Buddhist Atomism

The theories of *paramâṇu* and *kalāpa* in post-canonical Buddhism

1 Buddhist psychology

Buddhist training, on a higher level, invariably focusses on understanding the mind, training it, and liberating it from suffering. The true nature of existence is marked by the characteristics by impermanence, suffering and not-self. During post-Buddha times, as Buddhist philosophy developed, various efforts to systematize and standardized the Buddha's teachings were made, and came to be known as the Abhidhamma tradition.[1]

An important development in the Abhidhamma method of clarifying the deepest aspects of understanding the mind and seeing reality is analyze existence right down to its atomic level, as it were. Although the early Abhidhamma tradition never actually got down into such detailed definition of "atoms" of experience or states of matter, such ideas became popular in later time.

Which such atomic models of experience and insight are interesting, even useful, in some way, it should be remembered that they are not canonical. Such models are at best theoretical and may serve as useful teaching tools. However, during actual meditation, it is vital not to project such models onto our deeper experiences. The idea is to experience reality directly to the level beyond models and language.

2 Post-canonical atomism

2.1 SOURCES OF THERAVĀDA ATOMISM. In 12th-century Sri Lanka, the Abhidhamma theory of moments[2] took a very interesting turn, without any precedent in the Pali Canon itself: it evolved further into the theory of *rūpa,kalāpa* ("unit of matter"). The first identifiable development of this theory appears in **the Visuddhi,magga**[3] and in the Abhidhamma commentaries. The theory is fully developed in the commentaries and manuals of the 12th century and after, especially **the Abhidhamm'attha,saṅgaha** of Anuruddha,[4] its Sinhalese commentary (*sannaya* or *sannē*) by Sāriputta,[5] its Pali Subcommentary (*ṭīkā*) by Sumaṅgala,[6] and various Abhidhamma compendia such as **the Nāma,-rūpa,samāsa** and **the Sacca,saṅkhepa**.[7]

A close study of the fundamental principles of the theory of *rūpa,kalāpa* have shown that it is simply the Theravāda counterpart of the atomic theory of Sanskrit Buddhism.[8] **Y Karunadasa** observes that

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[1] See **Dhamma and Abhidhamma** = SD ***.

[2] On the theory of moments (*khaṇika,vāda*), see SD 17.2b(3).

[3] Vism 8.165/272, 8.224/287, 11.88/364 f, 17.156/552 f, 18.5-11/585-590, 19.1-27/598-605 (ch 19) passim, 20.2 f/606, 20.76 f/626. See also Vism:Ñ 14.61/498 n27, 14.76/504 n32, 18.5/680 n5.

[4] Anuruddha, Sri Lanka, 10th-11th cent (Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon,* 1928:168 f; Bechert, "Remarks on four Buddhist Sanskrit Works," in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism,* ed J Kashyap, 1979:26).

[5] Sāriputta "Sāgara,mati" of Pulatthi,pura (Sri Lanka), 11th cent.

[6] Sumaṅgala Araññ,vāsī, pupil of Sāriputta "Sāgara,mati." See prec n.

[7] **Abhidhamm'attha.saṅgaha** (Abhs 29); **Abhidharmârtha,saṅgraha Sannaya** (AbhsSn 156); **Abhidhamm'attha.saṅgaha Vibhāvinī Ṭīkā** (AbhsVṬ 58); **Sacca,saṅkhepa** (Sacs 4); **Nāma,rūpa,samāsa** (Nāmrs 19).

[8] Important critical studies of Buddhist atomism of the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas incl: **de la Vallée Poussin**, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* 1.43d, 2.22a-c = (Eng tr **LM Pruden**) Abhk:P 1:120-122, 184-188 (see Index: atoms) & *Vijñapti,matrata,siddhi: La Siddhi de Hiuan-Tsang,* Paris, 1928-1929:39 ff; *Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun: The Doctrine of Mere-consciousness,* Chin & Eng tr **Wei Tat**, Hongkong, 1973:46-59; **Y SŌGEN**, *Systems of Buddhist Thought,* Calcutta, 1934:121 ff; **WM McGovern**, *A Manual of Buddhist Philosophy,* London, 1923 1:125 ff; **Sylvain Lévi**, *Materiaux pour l'étude du systême Vijñaptimātra,* Paris, 1932:51 ff; **Th Stcherbatsky**, *Central Conception of Buddhism,* London, 1923:200 ff; **OKJ Rosenberg**, *Probleme fer buddhistischen Philosophie,* Heidelberg, 1924:158 ff; **TRV Murti**, *Central Philosophy of Buddhism,* London, 1955:200 ff; On Indian atomism, its origins & development, see: **AL Basham**, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas,* London, 1951:262 ff; **S Bhaduri**, *Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Metaphysics,* Poona, 1947:54 ff; **H**

