

# The Vedic Background of the Buddhist Notions of *Iddhi* and *Abhiññā* Three Case Studies with Particular Reference to the Pāli Literature

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**Abstract** This article begins with a brief introductory account of the vicissitudes of the academic studies on extraordinary capacities. Thereafter, the stereotyped passages in which *iddhi* and *abhiññā* occur as a meditative attainment achieved within a Buddhist path of liberation are presented and the interpretation of these two terms is discussed. After these preparatory opening remarks, the Vedic background of *iddhi* and *abhiññā* is treated with regards to three aspects. First, the speculative idea sustained by some scholars that would see the body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*) as the base and tool to perform *iddhis* and *abhiññās* is discussed on the basis of the Vedic evidence. Secondly, the term 'divine' (*dibba*) that occurs in the description of some *abhiññās* is compared with the use of the corresponding Vedic terms and with the Vedic idea of a divine power behind the functioning of the faculties. Finally, the *abhiññā* called 'the knowledge of degeneration and ascent of beings' (*cutūpapātaññā*) is compared with a couple of narratives involving the oneiric state within the Upaniṣads, showing some similarities between the two accounts.

**Keywords** Buddhism. Pāli. Veda. Upaniṣad. Iddhi. Abhiññā. Manomaya-kāya.

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## 1 Preliminary remarks

The terms *iddhi* and *abhiññā* are used in the Pāli canon to designate extraordinary capacities, namely kinds of remarkable abilities and knowledges mostly attained during the path of awakening. At first glance, the decision to deal with *iddhis* and *abhiññās* separately may seem a little arbitrary. For instance, on many occasions in the Pāli canon the *iddhis* are regarded as part of *abhiññās*' classification, namely, *iddhis* are regarded as the first *abhiññā*. This is evident from the compound *chaḷabhiññā* 'endowed with the six *abhiññās*'<sup>1</sup> and from other similar expressions, such as: *cha abhiññā* (the six *abhiññās*; D, III, 281).<sup>2</sup> However, it should be highlighted that the word *abhiññā* does not appear within the exposition of the extraordinary capacities in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* (D, 2), whereas the word *iddhi* is present. In the *Dīghanikāya*, a reference to the six *abhiññās* occurs in the *Dasuttarasutta* (D, 34; cf. D, III, 281), a proto-Abhidhammic text. From the point of view of the *Dīghanikāya*, the integration of *iddhis* within the group of the other *abhiññās* almost appears as a later development since only *Dasuttarasutta* mentions it. Moreover, although it seems that there has already been an established tendency in the Pāli canon to group together *iddhis* and the other *abhiññās*, there are examples from some texts later than the four principal *nikāyas* (*Dīgha*-, *Majjhima*-, *Saṃyutta*-, *Aṅguttara*-) that demonstrate that the Buddhist tradition has kept *iddhis* and *abhiññās* separated as well.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* devotes a chapter to the *iddhis* (*iddhi-kathā*; Paṭi, II, 205-14), and the *Visuddhimagga* devotes a chapter to the *iddhis* (*iddhividhā-niddesa*; Vism, 373-406) and another chapter to the other *abhiññās* (*abhiññā-niddesa*; Vism, 407-35).

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**1** This compound appears, for instance, in S, I, 191; Vin, II, 161; Pug, 14 (quoted also in PED, 57, s.v. "*abhiññā*", which, however, made a mistake writing 'Vin, II, 16', whereas the right reference is 'Vin, II, 161').

**2** There is also mention in the Pāli texts of an enumeration of five *abhiññās*: *pañcanam abhiññānam* (S, II, 216).

**3** A widespread canonical reference of *abhiññās* that does not include *iddhis* is the notion of 'three knowledges' (*tisso vijjā*, often also in the adjectival form *tevijja* 'having three knowledges') which includes only the last three *abhiññās* of the six-*abhiññās* (*chaḷabhiññā*) systematisation. Some scholars regard the notion of 'three knowledges' older than *chaḷabhiññā*, in this regard see Endo 1997, 17 and Gómez [2010] 2011, 515.

## 2 Introduction

In the field of the study of Indian religions, the analysis of the extraordinary capacities achievable through the practice of meditation is a topic that still needs a thorough examination. For instance, it was noted by David G. White that the third chapter of the *Yogasūtra*, which deals with the supernatural powers of yogis, “has historically been the least studied portion of that text, in spite of the fact that it comprises over one fourth of the entire work” (2012, 61). It is possible to state that the study of extraordinary capacities has had a fluctuating trend throughout the centuries since in the early XX century, at the beginning of the study of yoga traditions, some scholars attempted to associate the study of yoga powers with the results achieved in psychological research (such as hypnosis) in the hope to improve our insight into human capacities. This tendency survived until studies on these psychological phenomena were carried out by universities.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the progressive affirmation of a secularising tendency has resulted in a gradual abandonment of this kind of research and, indeed, it is possible to identify a certain embarrassment on the part of scholars in dealing with these extraordinary powers.<sup>5</sup> In recent times, it seems that the study of miracles and extraordinary powers has once again become popular and, therefore, works on this argument have been published recently.<sup>6</sup> Until now, the trend towards extraordinary capacities with reference to Indian religions in general has been exposed, but what can we say about the general trend in Buddhist studies? It can be argued that, despite notable exceptions, the general trend that became established was the same tendency that occurred for the study of the broader field of Indian religions:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> According to Kripal (2007, 183; see also Jacobsen 2012, 13), a change in the psychological studies was due to the emergence of behaviourism.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed sketch on the attitude towards the study of yoga powers, see Jacobsen 2012, 12-16.

<sup>6</sup> This new trend is confirmed by: 1) the renewed commitment of the universities, most notably, the doctoral thesis of David V. Fiordalis (2008); 2) the commitment of journals, such as volume 33 of the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* ([2010] 2011), which dedicated six articles to the study of miracles and superhuman powers in Buddhist traditions; 3) the publication of miscellanies, such as the volume edited by Knut A. Jacobsen *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration* (Leiden: Boston 2012), which deals with the study of yoga powers within many different traditions in different ages.

<sup>7</sup> Remarkable exceptions are, for instance, Demiéville (1927), La Vallé Poussin (1931), Conze (1952), French (1977). It is maybe thanks to maverick authors like these that the study of extraordinary phenomena started gradually to gain importance within the academia. For example, according to Gómez “[w]e owe it to Prof. Edward Conze to have contributed positively to break the spell of ‘Buddhist rationalism’ among Western students of the Buddhist texts, when he insisted, in his *Buddhism: Its Essence and Devel-*

The attempt to marginalize the practice of miraculous powers in the earliest Buddhist texts must be considered a feature of Buddhist modernism, and related to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century preoccupation with recovering a historical Buddha congenial to the rationalist and ethical sensitivities of certain Buddhist apologists. (Gethin 2011, 223)<sup>8</sup>

This tendency may have affected a huge number of scholars since the preoccupation towards the performance of miraculous powers flowed into the writing of the lemma '*iddhi*' within the *Pāli-English Dictionary*. Therefore, after the exposition of ten kinds of power, it is reported that

[t]here is no valid evidence that any one of the ten *iddhis* in the above list actually took place. A few instances are given, but all are in texts more than a century later than the recorded wonder. And now for nearly two thousand years we have no further instances. (PED, 107)

This last passage seems to reveal a certain anxiety towards powers as if to say to the reader to not take them too seriously.<sup>9</sup> However, the attitude of the Buddhist tradition towards the extraordinary capacities is exactly the opposite since these powers are treated as something that really exists and so needs regulation. Therefore, the monastic code, the *Vinaya*, contains some rules to regulate the performance and the attitude towards them. Hence, in the *Cullavagga* section of the *Vinaya*, the Buddha forbids monks to exhibit and flaunt the superhuman miracle of powers in front of lay people.<sup>10</sup> On another occasion, it is stated that claiming to have experienced the superhuman phenomena when it is not true is an offence that results in

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*opment, on the compatibility and frequent coexistence of magical belief and Buddhist philosophy*" (1977, 221).

**8** A similar kind of rationalistic approach affected the study of Indian philosophy in general: "[t]he promoters of the study of Indian philosophy often saw it as their job to emphasize the rational in Indian traditions against a Eurocentrism that saw rationality and philosophy mainly as an exclusively Western phenomenon" (Jacobsen 2012, 14).

**9** The same attitude was also noted by Harold W. French, who wrote that "[t]he texts themselves indicate different perspectives toward *iddhi* and modern interpreters exhibit the same tendency. Some, notably the Rhys Davids' and Oldenberg, seem embarrassed by the references, which are not insignificant, and are inclined to minimize the import of *iddhi* in the tradition" (1977, 42). Here, French is referring to both Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids and it is worth noting that Mr. Rhys Davids was one of the redactors of the *Pāli-English Dictionary*.

**10** *na bhikkhave gihīnaṃ uttarimanussadhammaṃ iddhipāṭihāriyaṃ dassetabbaṃ.* (Vin, II, 112)

the expulsion from the Monastic order.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the attainment of extraordinary capacities is also reported in a stereotyped account of the path of liberation, which is fully explained in the Pāli texts, for instance, in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, the *sutta* number two of the *Dīghanikāya*.<sup>12</sup> In this account, it is stated that a monk, after having cultivated morality, abandons the five hindrances (*pañca-nīvaraṇa*) and attains ever deeper meditative absorption states (*jhāna*) until the fourth level of absorption. Thereafter, he directs the mind (*citta*) for the sake of knowing and seeing (*ñāṇa-dassana*), discovering that the body is impermanent and that the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is attached to it. After raising awareness into the very nature of body and consciousness, the monk is able to create a new body made of mind (*manomaya*). At this point, the text lists a set of extraordinary capacities which culminate in the achievement of liberation. In later systematisations these capacities are called the six *abhiññās* (*chaḷabhiññā*), which consist of *iddhis*, in addition to the other five *abhiññās*.

### 3 The Pericopes of *iddhis* and Other *abhiññās*

After the creation of the body made of mind, the attainment of the extraordinary capacities is reported. These are listed hierarchically since the ending words that divide the attainments from each other state: “Oh Great King, this also is a visible fruit of the homeless life which is more advanced and exalted than the previous ones”.<sup>13</sup> The first pericope (or formulaic expression) that appears in this regard is a set of *iddhis* that the monk is able to perform:

When the mind is concentrated in this way, purified, cleaned, unblemished, freed from impurities, malleable, fit for work, steadfast, having attained impassibility, he directs and turns the mind to the variety of *iddhis*. He experiences variety of *iddhis* in many ways: having been one he becomes many, having been many he becomes one, he becomes manifested, he becomes concealed, he

<sup>11</sup> *yo pana bhikkhu anabhijānaṃ uttarimanussadhammaṃ attūpanāyikaṃ alamariyañāṇadassanaṃ samudācareyya iti jānāmi iti passāmīti, tato aparena samayena samanuggāhiyamāno vā asamanuggāhiyamāno vā āpanno visuddhāpekkho evaṃ vadēyya: ajānaṃ evaṃ āvuso avacaṃ jānāmi, apassaṃ passāmi, tuccham musā vilapin ti, aññatra adhimānā, ayaṃ pi pārājiko hoti asaṃvaso.* (Vin, III, 91)

