so it may be said that we have a plan (Udāsa) an exposition (niddesa) in question and answer rounded off with a summary (appanā).

In the suttas the doctrine is given with a practical purpose, the development of morality of insight, the attainment of realisation. In the Abhidhamma the preacher has been replaced by the scholar, whose main interests are definitions, technical determinations, analytical knowledge and synthetic logic, yet the goal is the same for both. The suttas will preach of altruistic love and selfless virtue, of mental absorption in meditative exercises, of purity of living, leading to clarity of thought. The Abhidhamma will analyse the process of thought, the components of corporeality and mentality, and thereby, prove that there is no abiding entity which could be called a soul. And thus the two meet again in the realisation of soullessness (Anatta) through self-renouncing virtue and self-renouncing wisdom.

69. Ibid., pp.417-418.
Kogen Mizuno describes the characteristics of the Abhidhamma. He said that the original Abhidhamma was a sort of commentary on the sutta which was the Buddha’s teaching, as seen in the juxtaposition of a pair (Abhidhamma and Abhininaya) found in the Nikayas. Gradually, annotation and explanation on the teaching (Dhamma) and precept (Vinaya) began during the Buddha’s life-time or immediately after his parinibbāna. These were called Abhidhamma and Abhininaya respectively. In the early period, they were included in the writings as commentary, sutta and systematical sutta. They are oldest forms of the Abhidhamma. Their characteristics were as given below :

1) They annotated and explained the sutta texts and gave definitions and explanations of terminology.

2) They arranged and classified numerical doctrines according to numerals.

70. Malalasekera, G.P. Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, pp.43-44.
3) They systematised the doctrines preached in the suttas and established a consistent method of practice.

These were the distinctive characteristics of the earliest abhidhamma. These abhidhammic suttas developed into independent abhidhamma which may be called the fundamental Abhidhamma. They were products of growth during a long period. In accordance with the various stages of development the methodology too underwent some changes. The early fundamental Abhidhamma had the above-mentioned three qualities in common with the Abhidhammic Suttas which preceded it. The only difference was that in the former the qualities were more developed. Accordingly they still consisted of explanations and interpretations of the suttas or their arrangement or organisation. But in the next stage, the Abhidhamma gradually deviated from the suttas and came to have contents of its own. The subjects of discourse were classified by some abhidhammic standards, by arrangement into various branches (Pali-Pañhapaccha), consideration of subordination of
concepts of the objects of discourse according to their connotation and denotation (Pali-Sangaha) consideration of concurrence and correspondence of various mental functions, etc., (Pali-sampayoga).

By means of these three methods, the conceptual definition of the objects of discourse became very exact and mind and matter were considered as a whole. In early Buddhism they were explained only as far as they had any connection with practice and emancipation. But here they came to be examined as a whole and objectively. Consequently the method of classification used by original Buddhism and the early Abhidhamma proved to be inadequate. And there arose the method of classification unique to the Abhidhamma of this period.

Now let us explain it concretely. In original Buddhism and the early Abhidhamma, matter and mind were synthetically classified by such categories as five Khandhas, twelve Ayatanas, eighteen Dhātus. But in

71. Ibid.
Abhidhamma of e.g., the Sarvastivadins from the middle period onward, all forms of existence were classified into five categories namely, matter (rupa), mind (citta), attributes of mind (cetasika), that power which belongs neither to matter nor to mind and yet activates matter and mind (citta-vippayuttadhamma), and the unconditioned (asankhata-dhamma). But this classification varies more or less with schools. On the other hand, in the late Abhidhamma, all things from temporal and local relations, are considered in terms of conditions or causes of their birth, rise, decay and extinction. Again, some schools considered the accomplishment or non-accomplishment of some phenomena by the influence of matter and mind. Hitherto, we have stated the characteristics mainly common to all schools of the Abhidhamma.

