the outer portal of Abhayagiri stūpa at Anuradhapura. They are popularly called bahiravas. People of Anuradhapura and its environs are in the habit of paying homage to them, by applying lime on these images in order to please them. Some persons take vows and oaths in front of these bhūtas. There have been instances of the intervention of these godlings. Litigants in modern day courts of justice are occasionally sent to swear in front of these bhūtas. There have been instances of the intervention of these godlings being sought to influence the election of peoples representatives.

The sculptures at the entrance to the palace of Vijayabahu I are of the 11th century, but materials from earlier buildings have been made use of in its construction. These sculptures as well as those which have already been referred to, may belong to a period in between 8th to 10th centuries A.C.

It is possible to surmise that people of Sri Lanka were accustomed to pay homage to these deities before they embraced Buddhism and that they continued to do so even afterwards. These deities were invoked for the purpose of achieving worldly ends. Devotion to Buddha (devatādeva god surpassing gods) was to result in the world to come. At the entrance to a Buddhist shrine, symbols like Śaṅkha and Padma have been placed to show that they occupy only humble positions like gatekeepers at shrines dedicated to the Lord of the World. The suggestion may also be made that in the act of by-passing such figures as Śaṅkha and Padma (as well as other gods) and approaching the stūpa or a shrine containing the likeness of the Buddha, non-attachment to things material is symbolized.

Nandasena Mudiyanse

References:

1. Artibus Asiae, 18(2) 1955, pp.1221-127
   S. Paranavithana, Śaṅkha and Padma

Śaṅkhārā can be derived from the noun kāra (Skt. kā), and the prefix sam, so that the literal sense of satīkāra is ‘together making’. This literal sense of a ‘together making’ occurs for example in the Vinaya, where the Buddha made an allowance for ‘making together’ (abhisaṅkhāriyam) a medicinal ointment, in the sense of preparing it (Vin. I, 205). Another relevant passage can be found in a verse in the Sutta Nipāṇa, where the etymologically closely related satīkāra qualifies a raft as being well ‘made together’ (Sn. 21), conveying the sense of this raft being well constructed.

In its usage in the discourses, satīkāras as ‘together makings’ have an active and a passive sense, representing both that which makes together and that which is made together. The more active naunce of a ‘making together’ in the sense of the exercise of volition or will-power is more prominent in the related term abhi satīkāra, which could be rendered as ‘volitional determination’, while the passive naunce of something being ‘made together’ in the sense of being a product of conditions underlying the related term satīkāra, which can be translated as ‘conditioned’.

The term satīkāra, however, comprises all these nuances, a fact which makes it almost impossible to capture the whole range of this term with a single English expression. Various translations have been proposed, such as activity, coefficient, composition, compound, concomitant, conjunction, constituent, construction, determinant, disposition, fabrication, formation, force, preparation, process, synergy, and volition. Each of these captures one or several aspects of the term, yet none is able to fully account for the entire range of meanings underlying the term satīkāra.

To get a clearer picture of this range of meanings, three main contexts in which the term satīkāra occurs can be distinguished: (1) as the fourth of the five aggregates (khandha); (2) as the second link in the twelve-fold formula of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), and (3) as anything conditioned, the most general sense of the term, exemplified by its usage in the standard formula for the first two of the three characteristics (tilakkhāta).

1. The satīkāras as an aggregate

The satīkāras are the fourth of the five aggregates and in this context represent the conative aspect of the mind. The aggregate of the satīkāras arises
dependent on contact, just as the aggregates of feeling and perception (M. III, 17). In the case of feeling such contact is related to the sense-doors, while the aggregates of saṅkhāras and perception are related to the sense-objects, i.e. to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental objects (S. III, 60). According to the definition found in the discourses (e.g. S. III, 63), the aggregate of the saṅkhāras comprises the volitions (cetasā) arising in relation to these six types of sense-object. In short, as an aggregate the saṅkhāras are that which reacts to experience.