<sup>12</sup> This stereotyped account of the path of liberation has had different classifications over time. Yit (2004, 16 fn. 34) proposes that it is from D, I, 62 to D, I, 85 and also provides references to the other scholarly classifications. An impressive account of the variations of this stereotyped path within *nikāyas* and *āgamas* will be provided by Gethin (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> *idam pi kho mahā-rāja sandiṭṭhikaṃ sāmāñña-phalaṃ purimehi sandiṭṭhikehi sāmāñña-phalehi abhikkantataraṇ ca pañitatarāṇ ca.* (e.g. D, I, 77)

goes beyond walls, ramparts, mountains unattached by them just as he was in the ether, he sinks and emerges from earth just as he were in the water, he walks on the water without sinking in it just as he were on the earth, he goes cross-legged through the ether just as he were a winged bird, he touches and strokes with the hand the sun and the moon which have so great power and splendour, he goes even with the body as far as the Brahmā world.<sup>14</sup>

Successively, other *abhiññās* are listed, starting with the ‘element of the divine ear’ (*dibbasotadhātu*):

He hears, with the element of the divine ear which is purified and far beyond the human one, both sounds, divine and human, distant and close.<sup>15</sup>

The ‘knowledge by comprehension of the minds [of others]’ (*cetopariyañā*):

He knows with the mind the ways of thought of other beings, of other individuals: when the mind is with passion he knows: ‘the mind is with passion’, when the mind is without passion he knows: ‘the mind is without passion’, when the mind is with hatred he knows: ‘the mind is with hatred’, when the mind is without hatred he knows: ‘the mind is without hatred’, when the mind is with delusion he knows: ‘the mind is with delusion’, when the mind is without delusion he knows: ‘the mind is without delusion’, when the mind is gathered he knows: ‘the mind is gathered’, when the mind is scattered he knows: ‘the mind is scattered’, when the mind is of great excellence he knows: ‘the mind is of great excellence’, when the mind is not of great excellence he knows: ‘the mind is not of great excellence’, when the mind is with a superior he knows: ‘the mind is with a superior’, when the mind is without a superior he knows: ‘the mind is without a superior’, when the mind is concentrated he knows: ‘the mind is concentrated’, when the mind is not concentrated he knows: ‘the mind is not concentrated’, when the mind is released he knows: ‘the mind is released’, when the mind is unreleased he knows: ‘the mind is unreleased’.<sup>16</sup>

**14** *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye thite ānejjapatte iddhi-vidhāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti. so aneka-vihitaṃ iddhi-vidhaṃ paccanubhoti – eko pi hutvā bahudhā hoti, bahudhā pi hutvā eko hoti, āvibhāvaṃ tiro-bhāvaṃ tiro-kuḍḍaṃ tiro-pākāraṃ tiro-pabbataṃ asajjamāno gacchati seyyathā pi ākāse, paṭhaviyā pi ummujja-nimmujjaṃ karoti seyyathā pi udake, udake pi abhijjamāno gacchati seyyathā pi paṭhaviyaṃ, ākāse pi pallānkena kamati seyyathā pi pakkhi sakuṇo, ime pi candima-suriye evaṃ mahiddhike evaṃ mahānubhāve pāṇinā parimasati parimajjati, yāva Brahma-lokā pi kāyena va saṃvatteti* (D, I, 78). Anālayo (2016, 15 fn. 16) prefers the alternative reading *vasaṃ vatteti* in place of *va saṃvatteti* in the last phrase. However, this variation does not affect the present survey.

**15** *so dibhāya sotadhātuyā visuddhāya atikkanta-mānuskāya ubho sadde suṇāti, dibbe ca mānuse ca, ye dūre santike ca* (D, I, 79). Here and in the following *abhiññās* pericopes, the introductory phrase is omitted: *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye thite ānejjapatte* [specific power inflected in dative/genitive] *cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti*.

**16** *so para-sattānaṃ para-puggalānaṃ cetasā ceto paricca pajānāti – sa-rāgaṃ vā cittaṃ sa-rāgaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti, vīta-rāgaṃ vā cittaṃ vīta-rāgaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,*

The 'knowledge of recollections of former existences' (*pubbenivāsānussatiññā*):

He remembers the manifold past abodes in this way: one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many contracted aeons, many expanded aeons, many contracted and expanded aeons. 'I was over there, I had this name, this family, this caste, this food, I had experienced this happiness and this pain, I had this end of life. I disappeared from there and arose over there. Also there I was, I had this name, this family, this caste, this food, I had experienced this happiness and this pain, I had this end of life. I<sup>17</sup> disappeared from there and arose here'. Thus, he remembers the manifold past abodes in all their modes and in detail.<sup>18</sup>

The 'knowledge of degeneration and ascent of beings' (*cutūpapātaññā*):

He sees beings with the divine eye which is purified and far beyond the human one; he knows beings degenerating and ascending, reaching according to their *kamma* low [existences], excellent [existences], good conditions, bad conditions, good destinies, bad destinies. 'Oh venerables, Alas! These beings are endowed with the bad conduct of the body, endowed with the bad conduct of the

*sa-dosaṃ vā cittaṃ sa-dosaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
vīta-dosaṃ vā cittaṃ vīta-dosaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
sa-mohaṃ vā cittaṃ sa-mohaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
vīta-mohaṃ vā cittaṃ vīta-mohaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
saṃkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ saṃkhittaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
vikkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ vikkhittaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
mahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ mahaggataṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
amahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ amahaggataṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
sa-uttaraṃ vā cittaṃ sa-uttaraṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
anuttaraṃ vā cittaṃ anuttaraṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
samāhitaṃ vā cittaṃ samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
asamāhitaṃ vā cittaṃ asamāhitaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
vimuttaṃ vā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti,  
avimuttaṃ vā cittaṃ avimuttaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti. (D, I, 79-80)*

**17** The Author followed the suggestion given by Giuliano Giustarini to read *so ahaṃ* in place of *so*.

**18** *so aneka-vihitaṃ pubbe-nivāsaṃ anussarati seyyathidaṃ ekam pi jātiṃ dve pi jātiyo tisso pi jātiyo catasso pi jātiyo pañca pi jātiyo dasa pi jātiyo visatim pi jātiyo tiṃsam pi jātiyo cattārisam pi jātiyo paññāsam pi jātiyo jāti-satam pi jāti-sahassam pi jāti-sata-sahassam pi aneke pi saṃvaṭṭa-kappe aneke pi vivaṭṭa-kappe aneke pi saṃvaṭṭa-vivaṭṭa-kappe. amutrāsiṃ evaṃ-nāmo evaṃ-gotto evaṃ-vaṇṇo evaṃ-āhāro evaṃ-sukha-dukka-paṭisaṃvedī evaṃ-āyu-pariyanto. tatrāpāsiṃ evaṃ-nāmo evaṃ-gotto evaṃ-vaṇṇo evaṃ-āhāro evaṃ-sukha-dukka-paṭisaṃvedī evaṃ-āyu-pariyanto. so tato cuto idhūpapanno ti iti sākāraṃ sa-uddesaṃ aneka-vihitaṃ pubbe nivāsaṃ anussarati. (D, I, 81)*

speech, endowed with the bad conduct of the mind, speaking evil of the nobles, having a wrong view, acquiring *kamma* through the wrong view. Cause the destruction of the body, they arose after death in an inferior destination, in a bad destiny, in a place of suffering, in a hell. Oh venerables, but these beings are endowed with the good conduct of the body, endowed with the good conduct of the speech, endowed with the good conduct of the mind, not speaking evil of the nobles, having a right view, acquiring *kamma* through the right view. Cause the destruction of the body, they arose after death in a good destiny, in the heaven world'. Thus he sees, with the divine eye which is purified and far beyond the human one, the beings; he knows beings degenerating and ascending, reaching according to their *kamma* low [existences], excellent [existences], good conditions, bad conditions, good destinies, bad destinies.<sup>19</sup>

The 'knowledge of extinction' (*khayañāṇa*) 'of the noxious influxes' (*āsava*):

He knows according to reality: 'this is suffering'; he knows according to reality: 'this is the origin of suffering'; he knows according to reality: 'this is the cessation of suffering'; he knows according to reality: 'this is the path which leads to the cessation of suffering'; he knows according to reality: 'these are the noxious influxes'; he knows according to reality: 'this is the origin of the noxious influxes'; he knows according to reality: 'this is the cessation of the noxious influxes'; he knows according to reality: 'this is the path which leads to the cessation of the noxious influxes'. When he knows and sees in this way, the mind is freed from the noxious influx of the sensual desire, is freed from the noxious influx of the existence, is freed from the noxious influx of the ignorance, in the liberation there is the knowledge '[the mind] is liberated', he knows: 'the birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done was done, from this life there will be not another one'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> so dibbena cakkhunā visuddhena atikkanta-mānusakena satte passati cavamāne upapajjamāne, hīne pañite suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe sugate duggate yathā-kammūpage satte pajānāti: ime vata bhonto sattā kāya-duccaritena samannāgatā vacī-duccaritena samannāgatā mano-duccaritena samannāgatā ariyānaṃ upavādakā micchā-diṭṭhikā micchā-diṭṭhi-kamma-samādānā. te kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ upapannā. ime vā pana bhonto sattā kāya-sucaritena samannāgatā vacī-sucaritena samannāgatā mano-sucaritena samannāgatā ariyānaṃ anupavādakā sammā-diṭṭhikā sammā-diṭṭhi-kamma-samādānā, te kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ saggam lokam upapannā ti. iti dibbena cakkhunā visuddhena atikkanta-mānusakena satte passati cavamāne upapajjamāne, hīne pañite suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe sugate duggate yathā-kammūpage satte pajānāti. (D, I, 82-3)

<sup>20</sup> so idaṃ dukkhaṃ ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāmini



#### 4 Interpretation of the Terms *iddhi* and *abhiññā*

As in the case for other Buddhist terms, the translation of *iddhi* and *abhiññā* is in some ways problematic. Taking first the term *iddhi*, it is possible to state that it derives from a Sanskrit root  $\sqrt{rdh}$ , therefore, the Sanskrit equivalent of *iddhi* is  $\sqrt{rdhi}$ .<sup>21</sup> The term *abhiññā* derives from a Sanskrit *abhi- $\sqrt{jñā}$*  and, therefore, its Sanskrit equivalent is *abhijñā*. The term *abhiññā* could be literally translated as ‘super-knowledge’ since the prefix *abhi-* often means an intensification (cf. PED, 54) and the root  $\sqrt{jñā}$  means ‘to know’. However, this translation might sound a bit naive or unsophisticated, so the rendering ‘higher knowledge’ will be adopted. It is worth noting that the term could have another less specific meaning related to the action of knowing, namely ‘to know fully’. This meaning is connected with the use of the term within some texts, such as the *Suttanipāta*, which would show, according to some scholars, the older strata of the language.<sup>22</sup> The root  $\sqrt{rdh}$ , from which the term *iddhi* derives, means to grow, increase, prosper, succeed (cf. SED, 226). Therefore, there is not a satisfying literal English translation – or at least it has not yet been found. Some scholars have adopted some literal translations, through terms like ‘success’, ‘accomplishment’ (e.g. Gombrich

*paṭipadā ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ime āsavā ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ āsava-samudayo ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ āsava-nirodho ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ āsava-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā ti yathā-bhūtaṃ pajānāti. tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati avijjāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, vimuttasmim viuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti, khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaniyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti pajānāti.* (D, I, 83-4)

**21** It was highlighted by Fiordalis (2008, 157 fn. 18) and Overbey (2012, 129-31) as some scholars wrongly assumed an equivalence between *iddhi* and *siddhi*. On the basis of an etymological argument, indeed, the word *siddhi* derives from a different root, namely from  $\sqrt{sidh}$ . Therefore, in a Sanskrit version of a Pāli passage that explains the various kinds of *iddhis* (*so aneka-vihitaṃ iddhi-vidhaṃ paccañubhoti*; D, I, 78) the term *iddhi* is substituted by the term  $\sqrt{rdhi}$ : *so'nekavidham  $\sqrt{rdh}$ viṣayaṃ pratyanubhavati* (SbhV, II, 246).