> Since the Theravāda scholasticism developed in comparative isolation in Ceylon, it is very unlikely that it influenced the Buddhist schools which flourished in the mainland. Therefore, and in view of the close parallelism that exists between the Theravādins' theory of *rūpa-kalāpas* and the atomic theory of the schools of Sanskrit Buddhism, it seems very probable that the former was formulated on the basis of the latter. In the manuals and the commentaries of the twelfth century and later, when the theory under consideration is presented in its fully developed form, the signs of external influence are more marked and therefore more unmistakeable. (1967:143)

This is of course not to say that the Pali atomic theory is a carbon copy of the Sanskrit system, but the similarities are more striking than the differences. **The Vaibhāṣikas**, for example, postulate two kinds of *paramâṇu* (atom), namely, the *dravya,paramâṇu* (the monad or unitary atom) and the *saṁghāta,paramâṇu* (the aggregate atom, ie the molecule). The *dravya,paramâṇu* is the most subtle (*sarva,sūkṣma*),[9] that is, the smallest unit of matter. In modern technical terms, then, the *dravya,paramāṇu* would be the atom and the *saṁghāta,paramāṇu* the molecule. [1.3]

In **the Visuddhi,magga**, where we find the earliest traces of atomism in the Theravāda, the term *kalāpa* (unit or group) is not used in the same sense as it is used in the mediaeval works. The Visuddhi,magga, for example, says that head-hair is an *aṭṭha,dhamma,kalāpa,* "eight-element unit," and **Karunadasa** notes:

> If it had used the term *kalāpa* in the technical sense, that it should say that the head-hair is a collection of *kalāpas* (each consisting of eight elements). The term should be put in the plural and not in the singular. For in the technical sense, *kalāpa* means the smallest unit of matter and as such the head-hair should consist of a large number of *kalāpas.* It is clear therefore that when the *Visuddhimagga* says that the head-hair is an *aṭṭha-dhamma-kalāpa*, it is referring to the eight kinds of material elements that enter into its composition. (1967:145)

Karunadasa then adds that this conclusion is further confirmed by **the Viśuddhi,mārga Sannaya** (the Sinhalese Commentary on the Visuddhi,magga), where it is stated that the *aṭṭha,dhamma,kalāpa* refers to the eight kinds of *rūpa*, which in their combination, make up what is called head-hair.[10]

As such, there is, in the Visuddhi,magga, where the earliest form of Buddhist atomism is found, is it in any way implied that the final or ultimate state of matter consists of atoms. Furthermore, the term *kalāpa,* whether in the singular or in the plural, is used interchangeably with the same sense.

> From the Buddhist point of view, one can say that the hair on one's head is a *kalāpa* of eight material elements, because it consists of the four primary elements and four of the secondary elements, viz, *rūpa, gandha, rasa* and *āhāra* [2]. One can also say that the hair on one's head consists of an enormous number of *kalāpas*, each consisting of the above-mentioned eight material elements. (1967:145)

2.2 BUDDHAGHOSA'S TERMINOLOGY. **Buddhaghosa** (early 5th century), the author of the Visuddhi,magga, uses *kalāpa* in the former (general) sense, as a group, while **Anuruddha** (12th century), the author of the Abhidham'attha,saṅgaha, uses it in the technical sense, as the smallest unit or group of matter. Furthermore, the mediaeval works use the term *kalāpa* (in the technical sense) where the Visuddhi,magga uses *cuṇṇa* (particle) or *paramāṇu* (atom).[11]

Jacobi, "Atomic Theory (Indian)," *Ency of Religion and Ethics* 2:199-202; **AB Keith**, *Indian Logic and Atomism,* Oxford, 1921:1921. For a comparative study of *rūpa,kalāpa* and Skt Buddhism, see **Y Karunadasa** 1967:142-167 (ch 8).

