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**A study of the five aggregates in Theravāda Buddhism:
their order and their relation to the doctrine
of the *paṭiccasamuppāda***

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Submitted in July 1992

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of PhD.
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A study of the five aggregates in Theravāda Buddhism

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Abstract

Although Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent individual entity, the tradition nevertheless makes frequent use of the “aggregate” scheme when asked to explain the elements at work in the individual. Through a detailed analysis of each of these five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*), I first intend to establish how the Theravāda tradition views their interaction, with each other and with the external world. Secondly, I will attempt to offer strong evidence that the traditional order systematically used for the enumeration of the five aggregates is significant. This will be evidenced by establishing a correlation between the five aggregates and the eight middle links of the theory of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). The results of my research will not only explain the psychosomatic workings of the individual — as viewed by the Theravāda tradition —, but will clarify the mental process which, according to the Pāli *suttas*, constitutes the grounds of transmigration.

Bien que le bouddhisme condamne la croyance en une entité individuelle permanente, la tradition emploie le schème des cinq agrégats (*pañcakkhandhā*) pour expliquer le processus psycho-physique de l'individu. Par le biais d'une analyse détaillée de chacun de ces cinq agrégats, j'espère démontrer, en premier lieu, comment la tradition Theravāda perçoit leur interaction, entre eux et avec le monde extérieur. Deuxièmement, je tenterai d'offrir certains arguments supportant l'ordre traditionnel utilisé systématiquement lors de l'énumération de ces agrégats. Pour ce faire, je devrai établir une corrélation entre les cinq agrégats et les huit chaînons médians de la théorie de production conditionnée (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Le résultat de cette recherche expliquera le processus psychosomatique de l'individu — tel que perçu par la tradition Theravāda — et clarifiera le processus mental qui, d'après les *suttas* palis, constitue le fondement de la transmigration.

Abbreviations

When reference to primary sources is made, we will give the abbreviation of the source used, followed by a lower-case Roman number indicating the volume number, and an Arabic number indicating the page number. For example, a quote from the third volume of the *Dīghanikāya*, page 238 will be listed as **D. iii, 238.**

| | |
|-------|---|
| A. | <i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i> |
| AA. | <i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i> commentary (<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>) |
| AbhK. | <i>Abhidharmakośa</i> |
| AbhS. | <i>Abhidharmamattasaṅgaha</i> |
| Dh. | <i>Dhammapada</i> |
| DhA. | <i>Dhammapada</i> commentary |
| Dhs. | <i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i> |
| DhsA. | <i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i> commentary (<i>Atthasālinī</i>) |
| D. | <i>Dīghanikāya</i> |
| DA. | <i>Dīghanikāya</i> commentary (<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>) |
| It | <i>Itivuttaka</i> |
| Kvu. | <i>Kathāvatthu</i> |
| M. | <i>Majjhimanikāya</i> |
| MA. | <i>Majjhimanikāya</i> commentary (<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>) |
| Miln. | <i>Milindapañha</i> |
| Net. | <i>Nettipakaraṇa</i> |
| Nid. | <i>Niddesa (Mahā)</i> |
| Ps. | <i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i> |
| Pug. | <i>Puggalapaññatti</i> |
| S. | <i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i> |
| SA. | <i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i> commentary (<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>) |
| Sn. | <i>Suttanipāta</i> |
| SnA. | <i>Suttanipāta</i> commentary (<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>) |
| Th. | <i>Thera-Therīgāthā</i> |
| Ud. | <i>Udāna</i> |
| Vbh. | <i>Vibhaṅga</i> |
| VbhA. | <i>Vibhaṅga</i> commentary (<i>Sammohavinodanī</i>) |
| Vin. | <i>Vinayaṭṭhaka</i> |
| Vsm. | <i>Visuddhimagga</i> |
| VsmA. | <i>Visuddhimagga</i> commentary (<i>Paramatthamañjūsā</i>) |
| Ymk. | <i>Yamaka</i> |
| AbhA. | Commentary on the <i>abhidhamma</i> excluding the <i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i> and the <i>Vibhaṅga</i> . (<i>Pañcappakaraṇatthakathā</i>) |

Introduction

Preliminary remarks

Buddhism distinguishes itself from other religious traditions by its explicit denial of the existence of a permanent self (c.f. *atta*) which experiences the external world. Buddhist texts present the entire universe, and the individual as well, as made up of different phenomena (*dhammas*). Although all these phenomena of existence are reduced to transitory entities by the theory of “selflessness” (*anatta*), Buddhism classifies them into different categories in order to explain the conventionally accepted concept of “person”. The three concepts of “bases” (*āyatanas*), “elements” (*dhātus*), and “aggregates” (*khandhas*) constitute different schemes for classifying the various phenomena. Although the aggregates are nothing but a “convenient fiction”,¹ the Buddha nevertheless made frequent use of the aggregate scheme when asked to explain the elements at work in the individual. According to this scheme, what we conventionally call a “person” can be

¹In his *Buddhist Dictionary*, Nyānātiloka emphatically remarked that these five aggregates “merely form an abstract classification by the Buddha, but that they as such ... have no existence. ... Due to a lack of understanding is also the fact that the five Khandhas are often conceived as too compact, too substantial, so to speak, as more or less permanent entities, whereas in reality, as already stated, they as such, never exist; and even their representatives have only an evanescent existence” (Nyānātiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (Colombo: Frewin & Co., 1956) p. 77.). These five aggregates are therefore classified under the heading of conventional truth (*sammutisacca* or *vohārasacca*) as opposed to “truth in the highest sense” (*paramatthasacca*) to which the theory of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) belongs. The *Milindapañha* clarifies the distinction between these two level of truths (Mil. 160).

understood in terms of five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhas*), the sum of which must not be mistaken for a permanent entity since beings are nothing but an amalgam of ever-changing phenomena. Through a detailed analysis of each of these aggregates, I first intend to establish how the Theravāda tradition views their interaction with each other and with the external world. Secondly, I will attempt to offer strong evidence that the traditional order systematically used for the enumeration of the five aggregates is significant. The results of my research will not only explain the psychosomatic workings of the individual, but will also shed light on the mental process which, according to the Pāli suttas, constitutes the grounds of transmigration.

According to the Theravāda *sutta* literature, the human personality is composed solely of the five aggregates,² and to perceive any of these *khandhas* as the “self”³ leads to a particular kind of wrong view known as “the view that complex things are real” (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*).⁴ If the entire personality is confined within these *pañcakkhandhas*, the Buddhist theory of perception — and of “misperception” as well — should be made clear by understanding the interrelation of the five aggregates. This thesis will clarify the fundamentals of Buddhist psychology by analyzing one of the earliest classifications of the *saṃskṛtadharmas*, the *pañcakkhandhas*, understanding the role that these aggregates play in the cognitive process and, as a by-product, explaining how the *pañcakkhandhas* chain us to the wheel of misery.

²M. i, 229

³Here, the word *atta* is used.

⁴M. i, 130, also M. i, 140-141 and A. ii, 128.

Once the individual meaning of the *pañcakkhandhas* is conceptualized, we will then endeavour to comprehend the relation that exists between each of the aggregates. If this last attempt is successful, the reason for the nomenclature of the *pañcakkhandhas* in the specific array found in canonical literature will become clear and will, therefore, present evidence against both Mrs. Rhys Davids's view that "the primary reason for the *khandha*-division was practical [...] and not scientific"⁵ and Th. Stcherbatsky's opinion that the order in which the aggregates appear is merely "a gradual progress from coarseness to subtleness".⁶ By demonstrating that the habitual taxonomy hints at a psychosomatic process present in every individual, I will have clarified the significance and importance of the traditional order of the five aggregates, which is far more than a mere "gradual progress from coarseness to subtleness", as Stcherbatsky remarked. Such justification for the nomenclature of the five aggregates has never been explicitly put forward, nor even alluded to.

Comments on the five aggregates

The five *khandhas* are variously translated as "matter" or form (*rūpa*); "sensation", "emotion" or "feeling" (*vedanā*); "recognition" or "perception

⁵C.A.F. Rhys Davids, trans., *Buddhist Psychology: A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics; a translation of the Dhammasaṅgaṇi from the Abhidharma-piṭaka* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1975) p. 55.

⁶Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970) p. 19.

(*saññā*); “karmic activity”, “formation”, or “force” (*saṅkhāra*); and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*). However, I believe that to rely solely on these standard translations is ultimately misleading, primarily because the concepts that some of them represent are heavily loaded with connotations inapplicable to the textual context in which the actual Buddhist aggregates were initially defined. For example, the term *vedanā* can be restricted neither to physical sensations nor to mental emotions or feelings, since the Pāli tradition itself informs us that *vedanā* can arise both on the body and on the mind.⁷ Moreover, the *Saṃyuttanikāya* states that one should “dwell observing the impermanence of pleasant sensations on the body”,⁸ thus implying that the term *vedanā* refers not only to an emotional “feeling” as Mrs. Rhys Davids has put forward, but also to a physical sensation occurring on the body. However, other passages such as “all mental objects culminate (flow) into *vedanās*”⁹ stress the fact that *vedanā* is not a mere physical element since it is influenced by mental contents. Yet it seems that most scholars adopt a certain translation for *vedanā* without first establishing this nuance, thus leading the reader to think that *vedanā* is either solely physical or mental.

This confusion may be partially due to the fact that Sanskrit and Pāli sources, in most instances, fail to provide descriptive definitions of the five

⁷As we will see in Chapter 3, the *Saṃyuttanikāya* presents a fivefold classification of the concept of *vedanā*, where the first two divisions (*sukkhindriyā* and *dukkhindriyā*) refer to pleasant and unpleasant bodily *vedanā*, the third and fourth (*somanassindriyā* and *domanassindriyā*) are pleasant and unpleasant mental *vedanā* and finally the fifth (*upekkhindriyā*) consists of neither pleasant nor unpleasant bodily and mental *vedanā* (S. v, 210).

⁸*So kāye ca sukhāya ca vedanāya aniccānupassī viharati.* S. iv, 211.

⁹*Vedanāsamosaṇaṇā sabbe dhammā.* A. iv, 339.

aggregates, let alone any treatment of their interrelationship. Therefore, the first undertaking of this thesis is to discover and establish the deeper meaning of each of these elements, and then to explain their complex interaction. This task would have been made easier if Pāli literature had paraphrased the meanings rather than illustrated them with a word endowed with the same etymology. For example, the *Majjhimanikāya* explains the meaning of *vedanā* thus: “it is called ‘sensation’ because it ‘senses’”.¹⁰ However, this problem will be solved by discerning a well-grounded definition of each aggregate by means of a systematic contextual analysis of every reference found in the Theravāda canon. By amalgamating all the passages where each of the *khandhas* is mentioned, I will be able to clarify their meaning and their implication within Buddhist doctrine.

Another problem arising from the study of the *khandha* theory is whether the order of their nomenclature is purely random or has a certain significance. The fact that the five aggregates are always presented in the same order throughout Pāli literature does not necessarily imply that anything significant can be deduced from this very order. The order could have been essentially random, and become standard primarily as a pedagogical means to ease memorization of the canon.¹¹ Scholars such as Mrs. Rhys Davids and Stcherbatsky have wondered why this particular order was chosen rather than another, and they both have put forward different explanations. As

¹⁰*Vedeti vedeitī kho āvuso, tasmā vedanā ti vuccati.* M. i, 293.

¹¹The Pāli canon was not written down until three or four centuries after the death of the Buddha. Therefore, certain mnemonic devices had to be elaborated to facilitate the memorization of this huge canonical corpus.

mentioned previously,¹² Mrs. Rhys Davids suggested that the order of the *khandhas* was purely practical and not scientific. Since she did not elaborate on what she meant by “practical”, her statement is not very useful. Stcherbatsky, on the other hand, put forward the hypothesis that the order reflects a gradual process from coarseness to subtleness. While it is true that, *prima facie*, the order starting with “matter” and ending with “consciousness” seems to reflect this gradual process, we will see that the “material” aggregate possesses elements which stand on the same level of subtleness as the “consciousness” aggregate.¹³ Yet my intention is not to refute Stcherbatsky’s argument, but only to show that the reason for the particular order of the aggregates is grounded in something much more important than this “gradual process”. In fact, I intend to show that there was an underlying reason for choosing this particular order: the nomenclature of these five aggregates had to be in total accord with the theory of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Although the latter is traditionally approached as the highest truth (*paramatthasacca*), and the former merely as a conventional truth (*sammuttisacca* or *vohārasacca*), I will present evidence that these levels of truth, in regard to the *pañcakkhandhas* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, are not merely juxtaposable, but that they represent different expressions of the same process.

¹²See page 3.

¹³Such elements are included in the list of *upādārūpa* on page 63.

The theory of dependent origination: the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

In order to grasp the interrelation of the aggregates, it will be necessary to briefly analyze the theory of “dependent origination” (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), a doctrine fundamental to all Buddhist traditions. This will serve our purpose by further illuminating the manner in which the five aggregates interact. Furthermore, by correlating some of the links of the chain of dependent origination with the five aggregates, it will become clear that these very links share the same order as the traditional nomenclature of the five aggregates, and that the latter fulfil the same function as that of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* (literally “arising on the ground of a preceding cause”) could very well be considered to be the common denominator of all the Buddhist traditions throughout the world, whether Mahāyāna or Theravāda. On the one hand, the canonical texts of the Theravāda tradition portray Venerable Sāriputta saying that “whoever understands the *paṭiccasamuppāda* understands the teaching of the Buddha, and whoever understands the teaching of the Buddha understands the *paṭiccasamuppāda*”.¹⁴ On the other hand, the present Dalai Lama recently stated that the fundamental precept of Buddhism is this law of dependent

¹⁴After this statement, an implicit correlation between the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the five aggregates is established: Yo *paṭiccasamuppādaṃ* passati so *dhammaṃ* passati, yo *dhammaṃ* passati so *paṭiccasamuppādaṃ* passatīti. *Paṭiccasamuppannā kho paṇ' ime yadidaṃ paṇcupādānakkhandhā*. “In fact, the five clinging-aggregates are dependently-arisen.” M. i, 190-1.

origination.¹⁵ No matter what the tradition is, we clearly see the importance attributed to this theory. The *paṭiccasamuppāda* constitutes, as Nyānātiloka pointed out, “the indispensable condition for the real understanding and realization of the teaching of the Buddha”.¹⁶ This theory is usually divided into twelve links (*nidānas*), each of which conditions the following one:

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Ignorance | (<i>avijjā</i>) |
| 2. | Karmic activities | (<i>saṅkhāra</i>) |
| 3. | Consciousness | (<i>viññāṇa</i>) |
| 4. | Mind and matter | (<i>nāmarūpa</i>) |
| 5. | Six sense-doors | (<i>saḷāyatanā</i>) |
| 6. | Contact | (<i>phassa</i>) |
| 7. | Sensation | (<i>vedanā</i>) |
| 8. | Craving | (<i>taṇhā</i>) |
| 9. | Attachment | (<i>upādāna</i>) |
| 10. | Becoming | (<i>bhava</i>) |
| 11. | Birth | (<i>jāti</i>) |
| 12. | Old age, death,... | (<i>jara-maraṇa...</i>) |

The order presented above, where one link conditions the next,¹⁷ is traditionally referred to as the “normal” (*anuloma*¹⁸) order. The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is also often presented in reverse (*paṭiloma*) order, which simply indicates that if one link is eradicated, the next is also eradicated.¹⁹

¹⁵Tenzin Gyatso, *Freedom in Exile* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) p. 10.

¹⁶Nyānātiloka p. 119.

¹⁷For example: “On account of ignorance, karmic activities arise”. *Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*.

¹⁸Literally [combing] “in the direction of the hair”.

¹⁹The usual wording of this reverse order would run thus: “From the thorough eradication of ignorance, karmic activities are eradicated.” *Avijjāya tveva asesavirāgaṇirodhā saṅkhāraṇirodho*.

The chain of dependent origination is often approached as a causal theory. We usually speak of causality when we say “there being this, there appears that”. Yet we have to stress that a substantial “cause” from which the “effect” was generated cannot be deduced from the *paṭīccasamuppāda*. As Stcherbasky remarked:

It [the *paṭīccasamuppāda*] means dependently co-ordinated-origination or dependent existence. According to it every momentary entity springs into existence in co-ordination with other moments. Its formula is “*asmin sati idam bhavati*” there being this, there appears that! According to this, there could be neither *causa materialis*, nor *causa efficiens*. An entity is not really produced, it is simply co-ordinated.²⁰

The same author offers a similar remark in *Buddhist Logic*:

In this sense the logical law of Causation is the reverse of the real law of Causation. A cause is not a reason. The cause is not a sufficient reason for predicating (or predicting) the effect. But the effect is a sufficient reason for affirming apodictically the preceding existence of its cause.²¹

Lilian Silburn has further clarified the sense of this twelvefold chain in her book *Instant et cause*:

Par leur simple réunion les mots qui constituent le pratīyasamutpāda vont enseigner la voie médiane: Contre l'éternalisme, le terme “en dépendance”, “pratīya”: met en évidence l'ensemble des conditions qui sont indispensables à l'apparition d'une chose (dharma), laquelle surgit en relation, et non pas d'elle-même, ni non plus sans condition. Ce même aspect d'harmonie des causes a pour but d'écarter la doctrine d'une cause unique, permanente, douée de durée, aussi bien que la doctrine inverse qui affirme l'absence de toute cause. Le terme “samutpāda” production en relation, fait échec à l'hérésie de l'annihilation et de non action en montrant que les choses se produisent en dépendance et non au hasard (adhicca).²²

²⁰Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1968) p. 9.

²¹Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1962) p. 311.

²²Lilian Silburn, *Instant et cause: le discontinu dans la pensée philosophique de l'Inde* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1955) p. 197.

Whether in the Pāli, Sanskrit or Chinese canon, this complex chain of causation is always said to give rise to suffering.²³ Therefore, the deactivation of any of the twelve links of this chain is bound to break the causal process and to eliminate suffering. Moreover, the Buddha stated repeatedly²⁴ that the root of all suffering lies in the five aggregates of clinging,²⁵ which represent the only psycho-physical constituents of the individual. We see that according to the Pāli canon, both the chain of dependent origination and the five aggregates are seen as responsible for suffering (*dukkha*). This is further evidenced by the *Mahāvagga* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*,²⁶ where an intimate relation between the five aggregates and the theory of dependent origination is established.²⁷ In this specific *sutta*, a description of the four noble truths is offered in terms of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Therein, the first noble truth follows the standard canonical rendering and ends with the following phrase: “in short, the five clinging-aggregates are *dukkha*”.²⁸ Yet the description of the two following

²³“This [the *paṭiccasamuppāda*] is the origin of the entire mass of suffering.” *Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti*.

²⁴This is found in the first noble truth: *Saṅkhittena pañcā upādānakkhandhā pi dukkhā*.

²⁵The “clinging-aggregates” (*upādānakkhandhā*) are basically the same as the “five aggregates” except that the former are responsible for binding the individual to the wheel of becoming, *saṃsāra*. This thesis will shed more light on the nuance between the two concepts (refer to pages 34 and following).

²⁶A. i, 176-177.

²⁷Étienne Lamotte has already noted this relation. Étienne Lamotte, “Conditioned Co-Production and Supreme Enlightenment”, *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1980: 118-139) p. 119.

²⁸[...] *saṅkhittena pañc'upādānakkhandhā dukkhā*. A. i, 177.

truths does not comply with the paradigmatic rendition. Instead, they are depicted in terms of the theory of dependent origination. The noble truth concerned with the arising of *dukkha* is simply explained by the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in normal order (*anuloma*), while the noble truth of cessation (of *dukkha*) is defined by the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in reverse order (*paṭiloma*). It is clear that the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, traditionally seen as an explanation for the arising and the eradication of *dukkha*, is intimately related to the theory of the five aggregates.

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a theory that proceeds to establish the connectedness of all phenomena of existence (*dhammas*). As Nyānātiloka stated:

Whereas the doctrine of Impersonality, or *anattā*, proceeds analytically, by splitting up into the ultimate constituent parts, into merely empty, unsubstantial phenomena or elements, the doctrine of dependent origination, on the other hand, proceeds synthetically, or showing that all these phenomena are, in some way or other, conditionally related with each other.²⁹

Since the *paṭiccasamuppāda* deals with all the phenomena of existence, it is evident that the different schemes used to classify these same phenomena can be traced within the *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself. As mentioned on page 1, the five aggregates are merely a classification of the various phenomena of existence and this scheme should be applicable to the *paṭiccasamuppāda* as well. So far, however, no one has shown where each of the five aggregates exactly fits into the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. It is my intention to make an explicit correlation between the aggregates and this twelvefold chain and to prove that the five aggregates can be correlated with certain links of the theory of

²⁹Nyānātiloka p. 119.

dependent origination. Moreover, by establishing such a correlation between the theory of dependent origination and the five aggregates, the traditional nomenclature of the five aggregates will prove to be meaningful.

The Theravāda tradition holds that certain links of the chain of causation are limited either to the past, present or future. In other words, and as exemplified in the diagram below, different links constitute different temporal divisions.³⁰ Although this chronological division is not expressed explicitly in Pāli canonical literature itself, it is supported by Buddhaghosa,³¹ and is taken for granted by modern traditional scholars.³² What I find confusing, however, is the clear delineation and theoretical distinction between these three divisions. Since the past is nothing but the ageing of the present, and the present the actualization of the future, each temporal division has to be seen as the paraphrasing of, or a different perspective on, the two other divisions. Furthermore, Étienne Lamotte, commenting on a diagram similar to the one below, stressed that “*le tableau dressé ici se réfère à un groupe de trois existences découpé artificiellement dans la suite infinie des*

³⁰*Tattha tayo addhā [...] Katham? Avijjā saṅkhārā añño addhā jāti-jarā-maraṇam anāgato addhā majjhe añña paccuppanno addhā ti tayo addhā.* Anuruddha, “Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha” (J.P.T.S., 1884, 1-46) p. 36. “There are three periods. Ignorance and karmic activities belong to the past; birth, old-age and death belong to the future and the middle eight [links] belong to the present.”

³¹As Mrs. Rhys Davids pointed out in her revised edition of Shwe Zan Aung’s translation of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*. Shwe Zan Aung trans., *Compendium of Philosophy; Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (London: P.T.S., 1967) p. 189, note #4.

³²See Nyānātiloka p. 120.

*existences s'intégrant dans un Saṃsāra qui n'a pas eu de commencement.*³³ Since these divisions are merely arbitrary, the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* that were classified under a certain time period could have been easily classified under another. What comes under "past" could have been under "future" or "present", and *vice versa*. Therefore, it becomes evident that elements belonging to a specific time period represent a process similar to the one reflected by the elements belonging to another. Ignorance and karmic activities operate on the same principles as birth and old age and death, and as the eight middle links. The physical and psychological elements at work in the individual remain the same whether in the past, present or future. Stated differently, the theory of dependent origination could run thus: within one life-span (links 11-12; birth and old age and death), one keeps generating karmic activities (link 2) because of ignorance (link 1), and this generation of karmic activities due to ignorance is more easily understandable by examining the process described by the eight middle links. The second thing that strikes my attention is that the division of the chain of causation into three time periods implies the presence of the five aggregates in each of these periods, since an "individual" — the five aggregates — must experience this process within each of the periods.³⁴ Although the interrelation between the

³³ Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien* (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1967) p. 43.

