

A Comparative Study of *Samādhi* in the *Visuddhimagga* and in the *Yoga Sutra*

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The *Visuddhimagga* and the *Yoga Sutra* are two classical texts which represent on the one hand, Theravada Buddhist tradition and on the other, one of the classical Hindu traditions. Both these texts explain the meditative state of *samādhi*. This paper provides a comparative analysis of definitions and the gradual stages of *samādhi* as presented in the two texts. It is evident that though these two texts use different terminologies in their presentations, they interestingly seem to refer to similar meditative experiences showing striking parallels. Since each text emphasizes different aspects of meditative experiences, a comparative study of these texts can shed light on each other enabling a better understanding of *samādhi*. However, the two texts are situated in the doctrinal context of the tradition to which they belong. Each text offers its presentation of *samādhi* relying on the concepts and terms, which are derived from its doctrinal background. Therefore, explanation of *samādhi* in one text cannot be considered as simply analogous to the other. Still a comparative analysis of the two texts shows that they can function as complementary texts which together enhance our understanding of meditative states.

INTRODUCTION

Samādhi is a highly acclaimed meditative state expounded both in the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Yoga Sutra* which represent Theravada Buddhist tradition on the one hand and on the other hand, one of the classical Hindu traditions. Both of these texts admit that *samādhi* is an intensely focused and unwavering state of mind, which is indispensable to achieve the ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*). Each text provides specific definitions, gradual stages of *samādhi* and techniques to achieve it. Though these two texts use different terminologies in their presentations, they interestingly seem to refer to the similar meditative experiences showing striking parallels. However, the two texts are situated in the doctrinal context of the tradition to which they belong. Each text offers its presentation of *samādhi* relying on the concepts and terms, which are derived from its doctrinal background.

This paper aims to provide a comparative analysis of definitions and gradual stages of *samādhi* as presented in the two texts. First, the paper examines the parallels between different stages of *samādhi* found in the two texts and then shows how the terminologies and explanations of each text shed light on the other text enabling a better understanding of the notions. Secondly, the paper will analyze how, despite close parallels, understanding of meditative experiences are ultimately bound to the doctrinal framework of each tradition.

DEFINITION OF *SAMĀDHI*

The Visuddhimagga is a post-canonical text of Theravāda Buddhism composed by a venerated Buddhist monk, Buddhaghosa in 5th century A.D. (Ñānamoli, 1956: ix). Though the text was written in the 5th century, it basically summarizes and interprets the teaching of the Pāli canon (*Tipitaka*) which belongs to a much earlier period. The Yoga Sutra is one of the earliest systematic treatises of meditative practices in Indian culture. Though there is no scholarly consensus on the authorship and the time of composition of this text, the majority of scholars consider it to have been composed by Patanjali who lived around the 3rd century A.D. (Miller, 1995: 6). While the Yoga Sutra remains an essential text in classical Hindu philosophy and meditation practice, the Visuddhimagga stands as the principal non-canonical authority of the practice of meditation and the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism.

In both the Yoga Sutra (YS) and the Visuddhimagga (Vism), *samādhi* appears as a paradigmatic concept in their presentation of the process of meditation. In the classical Yoga tradition, *samādhi* appears as the last item of the eight limbs of Yoga (*Aṣṭāṅgayoga*). The eight limbs of Yoga present the gradual steps that a yogi would follow in his yogic development. These eight limbs include moral observances (*yama*), restrictions (*niyama*), posture (*āsana*), breathing technique (*prāṇāyāma*), sensory withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*), fixation (*dhāraṇa*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and then *samādhi* as the culmination of this practice (YS II, 29). In the Buddhist context, *samādhi* stands as the sixth of the seven factors of enlightenment (*Satta-bojjhanga*) which are to be cultivated in the process of attaining enlightenment. These factors are mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of mental states (*dhamma-vicaya*), energy (*virīya*), happiness (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), *samādhi* and equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Vism IV, 51f). In the noble eightfold path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*), *samādhi* (with the qualification of *sammā*, right) appears as the last one together with right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort and right mindfulness. In the context

of classical Yoga, *samādhi* has been translated by different scholars in a number of ways such as “contemplation,” “concentration,” and “meditative absorption.” In Theravāda Buddhist context, *samādhi* is usually rendered as “concentration.” However, profundity of the concept of *samādhi* poses a challenge for scholars to render it by a single term.