[9] Abhk 1.22; Abhk:P 1:185, 187 f; AbhkV (ed Wogihara) 1:34, 123

[10] *(aṭṭha,dhamma,kalāpa,mattam eva) yanudu keśa,prajñaptiyaṭa kāraṇa vū varṇādīn ekatvayen gena kīha, ovun aṣṭa,dharma,mātra noveyi data yutu.* (VismSn 4:136)

[11] Vism 11.89/365.

The mediaeval Pali works use the terms for the four primary elements in two ways: one in the sense of "characteristic" (*lakkhaṇa*) and the other in the sense of "intensity" or extrusiveness (*ussada*). In the former sense, "earth" (*paṭhavī*) is solidity (*kakkhalatta*). In the latter sense, what is solid (*kakkhala*) is "earth" (*paṭhavī*); for, in whatever matter where solidity is most intense (*ussada*) is also called *paṭhavī,* although it comprises all the four primary elements and their derived matter.[12] The diversity of materiall manifestation of the elements is not due to difference in quantity (*pamāṇa*). but due to a difference in the intensity (*ussada*) or capability (*sāmatthiya*) of each element.[13]

Karunadasa, in his *Buddhist Analysis of Matter,* goes on to explain how the Visuddhi,magga uses the terms *kalāpa* and *cuṇṇa* or *paramāṇu.* The Visuddhi,magga, when referring to the earth element on an atomic level, uses *paṭhavī,dhātu* in the second sense, that is, in terms of its intensity. Each detailed analyses of head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, etc, ends with the statement that each is "rigid earth element,"[14] and each detailed analysis of bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, etc, ends with the statement that each is "liquid water element."[15] It then goes on to say, "But it is on account of intensity (*ussada*) that it comes to be called 'the earth element, the water element,'" (*ussada,vasena pana, paṭhavī,dhātu āpo,dhātu ti saṅkhaṁ gato ti*).[16] As such, the statement—that the earth element is the human body is reducible to atoms (*paramāṇu*)—refers to head-hair, body-hair, etc.[17]

Next, according to the theory of *avinibbhoga,rūpa* (inseparable form), the four primary elements and four of derived matter, namely, *rūpa, rasa, gandha* and *āhāra,* are necessarily conascent (*niyata,-sahajāta*) and positionally inseparable (*padesato avinibbhoga*).[18] It follows then that those parts of the human body that, on account of the intensity of the earth element, are conventionally called *paṭhavī,-dhātu,* consist of the above-mentioned eight material elements.

And since these eight elements are positionally inseparable, even when the head-hair, body-hair, etc, are reduced to atoms, each of the atoms should in turn consist of the same number of elements. As such, what the Visuddhi,magga calls *cuṇṇa* or *paramāṇu* is actually an aggregate of eight material elements, and is the same, in its technical sense, as *kalāpa,* and also corresponds to the *saṁghāta,-paramāṇu* of the Vaibhāṣika.[19]

This interpretation is further confirmed by the Visuddhi,magga's statement that if the human body's earth element were to be reduced to atoms, they would amount to an average *dona*-measure (1 litre), and that the water element would amount to half as much. Karunadasa observes:

> In a given instance of matter there is no quantitative difference between the primary elements that enter into its composition; the only difference is one of intensity (*ussada*). If the *Visuddhimagga* had used used *paṭhavī* and *āpo* in the philosophical sense (in the sense of *lakkhaṇa* only), then it would not say that, when reduced to the size of *paramāṇus,* the former might amount to a *dona*-measure and the latter half as much. (1967:146)

2.3 *KALĀP'AṄGA*. By way of summary, it can be said that in the Visuddhi,magga, wherein the theory of atomism was first introduced into the Theravāda, the ultimate unit is called *paramāṇu* or *cuṇṇa* (ie, the "atom"). In later works, however, the standard term is *kalāpa* (as the "atom"). Karunadasa notes that

> While the first two terms are indicative of the fact that what is indicated thereby is the smallest unit of matter, the other brings into relief that, although it is the smallest, yet in the ultimoate analysis, it is but a plurality of different material elements. The preference shown by the authors of the mediaeval works for the use of *kalāpa* instead of *paramāṇu* and *cuṇṇa*—the two earlier terms—is itself indicative of their desire to emphasize this fact. The use of the

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[12] See Karunadasa 1967:27-29, 145.
[13] VismṬ 451; Abhvk 273.
[14] Vism 11.48-68/353-359.
[15] Vism 11.69-80/359-363.
[16] Vism 11.88/365.
[17] Karunadasa 1967:146.
[18] Abhs 28; VismSn 389.
[19] Karunadasa 1967:146.