An example of the usage of the term saṅkhāra in the sense of volitional activity can be found in a passage that describes the lay-follower Sopha as having the volition to go forth (Ud. 57: pabbajjābhīṣasāṅkhāra). On being told by the monk Mahākaccāna of the difficulties of the monk's life, the force of this saṅkhāra diminished and he decided to remain a layman. A similar instance can be found in a discourse that describes the general Sāna as having the volition to visit the Buddha (A. IV, 180: gamiyābhīṣasāṅkhāra). On being told by the leader of the Jains that the Buddha was a teacher of non-action, his volition similarly lost force and he decided not to go. In both these instances, however, on a subsequent occasion the volitional force of their respective saṅkhāras became powerful enough to override all obstacles, so that finally Sopha did go forth and Sāna did go to see the Buddha.

Another example illustrating the volitional force of the term saṅkhāra can be found in the context of the four roads to power (iddhipāda), which combine different forms of concentration (samādhi) with volitional striving (padhānasāṅkhāra). Such volitional striving in this context refers in particular to overcoming what is unwholesome and to establishing what is wholesome (S. V, 268). Volitional striving (saṅkhārappadhāna) recurs again in another passage as a tool for overcoming dukkha (M. II, 223). The development of volitional striving by way of the four roads to power yields, among others, the ability to perform supernormal feats. Here again the saṅkhāras recur, since it is the iddhiśīlasāṅkhāra, literally the "supernormal determination", that is required for performing a magical feat, such as when Moggallāna shook the Vessantara palace with his toe (M. I, 253) or when another monk created rain and fire (S. IV, 292).

The Sampasiddhānta Sutta reports how someone with telepathic powers is able to recognize the operation of the saṅkhāras in another's mind (D. III, 104). According to this passage, once someone with telepathic powers has recognised the volitional direction of such a saṅkhāra, he or she will be able to predict the type of thought that is about to arise in the other person's mind. This indicates that the saṅkhāras as volition represent the beginning stages of mental activity, the first inclination or tendency that precedes the arising of thought, whose nature is determined by the directional input provided by the respective saṅkhāras.

The aggregate of saṅkhāras comprises past, present and future saṅkhāras internally or externally arisen ones, be they of a gross or subtle, inferior or superior quality, far or near (M. III, 17). As an aggregate, the saṅkhāras share with the other aggregates the qualities of all conditioned phenomena. Thus all volitions and intentions, representative of the 'will' in man, are impermanent, unsatisfactory and without a permanent self. Any of the possible views about a self in relation to saṅkhāras, by either identifying the will as being a self, or believing it to be the expression of a self, or to be part of a self, or else by taking the self to take part in a greater will, are simply mistaken. Though pleasure and satisfaction can be experienced in relation to the aggregate of saṅkhāras, such pleasure and satisfaction are outweighed by the disadvantage due to their impermanent and therefore unsatisfactory nature (S. III, 103).

During later developments of Buddhist philosophy, the meaning of the term saṅkhāra expanded until it came to include a wide range of mental factors. In the Abhidhammic analysis of states of mind the saṅkhāras have become a collective term for assembling such mental factors as, for example, contact, mental application, the five faculties and powers, factors of the noble eightfold path and the absence of hatred and covetousness (Dhs. 17). In this way, the saṅkhāras came to stand for anything mental apart from feeling, perception and consciousness. This goes somewhat beyond the implications of the aggregate of saṅkhāras in the early discourses, where it represented mainly the volitional aspect of mental experience. The fact that the saṅkhāras as an aggregate usually occur in the plural form and their inherent nuance of referring not only to what 'makes together' but also to what 'is
made together’ may have the choice of the saṅkhārā aggregate as a heading for those mental factors.