Both texts maintain a technical clarity of each concept they use throughout their respective presentation. It is fruitful to see how these texts define *samādhi* in the beginning of this comparative study. The first of four sections of YS is titled, *samādhipāda* as it deals with techniques and structure of *samādhi*. There, YS characterizes *samādhi* in the following way:

In one whose modifications of mind (*citta vṛtti*) have been annihilated, the mind becomes transparent, and, like a clear crystal, takes the color of what it rests on, whether it be the cognizer, the act of cognition or the cognized (YS I, 41).¹

In this definition, two important aspects of *samādhi* are revealed. The first is its unwavering and settled nature which is free from fluctuations. The second is that it is fully occupied with the given object. The first aspect refers to the framework of *samādhi* and the second aspect refers to the constituent of *samādhi*. The simile used in YS here is very helpful. A crystal due to its freedom from defects and color can fully reflect what it rests on. The transparency of crystal and its fully resting on a single object makes it possible for crystal to take the color of that object. In *samādhi* state, the mind in its framework is free from modifications (*vṛtti*) and, in its contents, is fully assimilated by the object of meditation. This second aspect is prominent in another definition of *samādhi*. “The same [contemplation] when there is consciousness only of the object of meditation and not of itself [the mind] is *samādhi*” (YS III, 3). The mind’s assimilation by the object of meditation is sharpened to the extent that mind’s awareness of itself is lost. The mind’s awareness of itself here probably refers to subjectivity. According to YS, *samādhi* is a state in which subjectivity is transcended.

Vism devotes one of its three major sections to *samādhi* and explains basic characteristics, different levels and developing techniques of *samādhi* throughout 11 chapters within the relevant section. Vism defines *samādhi* as “unification of mind” (*Cittass’ekaggatā*).² It further says, “It is *Samādhi* in the sense of concentrating (*samādhāna*). It is the centering of consciousness and consciousness-concomitants evenly and rightly on a single object” (Vism. III, 3). This definition refers to

unification of mind and mental factors to a state of one-pointedness and evenly placing it on a chosen object. Not only placing but also maintaining this focus is also meant here. Vism reiterates,

So it is the state, in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object undistracted and unscarred, that should be understood as *samādhi* (Vism III, 3).

The Buddhist analysis points out that the basic function of unifying the mind occurs in every sensory experience ensuring that mind takes only one object in a given moment. However, when such one-pointedness is maintained beyond bare stabilizing of mind on an object to a higher degree of steadiness and non-distraction of mind, then it is termed as *samādhi* (Gunaratana, 1985:9).

Two definitions of *samādhi* offered by these two texts appear very similar. Interestingly, both definitions refer to the same two aspects of *samādhi*: The settling or unifying aspect of mind and mind's full occupation with a chosen object. Both texts are in agreement with the general nature of *samādhi*.

Though the two texts maintain a general definition of *samādhi*, they do not present *samādhi* only as a single specific state of mind. In both texts, *samādhi* stands for a wide variety of gradually ranging super-conscious states of the mind that recognizes further refinements within the *samadhi* stage.

LEVELS AND VARIETIES OF SAMĀDHI

Visuddhimagga presents a systematic detailed explanation on the gradual levels of *samādhi*. It first explains a number of objects of meditation that a meditator can select to focus on. This explanation altogether points out 40 objects of meditation which include models of four material elements (earth, water, fire, air), patches of colors, breathing and contemplations on various subjects (Vism III, 104). Once the meditator has selected an appropriate object or a meditation master has recommended him an object, then he focuses his mind on the object and tries to keep it there, fixed and alert. If the mind strays, he notices this quickly, catches it, and brings it back gently but firmly to the object, doing this over and over as often as is necessary. This exercise gives rise to a mental image of the object, which is called "the preliminary sign" (*parikamma-nimitta*) (Vism. IV 30). Then the meditator begins to focus on this sign until it gets very bright and clear in his mind. Vism points out two further

developments of clarity with regard to this sign, namely "learning sign" (*uggaha-nimitta*) and "counterpart sign" (*patibhāga-nimitta*). At this stage five mental hindrances (Sensual Desire, Ill Will, Sloth and Torpor, Restlessness and worry, Skeptical doubt) subside and "Upacāra-samādhi" is attained.

... as soon as it [counterpart sign] arises the hindrances are quite suppressed, the defilements subside, and the mind becomes concentrated in *upacāra-samādhi* (Vism. IV 31).