> term *piṇḍa* [heap] in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* and its paraphrase as *rūpa-samudāya* in the Sinhalese *sannē* of Sāriputta are also suggestive of the same fact.[20] (1967:146 f)

According to Karunadasa, the closest Theravāda term to the *dravya,paramāṇu* (the "atom") of the Vaibhāṣika is *kalāp'aṅga* (literally, "the limb of the group," *kalāpa* + *aṅga*), that is, a constituent of a *kalāpa*.[21] For the sake of expedience, one could render *kalāp'aṅga* as "component," or even "part." The word *aṅga* clearly suggests that it has no independent existence and implies a whole. **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī,** for example, says:

> It is impossible to separate the tastes, etc,[22] of matter (*rūpa*). Like grains of sand, they are said to be mutually inseparable [ie mutually diffused]. In the ultimate sense, too, there is no taste in matter. If that were the case, then there would be taste-stimulus (*rasa-g,gahaṇa*) whenever there is sight-stimulus (*rūpa-g,gahaṇa*). In the same way, too, in the ultimate sense, the body-base (*kāyâyatana*) [ie the sense of touch] is not everywhere. Yet, it is not absent[23] because of the impossibility of breaking it up. Hence, no mixing of characteristics occurs. (Dhs 311)

However, if this were the case—that the *kalāp'aṅga* has no independent existence, apart from the *kalāpa*—it would be better equated with the sub-atomic particles, namely, the nucleons (neutrons and positrons) and electrons, which indeed do not exist separately, but only as components of the atom. Just as a nucleon in the nucleus of an atom or any of its electrons, even though theoretically smaller than the atom itself, is not actually regarded as a smaller independent particle, even so a unit-limb (*kalāp'aṅga*) is not regarded as being smaller than the unit (*kalāpa*) itself.

The basic atomic terminology of the Visuddhi,magga when compared to those of the Vaibhāṣika is as follows:

Vaibhāṣika	Buddhaghosa	Physics
dravya,paramāṇu	*kalāp'aṅga*	nucleons, electrons
saṁghāta paramāṇu	*paramâṇu, cuṇṇa*	atom
	kalāpa	molecule

Table 2.3a Comparison of atomic models (Buddhaghosa)

The basic atomic terminology of the later mediaeval scholiasts compared to those of the Vaibhāṣika is as follows:

Vaibhāṣika	Post-Buddhaghosa	Physics
dravya,paramāṇu	*kalāp'aṅga*	nucleons, electrons
saṁghāta paramāṇu	*kalāpa*	atom
	paramâṇu, cuṇṇa	molecule

Table 2.3b Comparison of atomic models (post-Buddhaghosa)

3 The *rūpa,kalāpa*

Now we will examine Buddhist atomism or atomic theory as we find it today, most popularly amongst those who practise the so called "vipassana" form of Buddhist meditation. This atomism is

[20] Abhs 28; AbhsSn 166.

[21] Karunadasa 1967:147 f, 153-158.

[22] Etc = any of the other components (*kalāp'aṅga*), namely, the 4 elements, colour, smell, and nutritive essence.

[23] *Na ca sabbattha n'atthi,* lit "and it is not not everywhere."

especially popular in the meditative traditions of Myanmar Buddhism, and they generally follow the most developed atomic theories of the post-Buddhaghosa scholiasts [1.1]. According to the contemporary "vipassana" atomic theory, an "atom" (***kalāpa***) of matter, has a minimum of eight material components. It is said to be smaller than even that subatomic particles of modern science, hence practically invisible!

Hence, one should note here that this vipassana "atom" (*kalāpa*) is not identical to the "atom" of science: they are only etymologically identical, that is, in the sense that they are "not divisible" (Latin, *atomus*; Greek, *atomos*). Theoretically, Buddhaghosa's definition of *kalāpa* would be closest to the "atom" of modern science.