The aggregate of saṅkhārā interacts with each of the other aggregates and has a conditioning effect upon each (S. III, 87). This conditioning effect of the saṅkhārās on the other aggregates points to its role as a link in the formula of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda). Though in this context the saṅkhārās do also act as volitions, their role is different due to the basic difference between the two schemes of the aggregates and of dependent origination. The five aggregates are an analysis of the constituents of empirical existence at a particular moment of time. Dependent origination, however, is concerned with a temporal sequence, depicting the conditioned arising of dukkha. The difference between these two schemes is similar to the difference between taking a horizontal and a vertical cut through a particular object. Both are cuts, yet the respective perspective is different. Thus the perspective on the saṅkhārās as an aggregate is more directed to the volitional aspect of empirical personality in the present existence, while the perspective on saṅkhārās as a link of dependent origination is concerned with ‘volitional formations’ in as much as they ‘form’ and thereby ‘condition’ future existence.

To illustrate this difference, the case of an arahant can be taken into consideration. An arahant is still endowed with the aggregate of saṅkhārās. However, none of these saṅkhārās is rooted in ignorance, so that none of these saṅkhārās will take part in the dependent origination of dukkha. This goes to show that the compass of the saṅkhārās as an aggregate is broader than that of the saṅkhārās as a link in dependent origination, since the former also comprises saṅkhārās that are not karmically effective.

(2) The saṅkhārās as a link in paṭicca samuppāda

The saṅkhārās are the second of the twelve-link formula of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda), leading from the first link of ignorance to the third link of consciousness. According to the traditional interpretation, saṅkhāras in this context represent the karmically active volitions responsible for rebirth and continued existence in saṁsāra. In this type of usage, the term saṅkhāra is equivalent to cetanā, pathanā and paññiddhi, all these being but different words for the exercise of volition and mental aspiration (cf. A. I, 32). That is, in the context of dependent origination the saṅkhārās are the creative principle of human existence. This creative potential of the saṅkhārās finds its expression in a passage from the Saṅgīti Sutta (D. III, 211), which asserts that all beings exist in dependence on saṅkhārās (subbe sattā saṅkhārathikkā).

The Papāta Sutta takes up the conditional relationship between the first link of ignorance (in terms of not understanding the four noble truths) and the saṅkhārās. According to its exposition, those who do not understand the four noble truths will delight in saṅkhārās leading to birth, old age and death, to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (S. V, 449). In contrast, those who understand the four noble truths will not delight in these saṅkhārās and thus be able to gain freedom from birth, old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. An additional perspective on ignorance leading to saṅkhārās can be found in a discourse where the Buddha examined the mistaken view that any of the five aggregates is a self or related to a self. Such a view, he pointed out, is in itself a saṅkhāra, resulting from ignorance and leading to craving (S. III, 96).

A related statement found in the Dvayatānapassāna Sutta sums up the role of saṅkhārās as a decisive link in the dependent origination of dukkha by declaring that all dukkha depends on the saṅkhārās, and with the cessation of saṅkhārās no more dukkha will arise (Sn. 731). Once this is clearly understood and the calming of all saṅkhārās is reached, so this discourse continues, one will no longer be subject to future existence (Sn. 733).

The Saṅkhārappatti Sutta illustrates the function of the saṅkhārās in the context of rebirth (M. III, 99). Here the Buddha explained how someone endowed with confidence, morality, learning, generosity and wisdom may have the aspiration to be reborn in a favourable situation as a human or in a heavenly realm. If this mental aspiration is developed and repeatedly cultivated, the person in question will indeed be reborn in that situation or realm. According to this discourse, repeatedly developing this mental aspiration, the saṅkhārās, is what leads to the particular type of rebirth (as long as by developing the aforementioned qualities the necessary merit has been accumulated).
According to the Saṅgīti Sutta, such an aspiration for a favourable rebirth can also become effective if it is based on the meritorious deed of giving to recluse and brahmīs (D. III, 258).