Kogen Mizuno describes the manuals of Abhidhamma. He states that when the age of manuals followed the age of fundamental Abhidhamma, the practice of Buddhism came to be discussed again. For example, the forms which the

72. Ibid., p. 45.
Pali Visuddhimagga chose was to set up seven stages of purity as the grading of Buddhist discipline and to expound the doctrines according to them. The Abhidhamma Kosasstra and the Satya-siddhi-sstra of the Sautrantika line systematise doctrines, according to the order of the four truths (i.e. sorrow, origin of sorrow, cessation of sorrow and the path). Again Skandha's Abhidhamma-vatara and the Mahayana-pancaskandhasstra of Vasubandhu of the Yogacara school and other discourse books arrange the doctrines and theories in the order of five aggregates. But on the other hand, based on purely objective theories, discussed doctrines by classification into matter, mind etc.,

Dr. W.S. Karunarathne mentions the Abhidhamma as a religion. According to him human life is essentially ethically conditioned to the religious consciousness. The meaning and significance of human conduct can be made intelligible only from the standpoint of ethics.

74. Malalasekera, G.P. Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, p. 46.
Culture and civilisation, whether of individual or of the group, are inconceivable without the motive force of an ethical ideology. Morality is the sense of value that the mind attaches to human behaviour, in thought, word and deed. All ethics, therefore, is psychological. Ethical action is fully conscious, purposive action. Human action, if it is to be ethically significant, has to originate always from volitional impulse. Psychological behaviour is not a mechanical process. The laws of the mind are fundamentally different from the laws of physics. Since the Buddha asserts the supremacy of mind over matter, what is essential for the seeker after ethical and spiritual perfection is to understand the nature and functions of psychological process. In the view of the Abhidhamma, the study of ethics and psychology is not an academic pursuit but something that is essentially relevant to the progress and harmony of individual and social life.

The Abhidhamma marks a consistent and highly successful attempt at the harmonious integration of ethics.

76. Ibid., p. 48.
psychology and religion. This fact gives the Abhidhamma its distinctive religious character. The discussions in the Abhidhamma are charged with a thoroughgoing ethical earnestness springing directly from the religious consciousness of the Abhidhamma. It is only in the light of the intense interest in ethics and religion that we can make sense of the seemingly unending and remorseless monotonous classifications and enumerations that keep on occurring in the pages of the Abhidhamma, both canonical and commentarial.

Kogen Mizuno gives an account of the Abhidhamma literature. He stated that from the earliest times there were, among members of the Buddhist order, experts called Abhidhammaka, who specialised in the study, and exposition of Abhidhamma. It was, however, during the period of sectarian Buddhism, i.e., after the growth of various schools that Abhidhamma became a separate branch of study with a special literature attached to it, although the prototype of such literature was to be found even earlier. Not all

77. ibid.
schools, nevertheless, showed the same enthusiasm for
the study and development of Abhidhamma.

The growth of Abhidhamma studies and their subsequent incorporation into books can be divided, roughly into three phases. The first covers the period of original or 'primitive' Buddhism and goes back to the time of the Buddha himself. The second is the period during which Abhidhamma became an independent collection or Pitaka, detached from the two other Pitakas of Sutta and Vinaya. This was the period of the compilation of the fundamental texts of the Abhidhamma and may be assigned chronologically to extend from about the middle of the 3rd century B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era. The period roughly coincides with the period of the differentiation of Buddhist schools.

The third period saw the production of commentaries to the fundamental books and manuals based on them. This period varies in different schools, but roughly, it

78. ibid., p.64.
79. ibid., p.65.
extended from about the beginning of the Christian era till about the end of the 5th Century A.D. But, of course the compilation of commentaries and manuals never actually ceased completely especially in the schools of South Asia of Pali Buddhism, and in some countries like Myanmar, the process goes on even today.

The Abhidhamma of Southern Buddhism i.e., the Buddhism of the Theravāda school, has Sri Lanka as its centre. Almost all the materials concerning its Abhidhamma have been preserved up to this day in the Pali language. There are seven fundamental Abhidhamma books in Southern Buddhism and in the later literature there exist the Visuddhimagga and commentaries on the seven Abhidhamma works. These commentaries and the Visuddhimagga are ascribed to Buddhaghosa of the first half of the fifth century. His senior contemporary Buddhodatta, also wrote manuals, such as Abhidhammatthānā. Then the Theravāda school of Sri Lanka went through a period of eclipse for several hundred years. But during this period too, a few simple manuals were written.

80, ibid.
81, ibid., p.66.
The revival of Abhidhamma studies began in about the twelfth Century A.D. In particular Anuruddha's Abhidhammatthasangaha was to the Theravāda school what the Kosa-āstra was to the Sarvāstivāda school. Later Abhidhamma studies proceeded mostly from this book and many commentaries and exposition of it were made. Afterwards, very soon, the centre of Abhidhamma studies moved from Sri Lanka to Myanmar. In Myanmar much development has since been made. There, even today the study of the Abhidhamma is enthusiastically pursued. It constitutes the essence of Buddhist learning and the study of Buddhism is itself called Abhidhamma.