³⁴ This perspective was already put forward by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośa*:
Ya eṣa skandhasantāno janmatrayāvastha upadiṣṭaḥ
sa pratītyasamutpādo dvādaśāṅgas trikāṇḍakaḥ
pūrvāparāntayor dve dve madhye 'ṣṭau paripūriṇaḥ. AbhK. iii, 20.

A passage that Louis de La Vallée Poussin has translated as follows: *Cette série de skandhas que nous avons vu se développer dans trois existences, c'est le Pratītyasamutpāda qui a douze membres en trois parties, deux pour la première, deux pour la troisième, huit pour celle du milieu.* (Louis de
 (continued...)

temporal divisions and the working of the five aggregates within each of the divisions could be evidenced, my thesis will be limited to the discussion of the middle division (i.e., links three to ten), for it is the most detailed temporal division and the one wherein the process is readily observable. Then only will I be able to clearly establish the correlation between Buddhist soteriology and psychology, respectively depicted by the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the five aggregates.

Diagram I

The Three Temporal Divisions of the Paṭiccasamuppāda

| | | |
|----------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
| PAST | 1. | <i>Avijjā</i> (Ignorance) |
| | 2. | <i>Saṅkhāra</i> (Karmic activities) |
| PRESENT | 3. | <i>Viññāṇa</i> (Consciousness) |
| | 4. | <i>Nāmarūpa</i> (Mind & Matter) |
| | 5. | <i>Salāyatanā</i> (Six sense-doors) |
| | 6. | <i>Phassa</i> (Contact) |
| | 7. | <i>Vedanā</i> (Sensation) |
| | 8. | <i>Tanhā</i> (Craving) |
| | 9. | <i>Upādāna</i> (Clinging) |
| | 10. | <i>Bhava</i> (Becoming) |
| FUTURE | 11. | <i>Jāti</i> (Birth; Rebirth) |
| | 12. | <i>Jarāmaraṇa</i> (Old age and death) |

³⁴(...continued)

la Vallée Poussin, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1980), vol. ii, p. 60-61.

Methodology

The aim of this study of the five aggregates is not to discover what the Buddha actually said about them, nor what he intended to mean, for it is impossible to state with conviction which texts were uttered by the Buddha himself. Although many scholars have attempted to offer a chronological classification of various canonical texts, it does not seem that a consensus has been reached. For example, Ven. H. Saddhatissa claims that the *Suttanipāta*, a work mainly containing verses, “is one of the oldest collections of Buddhist discourses in the Pali canon”.³⁵ A. K. Warder, on the other hand, is of the view that prose texts of the *Dīghanikāya* “are more authentic in their preservation of the utterances and dialogues of the Buddha”.³⁶ Moreover, it is very likely that, although a certain stance regarding the originality of Pāli texts is prevalent in the academic milieu, this same position might be discarded in the next decade due to the evolution of linguistics. A definitive statement as to the originality of Pāli canonical texts does not lie around the corner!

Our concern here, is not so much what the Buddha has said, but rather the position that the Theravāda tradition supports. This school has been regulating the lives and beliefs of millions of people for over two millennia

³⁵*The Sutta-nipāta*, trans. H. Saddhatissa (London: Curzon Press, 1985) note on back cover.

³⁶A.K. Warder, *Introduction to Pali* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980) p. viii.

and has elaborated an intricate scholastic and commentarial tradition. Undoubtedly, there is a huge chronological and geographical gap between the time the Buddha uttered his discourses (fifth and sixth centuries B.C., North India), and when they were written down for the first time (second century B.C., Sri Lanka). It is highly probable that certain elements present in the “original” canon were either “forgotten”, or that certain passages that were not uttered by the Buddha himself were “remembered”. Another seven centuries separate the actual writing down of the canon and the elaboration of most commentaries.³⁷ Again, this gap offers more grounds for those arguing that the exegetical literature was not necessarily consistent with “original” Buddhism. Since “original” Buddhism is a tradition that we have not yet discovered, we cannot prove whether exegetical literature was or was not consistent with the earlier tradition.

However, we can postulate that since the commentarial tradition was incorporated within the Theravāda tradition itself, the latter must have insured that the former was consistent with every aspect of its own theory. The Pāli *suttas* (texts known as the discourses of the Buddha), the *abhidhamma* (the scholastic literature), and the exegetical literature of Buddhaghosa were all included and accepted as an integral part of the Theravāda tradition. Therefore, our thesis will be based on the assumption that the Theravāda tradition itself must have assured the integrity of a text — whether canonical or exegetical — before taking it under its wing. This

³⁷The most well-known exegete of the Theravāda tradition, Buddhaghosa, lived in the fifth century A.D. Although he himself claimed that he only translated commentaries already extant in Sinhalese, the authorship of the commentaries is usually assigned to him.

study of the five aggregates will be based on the whole Pāli canonical literature, and will refer to the commentaries whenever certain canonical passages seem unclear. Our starting assumption might not prove to be true, for we might encounter contradictions within this immense corpus. Yet I believe that the two thousand five hundred year old tradition has taken the necessary precautions to avert breaches in its integrity. This thesis will therefore analyze the five aggregates within the Theravāda tradition as a whole.

This thesis first aims at establishing a correlation between the five aggregates and the doctrine of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. The former are a scheme for classifying all the phenomena of existence (*dhammas*) while the latter is a theory that accounts for the arising of any of these phenomena. I believe that the connection between the two doctrines has never been established before for two major reasons. First, the amount of data is incredibly large, far more than one intellect can handle. Secondly, these two doctrines work on two different levels of truth.

Scholars working on Pāli texts in the past were limited, for they did not have access to the tools necessary for making a thorough contextual analysis. The Pāli canon itself is constituted of more than fifty-two volumes, excluding all the commentarial literature that accompanies them. If we compare this canon to the Bible, the latter seems small. It would be possible to search through each of these books individually, looking for a particular word and noting the context where it is used, but this methodology would be almost impossible for a single individual intending to clarify the meaning and

interrelation of each of the five aggregates.³⁸ By using a databank containing the whole Pāli canon,³⁹ I was able to make a thorough contextual analysis of the concept of *pañcakkhandhas* and of each of its members. This task was made possible by the *Vipassanā Research Institute*, Igatpuri, India, who allowed me to use their Mahidol databank (*BUDSIR*) of the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*. Without this tool, I could have never accomplished what I had set out to do. Using “masks”⁴⁰, I searched for every occurrence of the word *khandha*, standing on its own, in whatever declensions it appeared, or as a member of a compound — thus incorporating the more specific term of *pañcakkhandhas*. The same procedure was followed with each of the five aggregates. Whenever a reference was found, it was stored on disk with the actual paragraph in which the word occurred. Although many of these references were repetitions, the amount of data collected was enormous: more than seven megabytes. I then proceeded to catalog these passages according to their implications. Most of the references only defined the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhas*) as matter (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), recognition (*saññā*), karmic activity (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Many others simply stated that the five aggregates — or any of them — are transient, or devoid of “self”. Certain references were also not relevant to this study because of

³⁸For example, the *Pāli Text Society* concordance was started by a group of scholars in 1955 and, almost forty years later, has covered only until *bahu*. This concordance, moreover, is not thorough, for some references are missing. Yet, considering the tools available to these scholars, the task on which they embarked was colossal.

³⁹*BUDSIR* databank, designed by Mahidol University, Bangkok, 1989.

⁴⁰A “mask” is used in computerized searches to find variations on a word or string of characters. For example, searching for “*kandh*” will find “*kandhā*”, “*kandhānam*”, “*pañcakkhandhā*”, “*rūpakkandhassa*” etc.

the polysemy of certain terms. A good example of this would be the term *rūpa*, which signifies “matter”, but also “form”, as a sense-object perceived by the eyes. Passages referring to the latter definition of the term had to be put aside. Passages left were compiled and through a detailed analysis of them, I was able to frame a structure that circumscribed the meaning and the function of each of these aggregates. This is what I will be presenting in the following chapters.

Apart from the fact that the computerization of the Pāli canon is fairly recent, another reason why an explicit correlation between the *pañcakkhandhas* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda* has not been established in the past is that each of these theories is classified into different levels of truth: the conventional usage (*sammuti*) and the highest sense (*paramattha*). These two levels of truth are not referred to as such in canonical literature. They have been elaborated by the authors of the later commentarial tradition⁴¹ who based their theory on the canonical distinction between the *suttas* of precise meaning (*nītattha*) and those of provisional meaning (*neyyattha*).⁴² The *paramattha* category contains elements reflecting the understanding that the universe is made of ever-changing and irreducible principles (*dhammas*), from the comprehension of which the notion of “individual” cannot persist.⁴³

⁴¹See K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980) p. 366-367.

⁴²For further clarification on these two types of *suttas*, see É. Lamotte's “Textual interpretation in Buddhism”, *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Donald S. Lopez, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988) p. 18 ff.

⁴³“*Paramatthato pana puggalo nāma n’atthī ti*”. AA. ii, 118.

As Jayatilleke has pointed out, *sammuti* denoted in its earliest use is “the ‘commonly accepted (theories or beliefs)’ of the various debating recluses and brahmins”.⁴⁴ But it soon came to refer to relative truth, or the conventional language which the Buddha had to use when addressing his audience.⁴⁵ He had to use the concepts of “person”, “monk”, “householder”, although none of these really exist. Without conventional language, the Buddha could have never taught. for words and conventions are necessary for communication.

Since the five aggregates are merely a scheme for classifying the only real phenomena of existence, they do not fall into the classification of *paramattha*; strictly speaking, they belong to *sammuti*. Yet I would prefer using a classification proposed by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, who elaborated a hermeneutical Buddhist theory. Buddhadasa inserted a third level between *sammuti* and *paramattha*, that of *paññatti*, which refers to doctrinal conventions. As Louis Gabaude has stated:

Tandis que la convention courante [sammuti] consiste à appeler quelqu'un "Monsieur X.", la convention doctrinale [paññatti] en fait un groupe d'agrégats (khandha). Ces agrégats, il est doctrinalement convenu de les appeler "forme" (rūpa), "sensation" (vedanā), etc. Pour Buddhadasa, ces conventions doctrinales "sont légèrement meilleures [que les conventions courantes]. [Elles montrent qu'on] est un peu plus doué. On peut dire qu'on ne se laisse pas alors abuser par les conventions courantes."⁴⁶

⁴⁴Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 366.

⁴⁵David Kalupahana's *Buddhist Philosophy* offers a detailed description of the concept of *sammuti*. David Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976) p. 134 ff.

⁴⁶Louis Gabaude, *Une herméneutique bouddhique contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*, (Paris: Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988) p. 96.

Whether the five aggregates belong to the *sammuti* or the *paññatti* is not of prime importance. Yet what is crucial is that they do not belong to the highest level of truth, *paramattha*, in which the *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself is classified.

I believe that one of the reasons why the doctrines of the *pañcakkhandhas* and that of *paṭiccasamuppāda* have not been correlated in the past is that modern Theravāda orthodoxy, as expressed by Ledy Sadaw and Nyānātiloka, support the view that these two truths are irreconcilable.⁴⁷ Although Ledy Sadaw and Nyānātiloka only refer to *sammuti* and *paramattha*, and not to *paññatti*, I feel that their influence might have restrained modern scholars from seeking parallels between different levels of truth.

By juxtaposing and establishing a correlation between these two levels of truth, this thesis will try to prove that the doctrine of the five aggregates and that of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* are reflections of the same process. No attempt has ever been made explicitly to correlate both doctrines and to state

⁴⁷Jayatilake, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 365. Ledy Sadaw explained the nuance between the two levels of truth in the following manner: "Now conventional truth is the work of popular custom; it is opposed to inconsistency, untruthfulness, in speech Ultimate truth is established by the nature of things; is it opposed to mere opinion. Thus, according to conventional truth, it is not untruthful to say there is a personal entity. Why? Because that is the conventional opinion of the great majority; because of the absence of any number of people maintaining the contrary. Nevertheless, it is just an erroneous view." Ledy Sadaw, "Some points in Buddhist doctrine" (J.P.T.S., 1914) p. 129. While Nyānātiloka stated: "In the Sutta the doctrines are more or less explained in the words of the philosophically incorrect 'conventional' everyday language (vohāravacana [synonymous to sammuti]) understood by anyone, whilst the Abhidhamma on the other hand makes use of purely philosophical terms true in the absolute sense (paramatthavacana)". Nyānātiloka, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Colombo: n.p., 1933) p. 2.

which links of the theory of dependent origination refer to which particular aggregate. In fact, scholarly research on the five aggregates is almost non-existent.⁴⁸

Although many works have been published on Buddhist psychology, very few deal with the Theravāda tradition. In fact, the mental process, in terms of the five aggregates, is a key aspect of Buddhism that has never been thoroughly analyzed, nor been given more than the slightest academic attention. Most works on Buddhism enumerate and include only a short description of these five aggregates without ever going to the heart of the matter. In fact, scholars in the field only allude to the subject. For example, David Kalupahana only devotes four continuous pages to the discussion of the five aggregates in his treatise entitled *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*; whereas Étienne Lamotte (*Histoire du bouddhisme indien*), A.K. Warder (*Indian Buddhism*), Steve Collins (*Selfless Persons*) and E.R. Sarathchandra (*Buddhist Theory of Perception*) only mention them in passing in their books. For example, apart from offering a translation for each of the five aggregates, Lamotte — like most of the above scholars — only explains succinctly the transitory and selfless character of these five aggregates without even trying to explain the role they fulfil.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Beside E.R. Sarathchandra's *Buddhist Theory of Perception* (Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1958), Anagarika Govinda's *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* (London: Rider and Company, 1961), and the first part of David Kalupahana's *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), the literature dealing with this precise subject is virtually non-existent.

⁴⁹Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, p. 30.

The most extensive studies on the five aggregates so far are those of Jui-Liang Chang (“An Analytic study of the three concepts of ‘*skandhā*’, ‘*āyatana*’ and ‘*dhātu*’”, an article written in Chinese⁵⁰) and of Rupert M. Gethin (“The Five *khandhas*: their treatment in the *nikāyas* and early *abhidhamma*”⁵¹). However, neither of these two articles constitutes a thorough research into the nature and the interrelation of each of the aggregates. Most of Gethin’s article is devoted to the relation between the *khandhas* and the four noble truths and the difference between *khandhas* and *upādānakkhandhas*, whereas Jui-Liang Chang is primarily concerned with making correlations between the three concepts of *khandhas*, *āyatanas* and *dhātus*.

I contend that this absence constitutes a gaping hole in the field of Buddhist Studies, for, although the five aggregates are seen as responsible for the arising of *dukkha*, no academic research has established how the function of each of these aggregates chain beings to *saṃsāra*. I am convinced that without a thorough understanding of the five aggregates, we cannot grasp the liberation process at work within the individual, who is nothing but the five aggregates. Consequently, by clarifying the function of the five aggregates and establishing a parallel between them and the *paṭiccasamuppāda* — also

⁵⁰Chang, Jui-Liang. “An analytic study on three concepts of ‘*skandha*’, ‘*āyatana*’ and ‘*dhātu*’” [Chinese: “Che hs[e]ueh lun p[v]ing”] (*Philosophical Review*, Taiwan, 8, Jan. 1975) 107-121. I am grateful to Boris Voyer (Ph.D. candidate at the department of Anthropology of l’Université de Montréal conducting his doctoral research in Medical Anthropology in China) for translating the article for me.

⁵¹R. M. Gethin “The five *khandhas*: their theatment (sic) in the *nikāyas* and early *abhidhamma*” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 52, 1986: 35-53).

known as the *bhavadakka*, or the wheel of becoming, and implicitly the wheel of misery — it will become clear how these five aggregates perpetrate the renewal of existence (*bhavadakka*). This thesis will therefore not only clarify a subject that has not been thoroughly investigated in the past, but also shed light on a crucial aspect of Buddhism: the psychosomatic process that binds beings to *saṁsāra* and that is, reciprocally, necessary for attaining enlightenment.

The thesis itself will consist of seven chapters excluding the introduction and the conclusion. The first step, before proceeding to establish the function of each of the five aggregates, is to clarify what is meant by the Pāli concept of *khandha* and to circumscribe what were the connotations attached to this concept at the time of the Buddha. The first chapter will therefore focus on explaining the concept of “aggregate” itself and contextualizing this conception within the wider Indian and Buddhist frameworks. Within that chapter, I will also clarify the distinction between the “five clinging aggregates” (*pañcupādānakkhandhas*) and the “bare” five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhas*), for this nuance, often overlooked by many scholars, needs to be stressed. The five following chapters will respectively discuss each of the five aggregates and hint at the place they could occupy among the eight middle links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. I will follow the traditional order of nomenclature and start with *rūpa* (matter) and end with consciousness (*viññāṇa*) for it is my intention to show that this particular order reflects the eight middle links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In order to arrive at a clear and precise definition of each of the aggregates in these five chapters, I will first analyze the etymology of the terms and study the

canonical references that shed light on their function. In the seventh chapter, I will establish the correlation between the five aggregates and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. By doing so, I will be able to establish a clear correlation between the individual, viewed by the Theravāda Buddhist tradition as the five aggregates, and the process that binds beings to the cycle of *saṃsāra*, the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Moreover, this correlation will bring evidence against the theory that the traditional nomenclature of the five aggregates is purely random.

Chapter 1

The Concept of *Khandha*

1.1 The term *khandha* in the wider Buddhist context

Buddhism differs from most religious traditions in that no room is allotted for an ultimate reality corresponding to the concept of “self”. Most Buddhist traditions view the entire universe (and the individual as well) as composed of different, irreducible principles (*dhammas*). Although these *dhammas* serve as a common denominator for different Buddhist doctrines, the number and classification of these primordial elements vary from one school to another. The Theravāda tradition allows for up to 200 principles,¹ while the Sarvāstivāda’s *Abhidharmakośa* has narrowed down the classification to seventy-two elements.² Nevertheless, both schools have elaborated numerous approaches for analytical purposes, one of which consists of the subdivision of these elements into two categories: *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata*. The *saṅkhata* category comprises most of the elements and refers to all conditioned (or originated, in the sense of having a beginning and an end) phenomena of existence. The *Aṅguttaranikāya* describes the *saṅkhatadhammas* as possessing three characteristics, namely, arising, passing

¹Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, p. 303.

²Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, p. 662.

away, and impermanence,³ while the *asaṅkhatadhammas* are referred to as the unconditioned,⁴ the last term being defined as *nibbāna*.⁵ Again, the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins differ as to the constituents of the *asaṅkhatadhamma*-group; the latter consider space (*ākāśa*) and two kinds of *nibbāna* (*pratisaṅkhyānirodha*⁶ and *apratisaṅkhyānirodha*⁷) as unoriginated principles, while the former allows only *nibbāna* in this category.⁸ The *dhammas* in the major group, generally known as the *saṅkhatadhamma*-group, are held responsible for a being's elation and depression⁹ because of their inherent characteristic of leading to an inaccurate perception of reality. This group of *saṅkhatadhammas* is further classified into five aggregates¹⁰ — the *pañcakkhandhas* — of matter (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), recognition (*saññā*), karmic activities (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) — which alone stand as the constituents of the individual.

³A. i, 152.

⁴*Katame dhammā asaṅkhatā? Yo eva so dhammo appaccayo — so eva so dhammo asaṅkhato.* Dhs. 193.

⁵*Katame dhammā asaṅkhatā? Nibbānaṃ — ime dhammā asaṅkhatā.* Dhs. 244.

⁶This first type of *nibbāna* refers to the eradication through wisdom of already existing defilements.

⁷This second type of *nibbāna* refers to the obstruction, through meditation (*dhyāna*) of any future defilements.

⁸Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, p. 675.

⁹M. iii, 299.

¹⁰*Saṅkhatam rūpam saṅkhatamrūpan ti yathābhūtam na pajānāti. Saṅkhatam vedanam. Saṅkhatamsaññam. Saṅkhate saṅkhāre. Saṅkhatam viññāṇam saṅkhatamviññāṇanti yathābhūtam na pajānāti.* S. iii, 114.

1.2 Etymology of the term *khandha*

The term *khandha* (or its Sanskrit equivalent, *skandha*) was already extant in pre-Buddhist literature. As for pre-*Upaniṣadic* literature, one of the oldest Indian treatises on semantics and etymology, the *Nirukta*, holds that the general meaning of *skandha* in the Veda is restricted to “the branches of a tree” since they “are attached to the tree”.¹¹ It is interesting to note that the word “trunk”, which stands for the union of all the branches of the tree, is one of the connotations of the Pāli term *khandha* as well.¹² The author of the *Nirukta* also alludes to a secondary meaning, viz. “shoulder”, which is derived from the same root (*skandh* = “to be attached”), and is used in this peculiar sense because the shoulder “is attached to the body”.¹³ We find a similar usage in the Pāli canon. The *Saṃyuttanikāya* and the *Visuddhimagga* also use the word *khandha* to designate shoulder.¹⁴ Some later pre-Buddhist literature such as the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* uses the word *skandha* in the sense of “branches” referring to the three branches of duty: *trayo dharmaskandhāḥ*

¹¹*Skandho vṛkṣasya samāskanno bhavati. Ayamapītaraskandha etasmādeva. Āskannam kāyo. Nirukta*, vi 18.

¹²S. i, 207; D. ii, 171-172; Sn. 282, etc.

¹³*Skandho vṛkṣasya samāskanno bhavati. Athamapītaraskandha itasmād eva. Āskannam kāye. Ahiḥ śayataupaparcanaḥ pṛthivyāḥ. Nirukta*, vi, 18.

¹⁴*Atha kho māro pāpimā kassaka-vaṇṇam abhinimninitvā mahantam naṅgalaṃ khandhe karitvā...* “So Mārā the evil one, taking the shape of a farmer, bearing a mighty plough on his shoulder”. S. i, 115. *Tasmā pathamaṃ sīsaṃ makkhetvā khandhādīni makkhetabbāni.* “Therefore, having first anointed the head, he should anoint the shoulders”, etc. Vsm. 100.

yajñāḥ adhyayanam dānam.¹⁵ In contrast, the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* uses the term *skandha* in the sense of a “mass” of smoke.¹⁶ A similar usage of the word is found in the Pāli canon; the *suttas* also use the word *khandha* to refer to a “mass” of fire and of water (*aggikkhandha* and *udakakkhandha*).¹⁷ The latter connotation is widespread in the Pāli canon, for we find constant references to the “mass of suffering” (*dukkhakkhandha*).¹⁸ The word *khandha* is also used in Theravāda literature to refer to the concept of “division”. For instance, the Theravāda tradition uses the term *khandha* to represent a variety of constituent groups. The *Dīghanikāya*, for example, alludes to four *khandhas*: *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā* and *vimutti*.¹⁹ The same source mentions another association of three *khandhas* which corresponds to the previous grouping less freedom (*vimutti*).²⁰ In both pre-Buddhist and Buddhist literature, the polysemy associated with the term *khandha* is striking. However, the most important usage of the term in Pāli canonical literature is in the sense of the *pañcakkhandhas*, “the five aggregates”. The importance of this meaning is evidenced by the fact that Nyānātiloka’s *Buddhist Dictionary*

¹⁵“There are three branches of duty. The first is sacrifice, study of the Vedas and alms-giving. The second is austerity. The third is a ‘student of dharma’ (*brahmacārin*) dwelling in the house of a teacher, settling himself permanently in the house of a teacher.” *Trayo dharmaskandhā yajñodhyayanam dānamiti prathamah, tapa eko dvitīyah, brahmacāryācāryakulavāsī tṛtīyotyantamātmānamācāryakulevasādayan*. Chāndogya Upaniṣad, ii, 23.