These eight components of matter, forming an octad (***aṭṭhaka***), are called "indivisible matter" or simply "inseparable" (*avinibbhoga rūpa*). The four primary elements—earth, water, fire and wind[24]—arise together, interdependently and inseparably. The smallest independent unit of matter—the octad—comprises of the four primary elements and the following material components:

colour (*vaṇṇa*) or a visible object;
smell (*gandha*) or a olfactory object;
taste (*rasa*) or gustatory object; and
nutritive essence (*ojā*), or food (energy).

This is called the "octad with nutriment as the eighth" (*oj'aṭṭhamaka,kalāpa*)[25] or simply the "pure octad" (*suddhaṭṭhaka,kalāpa*),[26] which is the most primitive material combination, found in dead matter, that is, carcasses and inanimate things. The simplest form of living matter is the "vital nonad unit" or simply "life nonad" (***jīvita,navaka,kalāpa***), formed by adding life-faculty (*jīvit'indriya*) to the octad. Every experiential unit of the five physical sense-faculties, the heart-base (physical seat of the mind), and sex has their respective decad units (***dasaka,kalāpa***) each, that is, a nonad unit plus their own matter.

Let us now briefly examine these seven decad units.

The eye sensitivity (*cakkhu pasāda*), located in the retina, takes a colour or visible form as its object. It serves as the physical base for eye-consciousness, which arises with the impingement of a colour or form upon the eye sensitivity, resulting in the eye decad (*cakkhu,dasaka*).

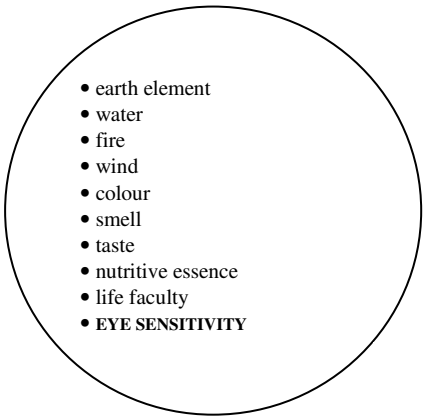

Diagram 10.1 The eye decad unit

The ear sensitivity (*sota pasāda*), located in the inner ear, takes a sound or vibration as object. It serves as the physical base for ear-consciousness, which arises with the impingement of a sound or vibration upon the ear sensitivity, resulting in the ear decad (*sota,dasaka*).

[24] See ***Khandha* 1 *Rūpa*** = SD 17.2a.
[25] Vism 18.5 f/585; Abhs:SR 164, 250; Dhs 315 f = DhsA:PR 413 f.
[26] Vism 15.105/368, 17.194/560; Abhs:BRS 6.18.253; Mohv:Be 99.

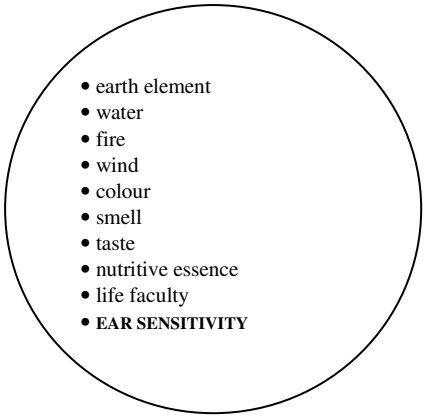

Diagram 10.2 The ear decad unit

The nose sensitivity (*ghana pasāda*), located in the nostrils, takes smell as object. It serves as the physical base for nose-consciousness, which arises with the impingement of a smell upon the nose sensitivity, resulting in the nose decad (*ghana,dasaka*).

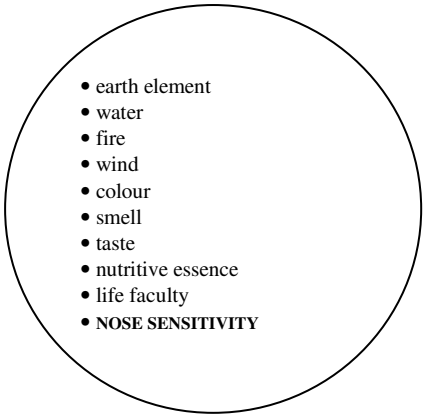

Diagram 10.3 The nose decad unit

The tongue sensitivity (*jivhā pasāda*), located one the tongue (taste-buds), takes taste as object. It serves as the physical base for tongue-consciousness, which arises with the impingement of a taste upon the tongue sensitivity, resulting in the tongue decad (*jivhā,dasaka*).

