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 Vijayabāhu I are of the 11<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 (devātideva god surpassing gods) was to result in the world to come. At the entrance to a Buddhist shrine, symbols like Śankha 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 Śańkha and Padma (as well as other gods) and approaching the stupa or a shrine containing the likeness of the Buddha, non -attachment to things material is symbolized.

### Nandasena Mudiyanse

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SANKHĀRĀ can be derived from the noun kāra (Skt. kṛ) and the prefix saṃ, so that the literal sense of saṅkhārā 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' (abhisaṅkhārituṃ) a medicinal ointment, in the sense of preparing it (Vin. I, 205). Another relevant passage can be found in a verse in the Sutta Nipāta, where the etymologically closely related saṅkhata 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, sankhāras 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 nuance of a 'making together' in the sense of the exercise of volition or will-power is more prominent in the related term abhi sankhāra, which could be rendered as 'volitional determination', while the passive nuance of something being 'made together' in the sense of being a product of conditions underlies the related term sankhata, which can be translated as 'conditioned'.

The term  $sankh\bar{a}r\bar{a}$ , 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, confection, 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  $sankh\bar{a}r\bar{a}$ .

To get a clearer picture of this range of meanings, three main contexts in which the term sankhārāoccurs 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 (panicca 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 (tilakkhaṇa).

## (1) The saikhāras as an aggregate

The sankhāras are the fourth of the five aggregates and in this context represent the conative aspect of the mind. The aggregate of the sankhāras 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 sańkhāras 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 sańkhāras comprises the volitions (cetanā) arising in relation to these six types of sense-object. In short, as an aggregate the sańkhāras are that which reacts to experience.

An example of the usage of the term sankhāra in the sense of volitional activity can be found in a passage that describes the lay-follower Sona as having the volition to go forth (Ud. 57: pabbajjābhisankhāra). On being told by the monk Mahākaccāna of the difficulties of the monk's life, the force of this sankhāra diminished and he decided to remain a layman. A similar instance can be found in a discourse that describes the general Siha as having the volition to visit the Buddha (A. IV, 180: gamiyābhisankhāra). 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 sańkhāras became powerful enough to override all obstacles, so that finally Sona did go forth and Sīha did go to see the Buddha.

Another example illustrating the volitional force of the term sankhāra can be found in the context of the four roads to power (iddhipāda), which combine different forms of concentration (samādhi) with volitional striving (padhānasankhāra). 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 (saikhārappadhāna) 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 sańkhāras recur, since it is the iddhābhisankhāra, literally the 'supernormal determination', that is required for performing a magical feat, such as when Moggallana shook the Vejayanti palace with his toe (M. I, 253) or when another monk created rain and fire (S. IV, 292).

The Sampasādanīya Sutta reports how someone with telepathic powers is able to recognize the operation of the saikhāras in another's mind (D. III, 104). According to this passage, once someone with telepathic powers has recognised the volitional direction of such a saikhāra, 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 saikhāras 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 saikhāras.

The aggregate of sankhāras comprises past, present and future saikhāras 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 sankhāras 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 sankhāras, 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 saikhāras, 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 sankhārā expanded until it came to include a wide range of mental factors. In the Abhidhammic analysis of states of mind the sankh āras 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 sankhāras came to stand for anything mental apart from feeling, perception and consciousness. This goes somewhat beyond the implications of the aggregate of sankhāras in the early discourses, where it represented mainly the volitional aspect of mental experience. The fact that the saikhāras 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 sankhārā aggregate as a heading for those mental factors.

The aggregate of sankhārā interacts with each of the other aggregates and has a conditioning effect upon each (S. III, 87). This conditioning effect of the sankhāras on the other aggregates points to its role as a link in the formula of dependent origination (paticca samuppāda). Though in this context the sankhāras 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 sankhāras as an aggregate is more directed to the volitional aspect of empirical personality in the present existence, while the perspective on sankhāras 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 saṅkhāras. However, none of these saṅkhāras is rooted in ignorance, so that none of these saṅkhāras will take part in the dependent origination of dukkha. This goes to show that the compass of the saṅkhāras as an aggregate is broader than that of the saṅkhāras as a link in dependent origination, since the former also comprises saṅkhāras that are not karmically effective.