When the meditator continues to develop his concentration, five mental qualities called, *Jhāna* factors are developed in his mind. They are, as translated by Bhikkhu Nānamoli, applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), happiness (*pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). With the strengthening of these *jhāna* factors, the state of "appanā-samādhi" is attained. Even in the early stage of *samādhi*, the *jhāna* factors are present, but they lack strength and steadiness. Thus the mind in this stage is compared to a child who has just learned to walk: he takes a few steps, falls down, gets up, and walks some more, and again falls down. But the mind in *appanā-samādhi* is like a healthy man who wants to stand: he could stand for a whole day (Vism IV 33). With further practice of this concentration, the mind attains four levels of *samādhi* which are called *jhāna*. Vism expounds four *Jhanas* and they are gradual developments of levels of *samādhi* in which mind gradually drops certain factors of the preceding levels in each subsequent level. The first *jhāna* has five factors: applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), happiness (*pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and unification of mind (*ekaggatā*) (Vism. IV,106). In the subsequent stages of *Jhāna*, these factors gradually drop keeping unification of mind (*ekaggatā*) and allowing equanimity (*upekkhā*) to arise at the last stage.

First *Jhāna*: "Quite secluded from sense desires, secluded from unprofitable things, he enters upon and dwells in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*) and with happiness (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) born of seclusion" (Vism IV 79).

Second *Jhāna*: "With the stilling of applied thought (*vitakka*) and sustained thought he enters and dwells in the second *jhāna*, which has internal confidence and singleness of mind without applied thought (*vitakka*), without sustained thought (*vicāra*) but with happiness (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) born of concentration" (Vism. IV 139).

Third *Jhāna*: With the fading away of happiness (*pīti*), he dwells in equanimity, mindful and fully aware he feels bliss (*sukha*) with his body, he enters upon and dwells in the third *jhāna* (Vism IV 153).

Fourth *Jhāna*: With the abandoning of pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters upon and dwells in the fourth *jhāna*, which has neither-pleasure-nor-pain and with purity of mindfulness due to equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Vism IV 183).

Beyond these four *jhāna[s]* Vism elucidates four more levels of *samādhi* which are called “immaterial states” (*āruppa*). In these states, mind does not rely on any material objects and surpasses the sphere of materiality altogether. Though at the fourth *jhāna*, gross materiality has been already surmounted, the meditator may still develop dispassion to materiality and all counterpart experiences. Then the meditator can attain immaterial spheres in his meditation. These meditative states are attained through focusing on immaterial or formless objects of meditation such as boundless space. In each stage of these states, the object of meditation is changed from a relatively gross object to a subtler one. Gunaratana remarks that in the earlier *jhāna* states, the gradual refinement of consciousness occur due to change in the internal composition of those states. But in these immaterial states, the ascending from one to the next occurs not as a result of a change in internal constitution but due to the refinement of the objects of meditation (1985:108). Therefore, these immaterial states are named after their respective objects. Vism expounds these four states as follows.

Base of Boundless Space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*): With complete surmounting of perceptions of matter, with the disappearances of perceptions of resistance, with non-attention to perceptions of variety, [and aware of] “unbounded space,” he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of boundless space (Vism X, 12).

Base of Boundless Consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*): By completely surmounting the base consisting of boundless space, [aware of] “unbounded consciousness,” he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of boundless consciousness (Vism X, 27).

Base of Nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*): By completely surmounting the base consisting of boundless consciousness,

[aware that] “There is nothing,” he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of nothingness (Vism X, 36).

Base of Neither Perception nor Non-perception (*nevasaññā nāsaññāyatana*): By completely surmounting the base consisting of nothingness he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception (Vism X, 42).

The pinnacle of the states of *samādhi* in Buddhist mental culture is called *nirodha samāpatti* or *saññā vedayita nirodha* (The state of the cessation of perception and feeling). The distinguishing feature of this attainment is the cessation of all mental activity in its entirety, thus generally known as “cessation experience”. This attainment is seen as the result of the balanced application of both concentration and investigation (or insight). Gunaratana explains that a meditator wishing to attain cessation experience (*saññā vedayita nirodha*) enters each of the above eight states (both *jhānas* and *āruppā*), in turn emerges from it, and contemplates each *jhāna*’s formation with insight as impermanent, unsatisfying and selfless. After completing this procedure with each meditative attainment up to the mental sphere of nothingness, the next to the last *āruppā* and he attends to certain preliminaries, which include resolutions of the duration in which he stays in this state of *samādhi* (1985: 189). Then the meditator determines to be without consciousness for a particular length of time.