¹⁶*Maitrī Upaniṣad*, vii, 11.

¹⁷Respectively, M. ii, 34 and S. iv, 179.

¹⁸Vin. i, 1; S. ii, 95; S. iii, 14; A. i, 77; A. v, 184; etc.

¹⁹D. iii, 229.

²⁰D. i, 206.

provides only the definition referring to the five aggregates.²¹ It also must be stressed that this particular definition of the term is non-existent in currently available pre-Buddhist literature, be it Upaniṣadic or Vedic.

1.3 The *khandhas* and the *Dhammacakkappavattana*

The sundry appearances of the term *pañcakkhandhas* in the *suttas* and the fact that the five aggregates are discussed in the first discourse of the Buddha — the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* — seem to indicate their intrinsic Buddhist character. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the Buddha's first discourse casts some doubt on this assumption for the following reason. Before having preached his first sermon to the five *bhikkhus*, the Buddha's doctrine was unfathomable to people of that day and age, yet the fact that he referred briefly to the *pañcakkhandhas* in the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* implies that all of their intricate connotations were already understood by those to whom the discourse was addressed. For example, in summarizing the various reasons for unhappiness, the Buddha concluded "in brief, the five clinging-aggregates lead to dissatisfaction",²² without elaborating on the term *pañcakkhandhas* (the five aggregates) any further. Neither of the two texts that contain commentaries on the *Dhammacakkappavattana*, the *Sāratthappakāsinī* and the *Samantapasādhikā*, shed light on this matter. Therefore, the term *pañcūpādānakkhandhas*

²¹Nyānātiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 76-80.

²²*Saṅkhittena pañcūpādānakkhandhā dukkhā*. S. v, 421.

(basically endowed with the same connotation as *pañcakkhandhas* as we will see on page 34) seems to have been a term in current use so that the Buddha did not need to elaborate on its signification.

The absence of a definition of the word *khandha*, in the Buddhist sense of the term, in pre-Buddhist literature leads us to three possible hypotheses: 1) the term existed then but was not recorded in the pre-Buddhist philosophical treatises available to us (or might have been incorporated in some of the *ājīvika* speculative works, sources which have not yet been discovered, if they exist); 2) the word *khandha* might have been a philosophical innovation introduced by the Buddha but, for literary reasons, the compilers of the Pāli canon decided not to include the detailed explanation of the term in the *Dhammacakkappavattana* even though the Buddha might have explained it then; or 3) the *Dhammacakkappavattana* was not composed at the beginning of the Buddha's ministry, but later in his career (or even after his death) when the Buddhist meaning of the term *pañcakkhandhas* had been established and was familiar to those within the tradition. The hypothesis that a well-developed doctrine was projected back into an earlier time to gain special authority seems quite popular amongst Western scholars. However, it is also possible that the abundant references to the term found in later discourses might have prompted the compilers to suppress the explanation of the term here for the sole reason of shaping the first discourse of the Buddha into a concise and thorough summary of the entire doctrine.

At first approach, it seems that the first hypothesis is the most plausible since a forerunner of the Buddhist *khandhas* is found in early *Brāhmaṇa* and *Upaniṣad*, where five factors also compose the major divisions of the individual. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*²³ has also elaborated a division of the individual (*puruṣaḥ*) composed of five different selves (*ātmā*) — *annarasamayaḥ* (the self made of food), *ātmāprāṇamayaḥ* (the self made of organic activities), *ātmāmanomayaḥ* (the self made of the mind), *ātmāvijñānamayaḥ* (the self made of cognition) and *ātmānandamayaḥ* (the self made of bliss) — all of which are relatively similar to the five Pāli *khandhas*. The *rūpakkhanda* could correspond to the “self made of food” since the *Dīghanikāya* describes *rūpa* as “being made of the four great elements which latter consist of ‘gross food’”,²⁴ i.e. *annamayaḥ*. The *saññākkhandha* and the *viññāṇakkhandha* could respectively be associated with *ātmāmanomayaḥ* (the “self made of mind”) and *ātmāvijñānamayaḥ* (“the self made of consciousness”). As K.N. Jayatilleke has pointed out,²⁵ *saṅkhārakkhandha* could also be related to *prāṇamayaḥ* since the former is described in the *Majjhimanikāya* as including the “in and out breathing”,²⁶ while the latter resembles the Upaniṣadic meaning of *prāṇa*, the vital breath.²⁷ Only

²³ *Eight Upaniṣads; With the Commentary of Śaṅkharācārya*, vol. 1; translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986) p. 223-397.

²⁴ *Tīṭh' atevāyaṃ Poṭṭhapāda oḷāriko attā rūpi cātummahābhūtiḥ kabaliṅkārahārabhakkho*. D. i, 186.

²⁵ Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 221.

²⁶ *Assāsapassāsā...kāyasāṅkhāro*. M. i, 301.

²⁷ Brh. 3.9.26; Kaṭha, 2.2.5.

vedanākkhandha and *ātmānandamayaḥ* seem not to correspond. Moreover, as with the Buddhist *pañcakkhandhas*, these five Upaniṣadic factors are united only during one's lifespan; at the moment of death, they separate.²⁸ Stressing the similarity between the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic interpretation of the components of the individual, Th. Stcherbatsky said:

This difference [between the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic aggregates] bears witness of the enormous progress achieved by Indian philosophy during the time between the primitive Upaniṣads and the rise of Buddhism. In the Buddhist system we have a division of mental faculties into feeling [*vedanā*], concept [*saññā*], will [*saṅkhāra*] and pure sensation [*viññāṇa*], in which modern psychology would not have much to change. In the Upaniṣads it is a very primitive attempt, giving breath, speech, sense of vision, sense of audition and intellect as elements. But one point of similarity remains: the last, and evidently, the most important element is in both cases *manas*. The macrocosm, or the Universal Soul, is likewise analyzed by the Upaniṣads into five component elements. In the number of the Buddhist *skandhas* and in the position of *manas* (= *viññana*) among them we probably have the survival of an old tradition.²⁹

As Stcherbatsky suggested, the term *pañcakkhandhas* might have been either a synonym for, or a popular term referring to, these five Brahmanical factors. Yet the context in which *pañcakkhandhas* is used in the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* implies connotations such as impermanence and non-self, both of which are definitely incongruent with the Brahmanical tradition. If the concept of *khandha* had been one of current usage referring to the earlier Brahmanical division of the personality, the Buddha would not have attached so much importance to the difference in meaning implied by his own use of the term. Hence, this leads us to consider as most plausible the second or third hypothesis, namely that the Buddhist meaning attributed

²⁸Stcherbatsky, *Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 61.

²⁹Stcherbatsky, *Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 61.

to *khandha* represented an innovation in Indian philosophy. It is impossible to ascertain whether the *Dhammacakkappavattana* originally included a detailed discussion on the *pañcakkhandhas* subsequently suppressed for literary reasons, or whether the concept of *pañcakkhandhas* was later included into what is considered the first discourse of the Buddha. We have sufficient grounds, however, to assert that the term *pañcakkhandhas* is a philosophical innovation on the part of the Buddhists.

Within the Pāli canon, the polysemy associated with *khandha* is striking, yet the prevailing meanings (“mass”, “group” and “aggregate”) agree with the definition given by the author of the *Nirukta*: *skandha* = “trunk”, i.e. that which represents the union, the “mass” of all the branches of a tree. However, as stated previously, the dominant usage of the term refers to the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhas* or *pañcupādānakkhandhas*), which are the focus of this thesis.

1.4 *Pañcakkhandhas* and *pañcupādānakkhandhas*

The reader has probably noted that, so far, the terms *pañcakkhandhas* and *pañcupādānakkhandhas* have been used almost interchangeably. The only difference between these two forms of aggregates seems to be that the group of the *pañcupādānakkhandhas* is subject to cankers (*āsavas*) and clinging (*upādāna*), while the other is not. The *Atthasālinī* clarifies the word *ādāna* (*pañca* + *upa* + *ādāna* + *khandhā*) by suggesting that it means “to catch hold

strongly”, and that its prefix *upa* merely adds an emphasis, just as in the words despair (*upāyasa*) and denounced (*upakkuṭṭha*).³⁰

The *Khandhāsutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* explicitly defines these two sets of “aggregates”, without, however, comparing them:

And what, monks, are the five aggregates? Whatever matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities, and consciousness, be it past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, these are called matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities and consciousness aggregates.³¹

And what, monks, are the five “clinging-aggregates”? Whatever matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities, and consciousness, be it past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, that are subject to cankers, subject to clinging, these are called matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities and consciousness “clinging-aggregates”.³²

In his article “*Khandha* and *upādānakkhandha*”, Bhikkhu Bodhi points out that “the fact that a differentiation is drawn between the two sets with the phrase *sāsava upādāniya* implies that a genuine difference in range does exist: that there are, in other words, aggregates of each sort which are *anāsava*

³⁰*Upādānan ti dalhagahaṇaṃ, dalhattho hi ettha upasaddo upāyāsa-upakkuṭṭhādīsu viya.* Dhs. 385.

³¹*Yaṃ kiṇṇi bhikkhave rūpaṃ (vedanā, saññā, saṅkhārā, viññāṇaṃ) atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā olārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā ayaṃ vuccati rūpakkhandho — vedanākkhandha, saññākkhandha, saṅkhārakkhandha, viññāṇakkhandha* S. iii, 47.

³²*Yaṃ kiṇṇi bhikkhave rūpaṃ (vedanā, saññā, saṅkhārā, viññāṇaṃ) atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā olārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā sāsavaṃ upādāniyaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati rūpupādānakkhandho — vedanupādānakkhandha, saññupādānakkhandha, saṅkhārupādānakkhandha, viññāṇupādānakkhandha* S. iii, 47-48.

anupādāniya".³³ This implies that certain aggregates are neither subject to cankers (*āsavas*) nor clinging (*upādāna*). I will borrow Bhikkhu Bodhi's expression and refer to this particular set of aggregates as "the bare aggregates". Moreover, as also Bhikkhu Bodhi points out,³⁴ since each of these *pañcupādānakkhandhas* is either an individual instance of matter, sensation, recognition, karmic activities or consciousness, we can postulate that they are all included amongst the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhas*) themselves. For example, any matter (*rūpa*) belonging to the *pañcupādānakkhandhas* automatically belongs to the *pañcakkhandhas*. *Pañcakkhandhas* is therefore a generic term that includes both the *pañcupādānakkhandhas* and the "bare aggregates", those aggregates which are not subject to clinging.

We often find the word *pañcupādānakkhandhas* translated as the "clinging aggregates", in the sense of "the aggregates that are clinging". However, according to the *sutta* literature, "clinging" can be divided into four

³³Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Khandha and upādānakkhandha"; *Pali Buddhist Review* 1(1) (1976): p. 94. Note that the hyphenated spelling of "clinging-aggregates" has been used so far to refer to the *pañcupādānakkhandhas* since it leaves the expression in its original compounded form, whereas "clinging aggregates" is used to express a specific interpretation (*karmadhāraya*) of the compound as the "aggregates that are clinging".

³⁴Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Khandha and upādānakkhandha"; *Pali Buddhist Review* 1(1) (1976): p. 94.

categories: “clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to wrong views, clinging to rites and rituals and clinging to the theory of self”.³⁵ In fact “clinging to sensual pleasures” is classified under the mental factor of greed (*lobha*), and the three other forms of clinging under the mental factor of wrong views (*diṭṭhi*);³⁶ and both these mental factors belong exclusively to the *saṅkhārakkhandha* (one of the five aggregates). Accordingly, we cannot possibly state that all the five aggregates are “clinging”, for only the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is directly responsible for this activity. Therefore, this translation of *pañcupādānakkhandhas* as “the aggregates that are clinging” is misleading.

A more accurate translation of the term *pañcupādānakkhandhas* would be “the five aggregates which are the object of clinging”. Since, by definition, a totally liberated person (an *arahant* or a *buddha*) does not generate any form of clinging, we could say that by extension, this definition of the *pañcupādānakkhandhas* indirectly associates the five “clinging-aggregates” with the ordinary people (*puṭhujjana*) caught up in the wheel of *saṃsāra*, and the five “bare aggregates” with those who have escaped the cycle of birth and

³⁵*Cattāro 'me āvuso upādānā: kāmupādānaṃ diṭṭhupādānaṃ sīlabbatupādānaṃ attavādupādānaṃ.* M. i, 51. Also at M. i, 66; D. ii, 58, iii, 230; S. ii, 3.

³⁶Dhs. 212-213.

rebirth and have attained enlightenment, i.e. *arahants* or *buddhas*. It is important to stress that these totally liberated “persons” generate neither craving nor aversion. It would seem, therefore, that the concept of *pañcupādānakkhandhas* would not be applicable to these liberated individuals since none of their aggregates can possibly be the object of their own clinging which is, in theory, non-existent. This theory is supported by David Kalupahana, who defines the five clinging-aggregates as those “that a person clings to as his personality”.³⁷ By definition, upon realizing the state of *sotapanna*, one eradicates all the different types of “personality beliefs” (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) and no longer perceives the aggregates as one’s own self. Hence, according to this reasoning, enlightened persons, when alive in this mundane plane, could not be characterized by the five clinging-aggregates, the *pañcupādānakkhandhas*, but rather by the “bare aggregates” which, as I defined them on page 36, are beyond cankers and clinging, and are not perceived as “one’s own”.

We would be tempted to establish a correlation between the five “bare aggregates” and those aggregates of *arahants* and *buddhas* if this equation were not negated in the *Samyuttanikāya*.

³⁷David J. Kalupahana, *The principles of Buddhist psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) p. 17.

An arahant, friend Koṭṭhita, should examine these five clinging-aggregates with method as being impermanent, suffering, sick, as a swelling, as a dart, as ill-health, as alien, transitory, void and selfless. For the arahant, friend, there is nothing further to be done, nor is there return to upheaving of what is done. Nevertheless, these things, if practised and enlarged, conduce to a happy state [*diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra*] and to mindfulness and thorough understanding.³⁸

This passage states that even *arahants* possess the five “clinging-aggregates” although, by definition, they do not generate clinging nor do they entertain any form of “personality beliefs”. This passage therefore contradicts Kalupahana’s definition of the clinging-aggregates as those that are clung to as one’s own personality.

Where, then, can we find these “bare aggregates”? In his article “*Khandha* and *Upādānakkhandha*”, Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests that the “bare aggregates” can be found only in “the happy state” (*diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra*) which he interprets as the “fruit of arahantship in which the world disappears and Nibbāna remains”³⁹ as an object. As with many Pāli words, the term *diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra* is used with several shades of meaning. Literally, it simply means “abiding in bliss owing to the

³⁸ *Arahatā pi kho āvuso Koṭṭhita ime pañcupādānakkhandhe aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato saññato anattato yoniso manasi kattabbā. Natthi khvāvuso arahato uttarikaraṇīyaṃ katassa vā paṭiccayo. Api ca kho ime dhammā bhāvitā bahulikātā diṭṭhadhammasukhavihārāya ceva saṃvattanti satisampajaññāya cāti* (S. iii, 168; translation inspired from *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Saṃyuttanikāya)*, trans. by F.L. Woodward (London: P.T.S., 1917-1922), vol. iii, p. 144.

³⁹ “*Khandha* and *upādānakkhandha*”, p.94.

dhamma being observed”, yet it is often translated as “a pleasant abiding here and now”. In the *Devadaha Sutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, for example, it seems extremely difficult to read anything more into the term than this peaceful abiding. But elsewhere, it is clearly used to refer to the *jhāna* themselves,⁴⁰ and to the *arahattaphalasamāpatti*.⁴¹ In personal correspondence, Bhikkhu Bodhi explained that the correlation between *diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra* with the *arahattaphalasamāpatti* is supported by the fact that “insight” into the aggregates as impermanent, suffering, etc. is not required for entering into the *jhāna*, while it does lead to the attainment of fruition.⁴² Therefore, in this particular context, Bhikkhu Bodhi’s interpretation of *diṭṭhadhammasukhavihāra* as the fruits of arahantship seems convincing, especially since the *Visuddhimagga* itself states that noble persons attain fruition “for the purpose of abiding in bliss here and now”.⁴³ Before proceeding any further, however, we need to clarify what is meant by “fruit

⁴⁰M. i, 40-41; M. iii, 4.

⁴¹SA. ii, 239.

⁴²Refer to chapter XXIII of the *Visuddhimagga* for a complete description of the practices required for entering into the absorptions (*jhānas*). For a more elaborate discussion on *jhānas*, see Winston Lee King’s *Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist transformation of yoga* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1980).

⁴³*Kasmā samāpajjantī ti diṭṭhadhammasukhavihārattham.* Vsm. 700.

of arahantship” in order to grasp the distinction between “clinging-aggregates” and “bare aggregates”.

Theravāda Buddhism, like all other early schools of Buddhism, claims that four levels of realization (the “fruits of the path”, *maggaphalas*) may be attained before reaching final *nibbāna*: the “level of stream-enterer”, or “the fruits of one who falls in the stream” — the person attaining this fruit will attain final *nibbāna* within seven lives at the most —; the “level of once-returner”; the “level of non-returner”; and the “level of arahant”. At the moment of entering the path of any of these four stages, the person emerges from the defilements and the five aggregates that are consequent upon wrong views.⁴⁴ At that very moment, all the elements (*dhammas*), except for cognizance-originated materiality (*cittasamuṭṭhānam rūpaṃ*) are profitable.⁴⁵ This implies that the five aggregates, which are a mere classification of the different elements (*dhammas*) of an individual experiencing this state, are free from cankers and clinging at that specific time; none of the aggregates present

⁴⁴*Sotāpattimaggaḥ* [sakadāgāmiḥ, anāgāmiḥ, arahattaḥ] dassanaṭṭhena sammādiṭṭhi micchādiṭṭhiya vuṭṭhāti, tadanuvattakilesehi ca khandhehi ca vuṭṭhāti. Ps. i, 71.

⁴⁵*Sotāpattimaggaḥ* jātā dhammā ṭhapetvā cittasamuṭṭhānam rūpaṃ sabbe 'va kusalā honti. Ps. i, 116.

in that state is consequent upon wrong views.⁴⁶ It also seems that when someone reaps the fruit of any one of these four paths, one temporarily “surveys” *nibbāna*. According to Buddhaghosa, at the end of the fruition, the consciousness re-enters the life continuum,⁴⁷ and the person proceeds to review *nibbāna* in the following manner: “this is the state that I surveyed as an object”.⁴⁸ The passage from one level of realization to another is also called a change of lineage (*gotrabhū*), for one has (temporarily) eradicated the external signs of karmic activities (*saṅkhāras*) and becomes intent on the pursuit of *nibbāna*.⁴⁹ Yet although one may have undergone a change of lineage (*gotrabhū*) and surveyed *nibbāna*, as long as one has not attained arahantship, one has not reached the final goal. As the *Atthasālinī* says:

Although a *gotrabhū* has seen *nibbāna*, he is like one who came to see the king for a specific purpose. Having seen the king riding on an elephant on a certain road, and being asked whether he had seen the king or not, he replies that he

⁴⁶Ps. i, 71. Strictly speaking, both path (*magga*) and fruit (*phala*) are specific *cittas*, states of consciousness. In the cognitive series of the path, the *maggacitta* occurs for one mental moment, which destroys the defilements to be eliminated by that particular path. The *maggacitta* is followed immediately by two or three mind-moments of *phalacitta*, which experiences the bliss of liberation accomplished by the *magga*. Thereafter, the mental process returns to the *bhavaṅga*. For a more elaborated discussion on the presence of the four mental aggregates while one is experiencing the fruits of the path, see the *Visuddhimagga*, chapters XIV and XXIII.

⁴⁷*Phalapariyosāne pan'assa cittaṃ bhavaṅgaṃ otarati.* Vsm. 676.

⁴⁸*Ayaṃ me dhammo ārammaṇato paṭividdho ti amantaṃ nibbānaṃ paccavekkhati.* Vsm. 676 *Nibbāna* is often classified as one of the five objects of thoughts (*dhammārammaṇas*). See *Compendium of Philosophy (Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha)*, trans. by Shwe Zan Aung (London: P.T.S., 1967) p. 3.

⁴⁹*Bahiddhāsaṅkhāranimittaṃ abhibhuyyitvā nirodhaṃ nibbānaṃ pakkhandaṭṭi gotrabhū.* Ps. i, 66.

had not, for he had not seen the king for the specific purpose he had come. In the same manner, although a person might have seen *nibbāna*, he cannot be said to have “insight” (*dassana*) because the impurities to be forsaken have not been eradicated yet.⁵⁰

Those experiencing any of these four fruits of the path are temporarily surveying *nibbāna* as an object, and dwell in a state where their four mental aggregates cannot be perceived by those who still have certain types of cankers and clinging. It is in this state that the “bare aggregates” can be found, for those dwelling in it, whether they are mere *sotāpannas* or *arahants*, are temporarily free of cankers and clinging⁵¹ for the time their “supramundane” experience lasts. Afterwards, they will assume the five clinging-aggregates again. The *arahants*, however, can induce this state of “surveying” by the mere contemplation of their five-clinging aggregates as suffering, impermanent, selfless, etc. A passage of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* even states that *arahants* involved in the practice of *ānāpānasati* may also attain the state of *diṭṭhe dhamme sukhavihāra*,⁵² previously interpreted as the fruit of arahantship.

⁵⁰*So hi paṭhamarū nibbānaṃ dassanato dassanan ti vutto. Gotrabhū pana kim cāpi paṭhamatararū nibbānaṃ passati? Yathā pana rañño santikarū kenacid eva kurūyena āgato puriso dūrato va rathikāya carantarū hitthikkhandhagatarū rājānarū disvā pi ‘diṭṭho te rājā ti’ puttūho disvā kattabbakiccassa akatattā ‘na passāmī ti’ āha, evameva nibbānaṃ disvā kattabbassa kiccassa kilesappahānassābhāvā na dassanan ti vuccati. DhsA. i, 43.*

⁵¹*Sabbe [dhammā] ‘va kusalā honti. Ps. i. 116.*

⁵²*Ye ca kho te bhikkhave bhikkhū arahanto khīṇāsavā vusitavanto katakaraṇīyā ohitabhārā anuppattasadaṭṭhā parikkhīṇabhavasamūjanā sammadaññā vimuttā. Tesam ānāpānasatisamūdhī bhāvito bahulikato diṭṭheva dhamme sukhavihārāya ceva samvattati satisampajaññūya ca. S. v, 326.*

Now that we have acquired the necessary background, we can return to and understand the passage of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* cited on page 39, which alluded to the fact that *arahants* can still be characterized by the *pañcupādānakkhandhas*. To clarify the difference between *pañcupādānakkhandhas* and the “bare aggregates”, we must resort to the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* — the *Atthasālinī* — where Buddhaghosa directly confronts the issue:

Although the aggregates of the arahat who has destroyed the cankers become conditions for clinging in others, when they say, for example, “Our senior uncle the Thera! Our junior uncle the Thera!”, the noble paths, fruits, and Nibbāna [the *navālokuttaradhammas*; see page 46] are not grasped, misapprehended, or clung to. Just as a red-hot iron ball does not provide a resting-place for flies to settle, so the noble paths, fruits or Nibbāna [*navālokuttaradhammas*], due to their abundant spiritual sublimity, do not provide a condition for grasping through craving, conceit, and wrong views.⁵³

This statement implies that although those who do not generate any more clinging (the *arahants*) have totally eradicated the cankers, they still possess the five clinging-aggregates in the sense that their five aggregates still constitute a ground for clinging in others who are not yet free from clinging. These aggregates are still *pañcupādānakkhandhas* since they remain potential objects of clinging for others who are not yet free from cankers and clinging.