**22** References to this use of the term *abhiññā* in the *Suttanipāta* are provided by Gómez [2010] 2011, 515 fn. 5. Some scholars who suggested that the *Suttanipāta* was part of the older stratum of the Buddhist texts are, for instance, Nakamura ([1980] 1987, 44-6) and Hirakawa (1990, 77). Norman ([1992] 2001, XXXI-XXXIII) discussed the relative date of some parts of the *Suttanipāta*, suggesting an old composition of some of them, and also highlighted that some *suttas* might be mentioned also in Aśoka's Calcutta-Bairāt edict ([1992] 2001, XXXIII-XXXIV). Some doubts about the supposed antiquity of the *Suttanipāta* have been put forward by De Jong (1991, 7; 1997, 97-8), whose observations, more recently, have been taken up by Cousins (2013, 18-9). The picture that emerges shows a difference of opinions though at least two chapters (*vagga*) of the *Suttanipāta* (viz. *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*) are still considered by some scholars one of the oldest records we have to the study of early Buddhism. In fact, Wynne and Gombrich recently wrote: “we believe that the *Aṭṭhaka-* and *Pārāyana-vaggas* (S[utta]n[ipāta] IV-V) are the key to understanding early Buddhism” (2018, 88; square brackets are added; italics in the original).

1997, 176; Gethin 2011, 221), however, these translations make complete sense only if the reader has a basic knowledge of Buddhism. The phrase ‘A monk can achieve various successes after the creation of a body made of mind’ does not give a real insight into what the monk achieves, whereas the phrase ‘A monk can achieve various psychic powers after the creation of a body made of mind’ is certainly more descriptive.<sup>23</sup> These attempts of a literal translation try to include – even if only partially – at the same time all ranges of meaning that the term *iddhi* covers. In fact, the term *iddhi* does not only mean the extraordinary capacities achieved by meditation, but it covers a wider range of applications.<sup>24</sup> King Mahāsudassana, for instance, was endowed with four *iddhis*: beauty, long life, good health, and he was beloved by Brahmins and householders (D, II, 177-8); The young Gotama, during his life as a prince, was endowed with a beautiful garden with lotus ponds, pleasant garments, different houses for different seasons, and good food (A, I, 145). *Iddhi* is also the craft of a hunter (M, I, 151-2) and the ability of a hunted animal to escape (M, I, 155). The ability of geese to fly is also called *iddhi* (Dhp, 175). This term could also mean a sort of richness since its opposite (*aniddhi*) means ‘poor’, ‘poverty’ (DOP, 374).<sup>25</sup> In spite of the large amount of meanings and applications, it can be argued that the use of the term *iddhi* within the account that lists the meditation attainments, namely the fruits of meditation practice, is very peculiar, whereas in many cases quoted above, the term *iddhi* means something like accomplishment, talent, or a particular beneficial condition. In some passages, it is particularly clear since the word *samannāgata* (D, I, 177-8; A, I, 145) is used, which means ‘endowed with’ (with the term *iddhi* in the instrumental case),<sup>26</sup> highlighting that *iddhis*, in that context, are something that one owns. When *iddhis* appear as meditation attainments the emphasis is not on the possession, but it is on the experiential factor. *Iddhis* are something that one can experience: *paccanubhoti* (D, I, 78).<sup>27</sup> So, the meaning, it seems, fluctuates between an

**23** However, it should be highlighted that the rendering ‘success’ works very well when the term *iddhi* occurs in combination with the verb *ijjhati* (which is from a root *√rdh* as well) since the latter could be translated as ‘to succeed’.

**24** A list of cognate terms is provided by Vibh, 217.

**25** Various applications of the term *iddhi* in different contexts are mentioned also in Rhys Davids 1899, 88 fn. 4; Fiordalis 2008, 123-4; French 1977, 43-4; Gethin 2011, 221. Cf. also the s.v. “*iddhi*” in PED, 107; DOP, 373-4; CPD, 291-2.

**26** See s.v. “*samannāgata*” in PED, 616.

**27** Here, it is worth reporting the remark the Author received from Giuliano Giustarini. He rightly pointed out that the meditator is often endowed with (*samannāgata*) factors earlier developed. This is exemplified by passages such as: *So iminā ca ariyena sīla-kkhandhena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya-saṃvarena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena sati-sampajaññena samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuṭṭhiyā samannāgato* (D, I, 71). Nevertheless, the Author was unable to find any persuasive canonical refer-

‘endowment’ and an ‘experienceable achievement’. What all meanings of the word *iddhi* have in common is that the term refers to something positive that is peculiar of someone, in the sense that is not ordinary, just as the *iddhis* of a king or a nobleman are not shared by the folk people, and in the same way the craft of the hunter, the agility of the hunted animal, and the ability to fly of geese are, all of them, not widespread skills. This also applies to the monk who has the possibility to experience *iddhis*, performances which can not be accomplished by an ordinary person without prior having engaged in a mental training or at least making use of a sort of esoteric science.<sup>28</sup> The performance is clearly made through the power of the mind, “when the mind is concentrated in this way [...] he directs and turns the mind to the variety of *iddhis*” (*so evaṃ samāhite citte [...] iddhi-vidhāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti*; D, I, 78), all these *iddhis* that the monk is able to perform are marvellous actions made through the mind. They are ‘psychic accomplishments’ or ‘psychic attainments’. The Author of the present article likes the translation ‘psychic power’ for the term *iddhi*, despite the fact that this translation is open to criticism. In this regard, it was highlighted by Fior-dalis that:

ence to the association of the term *iddhi*, indicating extraordinary performances, with *samannāgata*. The only canonical reference in which ‘*samannāgata*’ is associated with ‘*iddhi*’ understood as ‘magical power’ is Kv, 456-8, which, however, does not fit exactly the context under analysis since it concerns the possibility to prolong one’s own lifespan. Undoubtedly, the fact that *iddhis* could also be regarded as a kind of possession cannot be completely ruled out, the term *iddhimant* ‘one who has *iddhi*(s)’ is a good example. Furthermore, in Vibh (217), which provides some synonyms for *iddhi*, some terms indicate an acquisition, such as *lābha* or *patti*. However, in the same passage, there are also some terms that clearly indicate the connection of *iddhi* with the field of experience, such as *phusanā* and *sacchikiriya*. The word *phusanā* is connected with the verb *phusati* ‘to touch’ (PED, 430), and the word *sacchikiriya* with the verb *sacchikaroti*, which means ‘to experience’ in the sense of ‘to see with one’s eyes’ (PED, 603). Both terms suggest that this is a direct experience, just as the one acquired through the sense organs. Overall, it seems to me safe to maintain the experiential characteristic as a prerogative of *iddhi* in this context.

**28** This is attested, for instance, in the *Kevaddhasutta* (D, 11), in which the formulaic passage of D, I, 78 is used to explain what the term *iddhi-pāṭihāriya* means (cf. D, I, 212). In this text, the Buddha explains to Kevaddha that a person without faith would not be impressed by the miraculous performances and he would state: “There is a spell called ‘Gandhārī’, through which this monk experiences variety of *iddhis* in many ways” (*Atthi kho bho Gandhārī nāma vijjā. Tāya so bhikkhu aneka-vihitaṃ iddhi-vidhaṃ paccanubhoti*; D, I, 213), a spell (*vijjā*) called Gandhārī occurs also in J, IV, 498-9. In the same way, a person without faith would not be impressed by the mind-reading (*ādesanā*) since he could affirm that “[t]here is an art that concerns talismans (*Maṇika*), through which a monk reads the mind and mental states of other beings and individuals” (*Atthi kho bho Maṇiko nāma vijjā. Tāya so bhikkhu parasattānaṃ parapuggalānaṃ cittaṃ pi ādisati cetāsikam pi ādisati*; D, I, 214). Moreover, it is certainly interesting the term ‘*Athabban-iddhi*’ in As, 92. Here, it is involved a magical power (*iddhi*) which derives from the implementation of the teachings contained in the *Atharvaveda* (*athabbana* = Sanskrit: *ātharvaṇa* ‘belonging to the *Atharvaveda*’).

psychic power does not give a sense for the diverse range of powers that fall under the category of *ṛddhi*, and elicits confusion with other superpowers, such as clairvoyance and telepathy. (2008, 123)

Fiordalis is basically stating that the term ‘psychic power’ could be also ascribed to some other *abhiññās* since the knowledge by comprehension of the minds [of others] (*cetopariyañāṇa*) is a kind of telepathy and the knowledge of degeneration and ascent of beings (*cutūpapātañāṇa*), in which the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*) is developed, can be considered a sort of clairvoyance. He is certainly right in pointing this out, but nevertheless, the partial overlapping of the terms *iddhi* and *abhiññā* does not allow – at least according to the Author – a really safe translation for the term *iddhi*. Therefore, the translation of the term *iddhi* also made by Fiordalis, who often prefers the rendition ‘superhuman power’,<sup>29</sup> could overlap with the other *abhiññās* since clairvoyance and telepathy are certainly not an average human ability. Given that *iddhi* turned out to be an ambiguous term, not only for its broad semantic applications but also for its partial overlap with *abhiññā*, we should consider its translation as provisional and conventional. What seems to differentiate *iddhis* from the other *abhiññās* is that the *iddhis* result in a physical performance, whereas the *abhiññās* result in a new knowledge (*ñāṇa*).<sup>30</sup> In the exposition of the *iddhis* it is stated that the monk can multiply himself, can disappear or appear at will, and can achieve freedom of movement and mastery of natural elements. In the expositions of other *abhiññās*, on the other hand, a new knowledge of something is attained: knowledge of sounds, knowledge of other minds, knowledge of recollections of former existences, knowledge of degeneration and ascent of beings according to their *kamma*, knowledge of extinction of the noxious influxes. The connection of the term *iddhi* with the term *ñāṇa* seems to be a later development, probably an outcome of the

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**29** “Although I choose to translate *ṛddhi* as superhuman power, this is not a literal rendering of the term” (Fiordalis 2008, 122), on another occasion commenting the *Kevaladhassutta* (D, 11), he wrote regarding the term *iddhi*: “[m]y preference for translating it as ‘superhuman power,’ at least in this context, derives partly from the fact that Buddhist texts like this one sometimes gloss the term with *uttarimanussa-dhamma*, which can be translated more literally as a superhuman quality or characteristic” (Fiordalis [2010] 2011, 386 fn. 13).

**30** It should be pointed out that commentarial literature tried to ascribe the term *ñāṇa* to the *iddhi-vidha* (cf. DA, I, 222-3), however, the term *ñāṇa* was already naturally connected with four of the other *abhiññās* (e.g. *cetopariya-ñāṇa*, *pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*, *cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*, *āsavakhaya-ñāṇa*) and in the other one, the element of the divine ear (*dibbasotadhātu*), it is easy to understand why it could be considered a *ñāṇa*, since it results in a kind of knowledge: the knowledge of sounds divine or human; far or near.

*Abhidhamma* production.<sup>31</sup> However, *iddhis* might be connected with knowledge even in the early texts. In some classifications, *iddhis* are one of the *vijjās* (e.g. D, I, 100) or one of the *paññās* (e.g. D, I, 124), and both *vijjā* and *paññā* are associated with the action of knowing. This may indicate that the experiential characteristic of *iddhis* can, somehow, lead to or be connected with knowledge.

