

Ven. Ilukewela Dhammarathana,
B.A.(hons), BPU, M.A (Kelaniya),
Lecturer (Probationary)
The Department of Buddhist Philosophy
The Faculty of Buddhist Studies
Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka.
E-mail: idhammarathana@yahoo.com / Phone: 0094714432606

**The Psychological Perspective of Implantation and the Date of
Transmigration of *viññāṇa* to the Womb of a Mother as Depicted in
Buddhism**

Transmigration of *viññāṇa* to the womb of a human mother is a controversial issue in modern psychology for it has not yet been discussed factually. Before a human being is born or comes out of the womb, it should have been staying in the womb at least nine or ten months. In Buddhism, being is nothing but the psycho-physio combination. In other words, being means a collection of name and form (*nāma-rūpa*). Since the Buddha has divulged the reality of the being by revealing the transmigration of the *viññāṇa* to the womb of a mother, the prenatal development is a matter of subject to discuss with Buddhist perspective.

However, in any case, one should not take this *viññāṇa* which does not change like Ven. Sāti thought (Majjhima Nikaya, PTS. i. 258). The incident found in Mahātaṇhāsaṃkaya sutta of Majjhima Nikāya reveals how Ven. Sāti misinterprets the teachings of the Buddha saying that the unchanging consciousness transmigrates from life to life. In this regard, Buddha comments that Ven. Sāti has misunderstood His teachings and Ven. Sāti does the heinous crime by teaching it to the others (258). Therefore, this *viññāṇa* depends on one another (259).¹

Buddhism, at present, has developed in different ways. Especially, the followers of Buddha, Buddhism has been spread into branches and sub-branches because of doctrinal disputes raised among the Bhikkhūs. Firstly, Mahāsamāghikās separated from the trunk and developed as Mahāyāna. After the separation, the orthodox monks were named as Sthaviravāda while the same tradition was named as Hīnayāna by the unorthodox tradition. However, within two hundred years after the Great Parinibbana of the Buddha, eighteen schools have appeared in India (Hirakawa 114). During the period, from the Theravāda Tradition (Sthaviravāda) Sarvāstivāda, Sautrantika, Sammitiya and Vibhajjayavāda have branched off holding different views with regard to the transmigration of the being from life to life. At the third Buddhist Council, Ven. Moggaliputtatissa Thero took steps to preserve Buddhism with its original shape and he sent Buddhist missionaries to nine directions out of which Sri Lanka is one. In this paper, I collect the fact in relation to the Theravāda tradition preserved in Sri Lanka.

According to Aṭṭhakathā, one is not born at once, but it grows gradually in the womb and it can be seen firstly as kalalam (*Saṅgīyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakatā*, i. 300).² Buddhism not being subordinate to the modern psychology introduces the prenatal development of the being. Moreover, the Buddha has clearly stated how *viññāṇa* transmigrates to the womb. This is what the psychologists have yet been unable to reveal even with the modern equipment.

According to psychology there are three stages inside the womb and these stages pass quickly as the organism becomes a **zygote**, then an **embryo**, and finally a **foetus**. The transition from embryo to foetus occurs at 8 weeks, a full month before the pregnant woman enters the second trimester of her pregnancy and, often, before she is aware that she is pregnant. At this point, all of the embryo's major organs are formed. The rest of the prenatal period is a time of growth, developing function, and the refinement of organs and structures that already exist. This means that a woman may pass through the most critical periods of pregnancy before she even knows she is pregnant (Kipp 119).

Prenatal development is often divided into three major phases.

1. The period of the zygote (conception to implantation 10-14 days)
 2. The period of the embryo (15 - 56 days)
 3. The period of the foetus (57 - until birth)
1. The first phase, called the **period of the zygote**, lasts from conception through implantation, when the developing zygote becomes firmly attached to the wall of the uterus. The period of the zygote normally lasts about 10 to 14 days (qtd. in Kipp 120).
 2. The second phase of prenatal development, **the period of the embryo**, lasts from the beginning of the third week through the end of the eighth. This is the time when virtually all the major organs are formed and the heart begins to beat (120).
 3. The third phase, **the period of the foetus**, lasts from the ninth week of pregnancy until the baby is born. During this phase, all the major organ systems begin to function, and the developing organism grows rapidly (120).