⁵³...*khīṇāsavassa khandhā amhākaṃ Mātulathero amhākaṃ Cullapituthero ti vadantānaṃ paresaṃ upādānaṃ paccayā honti, maggaṃ phalaṃ nibbānaṃ pana agahitāni aparāmatthāni anupādīṇānaṃ*’ eva. *Tāni hi yathā divasaṃtrāto ayogūlo makkhikānaṃ abhinisīdanassa paccayo na hoti evaṃ evaṃ tejussadattā taṇhāmānādiṭṭhivasena gahaṇassa paccayā na hontī ti. Tena vuttaṃ: ime dhammā anupādīṇa-anupādānīyā ti.* DhsA. 347. Translation taken from Bhikkhu Bodhi’s “Khandha and upādānakkhandha”, p. 96.

However, as mentioned on page 43, *arahants* have the possibility of dwelling in a supramundane state of consciousness that “cannot be apprehended by a mind defiled with the *āsava* and *upādāna* due to their sublime purity, a purity flowing from the absolute purity of their object, *Nibbāna*.”⁵⁴ Therefore, the aggregates can only exist as “bare aggregates” in beings dwelling in this state of consciousness which is neither accessible to nor perceptible by those who are still subject to clinging.

To further clarify our discussion, we may allude to a statement in the *Sāratthappakāsinī*, a commentary on the *Samyuttanikāya*. According to this exegesis, the material aggregate (*rūpa*) is only present in the *kāmāvacara*, while the remaining four aggregates (*vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*) can be found in any of the four divisions: *kāmāvacara*, *rūpāvacara*, *arūpāvacara* and *lokuttara*.⁵⁵ The first three divisions (*āvacaras*) comprise the thirty-one planes of existence constituting the mundane realms, whereas the fourth (*lokuttara*) comprises the supramundane (*nibbāna*). The *kāmāvacara* is the realm of sensual desires, and is characterized by craving towards objects such as forms, sound, odour, taste, touch and ideas. This realm includes

⁵⁴Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Khandha and upādānakkhandha”, 96; see also Dhs. 196; 213; 248, 258.

⁵⁵*Rūpakkhandho kāmāvacaro cattāro khandhā catubhūmakā* [sic]. SA. ii, 270. The term *catubhūmakā* should be read as *catubhūmika*; and enumeration of these four *bhūmikas* is given in Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (Vsm. 452, 475, 493).

eleven planes of existence: the six celestial realms (*saggas*),⁵⁶ the human realm (*manussaloka*), and the four states of misery (*apāyas*).⁵⁷ The *rūpāvacara* is characterized by the four absorptions (*jhānas*) and corresponds to the sixteen fine-material heavenly planes, while the *arūpāvacara* is characterized by the four attainments (*samāpattis*) and corresponds to the four immaterial planes.⁵⁸ Two of the latter are planes completely devoid of material bodies, wherein only the four “mental” aggregates can exist.

The concept of *lokuttara*, on the other hand, refers to a sphere that is beyond or above (*uttara*) the mundane worlds (*loka*) and the three realms of existence (*āvacaras*); in other words, it refers to *nibbāna*. However, the word *lokuttara* is often employed for the “nine supramundane things” (*navalokuttaradhammas*). In such a context, the word is used to designate the four paths and their respective fruits as well as *nibbāna*.⁵⁹ The four paths are those that lead to the realization of the states of *sotāpanna*,

⁵⁶The six celestial realms of the *kāmāvacara* are: *Cātummahārājikadeva*, *Tāvātimsa*, *Yāma*, *Tusita*, *Nimmānarati*, *Paranimmitavasavatti*.

⁵⁷These four states include hell (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchānāyoni*), the ghost realm (*petaloka*), and the demon world (*asuranikāya*).

⁵⁸These planes are: *Ākāśānañcāyatanūpagadeva*, *Viññāṇañcāyatanūpagadeva*, *Ākiñcaṇñāyatanūpagadeva*, *Nevasaññānāsaṇṇāyatanūpagadeva*. Only beings who have experienced the four *samāpattis* can be reborn in these planes.

⁵⁹*Katamo lokuttaro vimokkho? Cattāro ca Ariyamaggā cattāri ca sāmāññaphalāni nibbānaṃ ca. Ayaṃ lokuttaro vimokkho.* Ps. ii, 40.

sakadāgāmī, *anāgāmī* and *arahant*, and the fruits are the realizations themselves in which a sight of *nibbāna* is also implied. According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*,⁶⁰ although the term *lokuttara* implies a certain “dissociation” and a “crossing over” from the world, it does not seem that the term refers to a totally transcendental experience, for the individual only dwells temporarily in the fruition states, and these states are still characterized by the four mental aggregates (*vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*). However, it is impossible to detect any of the five aggregates within the *nirupādisesa nibbāna* for it is defined as the full extinction of the five aggregates (*khandha-parinibbāna*).⁶¹ When the word *lokuttara* refers exclusively to *nirupādisesa nibbāna* and not the four paths and their fruits, the term *loka* means the five aggregates, while *uttara* means beyond or above.⁶² The *Sāratthappakāsinī* says that the material aggregate is only present in the *kāmāvacara*, and the remaining four aggregates can be found in any of the four divisions. Although the fourth division consists of the *lokuttara*, it has to be understood as the first eight constituents of the *navalokuttaradhammas*, where the *nirupādisesa nibbāna* is excluded, for none of the aggregates can be

⁶⁰Ps. ii, 166-167.

⁶¹It. 41. A more complete description of the *nirupādesanibbāna* and *khandha-parinibhāna* is offered starting on page 90.

⁶²*A Manual of Abhidhamma: Abhidhammatthasangaha*, by Anuruddha, trans. by Mahā Thera Nārada (Rangoon: Printed by the Buddha Sasana Council, 1970) p. 11.

present in the *nirupādisesa nibbāna*. It is in this *lokuttara* state that the four mental aggregates (*vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*) cannot be approached as objects of clinging (or as *pañcupādānakkhandhas*). This is so because, on the one hand, liberated ones are totally free from the *āsavas* and *upādāna* and, on the other hand, their four mental aggregates function on a different level of consciousness from those of ordinary people, since their mental aggregates have *nibbāna* as their object (*nibbānārammaṇā*).⁶³ Therefore, this level of consciousness cannot be apprehended by the common people (*puthujjana*).

Since the material aggregate (*rūpa*) exists only in its grosser form in the *kāmāvacara* (the sensual-desire realm), it always remains a clinging-aggregate in the sense that it is a potential object of clinging for beings dwelling in the sensual sphere. Therefore, the material aggregate could never be classified under the terminology of “bare aggregate”, for it is always associated (at least potentially) with clinging. As Buddhaghosa stated in the *Visuddhimagga*, *vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* can be free from cankers while *rūpa* cannot.⁶⁴ Technically, *rūpa* always falls into the category of the

⁶³Ps. i, 116.

⁶⁴*Ettha ca yathā vedanādayo anāsavā pi atthi, na evaṃ rūpaṃ.* Vsm. 478.

pañcupādānakkhandhas, but when seen in the global perspective of the four other “bare aggregates” (i.e. *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* or *viññāṇa* in the fruition states), it is classified as part of the “bare” *pañcakkhandhas* for purposes of simplification.⁶⁵

1.5 Summary

To recapitulate, we could say that the term *pañcakkhandhas* is all-inclusive, whereas the word *pañcupādānakkhandhas* refers only to those aggregates that are potential objects of clinging. Since one of the objectives of this thesis is to clarify the meaning and the interrelation of the *pañcakkhandhas* by establishing a correlation with the theory of dependent origination — the chain of causation that binds beings to the cycle of *samsāra*

⁶⁵*Yasmā pañ'assa rūpaṭṭhena khandhabhāvo yujjati, tasmā khandhesu vuttam; yasmā rūpaṭṭhena ca sāsavaṭṭhena ca upādānakkhandhabhāvo yujjati, tasmā upādānakkhandhesu vuttam. Vedanādayo pana anāsavā va khandhesu vuttā, sāsavā upādānakkhandhesu. Upādānakkhandhā ti c'euttha upādānagocarā khandhā upādānakkhandhā ti evam attho daṭṭhabbo. Idha pana sabbe p'ete ekajjham katvā khandhā ti adhippetā. Vsm. 478. “Because rūpa can be described as a [bare] aggregate on account of its “totalness”, it is classified amongst the [bare] aggregates. Because it can be described as a clinging-aggregate (*upādānakkhandha*) on account of its “totalness” and its association with clinging, it is classified amongst the clinging-aggregates. But *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* are classified as [bare] aggregates when they are free from clinging, and as clinging-aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandhas*), when objects of clinging. The term *upādānakkhandha* should be understood as referring to aggregates that are subject to clinging. On the other hand, all the aggregates (“bare aggregates” and clinging-aggregates) taken together are considered as aggregates (*pañcakkhandhas*).”*

— only the *pañcupādānakkhandhas* are of concern here; the “bare aggregates” have no role to play in the multiplication of misery and the binding to the wheel of birth and rebirth. However, the first part of this research has focused on the more generic term *pañcakkhandhas*, which includes indiscriminately both the “bare aggregates” and the *pañcupādānakkhandhas*, for the simple reason that one of the aims is to establish the interrelation between each of the aggregates. Whether “bare aggregates” or *pañcupādānakkhandhas*, the aggregates of one group function in exactly the same manner as those of the other group, with the slight nuance that aggregates of the *pañcupādānakkhandhas*-group are still objects of clinging. Now that the distinction between *pañcakkhandhas* and *pañcupādānakkhandhas* has been established, we shall analyze each of the *khandhas* and discover what their exact functions are.

Chapter 2

The *Rūpakkhanda*

2.1 Introduction to the concept of *rūpakkhanda*

As mentioned previously, the *rūpakkhanda* is the material aggregate. The sutta literature repeatedly offers a definition of this material aggregate which, at first approach, seems clear and concise. “What is this material ‘clinging-aggregate’? The four primary elements (*mahābhūtas*) and the matter derived from these (*upādārūpas*). And what exactly are these four primary elements: the element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire and the element of air”.¹ The problem with this definition, however, is that nowhere in the *nikāyas* can we find a clarification as to the nature of these *upādārūpas* (“secondary elements”). The *suttas* offer a general definition of matter (*rūpa*) stating that all matter is either past, present or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, small or large, and far or near.²

In the present chapter, we will first examine whether the general concept of matter (*rūpa*) can be correlated to the material aggregate

¹*Katamo c’āvuso rūpupādānakkhandho: cattāri ca mahābhūtāni catunnañ ca mahābhūtānañ upādāya rūpañ. Katame c’āvuso cattāro mahābhūtā: paṭhavīdhātu āpodhāru tejo:dhātu vāyodhātu.* M. i, 53, 185; a similar passage is also found in S. ii, 3-4; iii, 59.

²*Atītanāgatapaccupannañ ajjhatañ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikañ vā sukhumāñ vā hīnañ vā pañitañ vā yañ dūre santike vā, sabbāñ rūpañ.* S. iv, 382.

(*rūpakkhanda*) and secondly establish a correlation between the material aggregate and some of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. We shall first use later abhidhammic and commentarial literature to help us clarify what is meant by “primary elements” (*mahābhūtas*) and “secondary elements” (*upādārūpas*), and then classify all the elements comprised in the terminology of *rūpa* in order to help us clarify our understanding of the different categories of matter (e.g. internal, external; gross, subtle; far, near, etc.). With our understanding of these classifications as well as a threefold classification mentioned in the *sutta* literature itself, we will then be in a position to establish a classification of all the material elements and clarify the meaning of “matter”, and correlate the material aggregate to some of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

2.2 Nuance between *rūpa* and *rūpakkhanda*

According to Y. Karunadasa’s voluminous study, *The Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, four major meanings could be ascribed to the term *rūpa*: 1) *rūpa* in the sense of generic matter, 2) *rūpa* in the sense of what is visible, 3) *rūpa* in the sense of the *rūpadhātu* (*rūpaloka* or *rūpāvacara*; see page 46) and finally 4) *rūpa* in the sense of four *rūpajjhānas*, or the four absorptions (*jhānas*). “These four may be represented as the generic, specific, cosmological and the psychological meanings of the term [*rūpa*]”.³ However, we may question whether all the elements subsumed under the general heading of “generic matter” fall into the category of *rūpakkhanda*.

³Y. Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter* (Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1967) p. 1.

The question we need to ask, therefore, is whether there is any difference between *rūpakkhanda* and *rūpa* and whether the terms are synonymous. In elucidating this point, scholars such as Mrs. Carolyn Rhys Davids,⁴ Surendranath Dasgupta,⁵ and S. Z. Aung⁶ were misled by referring to the same passage of the sixth abhidhammic book, the *Yamaka*. This central passage runs as follows:

Is matter the material aggregate? "Pleasant matter" (*piyarūpaṃ*) and "agreeable matter" (*sātarūpaṃ*) are *rūpa*, but do not belong to the material aggregate; whereas the material aggregate is both matter and the material aggregate. What is neither the material aggregate nor matter? "Pleasant matter" (*piyarūpaṃ*) and "agreeable matter" (*sātarūpaṃ*) do not belong to the material aggregate but are matter; everything except matter and the material aggregate is neither matter nor the material aggregate.⁷

According to this passage, everything that comes under the heading of *rūpa*, except *piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa*, also belongs to the *rūpakkhanda*. *Rūpa* and *rūpakkhanda* refer to the same elements with the exception that *piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa* are excluded from *rūpakkhanda*. Both Rhys Davids and Dasgupta seem to agree with Aung's interpretation of this passage, in which Aung explains the terms *piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa* as the eighty-one worldly classes of consciousness and their concomitants that are attractive and pleasant.⁸

⁴Ymk. i, xi.

⁵Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975) vol. i, p. 94.

⁶*Compendium of Philosophy (Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha)* trans. by Shwe Zan Aung (London: P.T.S., 1967) p. 273.

⁷*Rūpaṃ rūpakkhando ti? Piyaṃ rūpaṃ sātarūpaṃ rūpaṃ, na rūpakkhando; rūpakkhando rūpaṃ ceva rūpakkhando ca. [...] Na rūpaṃ na rūpakkhando ti? [...] Piyaṃ rūpaṃ sātarūpaṃ na rūpakkhando, rūpaṃ; rūpaṃ ca rūpakkhandaṃ ca ṭhapetvā avasesā na ceva rūpaṃ na ca rūpakkhando.* Ymk. i, 16-17.

⁸*Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 273.

These eighty-one classes of consciousness do not, however, belong to the *rūpakkkhandha*, which is made up solely of the twenty-seven material qualities (i.e. the four *mahābhūtas* and the twenty-three *upādārūpas*).⁹ This interpretation suggests that the *Yamaka*'s definition of the term *rūpa* is not limited to matter, but also includes mental states (the eighty-one classes of consciousness). However, this particular interpretation is not supported by any textual evidence and seems to be pure speculation on the part of these scholars. Y. Karunadasa has pointed out¹⁰ a weakness in the foundation of this interpretation, since elsewhere in *abhidhammic* literature we find a definition of *piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa* which includes the six internal and external sense-doors,¹¹ all of which are included in the *rūpakkkhandha*.¹² There seems to be a contradiction between the *Yamaka*, which asserts that *piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa* do not belong to the *rūpakkkhandha*, and the *Vibhaṅga*, which implicitly includes *piyarūpa* and *sātarūpa* in the *rūpakkkhandha* since the six sense-doors, which are part of the *rūpakkkhandha*, are included in the definition of these two terms. However, Y. Karunadasa has indicated that the two seemingly contradictory statements of the *Yamaka* and the *Vibhaṅga* are not mutually exclusive because the former belongs to a method of exposition particular to the *Yamaka*, a method that could not be used to

⁹These twenty-seven material qualities will be discussed on p. 61.

¹⁰Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, p. 5.

¹¹In order to avoid confusion, we will, from now on, refer to the "internal sense-doors" as "sense-organs", and the "external sense-doors" as the "sense-objects".

¹²*Kiñ ca loke piyarūpaṃ sātarūpaṃ? Cakkhurū loke piyarūpaṃ sātarūpaṃ etth'esā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati, ettha nivisamānā nivisati. Sotam ...pe... ghānaṃ ... jivhā ... kāyo ... mano ... rūpā ... saddā ... gandhā ... rasā ... phoṭṭhabbā ... dhammā loke piyarūpaṃ sātarūpaṃ etth'esā taṇhā uppajjamānā uppajjati, ettha nivisamānā nivisati. Vbh. 101-102.*

define the *rūpakkhandha*.¹³ Therefore, the passage that Rhys Davids, Aung and Dasgupta have used to clarify whether *rūpa* is similar to the *rūpakkhandha* is seen to be irrelevant.

We should rather resort to the *Visuddhimagga*, where Buddhaghosa defines *rūpa* (in Karunadasa's sense of "generic matter") as the four primary elements and the matter derived from them.¹⁴ As we saw on page 51, this is the standard way of defining the *rūpakkhandha*. Here, Buddhaghosa not only applies the definition of the *rūpakkhandha* to the concept of *rūpa*, but also urges his reader to refer to his previous discussion on the *rūpakkhandha* in order to clarify the meaning of *rūpa*.¹⁵ On the basis of this statement by an authority as established as Buddhaghosa, we may proceed with the assumption that, traditionally, the *rūpakkhandha* is not seen as different from *rūpa* in the sense of "generic matter".

¹³Explaining Karunadasa's argument is not necessary for this thesis. However, those desiring further clarification can refer to Karunadasa's *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, p. 5-8.

¹⁴*Rūpan ti cattāri mahābhūtāni catunnañ ca mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya rūpaṃ.* Vsm. 558.

¹⁵*Tesaṃ vibhāgo Khandhaniddese vutto yevā ti.* Vsm. 558.

2.3 The *mahābhūtas*: the primary elements

Like the Jain tradition, the Buddhist tradition postulates the existence of four primary elements: *paṭhavīdhātu* (the earth element), *āpodhātu* (the water element), *tejodhātu* (the fire element), and *vāyodhātu* (the wind element). It is true, as Karunadasa pointed out,¹⁶ that although most Indian philosophical systems, such as Vedānta and Sāṃkhya, as well as Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, admit five primary elements, the Buddhist and Jain traditions have restricted these elements to four by eliminating *ākāśa* (the element of space) from the list. However, the Theravāda school incorporates the element of space into its list of “secondary elements” (*upādārūpas*).¹⁷

In a discussion with his son,¹⁸ the Buddha concisely explains the four primary elements and their particular qualities. The earth element (*paṭhavīdhātu*) is described as whatever is hard and solid (*kakkhalam kharigattam*), such as the hair, nails, teeth, etc. The water element (*āpodhātu*) is characterised by liquid (*āpogattam*), just as blood, tears, saliva, etc. The Buddha describes the fire element (*tejodhātu*) as what is hot, like the heat that digests food. And finally the air element (*vāyadhātu*) is characterized by

¹⁶Karunadasa, *The Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, p. 16.

¹⁷See page 63.

¹⁸*Mahārāhulovādasuttaṃ*, M. i, 420; a similar description is found in the *Mahāhatthipadopamasutta*, M. i, 185.

motion, like the different gases in the stomach and the abdomen.¹⁹ According to a different source, the first three primary elements (*paṭhavī, tejo, vāyo*) also share the fundamental characteristic of *paṭigha*,²⁰ meaning “solidity” in the sense that there is bound to be an impact, a shock, when two of these material particles collide. This quality of *paṭigha* (Skr. *pratighāta*) is defined in the *Abhidharmakośa* as “l’impénétrabilité, le heurt ou résistance (*pratighāta*), l’obstacle qu’un rūpa oppose à ce que son lieu soit occupé par un autre rūpa.”²¹

Buddhaghosa, in the commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgī* and the *Visuddhimagga*, offers us a more extensive definition of these four primary elements. According to the exegete, the earth element (*paṭhavīdhātu*) is so called because it “is spread out”,²² and it is the platform that supports the other three elements.²³ In commentarial literature, the earth element is

¹⁹Strangely enough, a discussion of the *ākāśadhātu* follows the description of these four elements just as if it belonged to primary matter. However, as we mentioned, the *ākāśadhātu* is not included in the Buddhist list of primary elements, but belongs to secondary matter.

²⁰Dhs. 147. For a further discussion on the term *paṭigha*, please refer to page 67.

²¹Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośa*, vol. i, p. 24-25.

²²*Paṭṭhaṭṭā paṭhavī* [sic]. Vsm. 364. We may wonder whether the word *paṭhavī* has been misspelt or if this “error” was a conscious alteration on the part of Buddhaghosa in order to indicate the etymological derivation of *paṭhavī* to *paṭṭaṭṭa*.

²³*Tattha kakkhaḷattalakkhaṇā paṭhavīdhātu paṭṭhānārasā sampaticchanapaccupaṭṭhānā*. DhsA. 332.

literally perceived as a support for the other three primary elements, just as the earth is a support for mountains and trees.²⁴

According to Buddhaghosa, the water element (*āpodhātu*) is thus termed because of its characteristic of flowing (*appoti*), gliding (*āpiyati*) and satisfying (*appāyati*). Here we may question the validity of the definition, for it seems that Theravāda commentarial literature goes to a certain extreme in defining words via the use of terms that apparently share the same etymology. For example, as we saw in footnote #22, *paṭhavī* is described as *patthaṭattā*, and *rūpa* is often characterized by the verb *rūppati* (see page 74). These apparently false etymological interpretations could in fact simply be mnemonic devices that were never intended to be linguistically accurate. As for the definition of *āpo*, however, we know that the verb *appoti* is derived from the root *āp*, while *āpiyati* and *appāyati* seem to be connected to the Sanskrit root *ṛ*, which is not etymologically linked to *āpo*. However, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* uses the terms *sineha* and *bhandana* to define the water element (*āpodhātu*), terms which have no apparent or real etymological link with it.²⁵ These two words support Buddhaghosa's previous definition by implying that the water-element is endowed with the characteristic of liquidity (*sineha*) and binding (*bhandana*).

²⁴*Tarupabbatādīnaṃ pakatipaṭhavī viya saha-jātarūpānaṃ patiṭṭhānabhāvena pakkhāyati, upaṭṭhātī ti vuttaṃ hoti. Anuruddha, Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha Vibhāvinīṭika, p. 110.*

²⁵*Katuman taṃ rūpaṃ āpodhātu? Yaṃ āpo āpogataṃ sineho sinehagataṃ bandhanattaṃ...* Dhs. 177.