## 5 The Vedic Background: Three Case Studies

*Iddhis* and *abhiññās* are not only terms that are difficult to translate, but they are also concepts well integrated within the path of awakening and, therefore, their analysis could be of benefit for the general understanding of the Buddhist tradition. Among the Vedic texts,<sup>32</sup> the closest ones to the Buddhist canon – not only in terms of chronology but also in terms of speculative arguments treated – are the Upaniṣads. However, not all scholars agree on the fact that Upaniṣads may have influenced early Buddhism. This controversy has been recently summarised by Cohen ([2017] 2018), who, however, has dedicated an unequal number of pages to the two points of view and the theory that asserts the Upaniṣadic influence on early Buddhism (Cohen [2017] 2018, 88-94) seems to prevail against the theory that assumes no direct relationship between the Upaniṣads and early Buddhism (88).<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding the academic controversies, a comparison between the Buddhist canon and the Upaniṣads is certainly of great benefit as to whether (1) the shared ideas between Buddhism and Upaniṣads are due to the common cultural *milieu*, or (2) that either Upaniṣadic ideas influenced Buddhism or Buddhist texts sometimes refer to or criticise Upaniṣadic concepts. In both cases, it seems safe to assume that a study concerning Vedic texts (especially the oldest Upaniṣads) could facilitate and support the reconstruction of the historical context in which Buddhism was born and developed.

**31** The oldest references to the compound *iddhividha-ñāṇa* occur mainly in Abhidhammic works, such as the *Paṭṭhāna* (e.g. Tikap, II, 166) or in the semi-Abhidhammic work known as *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (e.g. Paṭi, I, 111).

**32** The Author is aware of the complexity in defining what ‘Veda’ is. Therefore, the Author shall specify that he employs, in this work, the term ‘Vedic’ and other derivatives in a wide sense, including Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. What kinds of texts were considered part of the Veda depends by the historical period. Hence, in some old texts, such as the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, there is a mention about the three Vedas (*trayaṇa vedena*; ŚB 5.5.5.10) indicating that only the *mantras* were considered ‘Vedas’ at that time.

**33** The extensive work of Bronkhorst (2007) has been dismissed in a handful of lines.

## 5.1 A Glance into the Vedic Background in Order to Solve a Problem

Among these Buddhist extraordinary capacities, the *iddhis* are particularly interesting. As it was previously noted, the *iddhis* are marvellous performances made possible through the power of a mind trained in meditation. Since in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* the performance of *iddhis* is preceded by the creation of the body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*),<sup>34</sup> some scholars argue that the performance of extraordinary capacities is realised through this mental body.<sup>35</sup> However, the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* does not specifically state it, and this assumption seems to be based on the fact that the body made of mind is created before attainment of the ability to perform *iddhis*.<sup>36</sup> This argument, however, could be subject to the logical fallacy named *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, namely the assumption that what happens before is the cause of what follows. As a matter of fact, the temporal connection does not necessarily imply a causal one. However, it should be noted that on the one hand, many steps of the path of liberation in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* seem to be connected to each other, such as the elimination of the five hindrances (*pañca-nivaraṇa*), which seems to lead to the attainment of the first level of meditative absorption (*paṭhamajjhāna*) (cf. D, I, 73). Yet, on the other hand some steps are not directly influenced by each other, such as the knowledge by comprehension of the minds [of others] (*cetopariyaññā*) that is not attained thanks to the previous one, the element of the divine ear (*dibbasotadhātu*). Obviously, the *iddhis* and the other *abhiññās* could be considered in a very scholastic and synchronic way as only one step, the *chalaḥabhiññā*, but this interpretation would not take into account the fact that this classification might have not yet been developed when this passage was composed, since the word '*abhiññā*' does not even appear within this *sutta* with this kind of meaning.<sup>37</sup> More-

<sup>34</sup> The exposition of the creation of the body made of mind in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* has been recently discussed by De Notariis (2018).

<sup>35</sup> This opinion is supported by Swearer 1973, 449; Harvey 1993, 36; Hamilton 1996, 162-3; Radich 2007, 257; Clough [2010] 2011, 417; Lee 2014, 67; Anālayo 2016, 16.

<sup>36</sup> This is the argumentation, for instance, of Radich (2007, 257) and Anālayo (2016, 16).

<sup>37</sup> Therefore, all these attainments are listed in a section that could be a "coherent and separate work, which occurs in many other suttas both in the Pali and non-Pali traditions" (MacQueen 1988, 179). The term *abhiññā* occurs in the phrasing *sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedeti* (D, I, 62), but here it is just a short form of the absolutive *abhiññāya* (from the verb *abhiññāti*). Finally, it should be specified that the Author does not rule out the possibility that the stages - or at least some of them - in the path of liberation are connected to each other, but he believes that other possibilities should be taken into account as well. In fact, even other stages such as the practice of the monk to be mindful and fully aware in all his activities (*sati-sampajañña*; D, I, 70-1) and the fact that the monk becomes content of his frugal life (*santuṭṭha*; D, I, 71) are not strong-

over, there is a paradox, namely that later texts regard the creation of the mind-made body as an *iddhi* (cf. Paṭi, II, 205 and Vism, 378), and not a requisite to perform *iddhis*. In conclusion, there is likely a reasonable doubt about the fact that the extraordinary capacities are performed through the body made of mind since it is not clearly stated what its function is.<sup>38</sup>

A solution to this problem may require to pay further attention to the Vedic texts, whose descriptions of extraordinary capacities are likely earlier than Buddhist ones. A very interesting example is found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* in a passage that deals with a self (*ātman*) which is “the person made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*) among the breaths, the brightness inside the heart” (*vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu hṛdy antarjyotiḥ puruṣaḥ*; BU 4.3.7). This self is able to move in the intermediate world, which is an oneiric state that connects this world with the other world: “he, being common to both worlds, moves across them, just so he contemplates them, just so he oscillates [among] them. Thus, having fallen asleep, he goes beyond this world, these forms of death” (*sa samānaḥ sann ubhau lokāv anusaṃcarati dhyāyatīva lelāyatīva | sa hi svapno bhūtvemaṃ lokam atikrāmati mṛtyo rūpāṇi*; BU 4.3.7). The oneiric state is the intermediate state between this world and the other: “for this or that person there are indeed two states: this [world] and the state of the other world. The state of dream is the third and it is the junction point. Staying in this rendezvous point, he looks at both states: this [world] and the state of the other world” (*tasya vā etasya puruṣasya dve*

ly linked to each other. Another instance is when the monk finds a secluded dwelling (*vivittaṃ senāsana bhajati*; D, I, 71), he does this endowed with (*samannāgata*) many factors earlier developed, not just the previous one. These examples highlight that it is too simplistic to assume that a stage is developed only on the basis of the previous one.

**38** This is also evident from the way in which scholars have asserted that the *iddhis* are performed by means of the body made of mind. By way of example three recent works will be considered. Hamilton wrote that: “though it is not explicitly stated in the text, it would appear that it is the mind-made body which is subsequently directed by the mind to perform the *iddhis*, use its divine hearing and seeing, have insight into the minds of others, and recall former existences, and ultimately eradicate the *āsavas*” (1996, 162-3). The fact that the statement is not certain is due to the modal verb ‘would’, which implies that Hamilton considered it as a possibility and not a certainty. Radich wrote that “[n]ow, I suggest that, though the text never explicitly says so, there is a clear implication here that the sequence we have just rehearsed is a sequence of *necessary prerequisites* for the elaboration of each successive step on the path [...] it is only on the basis of this thorough and clear-sighted disillusionment with the fleshly body that it is possible to elaborate the *manomayakāya*; it is only on the basis of the elaboration of the *manomayakāya* that it is possible to attain the superpowers” (2007, 257). As previously stated, this argument could be affected by the logical fallacy named *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Lee wrote, concerning the body made of mind, that “[t]his special body has the ability to perform many supranormal activities” (2014, 67), without providing any reference or justification for this statement. In brief, it seems that there was a deficiency in past academic research on this topic.

*eva sthāne bhavata idaṃ ca paralokasthānaṃ ca | sandhyaṃ tr̥tīyaṃ svapnasthānam | tasmīn sandhye sthāne tiṣṭhann ete ubhe sthāne paśyatīdaṃ ca paralokasthānaṃ ca; BU 4.3.9*). In this dreamlike state, this person made of consciousness displays the creative power of the mind<sup>39</sup> and so is able to manipulate matter to create objects and parts of the landscape:

When he falls asleep, having taken away the matter of this entire world, having taken apart from his own, having created by his own, he dreams with his own splendor, with his own light. Then this person becomes his own light. In that place there are no chariots, there are not what is yoked on chariots (i.e. horses), there are no roads. Then he emits chariots, what is yoked on chariots, and roads. In that place there is no happiness, delight, gladness. Then he emits happiness, delight, gladness. In that place there are no ponds, tanks, and rivers. Then he emits ponds, tanks, and rivers. Hence, he is the creator.<sup>40</sup>

This passage is also quoted by Sue Hamilton, who seems to suggest that, all in all, *viññānamaya* and *manomaya* could be synonyms to indicate the subtle body (*liṅgaśarīra*) in the early Upaniṣads.<sup>41</sup> However, it seems that she has underestimated the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* account in which the *viññānamaya* self is a level more rarefied than the *manomaya* self. In fact, in this text it appears in a list which develops from the grossest element to the most rarefied (e.g. TU 3.10.4-5). The list exhibits five kinds of self and each of them is made (-*maya*) of a different substance: food (*anna*), breath (*prāṇa*), mind (*manas*), consciousness (*viññāna*), and bliss (*ānanda*). Hamilton (1996, 146) proposes the existence of a theory in the Upaniṣads according to which the reality and human existence is divided into three modes of existence and she relies upon the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* only to reinforce her argument, since the central part of the list of the five kinds of self (*prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *viññānamaya*) resembles a list found in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 4.4.5 (*viññānamaya*, *manomaya*, *prāṇamaya*).

<sup>39</sup> As it was pointed out by Hamilton (1996, 147).

<sup>40</sup> *sa yatra prasvapity asya lokasya sarvāvato mātrām apādāya svayaṃ vihatya svayaṃ nirmāya svena bhāsā svena jyotiṣā prasvapiti | atrāyaṃ puruṣaḥ svayamjyotir bhavati || na tatra rathā na rathayogā na panthāno bhavanti | atha rathān rathayogān pathaḥ sṛjate | na tatrānandā mudaḥ pramudo bhavanti | athānandān mudaḥ pramudaḥ sṛjate | na tatra veśāntāḥ puṣkariṇyaḥ sravantyo bhavanti | atha veśāntān puṣkariṇīḥ sravantiḥ sṛjate | sa hi kartā. (BU 4.3.9-10)*

<sup>41</sup> After arguing that in the Upaniṣads there is a subdivision of reality according to three modes of existences (quoting CU 6.5.1-4, cf. Hamilton 1996, 146), she writes, with reference to the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*'s passage: "[i]n this context, the term *manomaya* is not used to describe the intermediate level of sleep/dream, but three levels are nevertheless indicated. [...] In the early Upaniṣads, it is the terms *manomaya* and *viññānamaya* (and possibly dreams) which suggest the subtle self" (Hamilton 1996, 147).