The periods of prenatal development can be seen in the Canon too. Specially, Indaka Sutta states five stages in the prenatal development as kalala, abbhuda, pesi, ghana and pasākha. By following these stages respectively within nine or ten months the being is born in the human world (Majjhima Nikāya, PTS. i. 266).³ In Aṭṭhakathā, the stages are explained one by one.

Kallaṃ - It is called Kalala which is similar to a drop of oil (coconut oil) and its colour (Sānyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, PTS. i. 300).⁴ Here, the drop of oil would have taken from a hair which at first put into a cup of oil and then taken out. Therefore, this Kalala is a very small one which is hard to see even through the eyes.

Abbudaṃ - It is called 'abbuda' which has been growing seven days from kalala (300).⁵

Pesiṃ - It is called 'pesi' which has been growing seven days from abbuda (300).⁶

Ghanam - 'Pesi' that has been grown seven days is called 'ghana'. It becomes like egg-shaped as a result of kamma (300).⁷

Pasākhāṃ - At the fifth week, there arise five drops for two hands, two legs and the head (301).⁸

According to the facts found in the Canon, the prenatal development from zygote to foetus is fivefold. Furthermore, Indaka sutta finalizes that body hair, nails, etc., would grow in addition to the hair of the head, in the forty second week (301).⁹

The prenatal development in Buddhism begins with three conditions (Majjhima Nikāya. i, 266).¹⁰ They are:

1. Parents should be sexually united.
2. Mother should be in her period of fertilization.
3. Viññāṇa should come to the womb (266).¹¹

The Aṭṭhakathā states the process in detail. Accordingly, in Buddhism, the prenatal development begins with *mātā ca utunī* honti; the fertilization of the mother. Before this period, the womb begins to discharge the unfertilized egg and it is called the menstruation. After the menstruation period, the womb is ready to be fertilized. The seven days after the menstruation there begins the period of fertilisation that lasts seven days (Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, ii. 310).¹² In psychology also there introduced seven days fertile period. Sperm is alive around four to five days, while ovum is alive for two days. Therefore, what is mentioned in Aṭṭhakathā is clear and factual. Therefore, the fertile period is between from five days before the ovulation to two days after the ovulation. For instance, if the ovulation is on 12th, the fertile period is from 8th to 14th. This is the time to be sexually united.

According to the facts given above, parents may sexually unite before the ovulation. That is why in the Sutta the process is given orderly. In that sense, parents should sexually be united before the ovulation. Secondly, ovulation may happen. Even in psychology it is

accepted that since the ovum has energetically been remaining only 48 hours after the ovulation. Therefore, parents should have to unite before the ovulation. Secondly, the ovulation would occur. If the first two are functioned, the gandhabba comes to the womb. Here, Buddha has used the term 'gandhabba' which means that travels. Therefore, it travels in the cycle of birth and death unless it experiences the final extinction, nibbāna. Here, Buddha did not use the term *viññāṇa* because it is a reason to fall the listener into the extreme of eternalism. According to the Aṭṭhakatā this gandhabba is not a being who is wandering near by her, but it is a being that comes right at the moment according to its kamma (310).¹³

The gandhabba comes to the embryo at the time of implantation. This is a process. Therefore, there is no slightest moment or intermediate life between the two existences. In Abhidhamma this process is explained in details under the fourteen modes of consciousness (*kicca-saṅgaha*) and the seventeen thought moments (*citta-vīthi*).

The first chapter of the Abhidhammattasaṅgaha, Citta-Saṅgaha-Vibhāga, Consciousness is classified according to the nature (*jāti*) and planes or states (*bhūmi*). In Kicca Saṅgaha, the different function of all the 89 types of consciousness are explained in detail (Anuruddhacariya 163). The fourteen modes of functions introduced in Kicca-Saṅgaha are (161);¹⁴

1. re-linking (*paṭisandhi*)
2. life continuum (*bhavaṅga*)
3. apprehending (*āvajjana*)
4. seeing (*dassana*)
5. hearing (*savana*)
6. smelling (*ghāyana*)
7. tasting (*sāyana*)
8. contacting (*phusana*)