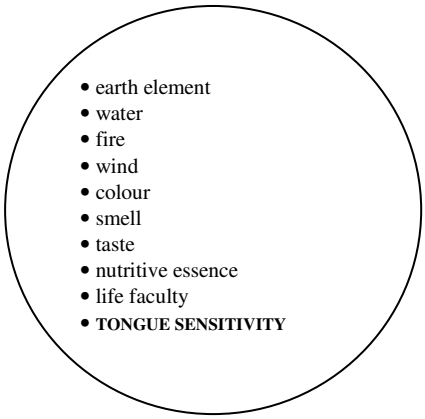

Diagram 10.4 The tongue decad unit

The body sensitivity (*kāya pasāda*), located on the skin and nerves, takes a tangible form (earth, water, fire, wind) as object. It experiences softness, hardness and warmth, smoothness and roughness, warmth and cold, lightness and heaviness, pressure and support, and so on. It serves as the physical base for body-consciousness, which arises with the impingement of a tangible form upon the body sensitivity, resulting in the body decad (*kāya,dasaka*).

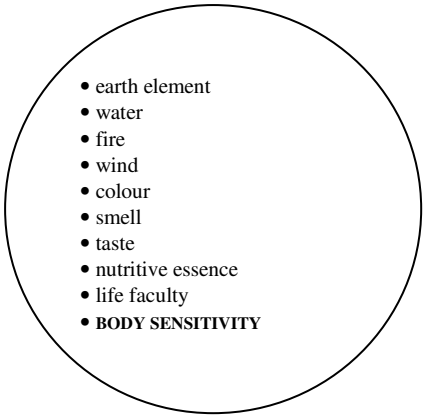

Diagram 10.5 The body decad unit

The heart-base sensitivity (*hadaya,vatthu pasāda*), located in the blood of the heart,[27] takes a mental phenomenon as object. It serves as the physical base for mind-consciousness, which arises with the impingement of a mind-object upon the heart-base sensitivity, resulting in the heart-base decad (*hadaya,vatthu,dasaka*). It also serves as the support for all consciousness, including the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*), with the exception of the sense-consciousnesses.

Diagram 10.6 The heart-base decad unit

Sexual phenomena are of two kinds, namely, femininity and masculinity. Only one of the sexual phenomena exists in each sexuality decad unit.

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[27] A base (*vatthu*) is a physical support for the occurrence of consciousness. A base, however, is different from a door (*dvāra*), since it plays a different role in the origination of consciousness. A door is a channel through which the mind-moments (*citta*) and mental concomitants (*cetasika*) of a cognitive process gain access to the object; a base is a physical support for the occurrence of cittas and cetasikas. (Abhs:BRS 3.20 guide).

According to Pali commentators, the heart (*hadaya*) serves as the physical support for all cittas other than the physical senses and their objects. Neither the Suttas nor the canonical Abhidhamma expressly mention the heart-base, but simply speak of "that matter (*taṃ rūpaṃ*) in dependence on which the mind element and mind-consciousness element occurs" (Paṭṭhāna 1.4). The Comys, however, subsequently specify "that matter" to be the heart-base (*hadaya,vatthu*), a cavity situated within the physical heart (Vism 8.111 f/256).

The heart-base has the characteristic of being the material support for the mind element and the mind-consciousness element (*Manual* ch 3 §21). The heart-base is to be found in dependence (*paccaya*) on the blood inside the heart, and is assisted by the four primary elements and maintained by the life-faculty (Abhs:BRS 239.5).

For further discussion, see Abhs:SR 277-279.