The importance of one’s mental inclination is also highlighted in the Kukkuravatika Sutta (M. I, 387), which reports the Buddha in discussion with some visitors who had undertaken the practice of behaving like a dog or like a cow as an ascetic penance. Being repeatedly asked by them about the fruit of their practice, he had to tell them that the mental inclination resulting from such a way of behaving will simply lead to rebirth as a dog or a cow. The principle behind that, so he explained in the same discourse, is that saṅkhāra of a particular type will lead to a corresponding type of rebirth. If these saṅkhāras are of a harmful (sabyāpajjha) nature, they will in turn lead to a rebirth where harmful types of experiences are predominant. That is, each being creates and forms its own character and existence, both in past lives and at every moment of present existence. This continuous process of creating and forming takes place through the medium of the saṅkhāras.

The Kukkuravatika Sutta subdivides such saṅkhāras into three types: bodily, verbal and mental. The same threefold distinction recurs elsewhere when defining the saṅkhāras in their function as the second link of dependent origination (e.g. S. II, 4). Based on ignorance, the Buddha explained in another discourse, one may generate such a bodily, verbal or mental saṅkhāra either on one’s own initiative or else when prompted by others, either deliberately (sampajjāna) or else without deliberation (asampajjāna) (S. II, 40). The question of deliberation recurs also in the Pāli Abhidhamma, which distinguishes between mind states with deliberation (sasaṅkhārika) and without deliberation, the first being based on prior deliberation while the second refers to its more spontaneous counterpart (e.g. Dhs. 27).

The Parivīmaṇasana Sutta introduces another threefold distinction of saṅkhāras relevant to the present context. Here the Buddha explained how due to ignorance a worldlyling generates meritorious (puñña), demeritorious (apuñña) and imperturbable (āneñja) saṅkhāras1, leading in turn to the arising of types of consciousness of the same nature (S. II, 82). However, the Parivīmaṇasana Sutta continues, once ignorance has been eradicated these three types of saṅkhāras are also abandoned.

(3) The saṅkhāras in general

The threefold distinction of saṅkhāras into bodily, verbal and mental occurs not only in the context of dependent origination, but also in relation to the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling (saṅkhārenādayātāna nirodha). According to the explanation found in the Cūḷavedalla Sutta (M. I, 301), on entering the attainment of cessation at first the verbal saṅkhāras cease, which in this context stand for initial and sustained mental application, followed by the cessation of the bodily saṅkhāras, which here stand for the breath, and finally the mental saṅkhāras will cease, which in the present context comprise perception and feeling. Two of these three saṅkhāras recur as part of the detailed exposition of mindfulness of breathing (M. III, 82), which instructs to calm the bodily saṅkhāras and to experience and calm the mental saṅkhāras.

The definition given in the Cūḷavedalla Sutta shows that each of these three types of saṅkhāras are different from the same threefold distinction into bodily, verbal and mental saṅkhāras applicable to the context of dependent origination. The difference is that the three types of saṅkhāras as the second link in the scheme of dependent origination depend on ignorance. The same cannot be said in the present context, since breathing, mental application and perception and feeling will still be present in the case of an arahant, in whom however ignorance has been eradicated and who therefore has gone beyond the three types of saṅkhāras leading to the dependent origination of dukkha.

The term saṅkhāra occurs also in relation to another type of cessation, namely the ‘gradual cessation’ of saṅkhāras (anupubbasāṅkhārānam nirodho) taking place by attaining the four jhānas, the immaterial attainments and the above mentioned cessation of perception and feeling (S. IV, 217). The ‘saṅkhāra’s whose cessation this passage describes are speech, initial and sustained mental application (vitakka viññāna), joy (pīti), breathing, perception of form, perception of infinite space, perception of infinite consciousness, perception of nothingness and finally all perceptions and feelings. The discourse
culminates with the destruction of the taints, at which point (the saṅkhāras of) hate, greed and delusion also cease.