# (2) The saikhāras as a link in paṭicca samuppāda

The sankhāras are the second of the twelve-link formula of dependent origination (panicca samuppāda), leading from the first link of ignorance to the third link of consciousness. According to the traditional interpretation, sankhāras in this context represent the karmically active volitions responsible for rebirth and continued existence in sansāra. In this type of usage, the term sankhārā is equivalent to cetanā, patthanā and panidhi, 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 saṅkhāras are the creative principle of human existence. This creative potential of the saṅkhāras finds its expression in a passage from the Saṅg ti Sutta (D. III, 211), which asserts that all beings exist in dependence on saṅkhāras (sabbe sattā saṅkhāratṭthirkā).

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 sankhāras. According to its exposition, those who do not understand the four noble truths will delight in sankhāras 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 sankhāras 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 sankhāras 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 saikhāra, resulting from ignorance and leading to craving (S. III, 96).

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

The Sańkhāruppatti Sutta illustrates the function of the sańkhāras 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 sańkhāras, 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 *Saṅg ñi Sutta*, such an aspiration for a favourable rebirth can also become effective if it is based on the meritorious deed of giving to recluses and brahmins (*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 sańkhāra of a particular type will lead to a corresponding type of rebirth. If these sankhāras 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 sankhāras.

The Kukkuravatika Sutta subdivides such sankhāras into three types: bodily, verbal and mental. The same threefold distinction recurs elsewhere when defining the sankhāras 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 sankhāra either on one's own initiative or else when prompted by others, either deliberately (sampajāna) or else without deliberation (asampajāna) (S. II, 40). The question of deliberation recurs also in the Pāli Abbidhamma, which distinguishes between mind states with deliberation (sasańkhārika) and without deliberation, the first being based on prior deliberation while the second refers to its more spontaneous counterpart (e.g. Dhs. 27).

The Parivīmaṃsana Sutta introduces another threefold distinction of saṅkhāras relevant to the present context. Here the Buddha explained how due to ignorance a worldling generates meritorious (puñāa), demeritorious (apuñāa) and imperturbable (āneñja) saṅkhāras¹, leading in turn to the arising of types of consciousness of the same nature (S. II, 82). However, the Parivīmamsana Sutta continues, once ignorance

has been eradicated these three types of saikhāras are also abandoned.

#### (3) The saikhāras in general

The threefold distinction of sankhāras 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 (saññāvedayitanirodha). According to the explanation found in the Cūlavedalla Sutta (M. I, 301), on entering the attainment of cessation at first the verbal sankhāras cease, which in this context stand for initial and sustained mental application, followed by the cessation of the bodily sankhāras, which here stand for the breath, and finally the mental sankhāras will cease, which in the present context comprise perception and feeling. Two of these three sankhāras recur as part of the detailed exposition of mindfulness of breathing (M. III, 82), which instructs to calm the bodily sankhāras and to experience and calm the mental sankhāras.

The definition given in the Cūlavedalla Sutta shows that these three types of sankhāras are different from the same threefold distinction into bodily, verbal and mental sankhāras applicable to the context of dependent origination. The difference is that the three types of sankhāras 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 sankhāras leading to the dependent origination of dukkha.

The term sañkhāra occurs also in relation to another type of cessation, namely the 'gradual cessation' of saňkhāras (anupubbasaňkhārānaṃ nirodho) taking place by attaining the four jhānas, the immaterial attainments and the above mentioned cessation of perception and feeling (S. IV, 217). The 'saňkhāras' whose cessation this passage describes are speech, initial and sustained mental application (vitakkavicāra), joy (pūt), 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 sankhāra 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- sankhāra (S. V, 152). On a later occasion he gave up that same will to live, here referred to as his āyu- saikhāra or his bhava- saikhāra (S. V, 262). According to the Mahāvedalla Sutta, such an āyusankhāra 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- sankhāra come to an end is faster than the motion of the sun and the moon (S. II, 266). In this particular instance the āyusankhāras represent life as such, not only the will to live. The similar bhava- sankhāra recurs also in another instance (A. V, 88), which explains that the bhava- sankhāra leading to renewed existence (ponobhavika) is one of the factors bound to bodily existence (sarīraṭṭha). This instance relates the bhavasankhāra to the context of rebirth in particular and therewith to its role in the continuity of samsāric existence.