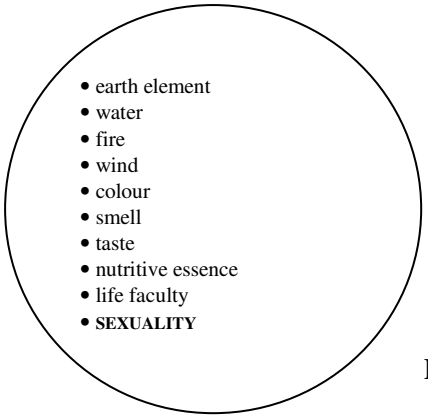

Diagram 10.7 The sexuality decad unit

The Saññoga Sutta (A 7.48) describes sexuality in these graphic terms:

> WOMANLINESS. A woman thinks about herself[28] in terms of her womanly faculty,[29] her womanly ways,[30] her womanly looks,[31] her womanly pride,[32] her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments.[33] She is aroused by this and delights in it.[34]
>
> Thus aroused, she considers another[35] in terms of a man's faculty,[36] his manly ways, his manly looks,[37] his manly pride,[38] his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. She is aroused by this and delights in it.
>
> Thus aroused, she desires external union,[39] and she desires the [physical] pleasure and [mental] joy arising on account of such a union. Monks, attached to[40] her womanliness, she enters into union with men.
>
> In this way, monks, a woman does not rise above her womanliness.
>
> MANLINESS. A man thinks about himself in terms of his own manly faculty, his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

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[28] "to herself," *ajjhattaṁ,* lit "internally".

[29] "womanly faculty," *itth'indriya,* lit "womanly sense-organ". Here referring to the physical features that make one a woman, that is, "womanliness". The term "femininity" usually refers to the psychological aspect of a woman, related to Jung's notions of *anima* and *animus.*

[30] "womanly ways," *itthi,kutta,* eg seductiveness, coquetry, and wiles (AA 4:32). Many of such terms in this sentence and their cognates below are in the Pali singular, which however need to be rendered idiomatically into the English plural.

[31] "womanly looks," *itth'ākappa,* ie her physical looks and how she is dressed (AA 4:32).

[32] "womanly pride," *itthi,vidha,* ie her pride and conceit (AA 4:32).

[33] "womanly adornments," *itth'alaṅkāra.* "adorning the head, the neck, the hands, the feet, the hips (*kaṭi*)" (*sīsûpago gīvûpago hatthûpago pādûpago kaṭûpago,* V 4:340)

[34] "She is aroused by this…" Here I have rendered *tattha* in the English singular, since such an unskillful person would attend to the features mentioned. In the cognate sentences below [4-5] *tattha* is rendered in the English plural, ie referring to the various physical features, to which the skillful person remains unattracted.

[35] "Another," *bahiddhā,* lit "outside (of herself)".

[36] "Manly faculty," *puris'indriya,* lit "manly sense-organ". Here referring to the physical features that make one a man, that is, "manliness." The term "masculinity" usually refers to the psychological aspect of a man. Note here in the sutta that the reference is "in terms of a man's faculty," and not "in another man." This is very significant as this reflects the fact that those sexually attracted to others, consciously or unconsciously, may look for such features that excite them in either sex.

[37] "Manly looks," *puris'ākappa,* ie his physical looks and how he is dressed.

[38] "Manly pride," *purisa,vidha,* ie his pride and conceit.

[39] "She desires external union," *bahiddhā saṁyogaṁ ākaṅkhati.* Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

[40] "Attached to," *sattā* (V 1:185; D 2:246; Nc 23, 34; Dh 342; J 1:376).

Thus aroused, he contemplates another in terms of a woman's faculty, her womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, he desires external union,[41] and he desires the pleasure and joy arising on account of such a union. Monks, attached to his manliness, he enters into union with women.

In this way, monks, a man does not rise above his manliness. (A 7.48.2 f/4:58 f) = SD 8.7

In a homosexual male, his masculinity is latent and weak, and his femininity is predominant, hence his attraction for another male. In the homosexual female, her femininity is latent and weak, and her masculinity is predominant, hence her attraction to another female. The decisive factor here is of course lust and delusion, as described in the Saññoga Sutta.

4 Life and food

It is earlier said that the simplest form of living matter is the "vital nonad unit" or simply "life nonad" (*jīvita,navaka,kalāpa*). Just as there is a vital force in the mental factors, so, too, there is a vital material force called **life-faculty** (*jīvit'indriya*) in living matter. The life-faculty has a supportive function, like water in a pond that prevents the lotus from withering. The life-faculty maintains the life of conascent (*sahajāta*) kinds of matter (those arising together) at the stable moment. It is itself being produced and dying from moment to moment, maintaining the life of conascent matter only in the unit (*kalāpa*). It maintains the karma-generated matter such as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, boy, heart-base and sex decad units. Without life-faculty, the body becomes dead matter, a corpse.