9. receiving (*sampañiccana*)
10. investigating (*santāraṇa*)
11. determining (*vottapana*)
12. impulsion (*javana*)
13. retention (*tadārammana*)
14. decease (*cuti*)

The one's process of thoughts would end with *cuti*. Just after the *cuti*, the next thought moment is *pañisandhi*. Here, between *cuti* and *pañisandhi*, there is no gap or space or any other thought moment but *bhavaṅga* continues. However, when the *citta-vīthi* is considered we can find that it is used for two purposes. One is to show the thought process that generally happens every day. In other words, throughout the life of an individual, the thought processes arise and ceases. The story is given to identify this process in the commentaries. A person having covered his head sleeps under a mango tree full of ripe fruits. A fruit falls near him and he awakes. Uncovering his head and opening his eyes, he looks at the fruit. He takes the fruit, squeezes it and smells it. Knowing its ripeness, he eats it and swallows it with saliva. He then sleeps again (Galmangoda 136). This is also a thought process. Here death or *cuti* means the end of the thought process and *pañisandhi* means the origin of new thought process. According to the context this cannot be applied. Here *pañisandhi* can apply only for the implantation or to the new birth.

The confusion has arisen here because of the *bhavaṅga*. According to the suggestions given by the scholars, there are three places where the *bhavaṅga* arises. They are (Gethim 139-141):

1. When the man is in the deep sleep where there are no dreams.
2. Between two thought processes (*citta-vīthi*)
3. Between two existences

Out of the three, only the last can apply to the context of implantation. Since the bhavaṅga is between two existences there is no room for an intermediate life. That is why in Aṭṭhakathā has mentioned that the gandhabba is not moving near by the mother and it comes to the womb according to its kamma (Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā. ii. 310).¹⁵

Therefore, after the ovulation the sperm and the ovum would meet in the fallopian tube and becomes a zygote. Now the first two activities are completed but not yet it becomes a being or an embryo. Zygote becomes embryo or kalala only when the gandhabba has arrived. In psychology it is called implantation.

In psychology, implantation is discussed in detail. The fertile period of a woman is determined by analyzing her menstrual cycle with an ovulation calculator or fertility chart. Normally, the cycle is a 28 day cycle. During the 14th day after a period, the ovum is released. This process is called ovulation and the days 12 to 16 days after a period are said to be a woman's most fertile period (Kipp 647). Ovulation is the release of a single, mature egg from a follicle that is developed in the ovary. It usually occurs regularly, around day 14 of a 28-day menstrual cycle. Once released, the egg is capable of being fertilized for 12 to 48 hours before it begins to disintegrate. This is the most fertile period of the woman's cycle: during ovulation, the chances of conception are highest. The fertile period starts about 4-5 days before ovulation, and ends about 24-48 hours after it. This is because sperm can live in female body for approximately 4 to 5 days, and the egg can live for 24 to 48 hours after being released. On the day before and the day of ovulation a female is more fertile. Knowing the fertile days either the chances of getting pregnant can be increased or avoid an unwanted pregnancy. As mentioned in Aṭṭhakathā, a continues period of seven days is stated as the most fertile days for a woman to be impregnate and such a woman has been compared to the paddy field which is ready to be cultivated (Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā. ii. 310).¹⁶

As the fertilized ovum, or zygote, moves down the fallopian tube toward the uterus, it is divided by mitosis into two cells. These two cells and all the resulting cells continue to divide, forming a ball-like structure, or blastocyst, that will contain 60 to 80 cells within 4 days of conception. Cell differentiation has already begun. The inner layer of the blastocyst will become the embryo, and the outer layer of cells will develop into tissues that protect and nourish the embryo (Kipp 122).

As the blastocyst approaches the uterus 6 to 10 days after the conception, small, burrlike tendrils emerge from its outer surface. When the blastocyst reaches the uterine wall, these tendrils burrow inward, tapping the pregnant woman's blood supply. This is implantation. This process is well explained in *Aṭṭhakathā* with no distinction (*Saṅyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*. i. 301).¹⁷

Implantation is quite a development in itself. There is a specific "window of implantation" during which the blastocyst must communicate with the uterine wall, position itself, attach, and invade. This implantation choreography takes about 48 hours and occurs 7 to 10 days after ovulation, with the entire process being completed about 10 to 14 days after ovulation (Hoozemans et al., 2004). Once the blastocyst is implanted it looks like a small translucent blister on the wall of the uterus.