Another context within which the term saikhāra makes its appearance are the five different types of non-returners (e.g. S. V, 201). Two types of non-returners (anāgāmī) can be distinguished according to whether they attain final Nibbāna with or without exertion (sasaikhāra-parinibbāyī or asaikhāra-parinibbāyī). A discourse in the Anguttara 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 saikhāra 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 saikhāras will pass away (Thag. 715). A similar usage recurs in a verse by the nun Vajirā(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 saikhāras (saikhārapuāja).

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

Sańkhāras can also stand for the whole of perceptual experience. Thus in the Pañcattaya 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 sańkhāra 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 sańkhāras (sasańkhārāvasesa).

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 (*Thīg*. 514). In her explanation for this decision, she pointed out that she did not delight in what belongs to *saṅkhāras* (*saṅkhāragate ratiṃ alabhamāna*). In this instance, the term *saṅkhāra* represents all the possible sensual delight awaiting her on being married.

In their more general usage, the saikhāras can have an active or a passive sense. The active mode underlies occurrences where the term saikhāra represents the cause or condition for something, while in the passive mode the saikhāras 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 (sasańkhārā), not without it (A. I, 82). The same general sense of sańkhāras as 'cause' recurs in another passage indicating that the faculties of pain or pleasure arise due to a cause (sasańkhārā), not without it (S. V, 213). These contexts use sańkhāra on a par with hetu, nimitta, nidāna and paccaya, different expressions representing the same presence of a 'cause' or 'condition'.

The passive mode of the term sankhāras 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 saikhāra. 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 saikhāras (A. IV, 100). Thus the entire realm of saṃsāra can be covered by this usage of the term saikhāra in the sense of saikhata, of all things that are 'conditioned'.

The same general usage underlies the Buddha's last instruction before entering final Nibbana, where he highlighted the impermanent nature of all conditioned phenomena, all sańkhāras (D. II, 156: vayadhammā sankhārā). The same theme recurs in another wellknown statement where he declared that all sankhāras 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 (dhammatthitatā), the regular pattern inherent in them (dhamma niyāmatā). To view all sankhāras as impermanent figures among the meditation practices of frequent occurrence in the discourses (e.g. A. III, 83: sabbasaikhāresu aniccānupassi). Their relation to dukkha recurs in the threefold distinction of dukkha (S. V, 56), which distinguishes between outright pain (dukkhadukkhatā), displeasure due to change (viparināmadukkhatā) and the unsatisfactoriness of all sankhāras (sankhāradukkhatā). The key to gaining higher wisdom and insight (adhipaññādha mmavipassanā), so another discourse explains (A. II, 94), is to properly contemplate saikhāras.

The development of insight in regard to sañkhāras recurs in the instructions delivered by the former Buddha Vipassī, which were concerned with the disadvantage, degradation and defilement of sañkhāras in contrast to the profitable nature of Nibbāna, instructions which caused his listeners to progress from stream-entry to full awakening (D. II, 42). The sañkhāra 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 sañkhāras (Ps. I, 61: saňkhārupekkhā). The corresponding knowledge, the saňkhārupekkhāñānāna,

forms a decisive stage in the build up of meditative insight leading up to the event of awakening (*Vism.* 659).

Of all sankhāras (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 sankhāra in its widest usage, the goal itself is no longer a sankh āra, but is beyond all saikhāras (Dhp. 154 visaikhāra). Nibbāna is neither 'formed' nor 'made up' or 'conditioned', but rather is 'unconditioned', asaikhata (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 Nibbana goes beyond the range of satikharas even in their most general sense, being in fact the 'stilling of all sankhāras', sabasankhārasamatha (e.g. M. I, 436). Such stilling of all saikhāras, so the Dhammapada explains, is happiness indeed (Dhp. 368 and 381). See also ASANKHATA, KHANDHA

Anālayo

#### Reference

The expression 'imperturbable' in the discourses usually refers to the mental experiences of the fourth jhāna and the immaterial attainments.

SAÑÑĀ. Saññā 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 jñā (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 (khandhā). It is also included as one component of nāma in the complex of nāmarūpa, one of the constituent elements of the cyclic individuated series of becoming (bhava) that proceeds in accordance with the law of dependent arising1. In the analysis of the perceptual process sañ  $n\bar{a}$  is represented as the cognitive response which is

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# VOLUME VII

FASCICLE 4: Saddhammappakasini - Sasanavamsa