It would be conventional to divide the course of development of Abhidhamma in Theravāda into three stages as was done in the case of Northern Buddhism, i.e.,

(1) The seven fundamental Abhidhamma books,

(2) The commentaries on the seven books and manuals, and

(3) their sub-commentaries.

The seven books of the fundamental Abhidhamma i.e.,

82. *ibid*.
83. *ibid*., pp.66467
Pali Abhidhamma are customarily grouped in the following order:

1) Dhammasaṅgata (enumeration of psychical phenomena)
2) Vibhaṅga (differentiation)
3) Kathāvatthu (subjects of discussions)
4) Puggalapaññatti (description of the Individuals)
5) Dhammatthā (discussion of the elements)
6) Yamaka (Book of Pairs)
7) Patthana or Mahāpadanā (Book of causes)

As mentioned before, traditions attributes these books to the Buddha himself. But, as a matter of fact, they must have been produced during a period of two or three hundred years, beginning from the second or third century after the Buddha's death. The books may be considered in three groups according to their time of compilation i.e., early, middle and later groups. The Vibhaṅga, the Dhammasaṅgata and Puggalapaññatti belong to the first period. The Dhammatthā and the Kathāvatthu belong to the middle period and the Yamaka and the Patthana to the later period.

34, ibid., p. 70.
The early books, i.e., in some parts of the Dhammasangāti and the Vibhanga and throughout the Pujahā-paññatti, quotations from the Nikayas are explained and expatiated. These texts, therefore, seem to belong to the early period. It is true that the method of study found in the middle period is adopted in some parts of the Dhammasangāti and the Vibhanga, but the characteristic of the early period are more prevalent in these books. So, we can conclude safely that they belonged to the early period.

Hirakawa Akira refers to Abhidhamma Buddhism and in this connection he states that inevitably, with the passage of but a few centuries following the death of the Buddha, doctrinal elaboration and scholastic codification of the Master's insights came to play an ever greater role in the Buddhist community. The early teachings of the Buddha were subjected to a process of reduction that quite naturally attempted to supply systematic vigor to a corpus of discourses that originally made no pretense to philosophy, and to expend upon the early teachings in

85, ibid.
accordance with the Saṅgha's own understanding of dhamma. This transformation of the tradition is reflected in the canon, where, in addition to the various textual genres mentioned above, the need to systematically classify the teachings gave rise at an early period to texts known as paṭṭihārā (matrices), lists or outlines of dhamma. These lists, greatly elaborated upon and expanded, probably formed the basis for a new direction in Buddhist exegesis and practices and for a new type of Buddhist literature, inquires into the "higher dhamma" (Abhidhamma) collected in a third Pitaka (in most schools) Abhidhamma literature explored the material and mental constituents of reality with a systematic vigor unknown to the Sutta literature providing scholar-monks who conceived these texts with a highly detailed map of the path to liberation through the systematic review of the dhamma.

As to the establishment of the Abhidhamma Pitaka we can say that the earlier abhidhamma texts were composed

around second century B.C. They were collected into Abhidhamma Pitaka by the First Century B.C. The Abhidhamma-Pitaka deals with seven texts which are generally known as the Sattapakaramas.

The value of the Abhidhamma is undoubtedly great. It was a distinctive merit of the Abhidhamma that it systematically unified various doctrines of original Buddhism into a consistent system and gave exact definition of all Buddhist terminology, clarifying all Buddhist concept. But it carried with it some shortcomings. The definitions of concepts and the exposition of doctrines were too formal and uniform, with the result that the profundity and sublimity of the early doctrines were lost. As such, it is impossible to grasp the stream of concrete practice by uniform and abstract definitions. In original Buddhism, the same terminology conveyed various meanings as the hearer's understanding and ability varied. The Abhidhammic definitions deprived the words or concepts of their nuance and flexibility, and the Abhidhammic studies gradually deviated from the practice of the path and became mere theories for their own sake, subtle
and complicated. The religiosity and practical nature of Buddhism were lost. It was to rectify these shortcomings that Mahāyāna Buddhism emerged.