The period of the embryo lasts from implantation (roughly the third week) through the eighth week of pregnancy. By the third week, the embryonic disk rapidly differentiates into three cell layers. The outer layer, or ectoderm, will become the nervous system, skin, and hair. The middle layer, or mesoderm, will become the muscles, bones, and circulatory system. The inner layer, or endoderm, will become the digestive system, lungs, urinary tract, and other vital organs such as the pancreas and liver (Kipp 122).

Only about half of all fertilized ova are firmly implanted, and perhaps as many as half of all such implants are either genetically abnormal and fail to develop, or burrow into a site incapable of sustaining them and are miscarried (Moore & Persaud, 1993; Simpson, 1993). So,

nearly three zygotes out of four fail to survive the initial phase of prenatal development (*Saṅyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*. i. 301). This is why three conditions which are directly related to the pregnancy are given in Buddhism. Mahātanhāsamkaya Sutta and Assalayana Sutta state the three conditions. The Mahātanhāsamkaya Sutta says even though the first; mother and father should be united and the second; mother should be in her fertile period occurred if bhavanga does not come to the womb or to the zygote, the pregnancy does not come true (*Majjhima Nikāya*. i. 266).¹⁸ The three conditions are;

1. *mātāpitaro ca sannipatitā honti* - mother and father should unite sexually
2. *mātā ca utunī hoti* - mother should be in her fertile period
3. *gandhabbo ca paccupaṭṭhito hoti* - *viññāṇa* should come to the womb

Furthermore, the development proceeds at a breathtaking pace during the period of the embryo. In the third week after conception, a portion of the ectoderm folds into a neural tube that soon becomes the brain and spinal cord. By the end of the fourth week, the heart has not only formed but already begun to beat. The eyes, ears, nose, and mouth are also beginning to form, and buds that will become arms and legs suddenly appear. At this point, the embryo is only about 1/4th of an inch long, but already 10,000 times the size of the zygote from which it developed. At no time in the future will this organism ever grow as rapidly or change as much as it has during the first prenatal month (Kipp 122).

Therefore, it is factual to confirm that zygote becomes embryo only when the gandhabba comes to the womb. In other words implantation is done only after the arrival of gandhabba.

The day gandhabba comes to the womb of a human mother should be calculated. For instance, a mother of twenty eight day cycle could be taken. If she gets her menstruation on the first of each month, her ovulation would be on 12th or at the end of the second week. Then,

implantation would be on the 18th or before the end of third week (figure 09). Therefore, if the 28 day cycle is possible, the following would be possible.

1. She should be sexually united on or before the 12th - *mātāpitū sannipatitā honti*
2. She should be fertilized on or after the 12th - *mātā utunī hoti*
3. The gandhabba should arrive after the 12th - *gandhabbo paccupaññhito hoti*

Endnotes

¹ See Mahatānhasamkaya Sutta to identify how the characteristics of *Viññāṇa* is explained with reference to the Dependent Origination: "paṭiccasamuppannaṃ viññāṇaṃ"

² Read Samyutta Nikaya Commentary, to notice "na mātukucchismim ekappahāreṇeva nibbattati, anupubbena pana vaḍḍhatī" ti dassento paṭhamamṃ kallaṃ hotīti ādimāha".

³ See Mahatānhasamkaya Sutta; tamenāni, bhikkhave, mātā nava vā dasa vā māse gabbhaṃ kucchinā

⁴ Read; "tilatelassa yathā bindu, sappimaṇḍo anāvilo / evaṃ vaṇṇapaṭibhāgaṃ, kalalaṃ sampavuccatī".

⁵ See; "sattāhaṃ kalalaṃ hoti, paripakkaṃ samūhataṃ / vivaṭṭamānaṃ tam bhāvaṃ, abbudaṃ nāma jāyatī".

⁶ See; "'sattāhaṃ abbudaṃ hoti, paripakkaṃ samūhataṃ / vivaṭṭamānaṃ taṃ bhāvaṃ, pesi nāma ca jāyatī "

⁷ Read; "sattāhaṃ pesi bhavati, paripakkaṃ samūhataṃ, / vivaṭṭamānaṃ tam bhāvaṃ, ghanoti nāma jāyati. / yathā kukkutyā aṇḍhaṃ, samantā parimaṇḍalaṃ / evaṃ ghanassa saṅghānaṃ, nibbattaṃ kammaṃ paccayā'ti.