The fire-element (*tejodhātu*) is defined by Buddhaghosa as that which is possessed with the characteristic of temperature (*teja*)²⁶ but, as with the *āpodhātu*, the *Dhanimasaṅgaṇi* and the *Atthasālinī* offers a definition that does not restrict itself to providing a cognate word: “the fire element has the quality of heat (*usmā* or *uṇhā*)”.²⁷

The air-element (*vāyodhātu*) represents the most dynamic of the four primary elements in that it is primarily characterized by mobility and inflation.²⁸ This is probably why, as Buddhaghosa stated, the air-element is called *vāyodhātu*.²⁹

Now that we have briefly described each of the primary elements, it is of crucial importance to mention that none of the four can exist without the presence of the other three. Fire, for example, is not merely composed of the fire-element, nor does water consist solely of the water-element. The *mahābhūtas* cannot exist independently of one another;³⁰ the four are present in every material particle. The *Paramatthamañjūsā*, commentary on the *Visuddhimagga*, clarifies this point by saying:

...likewise their [the four *mahābhūtas*] undemonstrability [*sic*], since they are not found inside or outside of each other for support. For if these elements were

²⁶“It heats therefore it is called fire-element”. *Tejatī ti tejo*. Vsm. 364.

²⁷*Yaṃ tejo tejogataṃ usmā usmāgataṃ usmarā usumāgataṃ...*Dhs. 177; a similar definition is found in DhsA. 332.

²⁸*Yaṃ vāyo vāyogataṃ chambhitattaṃ thambhitattaṃ...* Dhs. 177.

²⁹*Vāyatī ti vāyo*. Vsm. 364.

³⁰*Na ca taṃ nissāya na tiṭṭhanti ti*. Vsm. 367.

found inside each other, they would not each perform their particular functions, owing to mutual frustration. And if they were found outside each other, they would be already resolved (separate), and that being so, any description of them as unresolved (inseparable) would be meaningless. So although their standing place is undemonstrable, still each one assists the other by its particular function — the functions of establishing, etc., whereby each becomes a condition for the others as conascence condition and so on.³¹

As Karunadasa has stressed, all the four *mahābhūtas* appear in equal quantity in every manifestation of matter.³² What renders different manifestations of matter different is not the quantitative but rather the qualitative or “capability” (*sāmatthiya*) proportion of the *mahābhūtas*. The difference between water and fire does not reside in the quantity of the fire-element or water-element found therein, but rather in the intensity of these two elements.

The last aspect of the *mahābhūtas* I would like to mention is their deceptiveness. According to the Theravāda tradition, these four primary elements and their respective qualities are inherent in every material particle. Nothing else composes matter, yet we not only perceive material particles as warm or cold, stable or moving, hard or soft or spread or coagulated, but also as imbued with other qualities such as yellow or red, etc. These primary elements have the possibility of giving the appearance that they are something which they really are not. Buddhaghosa explains this by resorting to one of his favourite modes of clarification: he makes a play on words using the term

³¹*Paramatthanīyāsā*, 363. Quoted from *The Path of Purification*, p. 400, note 38.

³²Karunadasa, *Buddhist Cosmology of Matter* 26. The *Abhidharmakośa* supports this thesis by maintaining that “les grands éléments (mahābhūtas) sont, entre eux, sahabhūhetu”. Étienne Lamotte, *Abhidharmakośa* vol. I, pp. 248-249.

mahābhūta — which also means “great being” — by comparing the four primary elements (*mahābhūta*) to a great magician (*mahābhūta*):

Just as a magician (*mahābhūta*) turns water that is not crystal into crystal, and turns a clod that is not gold into gold, and shows them, and being himself neither a spirit or a bird, shows himself as a spirit or a bird so too, being themselves [the four *mahābhūtas*] not blue-black, they turn themselves into blue-black derived materiality [secondary elements], being themselves not yellow...not red...not white, they turn themselves into white derived materiality [secondary elements] and show that. In this way they are “great primaries (*mahābhūta*)” in being like the great creatures (*mahābhūta*) of a magician.³³

Thus, these primary elements are the foundations, the support that yields secondary elements.

2.4 *Upādārūpas*: secondary elements

The difference between secondary elements (*upādārūpas*) and primary matter (*mahābhūta* or *na-upādārūpas*) is adumbrated in the *sutta* literature itself,³⁴ yet no specific description of the *upādārūpas* is found in the *nikāya* literature. Although the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* has elaborated a scheme of twenty-three secondary *rūpas*,³⁵ I have found neither such an elaboration,

³³*yathā māyākāro amanim yeva udakam manim katvā dasseti, asuvannam yeva leddum suvaṇṇam katvā dasseti; — yathā ca, sayam neva yakkho na yak .hī samāno, yakkhabhāvam pi yakkhibhāvam pi dasseti, evam eva sayam anīlan’ eva hutvā nilam upādārūpaṃ dassenti. apītāni alohitāni anodātān’ eva hutvā odātāni upādārūpaṃ dassenti ti māyākāramahābhūtasūmaññato mahābhūtāni.* Vsm. 366-367. Translation from *The Path of Purification*, p. 98. A similar passage is found in DhsA. 299.

³⁴Such as in M. i, 53, 185; S. ii, 3-4, 59.

³⁵Dhs. 167. Noteworthy is that some commentarial literature recognizes a twenty-fourth “secondary matter”, the *hadaya-vatthu*, or the heart-basis. The heart-basis (*hadaya-vatthu*) seems to be a post-canonical development since it is only mentioned in literature compiled during or after Buddhaghosa. To my knowledge, this element is not mentioned in the *sutta* literature.

(continued...)

nor even a passing mention of the exact meaning of the secondary elements in the *suttas*. However one passage found in a few instances in the *suttas* offers us a hint as to the nature of these secondary elements: *cattāri ca mahābhūtāni catunnaṃ ca mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya rūpaṃ, idaṃ vuccat' āvuso rūpaṃ*.³⁶ This statement can be translated as “the four great elements (*mahābhūtas*; primary matter) and the *rūpa* derived (*upādāyaya rūpaṃ*) from these four great elements are called *rūpa*”. The *Pāli Text Society Dictionary* renders the term *upādāya* as “derived” and “secondary”, hence implying a prior substratum from which it could be “derived” (i.e. the *mahābhūtas*). The *Atthasālinī* explains what is meant by the “matter derived” from the four great elements: “matter which is dependent on, is derived from, and is still attached to the four great elements. What is known as ‘all matter’ consists of the four great elements and the twenty-three derived material ‘things’ shown in due order”.³⁷ These two references imply that the *upādāyarūpas* are always dependent on, and therefore secondary to, the four *mahābhūtas*.

The list of the twenty-three secondary elements is given in the *Vibhaṅga*³⁸ and the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*. This list can be broken down into different categories and presented as follows:

³⁵(...continued)

Since the mainstream canonical literature does not list this last element, I will not include it in our discussion of matter.

³⁶Such as in M. i, 53, 185; S. ii, 3-4, 59.

³⁷*Cattāri mahābhūtāni upādāya nissāya amuñcitvā pavattarūpan ti attho. Idaṃ vuccati sabbaṃ rūpaṃ ti, idaṃ cattāri mahābhūtāni padapaṭispāṭiyā niddiṭṭhāni tevīsati upādārūpāni ti sattavīsati pabbhedam sabbaṃ rūpaṃ nāma.* DhA. 300.

³⁸Vbh. 1 ff.

Diagram II

The twenty-three *upādārūpas*

- A) The first five sense-organs (internal sense-doors):
1. *cakkhāyatana* (organ of sight)
 2. *sotāyatana* (organ of hearing)
 3. *ghāṇāyatana* (organ of smell)
 4. *jivhāyatana* (organ of taste)
 5. *kāyāyatana* (organ of touch)
- B) The first four sense-objects (external sense-doors):
6. *rūpāyatana* (the visible)
 7. *saddāyatana* (sound)
 8. *gandhāyatana* (smell)
 9. *rasāyatana* (taste)
- C) The three faculties:
10. *itthindriya* (faculty of femininity)
 11. *purisindriya* (faculty of masculinity)
 12. *rūpajīvitindriya* (material faculty of life)
- D) The two modes of self expression:
13. *kāyaviññatti* (bodily expression)
 14. *vacīviññatti* (vocal expression)
- E) The three characteristics of matter:
15. *lahutā* (lightness)
 16. *mudutā* (elasticity)
 17. *kammaññatā* (adaptability)
- F) The four phases of matter:
18. *upacaya* (growth)
 19. *santati* (continuity)
 20. *jaratā* (decay)
 21. *aniccatā* (impermanence)
- H) The two unclassified elements:
22. *ākāśadhātu* (space-element)
 23. *āhāra* (food)
-

To discuss in detail every one of the twenty-three secondary elements is far too tedious an undertaking for the scope of this thesis. However, two points cannot be left undiscussed in view of our aim, i.e. to establish a thorough understanding of the interrelations within the *pañcakkhandhas*. The first of these points is the exclusion of bodily impressions (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana*) from the list of the *upādārūpas*. Since the organ of touch is enumerated as one of the sense-organs, it would be normal to expect its respective sense-object to be included in the enumeration. The reason for the exclusion of the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* lies in the fact that this particular sense-object is constituted by *paṭhavī*, *tejo* and *vāyo*, i.e. the *mahābhūtas* with the exception of water (*āpo*).³⁹ According to the Theravāda tradition, these three primary elements can be known by the tactile sense-door.⁴⁰ Yet we cannot say that the list offered by the Theravāda tradition excludes the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* since the latter is implicitly included by the presence of the first three *mahābhūtas*.

The second problem related to this enumeration is that Buddhism admits six sense-organs, the sixth being the mental organ (*mano*). However, we have seen that only the first five sense-organs were discussed and that the

³⁹*Phoṭṭhabbadhātu pana pathavī-tejo-vāyo-vasena tayo dhammā ti sankhaṃ gacchati. Vsm. 488.* Similar statements are found in Dhs. 143, 179; Vbh. 72.

⁴⁰Not all Buddhist traditions, however, agree on this point. The *Abhidharmakośa*, for example, maintains that all the four *mahābhūtas* are tangible: “*Le tangible est de onze espèces. Onze choses sont des choses tangibles (spraṣṭavyadravya): les quatre grands éléments (mahābhūtas), le doux, le rude, le lourd, le léger, le froid, la faim et la soif*”. Étienne Lamotte, *Abhidharmakośa*, vol. i, p. 18.

mental sense-organ (*mano*) as well as its respective object, the mental sense-object (*dhammāyatana*), were omitted from the list of *upādārūpas*. The reason for this exclusion is not, as David Kalupahana has suggested, that only the first five sense-organs and their respective objects belong to the *rūpakkkhandha* while the sixth sense (*mano*) and its object (*dhammāyatana*) belong to the *viññāṇakkhandha*.⁴¹ Kalupahana's interpretation is probably grounded in the theories of the Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika and Yogācāra systems, according to which the *dhammāyatana* (Pāli: *dhammāyatana*) is not part of the *rūpaskandha* (Pāli: *rūpakkkhandha*). However, according to the Theravāda tradition, while it is true that the sixth sense-organ (*mano*) belongs to the *viññāṇakkhandha*,⁴² its respective object, the *dhammāyatana*, belongs to the *rūpakkkhandha* itself. Since the range of the *dhammāyatana* is extremely wide, it does not limit itself to secondary elements. The *dhammāyatana* includes one *mahābhūta* as well as fifteen of the secondary elements (numbers ten to twenty-three in the above list), which are collectively termed *dhammāyatanapariyāpannarūpas*.⁴³ Therefore, since the *dhammāyatana* is comprised of these sixteen elements of matter, it definitely belongs to the *rūpakkkhandha* and not to the *viññāṇakkhandha* as Kalupahana suggested.

⁴¹Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 29.

⁴²However, as mentioned in note #35, post-canonical literature has incorporated a twenty-fourth element to the list of *upādārūpas*: the heart-basis (*hadayaavatthu*). This twenty-fourth element is recognised by Theravāda scholasticism as the physical basis for *mano*. (VsmA. 449-450). The term *hadaya* itself, not as belonging to the *upādārūpa* category, is also sometimes used as a synonym of *mano* and *manoviññāṇa*. (Vbh. 87, 88, 144)

⁴³Dhs. 179; Vbh. 14, 72.

2.5 The *Saṅgītisutta* division of matter

According to the *Saṅgītisutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, matter is divided into three dual categories: visible and “resisting”, invisible and “resisting” and finally invisible and “unresisting”.⁴⁴ This threefold division occurs only once in *nikāya* literature and no explanation is given for this classification. Neither does the commentary on this particular *sutta* shed much light on the topic.⁴⁵ The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, however, clarifies the meaning of the terms. According to this *abhidhammic* text, the term visible (*sanidassanaṃ*) is restricted to the *rūpāyatana* (the visible), the only material element which can actually be perceived by the eye.⁴⁶ All the other elements of matter (primary or secondary) are classified under the category of *anidassanaṃ* for they are invisible.⁴⁷ At first approach, this statement may seem to conflict with the *sutta* definition of the primary elements (see page 56) according to which the earth element finds expression in hair, nails..., the water element in blood, tears..., etc., all of which are visible. However, the *Katthavatthu* explicitly states that all the four *mahābhūtas* are invisible.⁴⁸ The *Abhidharmakośa*

⁴⁴*Tividhena rūpa-saṅgaho. Sanidassana-sappaṭighaṃ rūpaṃ, anidassana-sappaṭighaṃ rūpaṃ, anidassana-appaṭighaṃ rūpaṃ. D. iii, 217.*

⁴⁵DA. 937.

⁴⁶*Kataman taṃ rūpaṃ sanidassanaṃ? Rūpāyatanaṃ -idan taṃ rūpaṃ sanidassanaṃ. Dhs. 146.*

⁴⁷*Kataman taṃ rūpaṃ anidassanaṃ? Cakkhāyatanaṃ ...pe...kabalīṅkāro āhāro -idan taṃ rūpaṃ anidassanaṃ. Dhs. 146.*

⁴⁸Kvu. 331 ff.

resolves this apparent conflict between the textual statements by mentioning that all the four *mahābhūtas* are invisible and the fact that we can actually see at least some manifestations of them (such as hair or nails, which are parts of the earth element) explains that visibility is only to be understood from the perspective of common usage; in reality, the elements themselves are invisible:

Dans l'usage commun, ce qu'on désigne par le mot "terre", c'est de la couleur et de la figure; de même pour l'eau et le feu; le vent, c'est ou bien l'élément vent, ou bien de la couleur et de la figure. En effet, on parle de "vent noir", "vent circulaire"; mais ce qu'on appelle "vent" dans le monde, c'est aussi l'élément vent.⁴⁹

The elements classified under "resisting" (*sappaṭighaṃ*) are the five sense-organs and their respective objects, for they can actually or potentially come in contact with one another.⁵⁰ We notice that *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* is included in the list of *sappaṭighaṃ* while not being explicitly part of the enumeration of the twenty-seven elements of *rūpa* (i.e. the four *mahābhūtas* and the twenty-three *upādārūpas*). However, although *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* does not seem to be a constituent of the list, we have to remember, as we saw on page 64, that it is implicitly included, for the three *mahābhūtas* of *paṭhavī*, *tejo* and *vāyo* constitute the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana*. The *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* is probably excluded out of a desire to avoid duplication: since the first three *mahābhūtas* are the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana*, there is no need to mention this element again. Therefore, when the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* says that the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* is *sappaṭighaṃ*, the first three elements of *paṭhavī*, *tejo* and

⁴⁹Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośa* vol. i, p. 23-24.

⁵⁰*Kataman taṃ rūpaṃ sappaṭighaṃ? Cakkhāyatanaṃ, sotāyatanaṃ, ghānāyatanaṃ, jivhāyatanaṃ, kāyāyatanaṃ, rūpāyatanaṃ, saddāyatanaṃ, gandhāyatanaṃ, rasāyatanaṃ, phoṭṭhabbāyatanaṃ -idan taṃ rūpaṃ sappaṭighaṃ. Dhs. 147.*

vāyo are intended. The unresisting elements (*appaṭighaṃ*), on the other hand, are all those which are not resisting: i.e. the *āpodhātu* and all the fourteen elements that follow and include *itthindriya*. Therefore, the classification of “visible and resisting” (*sanidassanaṃ sappaṭighaṃ*) refers only to the *rūpāyatana*, while that of “invisible and resisting” (*anidassanaṃ sappaṭighaṃ*) designates all the sense-organs and the sense-objects (with the exception of the *rūpāyatana* and the inclusion of the first three *mahābhūtas* as *phoṭṭhabbāyatana*) and finally, that of “invisible and unresisting” (*anidassanaṃ appaṭighaṃ*) stands for all the elements left, i.e. *āpo*, *itthindriya*, *purisindriya*, *rūpajīvitindriya*, *kāyaviññatti*, *vacīviññatti*, *lahutā*, *mudutā*, *kammaññatā*, *upacaya*, *santati*, *jaratā*, *aniccatā*, *ākāsadhātu* and *āhāra*.

To summarize the implication of the classification of matter in the *Saṅgītisutta*, we can say that the twenty-seven material elements are invisible (*anidassanaṃ*) except, of course, *rūpāyatana* (the visible) which is, by definition, visible (*sanidassanaṃ*). The first five sense-organs and their respective objects, which latter include the first three *mahābhūtas* as *phoṭṭhabbāyatana*, are “resisting” (*sappaṭighaṃ*) and invisible (*anidassanaṃ*), while all the other elements are “non-resisting” (*appaṭighaṃ*) and invisible (*anidassanaṃ*). The reason for this first division of the material elements will become clearer once we have covered the various categories of matter and elaborated a diagram reflecting these sundry divisions.

2.6 The various classifications of matter

As mentioned on page 51, matter and all the elements it comprises can be classified according to different categories such as past, present or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, small or large, and far or near. In this section, we will briefly analyze the meaning and circumscribe the implications of three of these categories, namely 1) internal and external (*ajjhata* and *bahiddhā*), 2) gross and subtle (*olārika* and *sukhuma*) and 3) far and near (*dūre* and *santike*).

The first category establishes a distinction between internal or personal (*ajjhata*) and external or foreign (*bahiddhā*) elements. This first distinction, as we will see, will prove to be of great import for our research. This classification is not restricted to the material aggregate, but is also applicable to the other four *khandhas*,⁵¹ for the distinction between these two categories lies simply in the fact that internal elements are those which “belong” to the individual while the external elements are those which “belong” to other individuals.⁵² The only material elements which are internal are the first five sense-organs, that is the five cognitive physical faculties: the organ of sight, the organ of hearing, the organ of smell, the

⁵¹Dhs. 187.

⁵²*Katame dhammā ajjhata? Ye dhammā tesam tesam suttanam ajjhata paccattam niyatā paṭipuggalikā upādiṇṇā rūpā vedanā saññā saṅkhārā viññāṇaṃ — ime dhammā ajjhata. Katame dhammā bahiddhā? Ye dhammā tesam tesam parasattanāṃ parapuggalānaṃ ajjhata paccattam niyatā paṭipuggalikā...pe...viññāṇaṃ — ime dhammā bahiddhā. Dhs. 187-188.*

organ of taste and the organ of touch.⁵³ According to the same source, the external material elements include the four *mahābhūtas* (or to be literal “the sphere of the tangible, *phoṭṭhabbāyatana*, and the water element”), the four sense-objects enumerated under the twenty-seven elements of *rūpa*, and all the following *upādārīpas*. To have a clearer idea of these external elements pertaining to matter, the reader may wish to refer to the following list.

Diagram III
The external material elements

| | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Paṭhavī</i> | the earth element | (part of <i>phoṭṭhabbāyatana</i>) |
| <i>tejo</i> | the fire element | (part of <i>phoṭṭhabbāyatana</i>) |
| <i>vāyo</i> | the air element | (part of <i>phoṭṭhabbāyatana</i>) |
| <i>āpo</i> | the water element | |
| <i>rūpa</i> | the visible | |
| <i>sadda</i> | sound | |
| <i>gandha</i> | smell | |
| <i>rasa</i> | taste | |
| <i>itthindriya</i> | faculty of femininity | |
| <i>purisindriya</i> | faculty of masculinity | |
| <i>rūpajīvitindriya</i> | material faculty of life | |
| <i>kāyaviññatti</i> | bodily expression | |
| <i>vacīviññatti</i> | vocal expression | |
| <i>lahutā</i> | lightness | |
| <i>mudutā</i> | elasticity | |
| <i>kammaññatā</i> | adaptability | |
| <i>upacaya</i> | growth | |
| <i>santati</i> | continuity | |
| <i>jaratā</i> | decay | |
| <i>aniccatā</i> | impermanence | |
| <i>ākāśadhātu</i> | space-element | |
| <i>āhāra</i> | food | |

The two following categories, gross and subtle (*oḷārika* and *sukhuma*) and far and near (*dūre* and *santike*), are used, as Karunadasa pointed out,⁵⁴

⁵³Dhs. 154 ff.

⁵⁴Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, p. 38.

as a method for distinguishing the mental sense-objects (the elements composing thought known as the *dhammāyatana-rūpas*)⁵⁵ from the other *rūpas*. According to Buddhaghosa, the meanings of “far” and “near” are not at all linked, as we would expect, to the notion of spatial proximity, but rather to the capacity of being perceived.

“Gross” [*olārikaṃ*] means thick, that which may be seized by impact of the sensitive surface, because it has become the basis and the object of thought. “Subtle” [*sukhuma*] should be understood as the contradictory of what has been said. “Remote”: (an object may be) far [*dure*] even though it stands near. This is when there is a difficulty of cognizing, because it is not to be seized by way of impact [*ghaṭṭana*]. The other term “near” [*santike*] (may apply to an object) though it stands far. This is when there is ease of cognizing, because it may be seized by way of an impact [*ghaṭṭana*].⁵⁶

Karunadasa has succinctly circumscribed the implications of the above statement in the following passage:

...because of their being thus easily known (*gahanassa sukarattā*), they are styled *santike* (proximate). For this self-same reason they are also called *olārika*. The *dhammāyatana-rūpa* cannot be known through the medium of any of the first five sense-organs; their existence is known by a process of inference. In this sense they are not easily known (*duppariññeyya*). Hence they are described as *dure* (far). For this self-same reason they are also called *sukhuma* (subtle).⁵⁷

Therefore, the *dhammāyatana-rūpas* are described as far (*dure*) and subtle (*sukhuma*) because they are not easily perceptible. Buddhaghosa’s definition of *dure* and *sukhuma* revolves around the concept of “lack of *ghaṭṭana*”, or “lack of impact”, for there is no direct contact between the first five sense-organs and the *dhammāyatana*. The concept of “lacking an impact” is similar to the previously discussed concept of *appaṭigha* (see page 68) and, therefore, it is no surprise to find out that the fifteen material elements classified as *dure*

⁵⁵See page 65.

⁵⁶*The Expositor (Atthasālinī)*, trans. by Pe Tin Maung, (London: P.T.S., 1976) p. 438.