Another usage of the term saṅkhāra represents the life-force or the will to live. An example of this usage can be found in a discourse which describes how the Buddha overcame a disease with the help of his will to live, his jīvita-saṅkhāra (S. V. 152). On a later occasion he gave up that same will to live, here referred to as his āyu-saṅkhāra or his bhava-saṅkhāra (S. V. 262). According to the Mahāvagga Sutta, such an āyu-saṅkhāra continues even during the cessation of perception and feeling (M. I, 296). In another discourse the Buddha pointed out that the speed with which the āyu-saṅkhāra come to an end is faster than the motion of the sun and the moon (S. II, 266). In this particular instance the āyu-saṅkhāras represent life as such, not only the will to live. The similar bhava-saṅkhāra recurs also in another instance (A. V, 88), which explains that the bhava-saṅkhāra leading to renewed existence (ponobhavika) is one of the factors bound to bodily existence (saraṇātha). This instance relates the bhava-saṅkhāra to the context of rebirth in particular and therewith to its role in the continuity of saṁsāric existence.

Another context within which the term saṅkhāra makes its appearance are the five different types of non-returners (e.g. S. V, 201). Two types of non-returners (anāgāmi) can be distinguished according to whether they attain final Nibbāna with or without exertion (saṅkhāra-parinibbāyi or saṅkhāra-parinnibbāyī). A discourse in the Aṅguttara Nikāya explains that to attain ‘with exertion’ refers to undertaking contemplation of the unattractive nature of the body or of the repulsive nature of food, etc., while to do the same ‘without exertion’ is to do so with the help of developing the jhānas (A. II, 155).

At times, the term saṅkhāra can cover all five aggregates, not just the fourth. Such a usage occurs in a verse by the monk Adhimutta, who replied to a gang of criminals intending to murder him that he was free from fear, since he knew that there was no ‘I’ to be killed, but only saṅkhāras will pass away (Thag. 715). A similar usage recurs in a verse by the nun Vajirī (S. I, 135), who in reply to Māra pointed out that his notion of a (substantial) ‘being’ was mistaken, since in reality there is just a heap of saṅkhāras (saṅkhārapuṇiḥa).

Speaking of Māra, out of the different types of Māra distinguished in the commentarial literature, one is similarly related to saṅkhāras. This is the Abhisamāyavedīna, who according to the commentary to the Visuddhimagga (Vis. A. I, 255, Burm. ed.) represents the arising of birth and old age through the abhisamāyavedīna, the volitional determinations.

Saṅkhāras can also stand for the whole of perceptual experience. Thus in the Pāñcavīsakṣa Sutta (M. II, 231) the Buddha explained that for the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception the presence of anything seen, heard, sensed or cognised becomes an obstruction. In this passage he used the term saṅkhāra to represent what is seen, heard, sensed or cognised, continuing to explain that this lofty attainment can only be gained with a mere residue of saṅkhāras (saṅkhāra-vasesa).

Another relevant instance occurs in a verse in the Therīgāthā, where a girl about to be married to a prince decided to rather go forth (Thig. 514). In her explanation for this decision, she pointed out that she did not delight in what belongs to saṅkhāras (saṅkhāra-gate rātim alabhamaṇa). In this instance, the term saṅkhāra represents all the possible sensual delight awaiting her on being married.

In their more general usage, the saṅkhāras can have an active or a passive sense. The active mode underlies occurrences where the term saṅkhāra represents the cause or condition for something, while in the passive mode the saṅkhāras stand for whatever is a product of conditions.

An example for the active sense can be found in a passage which explains that evil unwholesome things arise due to a cause (saṅkhārāni), not without it (A. I, 82). The same general sense of saṅkhāras as ‘cause’ recurs in another passage indicating that the faculties of pain or pleasure arise due to a cause (saṅkhārāni), not without it (S. V, 213). These contexts use saṅkhāra on a par with hetu, nimiṭṭa, nīdāna and paccaya, different expressions representing the same presence of a ‘cause’ or ‘condition’.

The passive mode of the term saṅkhāras in its general usage stands for all conditioned phenomena. Examples for this usage can be found in two discourses (D. II, 198 and S. III, 146), where the Buddha drew
attention to the fact that the splendour and immense wealth possessed by himself in a former life as a king had all changed and passed away. The word used by him in this context to refer to the former splendour and wealth was saîkhrâra. A similar usage occurs in another discourse, where the Buddha described a worldwide draught leading to the parching up of all water and the destruction of all life, in order to illustrate the impermanent nature of all saîkhrâras (A. IV, 100). Thus the entire realm of sântsâra can be covered by this usage of the term saîkhrâra in the sense of saîkhâta, of all things that are ‘conditioned’.

