

The Cyclicity of *Dhamma* – PART 3

In Part 1 of this series we constructed a way in which two *dhammas* can come to exist inter-dependently. In Part 2 we proposed a way to construct an object from a subset of *dhammas* that constitute “self”. These constructions are mechanics of *samskaranaya* in an abstract sense. As Prof. Nalin De Silva claims, the world we experience is a *samskaranaya* of the human mind. But *samskaranaya* is a dynamic process as opposed to a static one. Here we will consider the dynamic aspect of *samskaranaya* in order to weave a story about the instability of the existential states of *dhammas*.

In Part 1, we saw that two cyclically dependent *dhammas*, *A* and *B* can exist in 16 possible composite states, meaning each unsubstantial state of *dhamma A* can give rise to four states of *B* and vice versa. Although all four states of *A* can be connected to all four states of *B* (Figure 2, Part 2), only one state of *A* is causing a particular state of *B* and vice versa at a given instance. What makes this causality mutually dependent (cyclic) is that, at a given instance, the state *m* of *A* causes the state *n* of *B* AND that the state *n* of *B* causes the state *m* of *A* represented by: $A_m \leftrightarrow B_n$ where $m, n = (10), (01), (11), (00)$. This is also the condition under which *A* and *B* are at a steady state.

Let us assume that both *A* and *B* are capable of actively and independently causing each other’s existence. Here being active means *dhammas* jumps from one state to another “consciously” and not passively change states as a result of a change in another *dhamma* merely due to its connectivity. Then at a given instance, what if state A_m causes state B_n AND state B_n causes state $A_{m'}$ and not A_m ? In this case we will end up with the two states $A_{m'}$ and B_n that are not mutually dependent. Given that both *A* and *B* can actively change their states, and that they cannot exist independently this unstable relationship must trigger a cascade of state jumps until a steady state is achieved at which time a state of a *dhamma* becomes both a cause and an effect i.e. $A_m \leftrightarrow B_n$. Since each can cause 4 possible states of the other, if *A* and *B* were to randomly jump from one state to the other (there is no reason to believe that this is the case) the probability of achieving a steady state is $1/16 = 1/4 \times 1/4$.

Central to this picture is the assumption that each *dhamma* is actively and independently causing the existence of other *dhammas*. But can all *dhammas* in a cyclic relationship be active independently? Given that independent unsubstantial *dhammas* are born as a result of *samskaranaya* one would guess there is some degree of correlation as well as independence between them. To avoid the complexity we could think of two special cases. One is to have just a single *dhamma* be active while others in the passive mode. In this case one could say that the “consciousness” is focused on one particular *dhamma* out of many. In this case a steady state is achieved instantaneously because all *four* states of the active *dhamma* are connected to all states of all other *dhammas* and they can be passively and instantaneously changed to suit the current state of the active *dhamma*. The other extreme case is to have many *dhammas* being active independently with no correlation between them. In this case, a steady state is achieved by chance alone with a probability of $(1/4)^n$ where *n* is the number of active *dhammas*. Just to demonstrate the

virtual impossibility of attaining a steady state in this situation, consider $n=30$. If all 30 *dhammas* were to change its state at random every millisecond, it could take as long as 1.2 million years to achieve a steady state!

A situation in between these two extremes seems more realistic but it is reasonable to assume that in the case of large number of active and uncorrelated *dhammas*, existential states of *dhammas* never reach steady state during the life span of a human. That is if we were to look at an independent *dhamma*, A in the unsubstantial view we would see its state jump endlessly between $(A=1, \sim A=0)$, (01), (11) and (00). Consequently a composite state between two mutually dependent *dhammas*, A and B , in the substantial view would jump between $(A=1, B=0)$, (01), (11) and (00).