⁵⁷Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, p. 38.

and *sukhuma* refer to the exact same elements that are classified as *appaṭigha*, i.e. those that constitute the *dhammāyatana*.

Diagram IV
Classification of the twenty-seven material elements

Only the five previously discussed categories are listed. If an element possesses a certain quality, a "Y" is given under that particular quality. If an "N" is given, this particular element belongs automatically to the opposite quality.

| | Opposite qualities | |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| mahābhūta | -----> | upādārūpas |
| paṭigha (sappaṭigha) | -----> | appaṭigha |
| ajjhata | -----> | bahiddhā |
| oḷārika | -----> | sukhuma |
| santike | -----> | dure |

| ELEMENTS | mahābhūtas | paṭigha | ajjhata | oḷārika | santike |
|----------------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. paṭhavī | Y | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 2. tejo | Y | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 3. vāyo | Y | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 4. āpo | Y | N | N | N | N |
| 5. cakku | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| 6. sota | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| 7. ghāna | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| 8. jivhā | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| 9. kāya | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| 10. rūpa | N | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 11. sadda | N | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 12. gandha | N | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 13. rasa | N | Y | N | Y | Y |
| 14. itthindriya | N | N | N | N | N |
| 15. purisindriya | N | N | N | N | N |
| 16. rūpajīvitindriya | N | N | N | N | N |
| 17. kāyaviññatti | N | N | N | N | N |
| 18. vacīviññatti | N | N | N | N | N |
| 19. lahutā | N | N | N | N | N |
| 20. mudutā | N | N | N | N | N |
| 21. kammaññatā | N | N | N | N | N |
| 22. upacaya | N | N | N | N | N |
| 23. santati | N | N | N | N | N |
| 24. jaratā | N | N | N | N | N |
| 25. aniccatā | N | N | N | N | N |
| 26. ākāśadhātu | N | N | N | N | N |
| 27. āhāra | N | N | N | N | N |

2.7 Implications of these classifications

Many scholars, including F. L. Woodward,⁵⁸ S. Z. Aung⁵⁹ and S. Dasgupta,⁶⁰ have been puzzled by a certain canonical definition stating that *rūpa* has a definite “subjective” element: *Rupaṃ ruppati* (or literally: “*rūpa* affects”). Although I agree with F. L. Woodward that *ruppati* cannot be considered as the proper etymology for the word *rūpa*, I feel that this particular definition sheds light on the nature of matter, since matter is not simply an objective reality independent of the perception of the individual.

The distinctions that we have covered so far between the different kinds of “matter” emphasize the deep empirical sense that characterizes Buddhism. It seems that Theravāda Buddhism stresses that for something to be present for someone, it needs to be perceived. Unless there is perception of the object (be it perception of the object itself or perception of its mere conceptualization), it is absolutely meaningless for that person — it is absent. By absent, we are not denying the absolute reality of the object when unperceived by a subject, but simply stressing that the object is of no

⁵⁸*The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Saṃyuttanikāya)*, trans. by F. L. Woodward (London: P.T.S., 1917-1922), iii, p. 73.

⁵⁹*Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 273.

⁶⁰Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 94.

significance to such a subject. Understanding this, we can now make sense of the distinctions between the different kinds of matter.

The division of matter into internal and external has strong implications for the present thesis, for it also establishes a distinction between matter endowed with reality independent of its being perceived, and matter whose reality is dependent on a potential perception. The elements of matter classified under *ajjhata* (internal matter) are the five sense-organs (*cakkhāyatana*, *sotāyatana*, *gandhāyatana*, *jivhāyatana*, and *kāyāyatana*) and are endowed with reality whether or not they are perceived. These five sense-organs are also dependent on the *mahābhūtas*, which constitute their foundation. Therefore, these four primary elements are also endowed with the same reality. The other classification, *bahiddhā* or external, refers to the material elements whose reality is dependent on a potential perception. It is easy to understand why four of the sense-objects (*rūpāyatana*, *saddāyatana*, *gandhāyatana* and *rāsāyatana*) are included in this division, for each of these refers respectively to the forms, sounds, smells and tastes that can potentially be perceived by an individual. However, that the four primary elements and the fourteen last *upādānīpas* are included in this division may seem problematic at first approach. But if we remind ourselves that Buddhism admits six sense-organs, as well as six sense-objects, we may also wonder what happened to the classification of the tangible objects (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana*) and to the mental-objects (*dhammāyatana*), both of which should seemingly be included under the “external” classification. As discussed on page 64, the sense-object of touch (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana*) is made up of the first three great elements (*paṭhavī*, *tejo* and *vāyo*). We have to stress that although all the

four great elements have a reality independent of potential perception, they become factors in the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* only when they can be perceived by an individual, only when there can be an actual contact between an individual and the first three elements. In other words, these three great elements are not always *phoṭṭhabbāyatana*, although the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* is always composed of these three.

The other element that seems to have been left out in the classification of matter is the *dhammāyatana* or the mental objects. But, as we have seen on page 65, the mental objects are only apparently left out since they are described by the fifteen elements: the fourth *mahābhūta* (*āpodhātu*) and the fourteen last *upādārūpas* (*itthindriya*, *purisindriya*, *rūpajīvitindriya*, *kāyaviññatti*, *vaciviññatti*, *lahutā*, *mudutā*, *kammaññatā*, *upacaya*, *santati*, *jaratā*, *aniccatā*, *ākāśadhātu* and *āhāra*). The same reasoning employed above regarding the *phoṭṭhabbāyatana* is applicable to the *dhammāyatana*: the *dhammāyatana* is always composed of one or more of the fifteen elements given above.

2.8 Relation between the *rūpakkhanda* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

So far in this chapter, we have covered various classifications of *rūpa*, but what must be emphasized in order to achieve the objective of this thesis is that matter can be divided into two major categories: internal (objective) and external (subjective) matter. The first refers to material reality (as well as our five sense-organs) existing independently of the potential perception of it, and the second to the form that matter takes in order to be

apprehended by the senses. In other words, this twofold division can be expressed as 1) the five sense-organs as well as the four primary elements that constitute the former, and 2) the six sense-objects. The first four sense-objects are explicitly listed in the Pāli canon as categories of matter, while the last two (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana* and *dhammāyatana*) are implicitly included by, respectively, 1) the first three *mahābhūtas*, and 2) *āpodhātu* and the fourteen last *upādārūpas*. It is these six sense-objects that comprise the “subjective” aspect of matter, subjective in the sense that they can potentially be perceived by, and affect (*ruppati*), the individual.

We are now properly equipped to establish a direct correlation between the *rūpakkhanda* and the theory of dependent origination. In fact, there is a direct relation between the *rūpakkhanda* and the fifth and sixth links of the chain: the six-sense doors (*saḷāyatanā*) and contact (*phassa*). The six-sense doors (*saḷāyatanā*) are usually understood in terms of “internal” and “external”, respectively the six sense-organs and the six sense-objects. However, it is widely understood that in the formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself, the term *saḷāyatanā* includes only the six sense-doors and not their respective objects.⁶¹ The nikāyan, abhidhammic and commentarial literature support this view.⁶² Therefore, we can establish a direct correlation with the

⁶¹Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter* p. 79; *The Guide (Nettippakaraṇam)*, trans. by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (London: P.T.S. 1977) p. 48, note 164/5; Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* p. 25, 123.

⁶²*Katamañca bhikkhave saḷāyatanam. Cakkhāyatanam sotāyatanam ghāṇāyatanam jivhāyatanam kāyātanam manāyatanam. Idam vuccati bhikkhave saḷāyatanam. S. ii, 3. Tattha katamam nāmarūpapaccayāsaḷāyatanam? Cakkhāyatanam ...pe... manāyatanam; idam vuccati nāmarūpapaccayāsaḷāyatanam. Vbh. 164. Also similar interpretation in Vsm. 565.*

saḷāyatanā-link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the five sense-organs that partly constitute the *rūpakkhanda*. The problem that we face, however, is that *saḷāyatanā* includes six sense-organs, whereas the *rūpakkhanda* only admits five of them by excluding the mind from its list (*mano*), the latter belonging to the *viññānaḥkhandha*.⁶³ However, the mental sense-organ has already been implicitly introduced into the chain of dependent origination by the two preceding links, *viññāṇa* and *nāmarūpa*,⁶⁴ and, as we will now see, the following link, *phassa*, explicitly requires the presence of *mano*.

Contact (*phassa*) is usually defined as the meeting of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), a sense-organ (*indriya*) and of an external stimulus (*visaya*).⁶⁵ According to this, contact not only requires the presence of a consciousness,⁶⁶ but also of the sense-organs and the sense-objects. We may suppose that the sense-objects were excluded from the *saḷāyatanā*-link of the chain of dependent origination since the latter seems to be an explanation of our personal bondage to misery; since sense-objects, when unperceived, have no influence on our binding to *saṃsāra*, it is understandable that they were not included. However, they are included in the link of contact, for here they

⁶³We would not have faced this problem if we had included the *hadayaivaṭṭhu* as the twenty-fourth, *upādārūpas*, since this particular element is the basis of *mano*. However, as stated in note #35, the inclusion of this twenty-fourth element seems to be a later addition.

⁶⁴The exact interrelation between *viññāṇa*, *nāmarūpa*, and *mano* to the other sense-organs and the following links of the chain will be explained in the chapter on *viññāṇa*.

⁶⁵*C. Akhuñ c'āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso.* M. i, 111. Similar passage found in S. iv, 32.

⁶⁶As we will see in the chapter on *viññāṇa*, there are six types of consciousness, one of which being the *manoviññāṇa*.

have a direct influence on the individual since they are actually perceived. We can establish a further correlation here between the sense-objects discussed in the *rūpakkhanda* and those of *phassa*. The only nuance is that in the *rūpakkhanda*, the sense-objects are potential objects of perception, while here, because of the congregation of consciousness, sense-organs, and sense-objects, they are actual objects of perception. The congregating of these three leads us to conclude that *phassa* is bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective inclinations. *Phassa* therefore refers to bare percept. However, we must once again carefully draw the difference between *phassa* and the sense-objects. While the latter can potentially be perceived, the former is actually perceived.

2.9 Summary

In our discussion of the *rūpakkhanda*, we saw that, if divided into the categories of sense-organs and sense-objects, matter can integrally be correlated to two links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, namely *saḷāyatanā* and *phassa*. The sense-organs (except *mano*) belong to *saḷāyatanā*, while the sense-objects along with *mano* are included in *phassa*. When these sense-objects are actually perceived, they constitute, along with consciousness and the sense-organs, “contact”, which I would describe as bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective inclination and which can potentially turn into a sensation (*vedanā*),⁶⁷ our next aggregate to be discussed.

⁶⁷*Phassapaccayā vedanā*. M. ii, 32; stated slightly differently at M. iii, 242. See also M. iii, 17 and its commentary MA. iv, 78.

Chapter 3

The *Vedanākkhandha*

3.1 Introduction to the concept of *vedanā*

As we saw in the previous chapter, “the six sense-organs” (*saḷāyatana*) and contact (*phassa*) taken together contain the whole of the *rūpakkhandha*. According to the formula of the *poṭṭicasamuṭṭpāda*, *phassa* is a necessary condition for the arising of sensation (*vedanā*). The principal difference between contact and sensation should be noted carefully. As we have seen, the former is the mere perception of external stimuli, a perception devoid of any subjective interpretation. *Vedanā*, however, has a definite subjective content, for sensation must either be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral,¹ a subjectivity that differentiates it from *phassa*.

According to the *Yamaka*, no distinction is to be found between the terms *vedanā* and *vedanākkhandha*,² and nowhere in the canon is such a distinction elaborated. The *Majjhimanikāya* explains the meaning of the term

¹*Katamā pan' ayye sukhā vedanā, katamā dukkhā vedanā, katamā adukkhamasukhū vedanā ti. Yam k'ho āvuso Visākhā kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā sukhaṃ sātaṃ vedāyitaṃ ayaṃ sukhā vedanā...* M. i, 302.

²*Vedanā vedanākkhandho ti? Āmantiā.* Ymk. 17.

vedanā by “*vedeti vedetīti kho āvuso, tasmā vedanā ti vuccati*”,³ i.e. “it is called ‘sensation’ because one ‘senses’”. Our task would have been easier if Pāli literature had paraphrased the meaning instead of illustrating it with a word endowed with the same etymology. However, the *Pāli Text Society Dictionary* agrees with the canonical statement that holds that the word *vedanā* is derived from the root “*ved*”, or the verb “*vedeti*”, both meaning “to know” or “to experience”. Hence, if the word *vedanā* is indeed related to *vedeti*, it implies that *vedanā* means experience, either physical or mental.

Several classifications of *vedanās* can be found in the Pāli canon, ranging from two to one hundred and eight.⁴ The most important classifications, however, are those in categories of three, five and six. The *Majjhimanikāya*, for example, clarifies the threefold division of *vedanās* as being pleasant, painful, and neither pleasant nor painful, i.e. neutral. These three types of *vedanās* are later said to be experienced either on the body or in the mind.⁵ The *Samyuttanikāya* has elaborated a similar classification⁶ which takes into consideration whether the *vedanā* is mental or physical in nature. This

³M. i. 293.

⁴Oh, Ānanda, according to one classification, *vedanās* are classified in two, according to another, in three, according to another, in five, to another, in six, according to another, in eighteen, to another, in thirty-six, to another, in one hundred and eight. *Dve p'Ānanda vedanā vuttā mayā pariyāyena tisso pi vedanā vuttā mayā pariyāyena, pañca pi vedanā vuttā mayā pariyāyena, cha pi vedanā vuttā mayā pariyāyena, aṭṭhādasā pi vedanā vuttā mayā pariyāyena, chattiṃsāpi vedanā vuttā mayā pariyāyena, aṭṭhasatāṃ vedanāsataṃ pi vuttāṃ mayā pariyāyenu.* M. i, 398; also at S. iv, 224.

⁵*Katamā pan' ayye sukhā vedanā, katamā dukkhā vedanā, katamā adukkhamasukhā vedanā ti. Yaṃ kho āvuso Visākha kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā sukhāṃ sātāṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ sukhā vedanā...* M. i, 302.

⁶S. v, 210.

classification is usually known as the *pañcindriyas*, where the five *indriyas* refer to the five types of *vedanās*; these *pañcindriyas* are not to be confused with the five moral strengths (*pañcabalā*) also sharing the same name (*pañcindriyā*). As *pañcindriyas*, *vedanās* are divided into five groups: the first two (*sukhindriyā* and *dukkhindriyā*) refer to pleasant and painful bodily *vedanās*, the third and fourth (*somanassindriyā* and *domanassindriyā*) are pleasant and painful mental *vedanās*, and finally the fifth (*upekkhindriyā*) consists of neither pleasant nor painful bodily and mental *vedanās*.⁷ Pāli texts further classify *vedanās* into six divisions based on the particular sense-organ (*āyatana*) through which the *vedanā* is “perceived”.⁸ The first five sense-organs — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body — are limited to the body, while the sixth sense-organ — the mind — is of mental character. Although there is a clear distinction between mental and physical *vedanās*, the previous statement from the *Majjhimanikāya* implicitly underscores the importance of the physical aspect of *vedanās*, because the bodily *vedanās* are predominant in number. Since only the *vedanā* triggered by the sixth sense-organ (the mind, *mano*) has a stronger mental content, it is logical to assume that most of the *vedanās* are physically based. However, it is important to stress that even those *vedanās* related to the five physical sense-organs do have a mental function, for *vedanā* is different from mere percept in that a certain

⁷S. v, 210-211.

⁸*Cha vedanākāya veditabbā ti iti...paṭicca vuttam? Cakkhuñ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṃgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā; sotañ ca paṭicca sadde ca uppajjati sotaviññānaṃ; ghānañ ca paṭicca gandhe ca uppajjati ghānaviññānaṃ; jivhañ ca paṭicca rase ca uppajjati jivhāviññānaṃ; kāyañ ca paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca uppajjati kāyaviññānaṃ; manañ ca paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati manoviññānaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṃgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā. Cha vedanākāya veditabbā ti iti yaṃ taṃ vuttam idam etaṃ paṭicca vuttam. Idam pañcamam chakkaṃ. M. iii, 281.*

interpretation of the stimuli has taken place. *Vedanās*, as stated previously, are always either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, a characteristic that differentiates them from objective percept. Therefore, we must stress that our use of the term “sensation” as a translation for *vedanā* does not refer to an anoetic sentience, or a bare experience devoid of personal inclinations.

3.2 The eradication of *vedanā*: *saññāvedayitanirodha*

Pāli texts repeatedly refer to a state beyond sensation or, more literally, a state characterized by the eradication of *saññā* and *vedanā* (*saññāvedayitanirodha*), which Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla have compared to *nibbāna*. I would like to discuss the state beyond *vedanā*, for it might have a direct impact on our understanding of Buddhist soteriology. We will first look at the textual evidence describing this state, and then respond to some modern interpretations of it.

The life of Siddhattha Gotama prior to his enlightenment, as portrayed in the *Ariyapariyesanasutta*, offers significant information on the different “trance-like” states. According to this text, the Bodhisattva visited many saints who were engaged in different types of penance. The most eminent were Ālārakālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. He first approached Ālārakālāma and mastered the stage of *ākāṅkāyatana samādhi* (the third *samāpatti*) which was the highest known to Ālārakālāma. The Buddha was not satisfied with this realization for it did not correspond to final liberation. He therefore left Ālārakālāma and went to study under Uddaka Rāmaputta. With the latter,

he quickly mastered the *samādhi* of *nevasaññānāsaññā* (the fourth *samāpatti*), which again was the highest he could learn from him. Siddhattha Gotama did not regard this as final liberation either and left to pursue his goal.⁹ It is then that he finally experienced *nibbāna*.¹⁰ This text explicitly states that the Buddha had attained all the eight absorptions, i.e. the four *jhānas* and the four *samāpattis*, and that he attained an even higher state: *nibbāna*. In this same *sutta*, the Buddha instructed the monks not only as to how to go through each of these eight absorptions, but also how to attain a state higher than these eight. This state is called *saññāvedayitanirodha*,¹¹ the eradication of *saññā* and *vedanā*. As La Vallée Poussin says:

Ils [les bouddhistes] pensent que ce neuvième [recueillement] a été découvert par le Bouddha; ils le nomment, non pas recueillement d'inconscience ("sans saññā"), mais recueillement de destruction de la conscience et de la sensation ("saññāveditanirodha") ou, plus simplement, recueillement de la destruction (nirodhasamāpatti); ils lui donnent un caractère nettement bouddhique en le définissant comme une prise de contact avec le Nirvāṇa (ou avec une entité semblable au Nirvāṇa).¹²

However, many modern scholars, such as Rune Johansson, hold that *saññāvedayitanirodha* is different from *nibbāna*:

However, *saññāvedayitanirodha* is not included and it is not identified [in Pāli texts] with *nibbāna*. There are texts that would seem to imply a very close relationship, but they are exceptions. *Nirodha* is frequently mentioned as an aid to the attainment of *nibbāna*; but *nibbāna* can be attained on the other levels just

⁹*Nāyaṃ dhammo nibbidāya, na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati.* M. i, 165.

¹⁰M. i, 167.

¹¹M. i, 174-175.

¹²Louis de la Vallée Poussin, "Musīla et Nārada; Le chemin du nirvāṇa", *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1937) p. 212.

as well, even without meditation [the author probably means the practice of the *jhānas* and *samāpattis*]; what is important is the destruction of the obsessions.¹³

Yet the *Ariyapariyesanasutta* depicts the Buddha teaching his disciples how to go through the eight absorptions successively, the same eight that he himself had to go through, and experience a state beyond these. According to this text, the Buddha establishes a parallel between the different attainments his disciples have to go through, and his own. It would therefore be strange rhetoric to find the ninth attainment of the Buddha, i.e. *nibbāna*, radically different from the ninth of his disciples, i.e. *saññāvedayitanirodha*. Theoretically, there should not be any major difference between the two, especially since *saññāvedayitanirodha* is described in the same way that *nibbāna* is often described. Both are being described as “crossing over the entanglement of the world”, as being out of reach of the Evil One (Māra).¹⁴

If the correlation between *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna* were based only on the above factors, it would not stand on firm ground. However, this is a belief accepted by some Theravāda monks of Sri Lanka and Burma, a belief which also finds support in the commentarial literature, texts that Rune Johansson may have overlooked. For example, in a chapter devoted to the discussion of *saññāvedayitanirodha*, the *Visuddhimagga* states that certain monks enter into this “trance” thinking: “Let us dwell in bliss by being without consciousness here and now and reaching the cessation that is

¹³Rune E. A. Johanson, *The Psychology of Nirvana* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1969) p. 49-50.

¹⁴M. i, 175.

nibbāna”.¹⁵ A few pages later, the same text says that *saññāvedayitanirodha* is “an attainment which a noble one may cultivate; the peace it gives is reckoned as *nibbāna* here and now”.¹⁶ The commentary in the *Visuddhimagga* goes even further by introducing an equivocal correlation between the term *saññāvedayitanirodha* and “*nibbāna*-without-residue”: *Nibbānaṃ patvā ti anupādisesanibbānaṃ patvā viya*.¹⁷ Noteworthy is the introduction of the particle *viya* by the commentator, which suggests similarity rather than identity. The passage should therefore be translated thus: [in this particular context of the *Visuddhimagga*, the expression] “attaining *nibbāna*” means attaining [a state] similar to *nibbāna*-without-residue. Although Dhammapāla established a correlation between the *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *anupādisesanibbāna*, we cannot make a direct equation between these two concepts. It is important to stress that the exegete did not establish a one-to-one correlation between the two terms, but only stated that they are “similar”.¹⁸ However, Buddhaghosa mentions that the mind of one who has emerged from *saññāvedayitanirodha* tends towards *nibbāna*.¹⁹ This suggests that the “trance” is a kind of adumbration of *nibbāna* that bends the mind towards achieving *nibbāna* itself and not simply the state that resembles it.

¹⁵*Diṭṭh'eva dhamme acittakā hutvā nirodhaṃ nibbānaṃ patvā sukhaṃ viharissāmā ti samāpajjanti.* Vsm. p.705. Translation from *The Path of Purification*, p. 828.

¹⁶*Iti santaṃ samāpattiṃ imaṃ ariyasevitaṃ, diṭṭh'eva dhamme Nibbānaṃ iti sankhaṃ upāgataṃ.* Vsm. p.709; translation from the *Path of Purification*, p. 833.

¹⁷VsmA. 902.

¹⁸Vasubandhu, in his *Abhidharmakośa*, seems to have been as careful as Dhammapāla in his definition of *saññāvedayitanirodha*: he stated only that the latter is similar (*sadrśa*) to *nibbāna*. *AbhK.* ii, 44.

¹⁹*Vuṭṭhitassa kiṃ ninnam cittaṃ hotī ti Nibbānaninnaṃ.* Vsm. 708.

To further clarify this discussion, we need to introduce an aperçu on *nibbāna* in order to be able to grasp the meaning of two scholars who have interpreted the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha*.