Now when he has thus attained the base of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*) and emerged and done this preparatory task, he then attains the base of neither- perception- nor non-perception (*nevasaññā nāsaññāyatana*). Then after one or two turns of consciousness have passed, he becomes without consciousness, he achieves cessation (Vism XXIII, 43)

The stopping of consciousness takes place automatically, as a result of meditator’s determination to reach this state of cessation. The meditator will remain in this state for as long as he has predetermined (Gunaratana, 1985: 189).

Thus this level appears to be a state of the stopping of the mental continuum altogether. As Dharmasiri points out, it is a transcendence of all possible forms of experience by a radical negative experience. It is an experience only in the sense that one who undergoes it can think of it afterwards. It is not ‘an experience’ while it lasts (Dharmasiri, 1974: 201). However the above description shows that this attainment is a

result of investigating the conditionality of all forms of meditative experiences. The balanced application of concentration and insight allows the meditator to understand that each meditative experience is ultimately conditioned. The investigation of the conditionality of meditative experiences allows one to go into a deeper level and to produce “the cessation experience” which is a transcendence of all positive forms of experience.

Yoga Sutra elaborates several levels of *samādhi*. Before we move into these levels, it is helpful to discuss prior stages of *samādhi*. First five limbs of Yoga eliminate the external causes for mental distraction. Once a meditator followed first five limbs, his mind is in a fitting position for an inner transformation. The beginning of actual inner transformation is called *dhāraṇa*, the sixth limb of Yoga. YS explains, “*Dhāraṇa* is the confining of the mind within a limited mental area” (YS III, 1). This is the fixation of mind on a chosen object of meditation and limiting the mind’s movements. YS recommends a number of objects of meditation including the recitation of “Om” and breath awareness. In the *dhāraṇa* stage, the meditator keeps the mind continuously engaged in the consideration of the object and brings it back again and again if the connection is broken (Taimni, 1961: 278). In this stage, he overcomes distractions of the mind reducing them in a progressive manner. The next stage is called *dhyāna* and YS defines it, “The uninterrupted flow of the mind towards the object [chosen for meditation] is *Dhyāna*” (YS III, 2). While, in the earlier stage, the meditator limits his mental territory through paying his attention to a chosen object, in this stage, he sharpens his focus and maintains that attention as a continuous whole. The continuity of mind’s focused attention in *dhyāna* is usually compared to the continuity of flow of oil being poured from one vessel into another (Taimni, 1961: 280). Once this uninterrupted continuity is maintained then gradually mind moves to the next stage, *samādhi*. However, one important change happening in this stage is the disappearance of the mind’s awareness of itself. In *samādhi*, the subjective role of the mind is reduced to the utmost limit, “as if, mind is devoid of its own nature” (*svarūpasunyam iva*. YS III, 3).

However, this is the underlying general nature of *samādhi*. YS describes ascending levels of *samādhi*. The first level of *samādhi* is known as *samprajñāta-samādhi*. YS defines it, “*Samprajñāta Samādhi* is that which is accompanied by reasoning, reflection, bliss and sense of pure being” (*Vitarka-vicārānandāsmītanugamāt samprajñātah*. YS I, 17). This level is explained in terms of the contents of the mind which are left after bringing it to a higher degree of focus as described earlier. At this stage, mind is free from external disturbances, inner fluctuations (*vṛtti*)

and has reduced the sense of subjectivity. Then it is left with certain cognitive and affective functions. Reasoning (*vitarka*), reflection (*vicāra*), bliss (*ānanda*) and sense of pure being (*asmitā*) are these functions. The mind is completely bounded to the object of meditation and it is experiencing those functions with regard to the object. With regard to these functions, four successive phases of *samprañjāta Samādhi* have been recognized.