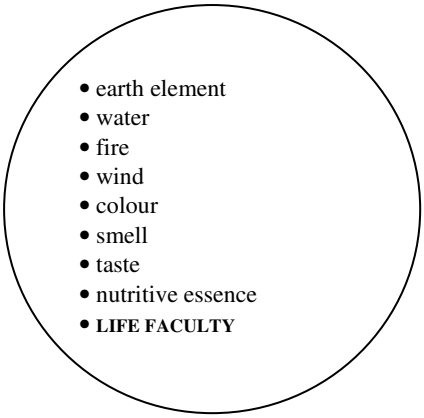

Diagram 10.8 The life nonad unit

Nutritive essence (*oja*) is found in every unit of matter that forms the basic eight inseparables or pure octad, that is, earth, water, fire, wind, colour, smell, taste and nutritive essence. Nutritive essence is that part of edible food which helps the growth of new matter in the body. The nutritive essence in each unit of matter, supported by digestive heat, multiplies itself over and again. As such, the Abhidhamma term for the simplest cluster of material states is "form with nutritive essence as the eighth" (*oja,aṭṭhamaka,rūpa*).

5 How to see not-self

In **the Arahantā Sutta 1** (S 22.76), the Buddha declares:

> Bhikshus, **form** is impermanent.
> What is impermanent is not-self.
> What is not-self **[83]** should be seen as it really is, with right wisdom, thus:
> "This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self." (S 22.76/3:82 f) = SD 42.9

[41] "She desires external union," *bahiddhā saṁyogaṁ ākaṅkhati.* Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

The Vibhaṅga Commentary explains that in such passages, the Buddha teaches the characteristic of not-self by means of both the impermanence and suffering.

> Why is this so? Because of the self-evidence [obviousness] of impermanence and suffering. For, when a plate of a saucer, etc, falls from the hand and breaks, they say, "Ah! Impermanence!" As such, impermanence is self-evident.
>
> But as regards selfhood (*atta,bhāva*), when boils, carbuncles, and so on, have arisen, or when pierced by splinters, thorns and so on, they say, "Ah! The pain!" As such, suffering is self-evident.
>
> The characteristic of not-self is not self-evident, dark, unclear, difficult to penetrate, difficult to illustrate, difficult to make known. (VbhA 49 f)

The Commentary (with some additional paraphrasing) goes on to explain how to directly see not-self in things around us. **The characteristic of not-self** is not self-evident we are unmindful of or unable to see into the resolution into the various elements (*nānā,dhātu,vinibbhoga*) because these are concealed by compactness (*ghana*).[42]

But when continuity is analyzed by closing observing of the rise and fall in daily life, *the characteristic of impermanence* appears as it really is.

When the postures are carefully noted by keeping in mind their continual oppression, *the characteristic of suffering* appears as it really is.

When this perception of compactness I resolved into the various elements of earth (resistance), water (coherence), fire (heat) and wind (motion), then *the characteristic of not-self* appears as it really is.

Now, why are the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) *impermanent*? Because they rise and fall, change, and become something else.

But these same five aggregates are *suffering* because "what is impermanent is suffering" (S 4:1). Why? Because of continual oppression. The mode of being continually oppressed is the characteristic of suffering.

But those same five aggregates are not-self because "what is suffering is not-self" (S 4:1). Why? Because there is no control over them. This lack of control over them is the characteristic of not-self.

For this reason, what is impermanent, suffering and not-self are one thing, and the *characteristics* of impermanence, suffering and not-self are another. For, the five aggregates, the twelve bases, the eighteen elements, are all impermanent, suffering and not-self. The modes of change in the manner mentioned are the *characteristics* of impermanence, suffering and not-self. (VbhA 50 f)

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[See also SD 26.1]

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[42] *Anatta,lakkhaṇaṁ nānā,dhātu,vinibbhogassa amanasikāra, ghanena paṭicchānnattā na upaṭṭhāti.* (VbhA 50; Vism 21.3/640).