Moreover, it may seem that in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*'s passage - in which the person made of consciousness is able to move in an intermediate oneiric world between this world and the other - *vijñānamaya* has a very peculiar application. It can be argued that in this passage the word *vijñāna* was not used in order to indicate the mind by chance. In this regard, within another *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* passage concerning a dialogue between Ajātaśatru and Gārgya, the one who is able to move in the oneiric state is, indeed, a person (*puruṣa*) made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*):

Ajātaśatru told him: "When he has fallen asleep, this person made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*), having taken consciousness by means of consciousness of these vital functions (*prāṇa*), settles down in the empty space inside the heart. When he takes these [functions], then this person is called 'sleeping'. The vital breath is seized, seized is the speech, seized is the sight, seized is the hearing, seized is the mind (*manas*). Wherever he roams into the dream, these worlds become his own, he becomes also a great king or a great brahmin, he settles in high and low [worlds]. Just as a great king, having seized the population (*jānapada*), would roam wherever he wants in his own country (*janapada*), exactly in the same way he, having seized the vital functions (*prāṇa*), roams by himself wherever he wants in his own body".<sup>42</sup>

Also, in this latter passage, which again concerns the oneiric world, a person made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*) is involved. One might be tempted to speculate about an equivalence between the terms used to indicate the 'mind': *citta*, *manas*, and *vijñāna*. Buddhist texts, indeed, often lack a clear distinction between these terms. In the *Samyuttanikāya* there is even a passage which states directly the equivalence of these terms: *cittaṃ iti pi mano iti pi viññānaṃ iti pi* (S, II, 94; quoted also in Mrs. Rhys Davids 1914, 17). Moreover, Buddhaghosa in a specific context also accords the same meaning to these expressions used to designate the mind: *viññānaṃ, cittaṃ, mano ti atthato ekaṃ* (Vism, 452). However, although these terms are sometimes synonyms, it seems that frequently in Buddhist texts they also have specific applications. In the partial investigation made by

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<sup>42</sup> *sa hovācājātaśatruḥ | yatraiṣa etat supto 'bhūda ya eṣa vijñānamayaḥ puruṣas tad eṣaṃ prāṇānāṃ vijñānena vijñānam ādāya ya eṣo 'ntar hṛdaya ākāsas tasmīn chete | tāni yadā grhṇāty atha haitat puruṣaḥ svapiti nāma | tad grhīta eva prāno bhavati | grhītā vāk | grhītaṃ cakṣuḥ | grhītaṃ śrotam | grhītaṃ manaḥ || sa yatraitat svapnyayā carati te hāsyā lokāḥ | tad uteva mahārājo bhavaty uteva mahābrāhmaṇaḥ | utevoccāvacam nigacchati | sa yathā mahārājo jānapadān grhītvā sve janapade yathākāmaṃ parivartetaivam evaiṣa etat prāṇān grhītvā sve śarīre yathākāmaṃ parivartate.* (BU 2.1.17-8)

Johansson<sup>43</sup> it is shown how *citta*, *manas*, and *viññāṇa* have some attributes in common, but also differ in some aspects (Johansson 1965, 209).<sup>44</sup> Therefore, for instance in the Pāli canon only the term *manas* is used to indicate that a body (*kāya*) is made of mind: *manomaya*. Alternative options such as *\*cittamaya* and *\*viññāṇamaya* are not attested within both canon and commentaries.<sup>45</sup> This could also be the case in the Upaniṣadic passages examined above, wherein the mention of a person made of consciousness (*viññānamaya*) might reveal a specific way to indicate the personification or embodiment that acts in the oneiric state. It is worth noting that this person seizes the vital functions and among them there is also the mind (*manas*): *tad grhīta eva prāṇo bhavati | grhītā vāk | grhītaṃ cakṣuḥ | grhītaṃ śrotram | grhītaṃ manaḥ* (BU 2.1.17). Therefore, *viññāna* and *manas* should not be regarded as synonyms in this context since they carry out different functions.

So, if *viññānamaya* and *manomaya* are not perfect synonyms, it would seem that to demonstrate that the extraordinary performances were really made through the body made of mind we should find a direct reference to it. In this regard, it might be useful to quote a passage from the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, a text probably older than the Upaniṣads. The text states:

He should meditate on the self which is made of mind (*manomaya*), whose body is vital breath, with a luminous appearance (*bhārūpa*), with an ethereal essence, which has the form it desires, which is swift as the thought, which has the desire of the truth, which supports the truth, which consists of all odours, which consists of all tastes, which extends and pervades throughout the whole regions, which is speechless, which is disinterested.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 'Partial' was chosen, since Johansson stated that: "[a]s this is not a statistical investigation, no completeness was aimed at, but an attempt was made to include as many different contexts as possible: I aimed at semantic completeness" (1965, 166).

<sup>44</sup> It seems that although these terms correspond to different mental functions, they are also strongly connected to each other. Therefore, Swearer writes: "in the Pāli *suttas* the terms *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa* were used either synonymously or as essentially related aspects of the same empirical consciousness" (1972, 358). Years later a similar statement was written by Somaratne: "[i]n sum, *citta*, *manas* and *viññāṇa*, though notionally, can separately be identified on the basis of their specific mental functions, though the three are aspects of the same mind" (2005, 201).

<sup>45</sup> It is remarkable that the term *viññānamaya* is found in late sub-commentarial literature, such as in the *purāṇaṭīkā* of the *Dīghanikāya*, in which, however, it appears in a passage that is an Upaniṣadic quotation: *'Annamayo pāṇamayo manomaya ānandamayo viññānamayo' ti pañcadhā attānaṃ Vedavādino vadanti* (DA-ṭ, 202). The sub-commentary refers here to the doctrine of the five kinds of self presented in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, oddly inverting *ānandamayo* and *viññānamayo*.

<sup>46</sup> *sa ātmānam upāsita manomayaṃ prāṇasarīraṃ bhārūpaṃ ākāsātmanāṃ kāmārūpaṃ manojavasāṃ satyasamkalpaṃ satyadhṛtiṃ sarvagandhaṃ sarvarasam*

This self made of mind demonstrates to have a mastership on the physical matter, since it 'has the form it desires' (*kāmarūpin*), it is endowed with a super-velocity since it 'is swift as the thought' (*mano-javas*), and also 'extends and pervades throughout the whole region' (*sarvā anu diśaḥ prabhūtaṃ sarvam idam abhyāptam*); basically, it is free to move wherever it wants, such as the monk who performs *iddhis* 'goes beyond walls, ramparts, mountains unattached by them just as he was in the ether' (*tiro-kuḍḍaṃ tiro-pākāraṃ tiro-pabbataṃ asajjamāno gacchati*; D, I, 78).

This *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*'s passage shows a self made of mind (*manomaya*) that is endowed with extraordinary capacities, just like the person made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*) in the oneiric state within the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*'s passage. So, it would seem that *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya* could actually represent similar functions, although the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*'s account and the peculiar presence of the person made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*) in the accounts concerning the oneiric state do not allow them to be regarded as perfect synonyms. It could be stated that at least part of the Vedic tradition would justify a connection between a self made of mind and the acquisition of capacities that are extraordinary. Therefore, the linguistic similarity of the term *manomaya* among distinct traditions reveals some shared features, though the contexts in which it occurs should always be carefully analysed in order to avoid a leveling of its function and use within different Indian traditions and different contexts within the same tradition.<sup>47</sup>

## 5.2 The Term 'Divine' (Pāli: *dibba*; Sanskrit: *divya/daiva*): What is There Behind the Linguistic Similarity?

On the basis of the formulation of some of the Buddhist *abhiññās*, it is possible to detect both change and continuity with the Vedic thought. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the 'element of the divine ear' (*dibba-sota-dhātu*) and the development of the 'divine eye' (*dibba-cakkhu*) within the *abhiññā* called the 'knowledge of degeneration and ascent of beings' (*cutūpapātāñña*). The point of interest is the Pāli adjective *dibba*<sup>48</sup> (Sanskrit: *divya* or *daiva*), which

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*sarvā anu diśaḥ prabhūtaṃ sarvam idam abhyāptam avākkam anādaraṃ.* (ŚB 10.6.3.2)

<sup>47</sup> A detailed analysis concerning some shared features of *manomaya* in Buddhism and Upaniṣads will be provided by De Notariis (forthcoming).

<sup>48</sup> Within the late Pāli commentarial literature, when the term is associated with the mind-made body of some gods, it is explained that "[the term] '*dibba*' [refers to something] produced in the divine world" (*dibbo ti devaloke sambhūto*; DA, I, 120 = Vibh-a, 509). A similar kind of explanation also occurs regarding the divine ear and the divine eye. Taking the divine ear as an example, it is stated that: "in this

means 'divine' and allows one to discover a certain connection with the Upaniṣads and Vedic texts. In the Buddhist passage the divine eye was developed through the action of the mind, and it is also possible in a passage of the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* (8.12.5) to detect a connection between the divine eye and the mind:

Then, one who understands: 'considering this', which is the self; the mind is his divine (*daiva*) eye. This, indeed, enjoys - seeing with the mind, with the divine eye - these desires (*kāma*), which are in the world of *brahman*.<sup>49</sup>

In other Upaniṣadic passages it is possible to find that the adjective 'divine', connected with some faculties, produces marvellous results, such as in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (1.5.18-20):

From fire and earth, divine (*daivī*) speech enters him. This very divine speech by which whatever one says, it happens.

From sky and sun, divine mind enters him. This very divine mind by which one becomes one who has happiness and therefore does not suffer.

From waters and moon, divine breath enters him. This very divine breath, which moving or resting does not waver nor receives harm.<sup>50</sup>

It is also attested that a natural manifestation, namely the thunder, could be considered a divine voice, most likely the voice of the sky (*div/dyu*) which is divine (*daivī*):

context, 'with the element of the divine ear', the term divine here [is used because] has similarity to the divine. The gods have only the element of ear purified and divine which is able to catch a [sound] object even if far since it is free from impurities, is unobstructed by bile, phlegm, blood, etc.; it is created thanks to their result of good conduct. And this element of ear devoted to knowing of this monk, which was developed by the power of mental culture and energy, is, indeed, of such quality, which is divine because it has similarity to the divine one. Moreover, it is divine even because it is attained through divine dwellings and because itself relies on divine dwellings" (*Tatra dibbāya sotadhātuyā ti ettha dibbasadisattā dibbā. Devānaṃ hi sucaritakammaṇibattā pīttasemharuhirādīhi apaḷibuddhā upakkilesavimuttatāya dūre pi ārammaṇaṃ sampaṭicchanasamatthā dibbappasādasotadhātu hoti. Ayañ cā pi imassa bhikkhuno viriyabhāvanābalanibattā nāṇasotadhātu tādisā yevā ti dibbasadisattā dibbā. Api ca dibbavihārasena paṭiladdhattā attanā ca dibbavihārasannissitattā pi dibbā; Vism. 407 = Ud-a, 201; Paṭi-a, I, 353*). A similar explanation concerning the divine eye occurs in *Vism*, 423; *Ud-a*, 73; *It-a*, II, 27; *MNidd-a*, II, 376; *Vin-a*, I, 162-3; *Paṭi-a*, I, 53.