1. *Samprañjāta vitarka*
2. *Samprañjāta vicāra*
3. *Samprañjāta sānanda*
4. *Samprañjāta sasmitā*

These four phases correlate with four layers of *guṇas* (characteristics) of phenomenal objects as taught in the classical Yoga. In *samprañjāta vitarka*, the meditator penetrates to the “*viśesa*”(particular) level of *guṇas* of the object of meditation. He penetrates to the next level of *gunas* called “*aviśesa*” (universal) in the *samprañjāta vicāra*. The third phase, *samprañjāta sānanda* brings the meditator to the “*linga*” (unity in diversity) level of *gunas*. In the last phase, *samprañjāta sasmitā*, he penetrates to the last level of *guṇas* called, “*alinga*” (substratum) (Taimni, 1961: 180).

The next level, *asamprañjāta-samādhi* is achieved through abandoning of these cognitive and affective functions. YS explains the nature of this level, “*Asamprajñāta Samādhi* is that in which remnant impressions left in the mind on dropping of the content of the mind after previous practice” (YS I, 18). As we saw earlier, the early level of *samādhi* had four types of contents in the mind. In this level, even those contents are dropped and the mind is calmed to a further degree. This level refers to a complete absence of discursive aspect of the mind. However, the impressions (*samskāra*) of those dropped functions are still left in the mind.

YS also refers to a level of *samādhi* called, *sabīja-samādhi*. It encompasses much of the field of earlier levels of *samādhi*. *sabīja* means “with seed” and what is meant by “seed” here is the object of meditation. The states of *samādhi* which are relied on as an object of meditation can be known by this name (Woods, 1927: 92). YS recognizes several phases of *sabīja-samādhi*. One is the phase called, *savitarka*. “Mixed state where words, meaning, knowledge and imagination are present is *savitarka*”(YS I, 42). The second phase is *nirvitarka* and YS explains it, “When memory is purified, mind is void of its own form and is luminous

with true knowledge of its object, then *nirvitarka*”(YS IM, 43). The third phase is explained as, “State of *samādhi* concerned with subtle objects extends up to the *alinga* state of *guṇas* (of the meditation object)” (YS I, 45). In all these three phases, the mind relies on an object of meditation and hence YS claims, “Those [stages] constitute *sabīja samādhi*” (YS I, 46). These phases closely resemble the phases of *samprajñāta-samādhi*. YS has utilized this term to introduce the other ascending level of *samādhi*, which is *nirbīja-samadhi*, the seedless state. YS explains the gradual process through which the meditator would reach this state. First “On attaining the utmost purity of the *nirvicāra* stage, there is a dawning of spiritual light” (YS I, 47). Here *nirvicāra* stage refers to equivalent state of *nirvitarka* in which reflection (*vicāra*) is absent. Then “Therein is direct cognition (*prajñā*), which holds the unalloyed Truth” (YS I, 48). This *prajñā* produces impressions (*samskāra*) which prevent the influences of previous impressions. However, towards the end even subtle impressions created by *prajñā* have to be abandoned. *Nirbīja-samādhi* is a state in which even those impressions are dropped. “On stoppage of even that impression, all ceasing *nirbīja* state (is attained)” (YS I, 51). At this stage, all modifications of mind (*citta vṛtti*), contents of mind (*pratyaya*), impressions created by those contents of mind (*samskāra*) and even impressions created by direct cognition (*prajñā*) are dropped. Taimni comments that at this level, the meditator transcends the realm of *prakṛti* altogether and reaches the realization of *puruṣa* (1961: 123). He further asserts,

“In the earlier stages of *Samprajñāta Samādhi* the dropping of the ‘seed’ leads the emergence of consciousness into the next subtler plane but after the *Asmitā* stage has been reached and the consciousness is centered on the Atmic plane, the dropping of the ‘seed’ will lead the emergence of consciousness into the plane of *Puruṣa* himself. The light which was up to this stage illuminates Itself, for it has withdrawn beyond the realm of these objects” (Taimni, 1961: 123).

YS in its fourth section refers to another *samādhi* called, “Dharma meghā”. *Yoga Bhāshya* explains, “...because the seeds of the subliminal-impressions have perished, there do not spring up for him any more presented ideas, – then the *Dharma meghā-samādhi* becomes his” (Woods, 1927: 341). It does not appear very different from the *Nirbīja-samādhi* in kind. However, this state is further characterized by the discriminative discernment (*viveka khyāti*) and constant passionlessness (*akusīth*) (YS IV, 29). The *Dharma meghā-samādhi* is the culmination of meditative process in YS.