What about an object constructed (*samskaranaya*) from many *dhammas*? In Part 2 of this series we proposed that an object could be constructed from a subset of elements in the set of *dhammas* that constitute “self” in the substantial view. Elements in the subset corresponds to an object P whose existential states obey, $P = p_1 \vee p_2 \vee p_3 \dots \vee p_n$ where p_i are *dhammas* that constitute the said subset. This means that if any of the constituting *dhammas* were to exist, the whole object P would exist. On the other hand P does not exist only when all the elements in the subset do not exist. Since we are constructing this object in the substantial view, terms exist and not exist refer to state $(p_i=1, \sim p_i=0)$ and $(p_i=0, \sim p_i=1)$ respectively of an independent *dhamma*. So in this view if P were not to exist, all p_i must be in the $(p_i=0, \sim p_i=1)$ state. If P constitute 30 *dhammas* the probability of this happening at random is $(1/4)^{30}$ i.e. almost zero. What this means is that while constituent *dhammas* undergo endless change in their existential state, objects constructed from them tend to exist uninterrupted (note that we are not interested in the properties of the object that may or may not change). It is also important to note that the change of state of an individual *dhamma* is discontinuous because there is nothing to relate one state of an individual *dhamma* to the next. On the other hand the existence of the composite object could be regarded as continuous (smooth).

So far we have discussed the dynamics of *dhammas* by viewing them from outside of “self” with respect to time; considering time as an absolute physical entity. This is not an actual view because an observer cannot reside outside of “self” and also because time is a self appointed concept (*pannati*) not an absolute. However, if we were to install a conscious observer either in an individual *dhamma* or in the object P , we still would not be able to say anything about the change in their existential states. This is because the concepts, time, change and memory are mutually dependent and taken alone neither the individual *dhamma* nor the object P have all the necessary concepts in place to “know” change. But we could consider a special case where P and an individual *dhamma*, d are in a cyclic relationship (in this case P can be constructed by taking all but one element (d) in the universal set “self”. Then from the results obtained in Part 2, we could infer that $P \leftrightarrow d$. Here it might be helpful to regard P as the mind and d as a citta). Now P and d constitute a single, inseparable object. Since P , the constructed object exists at all times we end up with only $(P=1, d=0)$ and $(P=1, d=1)$ states in the substantial view for the composite object. Due to the underlying instability in the unsubstantial states the composite object will jump endlessly between the above two states. This is akin to the

rising and ceasing of a *citta* although we have a composite object not a single *dhamma*. It is not possible to predict what a conscious observer in the composite object would infer about its state change since *P* and *d* are inseparable but we can speculate that the composite object would change states discontinuously assuming that *d* provides the concept of change while *P* the concept of memory. Finally we could assume that the mutual dependency of *P* and *d* would appoint the concept of time in both scenarios as a product of the mind's synthetic function. What is suggested here is that by forming a cyclic relationship with a single *dhamma* the dynamic process leads the mind to infer that a *citta* undergo rise and fall. Discontinuous state change means that the composite objects in two states are not identical. This description fits well with a popular interpretation given on the theory of moment in Abhidhamma. i.e. that the identity of the arising and ceasing *cittas* are not the same. In any case it is important to note that what is known about the nature of the composite object is known through a process of inference.

We have shown that *catuskotic* existence and the mutual dependency of *dhammas*, forces *dhammas* to change their existential states until a *dhamma* become both a cause and an effect. When there is a large number of active and uncorrelated *dhammas* this process of *samskaranaya* cause the existential states of *dhammas* to be eternally unstable. On the other hand, the existence of composite objects constructed from *dhammas* tends to be stable over time. The outcome of this story is consistent with the theory of moments in Abhidhamma. However there is a significant and important difference between the two approaches. According to Abhidhamma, the instability of the existence of *dhamma* is its universal nature i.e. *uppada*, *tithi* and *bhanga*. Contrarily we claim that it is not a so called nature of *dhamma* that leads to its unstable existence but the mechanics by which the mutual dependency between *dhamma* is formed. And it is this dynamics of *samskaranaya* that impart the rise and fall nature on the *dhamma*.

-Janaka Wansapura

panivida@fuse.net