**49** *atha yo vededaṃ manvānīti sa ātmā | mano 'sya daivaṃ cakṣuḥ | sa vā eṣa etena daivena cakṣuṣā manasaitān kāmān paśyan ramate ya ete brahmaloke.* (CU 8.12.5)

**50** *prthivyai cainam agneś ca daivī vāg āviśati | sā vai daivī vāg yayā yad eva vadati tat tad bhavati || divas cainam ādityāc ca daivaṃ mana āviśati | tad vai daivaṃ mano yenānandy eva bhavaty aho na śocati || adbhyas cainam candramasā ca daivaḥ prāṇa āviśati | sa vai daivaḥ prāṇo yaḥ saṃcaramś cāsaṃcaramś ca na vyathate 'tho na riṣyati.* (BU 1.5.18-20)

Just this, the divine voice, the Thunder, repeats: 'Da! Da! Da!'. Be tamed (*dāmyata*)! Donate (*datta*)! Be compassionate (*dayadhvam*)! One should yearn for the same triad: self-control (*dama*), donation (*dāna*), compassion (*dayā*).<sup>51</sup>

These examples make clear that although the higher knowledges (*abhiññā*) are extraordinary capacities more properly Buddhist, their exposition is, in some ways, still in connection with the late Vedic thought. Furthermore, it would be possible to state that the sensorial faculties were connected with the terms '*deva*' and '*devatā*' because of the Vedic tendency to establish analogies and connections between different realms of existence. From the time of the *Ṛgveda*, as attested for instance by the very famous *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90), the Indian tradition established correspondences between human body and cosmos, which are respectively the microcosm and the macrocosm. Regarding these kinds of correspondences already present in the *Ṛgveda* (although not systematically worked out as in later texts), the mundane or microcosmic level is called *adhyātma*, whereas the cosmic one is *adhidevata* or *adhidaiva* and the level of sacrifice is *adhiyajña* (cf. Jamison, Brereton 2014, 23-4). Such correspondences were often called *bandhu* 'bond', and they were also of great importance for later Vedic texts, such as Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads.<sup>52</sup> It is possible to find a good example of how these correspondences work at the very beginning of the *Aitareyopaniṣad*. The account starts with the creation of the worlds by the self (*ātman*), who was alone in the beginning. Thereafter, he created a man (*puruṣa*)<sup>53</sup> and this creation is reported as the creation of the bodily parts, to which functions and cosmic divinities correspond. The creation of the bodily parts begins after he had extracted the man from the waters,<sup>54</sup> made him solid (*amūrchayat*) and instilled heat into him (*abhyatapat*).<sup>55</sup> The

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**51** *tad etad evaiṣā daivī vāg anuvadati stanayitnur da da da iti | dāmyata datta dayadhvam iti | tad etat trayam śikṣed damam dānam dayām iti* (BU 5.2.3). The Author suspects that this Upaniṣadic passage is echoed in the *Dighanikāya*: *Tiṇṇam kho me idaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ kammānaṃ vipāko, yenāhaṃ etarahi evaṃ mahiddhiko evaṃ mahānubhāvo, seyyathidaṃ dānassa damassa saṃyamassa.* (D, II, 186)

**52** Cf. Gonda 1965; Olivelle 1998, 24; Smith 1998, 78-81; for a list of other terms used to indicate connections, see Smith 1998, 78 fn. 134.

**53** With the word 'man', the male of human species to which the word *puruṣa* refers to in Vedic contexts is meant (for more information, see Killingley 2006, 80). In this context, this translation is incontrovertible since among the created bodily parts there will be also the penis (*śiśna*).

**54** Since *udbhya* 'from out of these' is an ablative plural, Connolly wrote that "the *puruṣa* was derived from all the worlds created by the self and not just from the waters" (1997, 32). However, it should be highlighted that also 'waters' is plural, so it seems that the text allows more than one interpretation.

**55** *so 'dbhya eva puruṣam samuddhṛtyāmūrchayat || tam abhyatapat.* (AU 1.1.3-4)

first part of the body to be listed was the mouth, from which speech and fire came out: “the mouth (*mukha*) hatched like an egg, from the mouth [came out] the speech (*vāc*), from the speech [came out] the fire (*agni*)” (*mukhaṃ nirabhidyata yathāṇḍam mukhād vāg vāco 'gñih*; AU 1.1.4). So, a bodily part (*mukha*, ‘the mouth’) is associated with a function (*vāc*, ‘speech’), and with a divinity (*agni*, ‘fire’). This schema is repeated for other parts of the body, functions, and deities, resulting in the following correspondences (cf. AU 1.1.4):

mouth ( <i>mukha</i> )	nostrils ( <i>nāsikā</i> )	eyes ( <i>akṣi</i> )	ears ( <i>karṇa</i> )	skin ( <i>tvac</i> )	heart ( <i>hṛdaya</i> )	navel ( <i>nābhi</i> )	penis ( <i>śiśna</i> )
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
speech ( <i>vāc</i> )	breath ( <i>prāṇa</i> )	sight ( <i>cakṣus</i> )	hearing ( <i>śrotra</i> )	body-hair ( <i>loman</i> )	mind ( <i>manas</i> )	digestive breath ( <i>apāna</i> )*	semen ( <i>retas</i> )
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
fire ( <i>agni</i> )	wind ( <i>vāyu</i> )	sun ( <i>āditya</i> )	directions ( <i>diś</i> )	plants ( <i>oṣadhi</i> ) and trees ( <i>vanaspati</i> )	moon ( <i>candramas</i> )	death ( <i>mṛtyu</i> )	waters ( <i>ap</i> )

\* For the translation of the term *apāna* in this context, see Brown 1919, 109; Connolly 1997, 32; Pelissero 1998, 107. Anyway, it should be specified that the translation of *apāna* is a contentious issue.

Fire, wind, sun, directions, plants and trees, moon, death, and waters are named ‘deities’ in the *Aitareyopaniṣad*, i.e. *devatā*.<sup>56</sup> These deities, once they were created, after having sprung from the primordial *puruṣa*, plummeted into a great chaotic mass of water (*arṇava*) and so they requested: “identify us a dwelling in which once established we can eat food”.<sup>57</sup> A cow and a horse were offered to these deities, but they were deemed inadequate abodes. Thereafter, a man (*puruṣa*) was offered, which meets the expectations and any deity, after having become the respective faculty, enters in its physical *locus* within the body. For instance, “the fire, after having become speech, enters the mouth”.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *tā etā devatāḥ sṛṣṭā*. (AU 1.2.1)

<sup>57</sup> *āyatanam naḥ prajānīhi | yasmin pratiṣṭhitā annam adāma*. (AU 1.2.1)

<sup>58</sup> *agnir vāg bhūtvā mukhaṃ prāviśat* (AU 1.2.4). Connolly (1997, 32) seems to consider as *devatā* also the functions such as speech (*vāc*), breath (*prāṇa*), etc. However, the subject that enters into the dwelling is *devatā*, understood as the deity transformed into the faculty. In this regard, it is written that “[the *ātman*] said to them [*tā(h) = devatā*]: ‘enter in your respective dwelling!’” (*tā abravīd yathāyatanam praviśateti*; AU 1.2.3) and so the one which enters (*pra-√viś*) is the deity (e.g. fire, i.e. the *devatā*), after having become the faculty (e.g. speech).

Accounts, just like the one described in the above exposition of *Aitareyopaniṣad* (1.1-2) that has just been exposed, show that there is something divine behind the activity of the physical organs according to the Vedic thought. A divine and cosmic power underlies the normal functioning of the human body and a series of correspondences aim to identify at which part of the human body a certain divinity is allocated and which function it performs.<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting the strongly established idea that, among the faculties, the mind (*manas*) is regarded as divine. Therefore, besides the aforementioned passage in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (1.5.19), in which a mind that is divine appears (e.g. *daivaṃ mano*), as early as the *Ṛgveda* it occurs a mind which is divine: *kavīyamānaḥ ka iha pra vocad devam manaḥ kuto adhi prajātam* (RV 1.164.18).<sup>60</sup> The mind is even called in the late *Praśnopaniṣad* the supreme deity and is the place in which the other faculties are grouped together during the sleep.<sup>61</sup> It is this deity (*deva*) who experiences dreams.

In Buddhism, the sensorial faculties are connected with a divine-sphere (*dibba*) only when the aim is to indicate that they are able to operate beyond the normal physical boundaries. A connection with a power able to affect and interact with the universe is maintained by the mind and, therefore, extraordinary capacities such as *iddhis* and *abhiññās* are developed only after a mental purification.<sup>62</sup> In this regard, it could be useful to highlight that the canonical Buddhist texts might represent an initial stage in the process of departure from the Vedic understanding of the sensorial faculties. Unfortunately, a comprehensive treatment of the sensorial faculties within Buddhist texts would exceed the limits of the present survey. However, it would be worth noting how the late Theravāda exegesis developed a mechanical explanation of the sensorial faculty process (in this case the process of seeing), which does not leave any room for the idea that the sensorial process is still in connection with cosmic powers or divinities:

<sup>59</sup> There are, in the Upaniṣads, many other lists of faculties with respective deities that differ from the list in the *Aitareyopaniṣad* taken into account in terms of faculties, functions, deities and the correspondence between these. However, the underlying thought is the same. More Upaniṣadic lists, with a particular reference to pentads and their relationship with *Sāṃkhya*, have been analysed by Killingley (2016).

<sup>60</sup> This kind of reference appears also within other Vedic texts, such as *Atharvaveda* and *Vājasaneyisaṃhitā* (i.e. AV 1.1.2 and VS 34.1), cf. Wijesekera ([1944] 1994, 155-6).

<sup>61</sup> *evaṃ ha vai tat sarvaṃ pare deve manasy ekībhavati* (PU 4.2).

<sup>62</sup> See for instance: “when the mind is concentrated in this way, purified, cleaned, unblemished, freed from impurities, malleable, fit for work, steadfast, having attained impassibility, he directs and turns the mind to the variety of *iddhis*” (*so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye ṭhite ānejjappatte iddhi-vidhāya cittam abhinīharati abhininnāmeti. so aneka-vihitam iddhi-vidham paccanubhoti*; D, I, 78).

When the thought 'I will look ahead!' is generated, together with this very thought the wind element (*vāyo-dhātu*) caused by the thought, which brings forth the information (*viññatti*),<sup>63</sup> is produced. Thus, through the diffusion of the wind element due to the action of the thought, the lowest eyelid sinks down and the uppermost eyelid jumps up; there is not anyone who opens it through a mechanism. Then the sight-consciousness, which performs the function of seeing, is produced.<sup>64</sup>

It is as if the mental thought generates the electric impulsion (*vāyo-dhātu*),<sup>65</sup> which causes the eye to open through the eyelid shift and, after that, the sight consciousness arises and allows the individual to see.

So, it was noted that in Buddhism some faculties (seeing, hearing) may become divine if the mind is properly trained. This would seem a residue of the Vedic conception of the human being in its relation with the cosmos. However, although the old correlation between physical body parts, functions and deities is well attested in the Upaniṣads, an emerging tendency towards the new development occurring in Buddhism could be traced back to the Upaniṣadic texts, in which the adjective 'divine' is attributed to some faculties when they perform a particular function beyond the normal human reach or even non-human (e.g. BU 1.5.18: 'divine speech is that which makes whatever one says happen', or when the voice of a thunder is called divine, i.e. BU 5.2.3). So, this would lead us to expect that it would be possible to recover other faded images in the Upaniṣads of what would be further developed in later time by Buddhist tradition.

**63** On the Abhidhammic concept of '*viññatti*', see Harvey (1993, 34-5) and Karunadasa (2010, 189-98), who translate it as 'intimation'.

**64** '*Ālokessāmīti' pana citta uppajjamāne ten' eva cittena saddhiṃ citta-samuṭṭhānā vāyo-dhātu viññattim janayamānā uppajjati. Iti citta-kiriya-vāyo-dhātu-vipphārasen' eva hetthimaṃ akkhi-dalaṃ adho sīdati, uparimaṃ uddhaṃ laṅgheti. Koci yantakena vicaranto nāma n' atthi. Tato cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ dassana-kiccaṃ sādheṇṇaṃ uppajjatīti* (DA, I, 194). '*vāyo-dhātu-viññattim'* was emended '*vāyo-dhātu viññattim'* on the basis of the parallel passages in MA, I, 262; SA, III, 191; Vibh-a, 356.

**65** Cf. Harvey 1993, 35, for the comparison of *vāyo-dhātu* with the modern concept of electrical discharge in the nerves. See also Killingley (2006, 103 endnote 15), who interprets *vāyu* as a kind of shock, the motion or the kinetic energy.