PARALLELS

YS has been used as the handbook for the practice of meditative yoga in the classical Yoga tradition of Hinduism while Vism has served as the comprehensive guide book for the practice of meditation in the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. These two texts assume their significance in two different religious contexts and have been largely viewed by followers as exclusive to their tradition. However, a closer look at the definitions and stages of *samādhi* as explained by these texts show striking parallels.

YS explains the immediate prior stages of *samādhi* as *dhāraṇa* and *dhyāna*. *dhāraṇa* is primarily limiting mind's movement through fixing it on a chosen object of meditation. Vism recognizes a stage in which a mental image of the object of meditation appears in the meditator's mind, which is known as "the preliminary sign" (*parikamma-nimitta*). This sign is the result of fixing the mind on a chosen object of meditation for a considerable period of time. A close observation of these two explanations suggests that both texts refer to a similar stage that occurs in the beginning of the process of meditation. In referring to this stage, YS focuses on the aspect of meditator's role while Vism stresses the sharpening of the object of meditation in the meditator's mind. The next stage that Vism explains is the further brightening of the mental image of the meditation object. These bright and clear visions of the object, namely "learning sign" (*uggaha-nimitta*) and "counterpart sign" (*patibhāga-nimitta*) appear in the meditator's mind due to his continuous focus on it. YS recognizes *Dhyāna* as the next stage in which the meditator maintains the attention as an uninterrupted flow toward the object of meditation. Though it is not clear whether the scope of these stages mentioned in the two texts exactly match, it is evident again that the two texts place emphasis on different aspects of the same process. Due to this elaboration of different aspects by each text, these two explanations appear as profoundly complementary. By referring to YS, one can understand the subjective aspect of early stage of developing *samādhi* while with the help of Vism, one can comprehend the gradual transformation of the object of meditation in those stages. Two texts together provide a comprehensive picture of this beginning level of *samādhi*.

The most noted parallel of classical Yoga system and Buddhist tradition is that of *samprajñāta-samādhi* and four Buddhist Jhānas (Cousins, 1992; Bronkhorst, 1993; Crangle, 1994; Sarbacker, 2005). These two stages as presented in the two texts closely follow each other in both

content and process. *Samprajñāta-samādhi* is defined as having four characteristics: reasoning (*vitarka*), reflection (*vicāra*), bliss (*ānanda*) and sense of pure being (*asmitā*) (YS I, 17). The first *Jhāna* in Vism has five factors: applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), happiness (*pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and unification of mind (*ekaggatā*) (Vism. IV, 106). The translation of these terms appear differently here but it is worth noticing the original Pāli and Sankrit terms employed here to refer to those factors.

<i>Samprajñāta-samādhi</i> (YS)	First <i>Jhāna</i> (Vism)
<i>Vitarka</i>	<i>Vitakka</i>
<i>Vicāra</i>	<i>Vicāra</i>
<i>Ānanda</i>	<i>Pīti</i>
<i>Asmitā</i>	<i>Sukha</i>
	<i>Ekaggatā</i>

The first two factors of each set refer to certain cognitive functions of the focused mind while latter factors refer to the affective dimension of the focused mind. Both *ānanda* in Sanskrit and *pīti* in Pāli mean happiness. *Sukha* in Pāli also refers to a level of happiness which is physically felt in meditation. *Pīti* is primarily felt at the mental level and *sukha* can be understood as physical counterpart of that happiness (Vism IV, 100). It seems that Vism elaborates both the mental and physical aspect of this factor while YS renders it in a single term. Interestingly the two texts differ in the last factor. *Asmitā* means pure consciousness of the existence of *puruṣa* (universal Self). YS presents it as “the identity or blending together, as it were, of the power of consciousness (*puruṣa*) with the power of cognition (*buddhi*)” (YS II, 6). However, *ekaggatā* in Vism means one-pointedness of mind or complete unification of mind with the object of meditation (Vism. IV, 108). Vism does not recognize such pure consciousness of a greater reality and only refers to the quality of mental state at that stage.