⁸ Read; "ghanā pasākhā jāyantī pañcame sattāhe dvinnaṃ hatthipādānaṃ sīsassa vatthāya pañca pīlakā jāyantī, yaṃ sandhāyetaṃ vuttaṃ "pañcame, bhikkhave, sattāhe pañca pīlakā saṅghahanti kammato' ti".

⁹ Read; "ito paraṃ chaṭṭhasattamādānī sattāhāni atikkamma desanaṃ saṅkhipitvā dvācattālīse sattāhe pariṇatakālaṃ gahetvā dassento kesāti ādimāha. tathā kesā lomā nakhāpi cāti dvācattālīse sattāhe etāni jāyanti".

¹⁰ Read Mahatānhasamkaya sutta; "tiṇṇaṃ □ kho pana, bhikkhave, sannipātā gabbhassāvakkanti hoti".

¹¹ Read Mahatanhasamkaya sutta; "yato ca kho bhikkhave, *mātāpitāro* ca sannipatitā honti, *mātā* ca utunī hoti, gandhabbo ca paccupaññhito hoti, evaṃ *tiṇṇaṃ* sannipātā gabbhassāvakkanti hoti".

¹² Read; "Suddhe vatthumhi *mātāpitūsu ekavāraṃ* sannipatitesu *yāva satta divasāni* kettameva hoti".

¹³ Read; "***mātā ca utunī hotīti*** idaṃ utusamayaṃ sandhāya vuttaṃ. *mātugamassa kira yasmiṃ okāse* dārako nibbattati, tattha mahati lohitapiḷakā saññahitvā bhijjivā paggharati, vatthu suddhaṃ hoti, suddhe vatthumhi *mātāpitūsu ekavāraṃ* sannipatitesu *yāva satta divasāni* kettameva hoti. tasmīṃ samaye hatthaggaḥaveṇiggāhādīnā aṅgaparāmasanenapi dārako nibbattatiyeva. **gandhabboti** tattrūpagasattho. **paccupaññhito hotīti** na *mātāpitūnaṃ* sannipātāṃ olokayamāno samīpe ñhito paccupaññhito nāma hoti. kammayantayantito pana eko satto tasmīṃ okāse nibbattanako hotīti ayamettha adhippāyo".

¹⁴ Read Kicca Saṅgaho in Abhidhammattasaṅgaha; "*Paṭisaṅdhi-bhavaṅgāvajjanadassana-savana-ghāyana-sāyana-phasana-sampaṭiccana-santīraṇa-vottapana-javana-tadārammaṇa-cutivasena cuddasavidāni bhavanti*".

¹⁵ Read; "**gandhabboti** tattrūpagasattho. **paccupaññhito hotīti** na *mātāpitūnaṃ* sannipātāṃ olokayamāno samīpe ñhito paccupaññhito nāma hoti. kammayantayantito pana eko satto tasmīṃ okāse nibbattanako hotīti ayamettha adhippāyo".

¹⁶ Read; "suddhe vatthumhi *mātāpitūsu ekavāraṃ* *sannipatitesu yāva satta divasāni* kettameva hoti. tasmīṃ samaye hatthaggaḥaveṇiggāhādīnā aṅgaparāmasanenapi dārako nibbattatiyeva".

¹⁷ Read; " tena so tattha *yāpentīti* tassa hi *nābhito uññhito nālo mātu* udarapatalena ekābaddho hoti. so uppaladaṇḍako viya chiddo, tena *āhāraraso saṃsaritvā āhārasamuññhānarūpaṃ samuññhāpeti*. evaṃ so dasa māse *yāpeti*. *mātukucchigato naroti mātuyā tirokucchigato, kucchiyā* abbhantaragatoti attho".

¹⁸ Read Mahatanhasamkaya Sutta; "idha *mātāpitāro* ca sannipatitā honti, *mātā* ca na utunī hoti, gandhabbo ca na paccupaññhito hoti, neva *tāva* gabbhassāvakkanti hoti".

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