### 5.3 The Observation of the Action of Kamma (Sanskrit: *Karman*): A Faint Echo

During the exposition of the *abhiññā* called the 'knowledge of de-generation and ascent of beings' (*cutūpapātañña*), it is stated that, thanks to the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), the rebirth in an inferior or superior plane of existence according to *kamma* is observed (*so dibbena cakkhunā visuddhena atikkanta-mānusakena satte passati cavamāne upapajjamāne, hīne paṇīte suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe sugate duggate yathā-kammūpage satte pajānāti*; D, I, 82). Now, it will be argued why this particular *abhiññā* might have connections with the Upaniṣads.

As previously stated, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, during the oneiric state, a person made of consciousness (*vijñānamaya*) is able to perform activities that are beyond the common human capacities. The freedom of movement and the creative power of the mind found in this passage resemble the marvellous actions performed by a monk who experiences *iddhis*. However, within the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*'s account there is a detail that is less striking, but likewise interesting. Therefore, in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 4.3.7-38 there is often mention to the fact that the person made of consciousness, standing in the place between this world and the other world, sees both evils and joys (*pāpmana ānandāṃś ca paśyati*; BU 4.3.9) and later, indeed, it is repeated many times that this person has seen the merit (*puṇya*) and demerit (*pāpa*) (*dr̥ṣṭvaiva puṇyaṃ ca pāpaṃ*; e.g. BU 4.3.15). The terms *puṇya* and *pāpa*, which have been translated as 'merit' and 'demerit', are a little controversial. As Bodewitz stated, "[i]n post-Vedic texts in which *puṇyam* is mentioned together with *pāpam*, good and bad actions in general (and their resulting merits and demerits) are definitely meant" (2013, 44). This implies that the interpretation of *puṇya* and *pāpa* as 'merit' and 'demerit' is not valid for all passages in the Vedic texts, but mainly for the post-Vedic texts. So, in spite of the fact that Bodewitz found some Upaniṣadic passages in which *puṇya* and *pāpa* refer to good and bad activities and their results (e.g. BU 3.2.13, cf. Bodewitz 2013, 47), he asserted that:

B[ṛhad]Ā[raṇyaka]U[paniṣad] 4, 3, 15; 4, 3, 22 and 4, 3, 34 have *puṇyam* and *pāpam* as the objects of an other verb than *kar*, namely the verb 'to see'. In the state of dreams one sees (i.e. experiences) good and evil, which have nothing to do with moral distinctions but refer to pleasant and unpleasant experiences. (Bodewitz 2013, 47; square brackets added)

The Upaniṣadic verses quoted are part of the oneiric account. In this passage, Bodewitz interprets the verbs denoting 'to see' (in the cases mentioned, it is used *dr̥ṣṭvā*, a gerund form from the root *√dr̥ś*)

with the meaning ‘to experience’. He does not really provide evidence for this statement and, furthermore, the meaning ‘to experience’ does not appear in Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* as an explanation for  $\sqrt{drś}$  (cf. SED, 491) and in the *sub voce*  $\sqrt{pāś}$  it does not seem at all the primary meaning (cf. SED, 611). However, the rendering ‘to experience’ actually seems to fit the context of the passage as it will be shown below. Bodewitz also stated that the good and evil experienced “have nothing to do with moral distinctions but refer to pleasant and unpleasant experiences”, whereas the Upaniṣadic passage seems to indicate exactly the opposite, since it specifies that what one sees in that state does not follow him (*sa yat tatra kiñcit paśyaty ananvāgatas tena bhavati*; BU 4.3.15).<sup>66</sup> Therefore, analysing the Sanskrit text, it is possible to note that the verses 4.3.15-7<sup>67</sup> repeat almost the same phrasing with reference to three different states:

1. the serenity (*samprasāda*, i.e. the mental state during the deep sleep);
2. the dream (*svapna*);
3. and the waking condition (*buddhānta*).

However, it is possible to note that the phrase “whatever he sees there, he is not followed by it” (*sa yat tatra kiñcit paśyaty ananvāgatas tena bhavati*) occurs only for the first two states that are related to the act of sleeping, whereas it does not occur in the third one, the waking state. This may indicate that whatever one ‘sees’ in the waking state, he is ‘followed’ (*anvāgata*) by it, whereas if he had been in the other two states, he would not have been followed (*ananvāgata*) by it. It would seem that actually the verb ‘to see’ may convey the meaning of ‘to experience’ (as Bodewitz stated), and that these experiences have no results if they take place during sleep (i.e. not follow), but they get results if they take place in the waking state (i.e. follow). So, the person made of consciousness sees/experiences actions that may or may not have results according to the state in which these actions are experienced (waking or sleeping state). In the Buddhist text, the monk sees (*passati*) the different kinds of rebirths of

<sup>66</sup> He is not followed by merit and demerit: *ananvāgataṃ puṇyenānavāgataṃ pāpena* (BU 4.3.22).

<sup>67</sup> *sa vā eṣa etasmin samprasāde ratvā caritvā drṣṭvaiva puṇyaṃ ca pāpaṃ ca punaḥ pratinyāyaṃ pratiyony ādravati svapnāyaiva | sa yat tatra kiñcit paśyaty ananvāgatas tena bhavati | asaṅgo hy ayaṃ puruṣa iti | evaṃ evaitat yājñavalkya | so ’haṃ bhagavate sahasraṃ dadāmi | ata ūrdhvaṃ vimokṣāyaiva brūhīti || sa vā eṣa etasmin svapne ratvā caritvā drṣṭvaiva puṇyaṃ ca pāpaṃ ca punaḥ pratinyāyaṃ pratiyony ādravati buddhāntāyaiva | sa yat tatra kiñcit paśyaty ananvāgatas tena bhavati | asaṅgo hy ayaṃ puruṣa iti | evaṃ evaitat yājñavalkya | so ’haṃ bhagavate sahasraṃ dadāmi | ata ūrdhvaṃ vimokṣāyaiva brūhīti || sa vā eṣa etasmin buddhānte ratvā caritvā drṣṭvaiva puṇyaṃ ca pāpaṃ ca punaḥ pratinyāyaṃ pratiyony ādravati svapnāntāyaiva.* (BU 4.3.15-7)

beings. On the one hand, there is the observation of actions meritorious and not (Upaniṣadic account), and, on the other hand, there is the observation of the results of the actions of others (Buddhist account). The action of seeing/experiencing (Sanskrit: *paśyati*; Pāli: *pas-sati*) is an action that takes place in the mind in both the Upaniṣadic oneiric state and Buddhist account, but this does not imply that the experience is devoid of objectivity. Within the Upaniṣadic account, it is stated that the person made of consciousness sees/experiences merit and demerit in the dreamlike state and in deep sleep, as well as in the waking state. It seems from BU 2.1.18 that the oneiric experience is something that occurs inside the body, but, as W. Doniger stated, “[t]he fact that the dream exists only inside the body of the dreamer does not, however, imply that it is unreal, as such a dichotomy (inside vs. outside, private vs. public) might imply in Western thinking” (1984, 15).<sup>68</sup> Within the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*’s exposition of the *cutūpapātāñña*, it is not clear how to develop the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), nevertheless it is clear that the action of the mind is implied (*so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu-bhūte kammaniye t̥hite ānejjappatte pubbenivāsānussati-ññāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti*; D, I, 82). The instructions to perform this *abhiññā* are provided only by the later compendium of Buddhist doctrine called *Visuddhimagga* ‘The Path of Purification’. In this text (cf. *Vism*, 427-9), it is explained that one who wants to develop the divine eye should achieve the dwelling place of the access *jhāna* (*upacārājjhānagocara*) using the meditative object called *kaṣiṇa*, choosing one among the three *kaṣiṇas* of fire (*tejas*), white (*odāta*), and light (*āloka*), and should mentally extend it without getting the full absorption (*appanā*).<sup>69</sup> Among these three *kaṣiṇas*, the light *kaṣiṇa* is the best for this kind of performance.<sup>70</sup> The text continues stating that it is possible to see visible forms into the range of extension of the *kaṣiṇa*.<sup>71</sup> The objects seen through the divine eye are probably mental images, which are as much real as the objects seen with the physical eye:

In this context, when this form – inside the belly, belonging to the heart-base (*hadayavatthu*), under the surface of the earth, beyond walls, mountains, and ramparts, or in another sphere of existence

<sup>68</sup> A recent overview concerning the concept of ‘dream’ into the Vedic texts is provided by Pellegrini (2011, 11-29) in his excellent PhD dissertation.

<sup>69</sup> *tejokaṣiṇaṃ odātakasiṇaṃ ālokaṣiṇaṃ ti imesu t̥isu kaṣiṇesu aññataram āsannaṃ kātappaṃ; upacārājjhānagocaraṃ katvā vaḍḍhetvā upetappaṃ, na tattha appanā uppādetabbā ti adhippāyo.* (*Vism*, 427-8)

<sup>70</sup> *Imesu-ca pana t̥isu ālokaṣiṇaṃ yeva seṭṭhataram.* (*Vism*, 428)

<sup>71</sup> *Vaḍḍhitatṭhānassa anto yeva rūpagaṭaṃ passitappaṃ.* (*Vism*, 428)

(*paracakkavāla*) – which does not come into the range of perception of the fleshly eye of the monk, reaches the range of perception of the eye of knowledge (*ñānacakkhu*), and it is as seen with the fleshly eye; then the divine eye has arisen.<sup>72</sup>

In this regard, it is worth remembering that since in Buddhism the mind (*manas*) is considered a sense, namely the sixth sense, the nature of the mind's experience is not different from the other sensory experiences.<sup>73</sup>

In both Upaniṣadic and Buddhist accounts, the observation/experience is mental, but it does not mean that it is not real. Moreover, in both accounts it seems that the karmic theory (definitely within the Buddhist account and most likely in the Upaniṣadic one) is involved. Finally, in order to support this hypothesis that would read a connection between the two accounts, the Author would like to highlight a couple of dichotomous elements present in both traditions.

Starting with the Buddhist exposition of the *cutūpapātañāna*, it is possible to note that through the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), the rebirth of beings in an inferior or superior plane of existence according to the *kamma* is observed. The text provides a list of opposite pairs: *cavamāne upapajjamāne, hīne paṇīte suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe sugate dugate* (D, I, 82). With this phrasing, it indicates the possibility of degenerating (*cavamāna*) in negative conditions (*hīna, dubbaṇṇa, dugata*), or ascending (*upapajjamāna*) in positive conditions (*paṇīta, suvaṇṇa, sugata*). The negative conditions *par excellence* are rebirths in hells, whereas the positive conditions are rebirths in heavens. The suffix *-māna* used to create the present passive participle of the verbs *cavati* and *upapajjati* might indicate that the action occurs automatically, and the beings involved are just passive subjects of the action. Therefore, the *kamma* is clearly understood as a sort of natural law, which acts automatically at the moment of death, leading to the following rebirth. It makes sense to consider the verb *cavati* as indicating a fall from one state to another<sup>74</sup> and the verb *upapajjati* indicating an ascent towards more elevated states.<sup>75</sup>

**72** *Tattha yadā tassa bhikkhuno maṃsacakkhussa anāpāthagataṃ anto kucchigataṃ hadayavathunissitaṃ heṭṭhā pathavitalanissitaṃ tirokuḍḍapabbatapakāragataṃ paracakkavālagatan ti idaṃ rūpaṃ nānacakkhussa āpāthaṃ āgacchati, maṃsacakkhuno dissamānaṃ viya hoti, tadā dibbacakkhu uppannaṃ hoti.* (Vism, 428-9)

**73** Cf. Johansson 1969, 48; Clough [2010] 2011, 417; Clough 2012, 86. Johansson wrote about the *abhiññās* that “[s]ome of the supernatural forms of knowledge (*abhiññā*) may be understood as ideations interpreted as *real*” (1969, 48).