Lance S. Cousins examines references to the above factors of *jhāna* in early Buddhist sources in both Pāli and Sanskrit languages comparing them with the characteristics of *samprajñāta-samādhi* and argues that the Buddhist list of factors of *jhāna* has been modified in the Yoga system (Cousins, 1992: 149). Though it is easy to see that both the traditions have been influenced by each other, it is not possible, with certainty, to decide which precedes which in its influence on the other. However, Cousins’s remarks that the Yoga system tends to have a cosmological orientation as opposed to psychological biases of the Buddhist explanation is insightful. Vism explains four stages of *jhāna* with a psychological orientation while YS (and its commentaries) tends

to present them with a cosmological orientation. As explained earlier, four phases of *samprajñāta-samādhi* are explained with reference to the four layers of *guṇas* (characteristics) of objects. In each phase, the meditator penetrates into those layers and finally comprehends the substratum of the object (Taimni, 1961: 180). Vism in its explanation of the four *jhānas* only points out the psychological refinements occurring in the meditator's mind in each stage.

It is quite interesting that in explaining the prior proximate stages of *samādhi*, the focus of Vism is on the refinement of the meditative object while the emphasis of YS is on the subjective aspect: the refinement of the meditator's attention. In explaining the first stages of *samādhi*, the focus of the texts seem to interchange. Both texts present gradual stages of *samādhi* as moving from gross levels to subtle levels at each stage. Vism explains this transition from grossness to subtlety as changes in psychological states while YS tends to focus on transition of the object moving to subtler objects. Different emphases of the two texts in presenting different stages of *samādhi* allow the reader to use them as complementary texts.

Asamprañjāta-samādhi in YS is a level of *samādhi* which is free from cognitive and affective functions of the mind. This is a moving from "gross" levels of *samādhi* to a "subtler" level through dropping the four mental functions of the *samprañjāta-samādhi*. The term, *prajñā* used in both names primarily means, "Cognition," while *samprañjāta-samādhi* is named as such referring the element of cognition that underlies it. The next level of Samadhi, *asamprañjāta-samādhi* has been characterized primarily by the absence of the element of cognition together with other factors of the *samprañjāta-samādhi*. Yoga Bhāshya explains that this level of *samādhi* is not "conscious" of meditation objects (Woods, 1927: 42). In the scheme of the four Buddhist *jhānas*, each ascending *jhāna* drops certain factors of the preceding *jhāna* and the fourth *jhāna* is a state in which both cognitive and affective factors of the early *jhānas* are absent (Vism IV 183). Accordingly, both the *asamprañjāta-samādhi* and the fourth *jhāna* refer to a similar transformation of mind. Though the exact categorization of these states may not precisely match, it is clear that both point to the same dimension of mental development.

The four immaterial *jhānas* in Vism are higher levels of *samādhi* which go beyond the usual objects of meditation to direct the mind on objectless space, consciousness, nothingness. Taimni interprets the *nirbīja-samādhi* as objectless meditation (1961: 115). If we follow Taimni's interpretation, the four immaterial *jhāna* in Vism appear very

close to *nirbīja-samādhi* in terms of the field of focus. However, the parallels are less obvious in the later levels of *samādhi* than in the early levels.

The notion of subliminal impressions (*samskāra/sankhāra*) is a central theme in both YS and Vism in explaining the progression of meditation and the final liberation. Ascending levels of *samādhi* in both texts aim at gradual suppression and consequent elimination of subliminal impressions of mind. In YS this goal is accomplished in *nirbīja-samādhi* and in Vism, the complete elimination of subliminal impressions is achieved in *nirodha-samāpatti* (also known as *saññāvedaitanirodha*).

IDIOSYNCRASIES

Despite the close similarities found in the presentations of levels of *samādhi* in the two texts, each text's classifications of *samādhi* and terminology are heavily based on the larger doctrinal framework that each text shares. The purpose of developing *samādhi* in both texts is to overcome suffering (*duhka /dukkha*). However, two texts have different views about how suffering arises. YS is in the view that suffering arises because of the false identification of *puruṣa* (Immutable and Universal Self) with the manifested mental processes of the individual, *prakṛti*. Therefore, the goal in YS is to isolate the *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. The classifications and explanations of *samādhi* in YS are presented to direct the meditator to transcend *prakṛti* and to experience the "isolation" of *puruṣa*. Yoga Bhāṣya interprets it, "...together with subliminal-impressions which are conducive to Isolation, the mind-stuff ceases [from its task]. When it ceases, the Self abides in himself and is therefore called pure and liberated." (Woods, 1927:98). In employing these notions of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, YS shares the doctrinal basis of Sāṅkhya philosophy. Vism, in contrast, sees that suffering arises due to craving (*taṇhā*) which is sprung from the ignorance (*avijjā*) of the selflessness of phenomena (*anattā*). The goal of *samādhi* in Vism is to facilitate the realization and experience of selflessness (*anttā*). Being a representative text of Buddhist philosophy, Vism does not postulate a *puruṣa* like Universal Self. The presentation of *samādhi* in Vism is organized in a way that guides the meditator to come to the realization of selflessness and consequently, to the experience of the extinguishing of suffering (*nibbāna*) through transcending craving and ignorance. Other than experiencing the very cessation of suffering, Vism does not present any level of *samādhi* which corresponds to a transcendental reality. Moreover, the concept of *samādhi* in YS encompasses the ultimate goal, the achieving *kaivalya* (isolation, freedom). In Vism, the concept of *samādhi* does not fully absorb its ultimate goal, *Nibbāna* (extinguishing,