There is an amazing amount of dissension amongst scholars as to the nature of *nibbāna*. Some perceive *nibbāna* as a state that can only be attained when one is dead,²⁰ for it is often described as a state beyond mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), a condition that transcends the five aggregates that constitute the amalgam of mind and matter. Others interpret *nibbāna* as the state of consciousness that Siddhattha Gotama attained at the age of thirty-five under the Bodhi tree, a state which is also experienced upon attaining arahanthood.²¹ However, although the terms *buddha* and *arahant* imply, according to the second interpretation, the experience of *nibbāna*, they do not necessarily suggest that liberated “persons” are dwelling in a transcendental state, nor that they have totally eradicated the five aggregates. It seems therefore that these two perspectives on *nibbāna* are mutually exclusive. This difference of opinion as to the nature of *nibbāna* is probably due to the overlooking of the difference between “two types” of *nibbāna*. Most Buddhist schools hold that the historical Buddha, for example, experienced enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at the age of thirty-five and, according

²⁰As Louis de La Vallée Poussin stated in one of his lectures at Manchester College: “It may therefore be safely maintained that *Nirvāṇa* is annihilation.” *The way to Nirvana: six lectures on ancient Buddhism as a discipline of salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 117.

²¹Th. Stcherbatsky represents the followers of this perspective: “Buddha and *Nirvāṇa* are different names for the same thing”. Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, p. 79.

to certain scholars,²² reached *nibbāna* simultaneously. He only entered into *nibbāna*, however, when he passed away at the age of eighty. Our understanding of the difference between these “two” *nibbānas* will be heightened if we discuss the two categories used to explain these two kinds of *nibbānas*, namely *sopādisesa* (with residue) and *nirupādisesa* or *anupādisesa* (without residue).

According to Pāli texts, *nibbāna* has, strictly speaking (*nippariyato*) and in the ultimate sense (*paramatthato*), a single nature and is without division or distinction. But for the sake of logical treatment and in order to make known the nature of the attainment of *nibbāna*, it can be divided into two categories: *sopādisesa* and *nirupādisesa* (or *anupādisesa*),²³ a nuance that is thoroughly explained by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*:

But this [single goal, *nibbāna*] is firstly called *with result of past clinging left* (*sopādisesa*) since it is made known together with the [aggregates resulting from the past] clinging still remaining [during the Arahant's life], being thus made known in terms of the stilling of defilement and the remaining [result of the past] clinging that are present in one who has reached it by means of development. But [secondly, it is called *without result of past clinging left* (*nirupādisesa*)] since after the last consciousness of the Arahant, who has abandoned arousing [future aggregates] and so prevented kamma from giving result in a future [existence], there is no further arising of aggregates of existence, and those already arisen have disappeared. So the [result of past] clinging that remained is non-existent; and it is in terms of this non-existence, in the sense that ‘there is no [result of

²²“Aussi bien quand le Bouddha est parvenu du même coup à la Clairvoyance et au Nirvāna, c’est un cri de triomphe et d’allégresse qui s’échappe de ses lèvres à l’idée qu’il a enfin brisé les chaînes du Destin et s’est pour toujours libéré de la prison corporelle.” A. Foucher, *La Vie du Bouddha d’après les textes et les monuments de l’Inde* (Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1987) p. 326.

²³*Tad etam [nibbānam] sabhāvo ekavidham pi, saupādisesanibbānadhātu anupādisesanibbānadhātu ceti duvidham hoti. AbhS. 31.*

past] clinging here, that the [same goal is called] *without result of past clinging left*.²⁴

The *Itivuttaka*, on which the previous passage of the *Visuddhimagga* probably bases its interpretation, mentions that one who has attained *sopādisesa nibbāna* still possesses the five senses and still experiences pleasant and painful sensations,²⁵ while the state of *nirupādisesā nibbāna* is characterized by the eradication of all becoming (*bhava*),²⁶ implying that no emergence from this state is possible.

On the other hand, the state of *sopādisesa nibbāna*, as the words themselves imply, is “*nibbāna-with-residue*” in the sense that subtle karmas (*saṅkhāras* as we will see later) still remain. These karmas are not strong enough to propel these people into another rebirth, but strong enough to maintain them alive. Liberated persons are not producing any more kamma, for the kamma process (*kammabhava*) has been eradicated. They have eradicated all kamma-results (*kammavipūka*) that may lead to another life, but still have to reap some subtle kamma-results. It is these kamma-results that maintain the regeneration of the five aggregates and keep the process going. Therefore, this *sopādisesa nibbāna* could be correlated to a state of mind that alters our perception of the world, or rather, enables us to really

²⁴*The Path of Purification*, p. 580-581. This subject is further elaborated in the *Itivuttaka* (38, 39, 40, 41) as well as in Kamaleswar Bhattacharya's article “Upadhi, upādi et upādāna dans le canon bouddhique pâli”, *Mélanges d'indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris: Publications de l'institut de civilisation indienne).

²⁵*Tassa tiṭṭhanteva pañcendriyāni yesaṃ avighātattā manāpāmanāpaṃ paccanubhoti, sukhadukkhaṃ paṭisaṃvediyati...saupādisesā nibbānadhātu.* It. 38.

²⁶*Anupādisesā pana samparāyikā yamhi nirujjhanti bhavāni sabbaso.* It. 38.

perceive the world as it is (*yathābhūta*). This definition is extremely similar to Āryadeva's interpretation of the state *visaṃyogavimutti-phala*:

Ce fruit de délivrance [visaṃyogavimutti-phala], disons nous, n'est pas une certaine entité à part du lien, de ce qui est lié et du moyen. --C'est-à-dire: 1. quand on obtient d'être délivré du lien, on ne réalise pas une certaine délivrance qui soit à part, qui soit extérieure au lien. Ce qui est nommé délivrance, c'est seulement la non-naissance d'un [nouveau] lien en raison d'un certain état qui est la vue des choses telles qu'elles sont (yathābhūtam); 2. de même pour ce qui est lié. Ce qui est nommé délivrance, ce n'est pas une entité (saddharma) à part, mais un certain état d'aise et d'indépendance [dans lequel le lié est] dégagé du lien des passions-erreurs; 3. de même pour le moyen. Ce qui est nommé délivrance, ce n'est pas une entité à part, extérieure au chemin; c'est une certaine efficacité qui dégage des passions erreurs.²⁷

Nirupādisesa nibbāna, on the other hand, is “*nibbāna*-without-residue” in the sense that all *kammas* or *saṅkhāras* have been eradicated and, consequently, no fuel that can perpetuate life can be found. *Nirupādisesa nibbāna* is what is usually referred to as *khandhāparinibbāna*. This state of *nirupādisesa* is *nibbāna* beyond mind and matter, no different from the state of *nibbāna* that the Buddha attained at the moment of death. In this state, as the *Itivuttaka* and Āryadeva mentions,²⁸ none of the five aggregates can be located.

Identifications are often made in works on Buddhism with *nirupādisesa nibbāna* (without residue) and the term *parinibbāna*, and between *sopādisesa nibbāna* and “plain” *nibbāna*. However, no sound textual justification is found for such identification. It is true that in the *sutta* literature the term

²⁷Louis de La Vallée Poussin, “Āryadeva et le Nirvāṇa”, *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1932)p. 132.

²⁸It.41. “A l'époque de l'absolu Nirvāṇa (*parinirvāṇa*), n'existent ni les *skandhas* ni l'*ātman*.” Louis de la Vallée Poussin, “Āryadeva et le Nirvāṇa”, p. 133.

parinibbāna seems to be restricted to the passing away of the *arahant* (i.e. the attainment of *nirupādisesa nibbāna*). Yet the substantive in these particular passages virtually functions as an elegant or polite term for an *arahant*'s death rather than entering into *nirupādisesa nibbāna* itself. The main reason is that the verb form *parinibbāyati* is also used to mean the attainment of arahantship itself and does not require the passing away of the arahant at that particular moment.²⁹ Furthermore, commentarial literature mentions two kinds of *parinibbānas*: 1-) *kilesaparinibbāna*, the extinction of defilements which is equated with *sopādisesa nibbāna*, and 2-) *khandhaparinibbāna*, or the extinction of the aggregates, i.e. the passing away of the *arahant*, *nirupādisesa nibbāna*. As Peter Masefield pointed out in his article "The Nibbāna-Parinibbāna Controversy",³⁰ not even the past participle *parinibbuta* refers exclusively to the state of *nirupādisesa nibbāna*.³¹ Therefore, the term *parinibbāna* is not used in the present thesis because of its dubious significance, and because the concepts of *nirupādisesa* and *sopādisesa* are the precise technical terms that refer respectively to the total eradication of the aggregates at the time of the death of the *arahant*.

To return to our discussion on cessation, we find that although commentarial literature equivocally equates *saññāvedayitanirodha* with *nibbāna-without-residue* (*nirupādisesanibbāna*), this equation is often

²⁹See M. i, 67.

³⁰Peter Masefield, "The Nibbāna-Parinibbāna Controversy", *Religion*, Vol.9, Autumn 1979 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.) p. 216.

³¹Refer to footnotes # 68 and # 69 for example of this particular usage of the term *parinibbuta*.

questioned by scholars. For example, David Kalupahana stated regarding these two states that “scholars more conversant with the buddhist tradition [than William James] go to the extent of equating the state of cessation (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) with freedom (*nibbāna*)”.³² According to Kalupahana, these two states cannot be equated, either unequivocally or equivocally.

There seems to be a serious flaw in Kalupahana’s argument against the correlation between *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*. According to him,

The *Ariyapariyesanasutta* in which the Buddha refused to equate freedom with the state of cessation should have served as a corrective to this wrong identification. In fact, as pointed out earlier, the state of cessation is to be experienced by the body (*kāyena sacchikaraṇīyā dhammā*) rather than to be realized through wisdom (*paññā*).³³

A careful reading of the *Ariyapariyesanasutta*, however, shows that the Buddha never refused to equate *nibbāna* with *saññāvedayitanirodha*. What we find in this particular text is simply a statement that none of the eight absorptions can be equated with *nibbāna*:

This dhamma [the teaching of Ālāra Kālāma] does not lead to disregard, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation, nor to tranquillity, nor to super-knowledge, nor to awakening, nor to *nibbāna*, but only as far as reaching the plane of “nothing”.³⁴

³²Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 76.

³³Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 94.

³⁴*Nāyaṃ [Ālārakālāmassa] dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati, yāvad-eva ākiñcaṇṇāyatanūpapattiyā ti.* M. i, 165 Translation inspired from *Middle Length Sayings*, vol. i, p. 209. The same is said about the teaching of Uddaka Rāmaputta with the slight nuance that this latter leads no further than to the state of “neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (see M. i, 166).

It seems that Kalupahana has made the mistake of associating *saññāvedayitanirodha* with the attainments of the eight absorptions (actually the four *jhānas* and the four *samāpattis*), for it is sometimes described as the ninth absorption.³⁵ The *Ariyapariyesanasutta*, however, does not mention the attainment of *saññāvedayitanirodha* in this specific passage,³⁶ and to take for granted that it is implied by this particular discussion of the eight absorptions is precarious. Therefore, we cannot definitely affirm that the Buddha refused to equate *saññāvedayitanirodha* with *nibbāna*.

Saññāvedayitanirodha is known as a state beyond mind and matter, as is *nirupādisesa nibbāna*. One of the differences to note, however, between *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*-without-residue is that the latter can only be experienced after death, while in the former, one has to be alive. Alive, yes, but not in appearance. One dwelling in *saññāvedayitanirodha* has the same features as a dead body with the slight exception that life (*āyu*) and bodily heat are still present, and that his sense-organs are purified.³⁷ Like *nirupādisesa nibbāna*, *saññāvedayitanirodha*, as the term itself implies, is also devoid of *saññā* and *vedanā*. Without the existence of these two aggregates, the two other mental aggregates, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* cannot be present either.

³⁵For example, the *Dīghanikāya* describes nine successive "cessations", which consist of the four *jhāna*, the four *samāpatti* and *saññāvedayitanirodha*. D. iii, 266. The eight absorptions, however, are not usually coupled with *saññāvedayitanirodha*, except when the latter is described as higher than any of the former.

³⁶That is M. i, 166-167.

³⁷*Āyu aparikkhīṇo, usmā avūpasantā, indriyāni vipasannāni*. M. i, 296.

According to the *paṭiccasamupāda*, *saṅkhāra* is the necessary condition for the arising of *viññāṇa* which can potentially turn into *vedanā*. If there is no *vedanā*, there cannot be any *saṅkhāra* for, as we will see in the chapter on *saṅkhāra*, the three links of the *paṭiccasamupāda* that follow *vedanā* (*taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava*) are members of the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. Furthermore, if there is no *saṅkhāra*, no *viññāṇa* can arise since *saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇam*. This argument is also implicitly supported by the *Visuddhimagga* in its definition of *saññāvedayitanirodha*: “What is the attainment of cessation [*saññāvedayitanirodha*]? It is the disappearance of consciousness (*citta*) and its mental factors (*cetasikas*) owing to their progressive eradication”.³⁸ Noteworthy is that abhidhammic literature uses the term *citta* as a synonym of *viññāṇa*³⁹ while *cetasika* comprises not only *vedanā* and *saññā*, as we would expect from *saññāvedayitanirodha*, but also the fifty factors that constitute *saṅkhāra*. Since *saññāvedayitanirodha* is devoid of *citta* and *cetasikas*, it is therefore also devoid of *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra*. However, one of the aggregates, the *rūpakkhanda*, must still be present since the body is still alive and must be sustained by the *rūpajīvitindriya* (material faculty of life), one of the twenty-four *upādārūpa* (see page 63). Therefore, *saññāvedayitanirodha* is not simply a “more radical negation of apperceptions” [*saññā*], as Tilmann Vetter suggested,⁴⁰ but a radical negation of all the four

³⁸*Tattha kā nirodhasamāpattī ti yā anupubbanirodhavasena cittacetasikānaṃ dhammānaṃ appavatti.* Vsm. 702.

³⁹Nyānātiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 37.

⁴⁰“Probably in a period already dominated by the method of discriminating insight some persons wished to make use of this wasteland and discovered in the cessation of apperceptions and feelings [*saññāvedayitanirodha*] a state (or rather a name) not yet touched by any criticism.
(continued...) ”

mental aggregates. In this sense, nor could it be equated, as Winston King advanced⁴¹ with the fruits of the paths, for, as we saw on page 41, these are still characterized by the four mental aggregates, while *saññāvedayitanirodha* is completely devoid of them.

While dwelling in the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha*, the body is said to be utterly protected from any kind of injuries. Pāli texts offer us the shocking example of Mahānāga who dwelt in this trance while the house he was in caught fire. The whole residence burned down without Mahānāga even noticing it. After all, without the four mental aggregates, one cannot be aware of anything in the mundane world! However, only the house burned. The monk, although he was caught in the blaze, was left untouched by the flames. Emerging from *saññāvedayitanirodha*, he even made a pun and “flew away”.⁴²

Unfortunately, this sensational (albeit deprived of sensation) state of *saññāvedayitanirodha* is not available to just anyone. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, only the *anāgamī* and the *arahant* who have successively

⁴⁰(...continued)

‘Neither apperception nor non-apperception’ [the fourth *samāpatti*] now becomes the last but one stage and its description is to be understood as a middle-way formulation allowing for a more radical negation of apperceptions.” Tillman Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988) p. 68.

⁴¹*Saññāvedayitanirodha* “is the maximum possible temporal extension of those nibbāna realizations contained in Path and fruition awareness as well as the experiential ultimate, *nibbāna* itself, tasted in one’s present existence”. King, *Theravāda Meditation*, p. 104.

⁴²Vsm. 706.

passed through the eight absorptions can enter this state.⁴³ This is extremely important, for many scholars say that equating *saññāvedayitanirodha* with *nibbāna* is impossible since according to the Buddhist tradition, *nibbāna* can be experienced only by means of wisdom (*paññā*) and discriminative insight (*vipassanā*), while the eight absorptions can be attained by simply practising concentration (*samatha*). However, the fact that it is necessary to be either an *anāgamī* or an *arahant* in order to experience *saññāvedayitanirodha* demands a certain amount of wisdom and discriminative insight. Only those who have perfected these two qualities would be able to experience the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha*.⁴⁴ As Winston L. King emphasized, “only those who have attained the Path can attain cessation. It cannot be repeated too often that *cessation is an integral blending of the two*”⁴⁵ practices of *samatha* (concentration) and insight (*vipassanā*). However, *anāgamīs* and *arahants* who have reached the goal but have not followed the path of the absorptions cannot enter into this state; they will have to wait for the dissolution of their five aggregates — i.e. death — before they can reach this state.

Paul J. Griffiths, however, does not agree with this correlation and he devoted a whole book to the subject. According to Griffiths, two different

⁴³*Ke taṃ samāpajjanti ti sabbe pi puthujjanā sotāpannā sakadāgāmino, sukkhavi-passakā ca anāgāmino arahanto na samāpajjanti. Añña samāpattilābhino pana anāgāmino khīṇāsavā ca samāpajjanti: dvīhi balehi samannāgatattā tayo ca saṅkhārānaṃ paṭippassaddhiyā soḷasahi nāṇacariyāhi, navahi samādhicariyāhi vasībhāvatā paññā nirodhasamāpattiyā nāṇaṃ ti hi vuttaṃ.* Vsm. 702. The reader might want to refer to the section of the *Visuddhimagga* (p. 702-709) which explains how one can enter *saññāvedayitanirodha*, what are the requirements, how does one emerge from that state, etc.

⁴⁴See A. iii, 192; Vsm. 705.

⁴⁵King, *Theravāda Meditation*, p. 108.

paths are to be found in primitive Buddhism: the path of discriminative insight (*vipassanā*) that leads to *nibbāna*, and the path of concentration (*samatha*) that leads to the absorptions and to *saññāvedayitanirodha*. The exegetes, especially Buddhaghosa, attempted to reconcile these two paths by correlating *saññāvedayitanirodha* with *nibbāna*-without-residue (*nirupādivesanibbāna*), and by stating that, in order to experience cessation, one must have already perfected wisdom through discriminative insight to the level of *anāgāmi*. Griffiths does not agree with Buddhaghosa's reasoning, and he almost goes to the extent of charging the exegete with heresy.⁴⁶ Griffiths' statement is rather strong and I do not feel his arguments bear out the charge; a response to Griffiths's argumentation is therefore required.

Griffiths has two major arguments against the identification of *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*. His first one is based on the following statement from the *Visuddhimagga*: "Why do they attain *nirodha*? [...] they attain it thinking: 'let us live happily [*sukham*] by being mindless in this very moment and having attained cessation which is *nibbāna*'."⁴⁷ According to Griffiths,

it is unclear how a condition in which no mental events occur can possess affective tone as appears to be suggested [by Buddhaghosa]. Presumably it would be more accurate to describe the attainment of cessation as a condition which is free from both happiness and sadness and indeed from all affective tone whatever.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless; Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-body Problem* (Illinois: Open Court, 1986) p. 29. See page 99 for Griffith's charge.

⁴⁷*Kasmā samāpajjantī ti [...] diṭṭh'eva dhamme acittakā hutvā nirodhaṃ Nibbānaṃ patvā sukhaṃ viharissāmā ti samāpajjanti.* Vsm. 705.

⁴⁸Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, p. 29.

The remark is accurate; since *saññāvedayitanirodha* is a state where none of the mental aggregates is at work, it is impossible to experience either pleasant or unpleasant sensations. However, although Griffiths mentions Dhammapāla's commentary on the *Visuddhimagga*, he does not seem to give it proper consideration. According to Dhammapāla, the word happiness (*sukhaṃ*) in this particular passage simply means the absence of suffering.⁴⁹ I believe that this is what Buddhaghosa had in mind when he said that those wishing to attain cessation do so in order to "live happily". We have to understand that the Buddhist noble truth of suffering postulates the universality of suffering. Suffering does not merely result from unpleasant sensations, physical or mental, as Griffiths seems to imply, but is inherent to everything that is compounded (*saṅkhāra*), i.e. all psycho-physical phenomena of existence, all the five aggregates. These are characterized by constant change, they arise and pass away; they are transitory (*anicca*). Because of this inherent instability, they are subject to suffering.⁵⁰ Moreover, suffering is often directly correlated with the five clinging-aggregates (*saṅkhittena pañcupādānakhandhā pi dukkhā*). Although the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha*, being defined as beyond any of the four mental aggregates, can definitely not be characterized by pleasant and unpleasant sensations, it can be understood as a "pleasant" experience in Dhammapāla's sense, for it transcends the suffering that is inherent in all types of sensations.

⁴⁹*Sukhaṃ ti niddukkhaṃ. VsmA. 1673.22.*

⁵⁰As stated in the *Samyuttanikāya*: "What do you think, monks: is *rūpa* permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, Sir" "And that which is impermanent, is it suffering or pleasant?" "Suffering, Sir." *Taṃ kiṃ maññatha bhikkhave rūpaṃ niccam vā aniccaṃ vāti. Aniccaṃ bhante. Yaṃ pañāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā ti. Dukkhaṃ bhante. S. iii, 67.* The same mode of questioning is used for the four other mental aggregates.

Griffiths's second argument is that Buddhaghosa's identification of *nibbāna* with *saññāvedayitanirodha* "seems to approach uneasily close to a standard Buddhist heresy" for it "encourages some version of the annihilation view".⁵¹ The annihilation view (*ucchedadiṭṭhi*) is grounded in the belief that there is an unchanging self that remains constant throughout life and which, at the time of death, simply disappears. It is the belief in the existence of an entity which is more or less identical with the five aggregates and which becomes totally annihilated at the time of death.⁵² First, Buddhism categorically rejects the view that there is a permanent entity which is identified with the five aggregates.⁵³ the tradition denies the truth of the presupposition altogether by affirming that there is merely a sequence of similar events that are causally related, but that this similarity can definitely not be perceived as identity. Furthermore, Buddhism also repudiates the view that there is no existence after death⁵⁴ since it believes that there is a certain continuum from one life to another; the last consciousness of this life (*cutticitta*) will engender the first consciousness of the next life (*paṭisandhiviññāṇa*). However, there is a way to exit this cycle of birth, death and rebirth: by eradicating all karmic activities (*saṅkhāras*) — and not simply by dying — one can escape this saṃsāric circle and attain *nibbāna*. Griffiths says that "many Buddhist texts, especially those which discuss the question of the nature of *nibbāna*, do in fact read as though they embrace just this

⁵¹Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, p. 29.

⁵²Nyānātiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 48.

⁵³*Rūpaṃ vedayitaṃ saññaṃ viññāṇaṃ yaṃ ca saṅkhatam n'eso aham asmi.* S. i, 112.

⁵⁴Such as portrayed in D. i, 55.

‘annihilation view’⁵⁵. It is true that *nibbāna* is most of the time described in negativistic terms, but reaching the goal is often the result of many lives of practice;⁵⁶ this very point indicates that there is some sort of continuum from one existence to another, a view that the “annihilists” would reject. “However this may be”, as Griffiths continues, “it certainly seems as though this text of Buddhaghosa’s, identifying the attainment of cessation with *nibbāna*, is one of those that encourages some version of the ‘annihilation view’⁵⁷. I do not clearly understand how Griffiths can interpret the words of Buddhaghosa in such a manner, since the passage quoted above clearly stated that those referred to want to attain cessation in order to attain a certain “bliss”, (*sukham*), a bliss which is definitely beyond sensations. Yet the very fact that “bliss” is present — and experienced — indicates that this is not total annihilation. Furthermore, it is not *saññāvedayitanirodha* which creates the problem, but *nibbāna per se*: the latter (or at least *nirupādisesanibbāna*) is described as being beyond the five aggregates⁵⁸ — a statement which resembles the annihilationist view in the sense that all

⁵⁵Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, p. 29.