The same general usage underlies the Buddha’s last instruction before entering final Nibbâna, where he highlighted the impermanent nature of all conditioned phenomena, all saîkhrâras (D. II, 156: vayadhammâ saîkhrâra). The same theme recurs in another well-known statement where he declared that all saîkhrâras are impermanent and unsatisfactory, and all dhammas are not self (Dhp. 277-279). This, so he explained (A. I, 286), is the fixed way things are (dhammaññâtha), the regular pattern inherent in them (dhamma nivûmata). To view all saîkhrâras as impermanent figures among the meditation practices of frequent occurrence in the discourses (e.g. A. III, 83: saîbhasaîkhrâresu aniccûmipassi). Their relation to dukkha recurs in the threefold distinction of dukkha (S. V, 56), which distinguishes between outright pain (dukkhadukkkhâ), displeasure due to change (viparinûmadukkkhâ) and the unsatisfactoriness of all saîkhrâras (saîkhrâradukkkhâ). The key to gaining higher wisdom and insight (adhipaññâdha mnañipassanâ), so another discourse explains (A. II, 94), is to properly contemplate saîkhrâras.

The development of insight in regard to saîkhrâras recurs in the instructions delivered by the former Buddha Vipassâti, which were concerned with the disadvantage, degradation and defilement of saîkhrâras in contrast to the profitable nature of Nibbâna, instructions which caused his listeners to progress from stream-entry to full awakening (D. II, 42). The saîkhrâra are however not only relevant to the progress from stream-entry onwards, but also to the earlier stages of the development of insight, which requires the development of equanimity in regard to all saîkhrâras (Ps. I, 61: saîkhrârutekkhâ). The corresponding knowledge, the saîkhrârutekkhâma, forms a decisive stage in the build up of meditative insight leading up to the event of awakening (Vism. 659).

Of all saîkhrâras (in the sense of conditioned phenomena), the noble eightfold path is the best (A. II, 34). Though the path is still conditioned and thus takes part in what is covered by the term saîkhrâra in its widest usage, the goal itself is no longer a saîkhrâra, but is beyond all saîkhrâras (Dhp. 154 visaîkhrâra). Nibbâna is neither ‘formed’ nor ‘made up’ or ‘conditioned’, but rather is ‘unconditioned’, asaîkhrâta (Ud. 80). With full awakening this ‘unconditioned’ is reached, when lust, hatred and delusion have been completely overcome and eradicated (S. IV, 362). Thus only Nibbâna goes beyond the range of saîkhrâras even in their most general sense, being in fact the ‘stilling of all saîkhrâras’, sabasaîkhrârasamaññâ (e.g. M. I, 436). Such stilling of all saîkhrâras, so the Dhammapada explains, is happiness indeed (Dhp. 368 and 381). See also ASÂNHÂTA, KHANDHA

Anâlayo

Reference

1. The expression ‘imperturbable’ in the discourses usually refers to the mental experiences of the fourth jhûna and the immaterial attainments.

SAÑÑA. Saññâ is one of the principal terms used in Buddhism to refer to a particular mode of cognitive activity. The term is derived from the verbal root jhâ (to know) with the prefix sam. The distinctive meaning of the term in Buddhism needs to be understood in comparison with a number of other terms derived from the same verbal root, but differentiated in meaning by the addition of other prefixes such as vi, pra, pari, and abhi. The term occurs as the third item under the enumeration of the five aggregates (khânâhâ). It is also included as one component of nîma in the complex of nîmarûpa, one of the constituent elements of the cyclic individuated series of becoming (bhava) that proceeds in accordance with the law of dependent arising. In the analysis of the perceptual process saññâ is represented as the cognitive response which is
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