**74** Cf. s.v. “*cavati*” in DOP, 125; BHSD, 226.

**75** As stated by the PED (128) s.v. “*upapajjati*”, the etymology of *upapajjati* is a bit controversial since it is not really clear if it derives from *upa-√pad* or from *ud-√pad*. The dictionary, therefore, highlights as *upap-* and *upp-* are almost written in the same way

Similar dichotomous elements are present in another Upaniṣadic passage (BU 2.1.16-20) that involves a person made of consciousness within the oneiric state. In this passage, it is stated that this person *uccāvacaṃ nigacchati* (BU 2.1.18). Since the compound *uccāvaca* means high (*ucca/uccā*) and low (*avaca*) without specifying anything else; it is not immediately clear how to translate it. The expression 'high and low' could refer to high and low regions (see, for example, Olivelle 1998, 63), states, worlds. However, it could also indicate high and low conditions (e.g. in the Śāṅkara's comment on this compound: *utāpy uccāvacaṃ uccaṃ ca devatvādy avacaṃ ca tiryaktvādi, uccaṃ ivāvacaṃ iva ca nigacchati*; BUBh ad 2.1.18).<sup>76</sup> In spite of possible translations, and likewise the Buddhist account, it is possible to observe that it involves a movement or a shift and a settlement (*nivṛgam*) in a higher situation or in a lower one. It may be possible that these two translations are not mutually exclusive because in order to visit another realm one could assume the life conditions of this realm. This seems to occur sometimes in the Buddhist texts, which state often that one of the characteristics of some gods in certain realms is to have a body made of mind (*manomaya*) (cf. e.g. D, I, 17), and so no wonder in S, V, 282 it is stated that the Buddha can visit the world of Brahmā with both the physical body and the body made of mind (*manomaya*).

Drawing conclusions from this analysis, it is possible to state that:

1. Buddhist and Upaniṣadic accounts seem to involve the karmic theory, although in the Buddhist account it is more evident than in the Upaniṣadic passages.
2. The action of 'seeing' is involved in both traditions and the experience is as much mental as real. Seeing rebirth according to *kamma* with the divine eye is not very different from seeing merit and demerits in the dream; both are actions that take place in the mind, one during meditation and one during sleep. In these cases, the action of seeing is a mental action, which, on the one hand, implies being a spectator, and, on the other hand, implies an all-pervasive experience.
3. Similar dichotomous elements are present in both traditions. The Buddhist text indicates the possibility of degenerating (*cavamāna*) in negative conditions (*hīna, dubbaṇṇa, duggata*), or ascending (*upapajjamāna*) in positive conditions (*paṇīta*,

in Sinhalese script. In any case, both prefixes could indicate an upward direction (cf. s.vv. "upa-" and "ud-" respectively in PED, 123 and 118).

**76** The text formatting has been slightly edited. This interpretation could be also coherent with the fact that the previous phrase states that the person made of consciousness may become a great king or a great brahmin (i.e. he experiences a very good and high condition): *tad uteva mahārājo bhavaty uteva mahābrāhmaṇaḥ | utevoccāvacaṃ nigacchati* (BU 2.1.18).

*suvanna, sugata*). The Upaniṣadic account involves a movement or a shift and a settlement (*nigacchati*) in high (*ucca/uccā*) and low (*avaca*) regions, states, worlds, or conditions (*uccāvacaṃ nigacchati*; BU 2.1.18).

## 6 Conclusion

In line with the growing interest in the study of extraordinary capacities within the Indian traditions, this paper has (hopefully) shown the importance of the comparison between the Buddhist and Vedic texts with reference to the widespread Buddhist notions of *iddhi* and *abhiññā*. At first, the interpretation and translation of these two terms have been discussed, and despite that the Author has expressed his preferences with regard to the rendering of the terms into English, he does not consider his argumentations as conclusive. In fact, it should always be remembered that a translated word is consistently drawn from a context and it is translated in order to satisfy a specific audience. Although a certain degree of arbitrariness is acknowledged, however, there could always be better or worse translations inasmuch as the context of use of the translated term and the target audience are taken into account. Therefore, translations such as ‘psychic power’ and ‘higher knowledge’, for the terms *iddhi* and *abhiññā* respectively, may fit the context in which they stand for capacities developed through the meditative practice and satisfy a broad audience that may not consist solely of scholars. Nevertheless, translations such as ‘superhuman power’ or ‘success’ for the term *iddhi* can not be ruled out, and according to the authors’ preference and/or to the context and audience, could be certainly adopted.

Thereafter, in order to better understand the concepts of *iddhi* and *abhiññā*, some connections with the Vedic texts have been analysed. At first, the thorny problem concerning the involvement of the body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*) in the execution of the extraordinary capacities was taken into account. Although many scholars sustained that these kinds of marvellous performances were thought to be performed through the body made of mind, no one provided strong evidence to support this thesis. A glance into the Vedic texts that deal with similar topics has shown that it could be reasonable to believe that the body made of mind is involved in these kinds of extraordinary performances. However, it should be stressed that this does not mean that the use of the body made of mind is mandatory to perform these extraordinary acts. It is attested, for instance in the *Samyuttanikāya*, that the Buddha was able to go to the Brahmā world (i.e. the last *iddhi*) with both the physical body (*cātumahābhūtikena kāyena*, lit. the body composed of the

four great elements) and the body made of mind (*manomayena kāyena*).<sup>77</sup>

The investigation within the Vedic texts continued with the analysis of the term 'divine' (Pāli: *dibba*; Sanskrit: *divya/daiva*) since it occurs in the description of some *abhiññās*. It turned out that this use of 'divine' is still in some ways connected with the Vedic one, but it certainly shows a development (started already in the Upaniṣads) according to which a faculty is called 'divine' when it performs a function in a way that is beyond the normal or average use. Within the Vedic thought, all faculties were connected with a divine power, whereas in Buddhism it seems that this connection with a power able to affect the reality was maintained only by the mind, which, once purified, can improve the range of action of the normal faculties (i.e. seeing and hearing). The later Theravāda exegesis has indeed developed a mechanistic explanation in order to explain the sensorial process (e.g. the process of seeing), showing that there was a trend of a progressive abandonment of the idea that there is a magical or divine power behind the functioning of the senses (and other faculties). Although it is beyond the aims of the present discussion, it is nonetheless interesting to note that there seems to be a connection with the Max Weber concept of 'disenchantment of the world' (*Entzauberung der Welt*).<sup>78</sup>

Finally, the *abhiññā* called the 'knowledge of degeneration and ascent of beings' (*cutūpapātāñña*) was compared with a couple of accounts involving the oneiric state in the Upaniṣads (i.e. BU 4.3.7-38 and 2.1.16-20). Some similarities were recovered<sup>79</sup> and this fact might

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. *abhiññāti nu kho bhante Bhagavā iddhiyā manomayena kāyena Brahmālokam upasaṅkamitā* [...] *abhiññāti kho pana bhante Bhagavā iminā cātumahābhūtikenā kāyena iddhiyā Brahmālokam upasaṅkamitā* (S, V, 282).

<sup>78</sup> "Thus the growing process of intellectualization and rationalization does *not* imply a growing understanding of the conditions under which we live. It means something quite different. It is the knowledge or the conviction that if *only we wished* to understand them we *could* do so at any time. It means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle *control everything by means of calculation*. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world" (Weber [1864-1920] 2004, 12-3). In this regard, it is worth noting that the Buddhist exegetical account in which the function of seeing is described in a very mechanistic way occurs within sections that are related to the practice of mindfulness (*sati*), just as in DA, I, 194 that is part of a section entitled by the editor of the commentary (Mr. Rhys Davids) as '*sati-sampajaññaṃ*', or in MA, I, 262 that is part of the comment on the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* (M, 10). Rephrasing the Max Weber's statement from a Buddhist point of view we can say that: the bodily and mental process through which the function of seeing is performed is not part of our average awareness under which we live. But it is a kind of knowledge that if *only we wished* to have we *could* get it at any time. It means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle *be aware of everything by means of mindfulness*.

<sup>79</sup> In this regard, this case study is in line with the findings of Black (2011), who spotted similarities between the narratives involving the Buddhist character of Ambaṭṭha and the Upaniṣadic character of Svetaketu.

justify further speculations. For instance, could there be a connection between the Upaniṣadic oneiric state and the Buddhist meditation? It can be argued that the answer might depend on the sources consulted. Glancing at the Theravāda exegesis, it would seem evident that the action of dreaming and the meditative absorption (*jhāna*) would involve a different mental activity and so they would seem in no way compatible.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, the Upaniṣadic accounts of the oneiric state have some details that cannot go unnoticed. For example, in BU 4.3.7 the person made of consciousness (*viññānamaya*), able to move within the oneiric state, moves across the worlds (this and the oneiric one) and contemplates them (*ubhau lokāv anusamcarati dhyāyati*). The verb *dhyāyati*, which has been loosely translated as ‘contemplates’, is from a root *√dhyai*, just as the Buddhist meditative absorption state is called *jhāna*, which is in Sanskrit *dhyāna*, and so is from the same root. Remarkable is also the fact that extraordinary capacities are displayed by the person made of consciousness in the Upaniṣadic oneiric state and that in the Buddhist texts a body made of mind (*manomaya-kāya*) could be involved in similar kind of extraordinary performances.

In conclusion, the comparison of the Buddhist notions of *iddhi* and *abhiññā* has shown that Buddhism did not come out from impenetrable darkness, but it was immersed into a rich environment of ideas. Buddhism, just as any historical phenomenon, is in dialogue with the historical period in which it lives, is influenced and tries to influence its environment and, therefore, it is part of a historical picture, which developed in many ways during the flowing of time.

**80** A comparison between dreaming and meditating is provided by Harvey (1995, 162-4). Without going into the details of the articulated Theravāda theory of mental process, it is possible to state that during the dream there is a rapid alternation of the passive state of consciousness called *bhavaṅga* and the state of *javana*, often translated as ‘impulsion’, whereas during the meditative absorption there is an uninterrupted sequence of *javanas*.



## Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅuttaranikāya</i>
AU	Aitareyopaniṣad
As	<i>Atthasālinī (Dhammasaṅgaṇi-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
AV	Atharvaveda
BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (see Edgerton)
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad
BUBh	Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad-bhāṣya
CU	Chāndogyopaniṣad
CPD	Critical Pāli Dictionary (see Trenckner et al.)
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
DA	<i>Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsinī)</i>
DA-ṭ	<i>Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā-ṭīkā</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
DOP	Dictionary of Pāli (see Cone)
It-a	<i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthadīpanī)</i>
J	<i>Jātaka</i>
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
MA	<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)</i>
MNidd-a	<i>Mahāniddeśa-aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammapajjotikā)</i>
Paṭi	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Paṭi-a	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammappakāsinī)</i>
PED	Pali-English Dictionary (see Rhys Davids and Stede)
PU	Praśnopaniṣad
Pug	<i>Puggalapaññatti</i>
ṚV	Ṛgveda
S	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i>
SA	<i>Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Sāratthappakāsinī)</i>
ŚB	Śatapathabrāhmaṇa
SbhV	Saṅghabhedavastu
SED	Sanskrit-English Dictionary (see Monier-Williams)
TU	Taittirīyopaniṣad
Tikap	<i>Tikapaṭṭhāna</i>
Ud-a	<i>Udāna-aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthadīpanī)</i>
Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Vibh-a	<i>Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā (Sammohavinodanī)</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vin-a	<i>Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā (Samantapāsādikā)</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
VS	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā

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