freedom). *Samādhi* is the proximate cause of the insight that leads one to experience *Nibbāna*.

Though the similarities of definitions and levels of *samādhi* are evident in both texts and often explanations of each text can shed light on the other text in a complementary way, each text's presentation of *samādhi* cannot be fully comprehended out of its doctrinal framework. Both texts make use of a number of technical terms to describe the process of developing *samādhi*. Those terms are again drawn from their respective doctrinal frameworks. YS employs terms such as *guna*, *liṅga*, *aliṅga*, *bīja*, *svarūpa* which cannot be fully explained without referring to the Sāṅkhya philosophy. For example, in describing *vairāgya* (passionlessness), YS says, "This passionlessness is highest when discernment of the Self (*puruṣa*) results in thirstlessness for qualities (*guṇa*)" (Woods, 1927: 37). For one to understand this *sutra*, he should be familiar with Sāṅkhya concept of *guṇas*. Similarly, Vism uses the terms such as *sati*, *saññā*, *vedanā*, *upekkha*. In describing the highest level of *samādhi*, Vism defines it as the cessation of *saññā* and *vedanā*. Without a grasp of Buddhist concepts of *saññā* and *vedanā*, it is not possible to understand the full significance of this level of *samādhi*.

Avidyā/Avijjā is a common term that appeared in both YS and Vism. However, the meaning of the term in each text is not exactly the same. The term receives its specific meaning within the doctrinal background of each text. YS initially defines *avidyā* as "taking the non-eternal, impure, evil and non-*ātman* to be eternal, pure, good and *ātman* respectively" (YS II, 5). This phrase is interpreted to mean that *āvidyā* stands for the misrecognition of manifested matter (*prakṛti*), which are non-eternal, impure, evil and non-*ātman* with the transcendental Reality (*puruṣa*) which is eternal, pure, good and *ātman* (Taimni, 1961:141). *Avidyā*, in YS, means the ignorance of essential nature of transcendental Reality, *puruṣa*. However, In Vism, the meaning of *avidyā/avijjā* is tied to the Buddhist notion of suffering (*dukkhā*). In this context, *avijjā* means ignorance of nature, origin, cessation of suffering and the way to end suffering. The mechanism of suffering is the heart of understanding *avijjā* in Vism and the notion of Transcendental Reality assumes no significance there.

CONCLUSION

Both Visuddhimagga and Yoga Sutra present a systematic treatment of the meditative state, *samādhi* demonstrating striking parallels. The two texts stand very close to each other both in definitions and gradual levels

of *samādhi*. Though classifications and boundary levels of *samādhi* in each text do not coincide with each other, they throw a significant light on the similarity in dimensions of the meditative process. One of the reasons for these striking parallels could be that both Buddhism and the classical Yoga system grew in the same soil and influenced each other over centuries. Moreover, both traditions aim at a similar soteriological goal. Due to the different emphasis that each text places on certain aspects while keeping a similar orientation, the two texts together enable a better understanding of the meditative process in general. However, in appreciating these parallels, we should be conscious about the doctrinal background of the two texts. Even the influences they receive from each other and common goals were again conditioned by their overall worldviews and doctrinal standpoints. The explanation that each text presents can benefit the other. But no presentation of *samādhi* in one text can be considered as directly analogous to the other. At best these texts can function as complementary texts but not completely interchangeable. This may be the truth of various comparable religious and mystic traditions.

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NOTES

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- ¹ All references to *Yoga Sutra* follow the numbers of the sutras and the translation of I.K. Taimni (1961), if not otherwise mentioned.
- ² All references to *Visuddhimagga* follow the passage numbers and the translation of Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1956).