⁵⁶For example, the *Jātaka* offers the biographies of hundreds of the previous life of the bodhisattva on his way to enlightenment.

⁵⁷Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, p. 29.

⁵⁸“But [secondly, it is called *without result of past clinging left (nirupādisesa)*] since after the last consciousness of the Arahant, who has abandoned arousing [future aggregates] and so prevented kamma from giving result in a future [existence], there is no further arising of aggregates of existence, and those already arisen have disappeared. So the [result of past clinging that remained is non-existent; and it is in terms of this non-existence, in the sense that ‘[sic] there is no [result of past] clinging here, that the [same goal is called] *without result of past clinging left*.” *The Path of Purification*, p. 580-581.

constituents of the individual are destroyed, but contradicts it in the sense that there is still something left: perfect bliss (*paramarṇ sukharṇ*).

The Theravāda commentarial tradition has established an equivocal relation between *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*-without-residue. Equivocal in the sense that in the passage of the *Visuddhimagga* that we referred to, Buddhaghosa is not speaking in his own voice and does not seem to be making a straightforward doctrinal statement that *saññāvedayitanirodha* is *nibbāna*. He simply states that certain monks enter this trance thinking: “let us dwell in bliss by being without consciousness here and now and reaching the cessation that is *nibbāna*”.⁵⁹ Buddhaghosa places this statement in the mouths of others, and from the context it seems that this is a loose, metaphorical way of speaking for such rhetoric is not typical of Buddhaghosa when writing in a strictly analytical manner and when supporting a doctrinal point. Hence the commentator, Dhammapala, rushes in to prevent misunderstanding by explaining that “reaching the cessation that is *nibbāna*” means “as though reaching *nibbāna*-without-residue”.

However, according to Pāli sources, there is a major distinction between *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*. On the one hand, *nibbāna* is not a particular meditative attainment. It is a *sabhāvadhamma*, a reality which exists in the ultimate sense (*paramatthato*). As an ultimate reality, *nibbāna*

⁵⁹Vsm. 705.

differs from all other *dhammas* in that it is unconditioned, unborn,⁶⁰ undying,⁶¹ etc. It is realized by practitioners when they attain the paths and fruits, but its existence is by no means dependent on anyone's attainment. *Nibbāna* exists and remains as such whether or not it is realized. On the other hand, *saññāvedayitanirodha* is not a *sabhāvadhamma*, it has no individual essence and it is produced (*nipphanna*). For the simple reason that it has no individual essence, according to the *Visuddhimagga*, it is not classifiable as formed or unformed, mundane or supramundane.⁶² According to Pāli literature, *nibbāna* is a real *dhamma*, *āyatana*, and *dhātu*, while *saññāvedayitanirodha* is not. The latter is simply the cessation of mental factors reached through the procedure described in the *Visuddhimagga*.⁶³ In the light of these canonical definitions of *saññāvedayitanirodha* and *nibbāna*, the juxtaposition of these two states as one becomes almost impossible.

Yet a further hypothesis about *nirodhasamāpatti* and its place within Buddhism has been put forward by Louis de La Vallée Poussin.⁶⁴ In his article, La Vallée Poussin explores the debt of Buddhism to the ancient form of *Saṃkhyā* or *yoga* where the practice of complete withdrawal of the senses

⁶⁰Dhs. 2; Sn. 362; It. 87; Ud. 80, etc.

⁶¹Vsm. 507.

⁶²*Nirodhasamāpattisaṅkhatā asaṅkhatā ti ādi pucchāyaṃ pana saṅkhatā ti pi asaṅkhatā ti pi lokiyaṃ ti pi lokuttaraṃ ti pi na vattabbā. Kasmā? Sabhāvato n'atthitāyo* Vsm. 709. A similar statement regarding the mundane and supramundane classification of *saññāvedayitanirodha* is found in the *Kathavatthu*, p. 516.

⁶³Vsm. 705 ff.

⁶⁴Louis de La Vallée Poussin, "Āryadeva et le Nirvāṇa".

was the only means of achieving *cittavṛttinirodha*, which was in turn the only means of attaining *kaivalya* or liberation. The argument can be made that the early Buddhists wanted to show that they had incorporated every kind of practice into their system and had an attainment higher than any of those associated with other practices. The issue of integrating *saññāvedayitanirodha* into the Buddhist tradition could be the survival of another attempt to make Buddhism appear superior to rival practices.⁶⁵

Whether or not *nibbāna* and *saññāvedayitanirodha* are the same, I cannot say; there is definitely a controversy on the subject. All I can say is that Kalupahana and Griffiths, who both have challenged the commentarial correlation between the two, have failed to provide adequate support for their position. As for the Pāli texts themselves, they do not seem to be in total accord on this point. One thing is certain: both share a “blissful feeling”.⁶⁶ As mentioned previously, the peace generated by *saññāvedayitanirodha* “is reckoned as *nibbāna* here and now”⁶⁷ for it shares *nibbāna*’s peaceful quality. However, it might not necessarily be the same as *nibbāna* itself, and could simply be some kind of blissful foretaste of the *nibbāna* element without residue.

⁶⁵On the Buddhist attempt to integrate practices that antedated the Buddha, the reader may wish to refer to Martin Wiltshire’s *Ascetic Figures Before and In Early Buddhism; The Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990).

⁶⁶Blissful in the sense that it is devoid of sensations rather than being characterized by a pleasant feeling.

⁶⁷VsmA. 833.

3.3 The destruction of *vedanā*: *vedanākkhaya*

Now that we have discussed *saññāvedayitanirodha*, we also ought to mention another kind of destruction of sensation. This, however, is not termed *nirodha* (eradication), but rather *khaya* (destruction), and refers to a slightly different state. We find passages including this term in the *Suttanipāta*:

Whatever sensations one experiences, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, inside or outside, all are suffering, all are illusory, all are ephemeral. Whenever there is contact, sensations pass away [as soon as they arise], thus one is free from passion, has destroyed the sensations and is fully liberated (*parinibbuto*).⁶⁸

Similar passages are found in the *Saṃyuttanikāya*:

A disciple of the Buddha, with concentration, awareness and constant thorough understanding of impermanence [*sampajāno*] knows with wisdom the sensations, their arising, their cessation and the path leading to their destruction. One who has reached the destruction of sensation is freed from craving, is fully liberated (*parinibbuto*).⁶⁹

According to the texts, people “destroying sensations” are fully liberated, yet nowhere is it stated, as it is with the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha*, that in order to undertake this practice and attain the goal, one must have previously attained the eight absorptions. Therefore, a difference seems to be implied between *vedanānaṃ khayā* and *saññāvedayitanirodha*. Moreover, people who have accomplished the “destruction of *vedanās*” are still alive and interact

⁶⁸ *Sukhaṃ vā yadi va dukkhaṃ adukkhamasukhaṃ sahā ajjhataṇ ca bahiddhā ca yaṃ kiñci atthi veditaṃ etaṃ ‘dukkhaṇ’ ti ñatvāna mosadhammaṃ palokinaṃ phussa vayaṃ passaṃ evaṃ tattha virajjati vedanānaṃ khayā bhikkhu nicchāto parinibbhuto ti.* Sn. 144.

⁶⁹ *Samāhito sampajāno sato buddhassa sāvako vedanā sampajānāti vedanānaṃca sambhavaṃ yattha vetā nirujjhanti maggaṇca khayagāminam vedanānaṃ khayā bhikkhu nicchāto parinibbuto ti.* S. iv, 204. Another similar passage at S. v, 57.

with the world, whereas the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha* is characterised by a complete alienation from experience.

As was pointed out by Padmasiri de Silva,⁷⁰ *vedanānam khayā* does not imply the destruction of all sensations. According to the *Samyuttanikāya*, *vedanās* can be classified into eight types. The first four are caused by bodily disturbances such as those originating from bile (*pitta*), phlegm (*semha*), wind (*vata*), and a combination of them all (*sannipātika*). The fifth originates from climatic conditions (*utuporiṇāmajā*). The sixth arises from disagreeable things coming together (*visamaparihārajā*) such as sitting too long or an improper combination of food. The seventh is caused by injuries and external attacks (*opakkamika*), such as being bitten by a snake. And finally, the eighth type of *vedanā* is caused by the ripening of one's own *kamma* (*kammavipākajāni vedayitāni*).⁷¹ Of all these types, it is only the last, those sensations generated by past *kammas*, that is destroyed when the expression *vedanānam khayā* is used. The other seven types of *vedanās* are still functioning. When one has attained the state of *vedanānam khayā*, one still functions normally, but no *vedanā* arises because of past *kammas*. Furthermore, those *vedanās* that arise do not lead to the production of any new *kamma*, for those who have attained this state are, as stated in the two passages quoted above, fully liberated (*parinibbuto*). This attainment of *parinibbuto*, as long as one is alive,

⁷⁰Padmasiri de Silva, "Kamma and vipassanānupassanā", *The Importance of Vedanā and Sampajañña* (Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute, 1990) n.p. (paragraph 11 of the article).

⁷¹S. iv, 230.

is non-different from *nibbāna*-with-residue (discussed on page 89),⁷² for it can be considered as a state of mind, or more accurately, the state of a purified mind.

3.4 *Vedanā* and craving

The place that *vedanā* occupies in Buddhist soteriology is crucial, since *vedanā* constitutes the bifurcation point from which diverge the road leading to the multiplication of unhappiness and the road leading to the eradication of misery.⁷³ Because of the Buddhist pivotal theory of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), *vedanā* is often misunderstood as not only being the basis for, but also as inevitably leading to craving (*taṇhā*). However, if we carefully examine the Great Discourse on Causation (*Mahānidānasutta*) where each of the twelve links of the theory of dependent origination is explained, we do not find any textual evidence stating that *vedanā* necessarily leads to craving. All that is said is:

‘With sensation as condition, there is craving. This, Ānanda, should be understood in this way. If there were no sensation at all, of any kind, anywhere — i.e. no sensation arising from eye-contact, no sensation arising from ear-contact, no sensation arising from nose-contact, no sensation arising from tongue-

⁷²*Arahattapattito paṭṭhāya kilesavaṭṭassa khepitattā sa-upādisesena carimacittanirodhena khandhavaṭṭassa khepitattā anupādisesena cā ti dvīhi pi parinibbānehi parinibbutā anupādāno viya padīpo apaṇṇattikabhāvaṃ gatā.* DhA. ii, 163.

⁷³*Vedanāya kho Vaccha aññāṇā vedanāsamudaye aññāṇā vedanānirodhe aññāṇā vedanānirodhagāminiyāpaṭipadāya aññāṇā. Evam imāni anekavihitāni diṭṭhigatāni loke uppajanti.* “Vaccha, it is from the lack of knowledge in reference to the arising of sensations, to the eradication of sensations and to the path leading to the eradication of sensations that various wrong views regarding the universe arise”. (S. iii, 258) Wrong views are said to bind one to misery.

contact, no sensation arising from body-contact, and no sensation arising of mind-contact — then, no sensation would be present; with the cessation of sensation, would craving be discerned? 'Definitely not, *bhante*'. 'Therefore, Ānanda, sensation is the cause, source, origin and condition for craving'.⁷⁴

This passage explicitly states that *vedanā* is a condition for craving, and that if no *vedanā* is found, craving cannot arise. But it does not state that *vedanā* is the only causal factor involved in the production of craving. The fact that craving cannot be produced without the presence of a *vedanā* does not imply that craving is necessarily produced when a *vedanā* is present. As Kalupahana noted:

While it is true, and this is actually the position held by the Buddha, that pleasant sensations *could* give rise to craving and lust, and unpleasant sensations (*dukkhā vedanā*) can be the cause of aversion and hatred (*dosa*), the causal relation is not a one-to-one relation.⁷⁵

Vedanā itself is devoid of the connotation that many have read into the *paṭiccasamuppāda*; *vedanāpaccayā taṇhā* does not imply that *vedanā* is a sufficient condition for the arising of *taṇhā* (craving), but simply that it is a necessary condition. For example, when narrating his experience before he attained enlightenment, the Buddha mentioned to Aggivessana that while

⁷⁴“*Vedanāpaccayā taṇhā ti' iti kho pan' etaṃ vuttaṃ, tad Ānanda iminā p'etaṃ pariyāṣyena vedītabbaṃ yathā vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. Vedanā va hi Ānanda nābhavissa sabbena sabbaṃ sabbatthā sabbaṃ kassaci kimhici, seyyathidaṃ cakkhu-samphassajā vedanā, sota-samphassajā vedanā, ghāna-samphassajā vedanā, jivhā-samphassajā vedanā, kāya-samphassajā vedanā, mano-samphassajā vedanā, sabbaso vedanāya asati vedanā-nirodhā api nu kho taṇhā paññāyethāti? 'No h'etaṃ bhante'. 'Tasmā ih'Ānanda es'eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo taṇhāya, yadidaṃ vedanā'". D. ii, 58. A similar passage is repeated for each of the twelve links.*

⁷⁵Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 46. Th. Stcherbatsky supports this view by saying that the “*pratīyasamutpāda* can hardly be called causation in the sense in which it is usually understood. It really means dependently co-ordinated-origination or dependent existence. According to it every momentary entity springs into existence in co-ordination with other moments. Its formula is ‘*asmin sati idam bhavati*’ there being this, there appears that! According to this, there could be neither *causa materialis*, nor *causa efficiens*. An entity is not really produced, it is simply co-ordinated.” *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, p. 9.

dwelling in jhanic ecstasy, he was not affected by the pleasurable *vedanās* that characterize such states,⁷⁶ and was not, therefore, generating craving. The Buddha was experiencing sensations, but was not generating craving.

A further example is found in the *Majjhimanikāya* where the Buddha is described as experiencing the arising and fading away of sensations.⁷⁷ Since a Buddha, by definition, is completely free from craving, the *vedanās* that arise within him cannot give rise to craving. Hence, *vedanā* itself is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of craving; rather, the perspective from which sensations are approached plays a crucial role in the emergence of craving. In fact, the *Majjhimanikāya* states that those *vedanās* approached as impermanent (*anicca*), sorrowful (*dukkha*) and subject to the vicissitudes of life (*vipariṇāmadhamma*) eradicate the tendency of reacting to sensations with greed,⁷⁸ which would ultimately generate craving.

This particular soteriological approach to sensations is also described in the *Samyuttanikāya* as leading away from craving and any other defilements. Describing a monk practising this particular approach, the Pāli sources say:

He is aware of the *vedanā* thus: “there has arisen in me one of the five types of *vedanās*. Now this has its condition, its cause, its reasons, and has been

⁷⁶*Evarūpā pi kho me Aggivessanauppannā sukhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati.* Literally: Thus, Aggivessana, my mind was standing not having been overpowered by the pleasurable *vedanās* previously arisen. M. i, 247.

⁷⁷*Yampi, bhante, Bhagavato veditā vedanā uppajanti, veditā upaṭṭhahanti, veditā abbhuttham gacchanti.* M. iii, 124.

⁷⁸M. iii, 218-220.

conditioned. That this *vedanā* should arise without these is impossible". Thus he comes to know fully the *vedanā*, its arising and its ceasing: and, thereafter, when a *vedanā* arises, it comes to cease without remainder, — that also he fully knows.⁷⁹

The *Majjhimanikāya* further states that a "certain kind" of *vedanās* — which kind may still be either pleasant, painful or neutral — is conducive to the development of unwholesome states (*akusalā dhammā*), while "another kind" of *vedanā* leads to the cultivation of wholesome states.⁸⁰ This passage does not reveal which kind of *vedanā* is conducive to either wholesome or unwholesome states, but its commentary, the *Papañcasūdanī*, clarifies this point. This source defines the sensations leading to the unwholesome states as *gehasitā*⁸¹ (belonging to the householder), but makes no mention of those leading to the wholesome state. In another *sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, however, two kinds of sensations are contrasted: the *gehasitā* and the *nekkhamasitā*⁸² (belonging to the renouncer); it seems that the *nekkhamasitā vedanās* are those that are conducive to wholesome states, since the text states that the characteristic of these *nekkhamasitā vedanās* lies in the way they are

⁷⁹*So evam pajānāti. Uppannam kho me idam domanassindriyam* (and for all the other *indriya*). *Taṁca kho sanimittam sanidānam asaṅkhāram sappaccayam. Tam vata animittam anidānam asaṅkhāram appaccayam domanassindriyam uppajjissatīti netam thānam vijjati. So domanassindriyam ca pajānāti domanassindriyasamudayaṁca pajānāti. Domanassindriyanirodham ca pajānāti. Yattha cuppannam domanassindriyam aparisesam nirujjhati taṁca pajānāti. S. v, 14.* I have taken the liberty of translating the term *indriya* as *vedanā* since the term *pañcendriyāni* refers to the five types of *vedanā*. See page 82 for a discussion of these five *indriya*.

⁸⁰*Idha' ekaccassa evarūpaṁ sukhaṁ vedanaṁ vediyato akusalā dhammā abhivaḍḍhanti kusalā dhammā parihāyanti, idha paṇ'ekaccassa evarūpaṁ sukhaṁ vedanaṁ vediyato akusalā dhammāparihāyanti kusalā dhammā abhivaḍḍhanti...* The same is given in respect of painful and neutral *vedanās*. M. i, 475.

⁸¹*Evarūpaṁ sukhaṁ vedanaṁ pajahathā ti idam cha gehasitasomanassavasena. MA. ii, 187.*

⁸²M. iii, 217ff.

approached. They are perceived as “they really are”, i.e. as painful and impermanent. This distinction between these two types of *vedanā* is not intrinsic to the *vedanās* themselves, but rather results from the way one approaches the *vedanā*. However, we have to be careful not to be misled by the terms. Although the words *gehasitā* and *nekkhamasitā* literally refer to the household life and that of renunciation respectively, they concern the mental disposition of a person rather than their outer dress or apparent condition. Nothing prevents a householder from attaining stages that certain monastics have failed to reach due to their lack of practice. As is stated in the *Dhammapāda*:

Even though one may be highly dressed [i.e. not wearing the simple monastic habit, therefore being a householder], if one is poised, calm, controlled and established in the holy life, having laid aside the rod towards all beings, this person is truly a *brahmaṇa*, a recluse, a *bhikkhu*.⁸³

This passage supports the popular adage *habitus non facit monachum*. The Pāli canon even apprises us of certain householders who had attained a higher development than certain monks. For example, Citta Gahapati, who remained a householder throughout his life, possessed a thorough understanding of the teaching of the Buddha⁸⁴ and had attained a stage that was superior to many who had become monastics.⁸⁵ Equally, there are cases of monks who remained as undeveloped at the mental level as an ordinary householder (*putthujana*). For example, the venerable Nanda was

⁸³*Alaṅkato ce’pi samāṃ careyya santo danto niyato brahmacārī sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ so brāhmaṇo, so samaṇo, so bhikkhu.* Dh. 142.

⁸⁴A. i, 26.

⁸⁵Vsm. 442.

tormented by thoughts of his former wife⁸⁶ and his mental state did not reflect the calm of the true renunciate, but rather the agitation of the householder. Therefore, we have to stress that the terms *nekkhamasitā* and *gehasitā* refer to ways of approaching the *vedanās* rather than to physical appearance and social status.

The *Papañcasūdanī* further interprets these two terms of *gehasitā* and *nekkhamasitā* as being similar to the terms *āmisā* and *nirāmisā*, also used to describe *vedanās*.⁸⁷ The *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*, a text essentially concerned with meditative practices, also uses these terms of *āmisā* and *nirāmisā vedanās*.⁸⁸ The term *āmisā* is derived from the Sanskrit *āmiṣa* or *āmis*, both meaning “raw flesh”,⁸⁹ and the word *nirāmisā* literally means ‘without raw flesh’. We might easily say that the Buddhist meaning of the terms has been extended respectively to “non-vegetarian” and “impure” and to “vegetarian” and “pure”. However, as Seyfort Ruegg established in his article “Ahimsa and vegetarianism in the history of Buddhism”, the establishment of vegetarianism in Buddhism is closely connected to “a specific religious and philosophical teaching: the tathāgatagarbha doctrine”,⁹⁰ which was elaborated much later

⁸⁶G.P. Malasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, vol. ii (London: P.T.S., 1974) p. 10.

⁸⁷MA. i, 278. The kinds of *vedanās* that the *Papañcasūdanī* is referring to are described in detail in the *Saḷāyatanaṭṭhānasutta*. M. iii, 219.

⁸⁸M. i, 59 also at A. iii, 411 and D. ii, 298.

⁸⁹V.S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1985) p. 222.

⁹⁰D. Seyfort Ruegg, “Ahimsa and vegetarianism in the history of Buddhism”, *Buddhist Studies in honour of W. Rahula*, ed. by O.H. de A. Wijesekera (London: Gordon Fraser, 1980) p. 236-237.

than the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*. It seems that, at the time the *Satipaṭṭhāna* was composed, meat eating was not yet perceived as “corrupting”. We cannot therefore establish a relation between the meaning of these two words and the connotations implied by eating meat. However, it is very clear from this particular *sutta* that the *vedanās* represented as *nirāmisā* symbolize those *vedanās* which are not conducive to further defilements such as craving or aversion.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed the states of *saññāvedayitanirodha* and of *vedanākkhaya*. The former is a state comparable to *nirupādisesanibbāna*, for none of the mental aggregates can be found therein. The latter is more comparable to *sopādisesanibbāna*, for the five aggregates of a person experiencing such a state are still functioning. We have also discussed many classifications of *vedanās* such as *nirāmisā*, *nekkhamasitā*, *āmisā* and *gehasitā*. We came to the conclusion that a certain means of approaching *vedanās* would transform them into *nirāmisā* or *nekkhammasitā vedanās*, which are of an inoffensive nature, while an alternative approach would transform *vedanās* into *āmisā* or *gehasitā vedanās*, which are endowed with a negative connotation since they will act as potential agents in the future arising of craving and aversion. The factor responsible for this particular approach to *vedanās* is the next *khandha*: recognition (*saññā*). It is this third aggregate that will transform the sensation into a *nirāmisā* (or

nekkhamasitā) or a *āmisā* (or *gehasitā*), a transformation that will be either responsible for the generation or eradication of craving.

Chapter 4

The *Saññākkhandha*

4.1 Introduction to the concept of *saññā*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, *vedanā* is a necessary condition for the arising of *taṇhā*, craving, yet not a sufficient one. *Taṇhā* is dependent on the occurrence not only of sensation, but also of a particular type of *saññā*. Our aim in this chapter is twofold. First, we will try to circumscribe the meaning of the *saññākkhandha* and, second, show how it can contribute in the emergence of *taṇhā* by inserting this aggregate into the chain of dependent origination.

Like *vedanā*, *saññā* is usually defined in respect of the six sense-doors (*āyatanas*) through which the faculty is applied. Thus, *saññā* is classified in terms of 1) visible object (*rūpasaññā*), 2) sound (*saddasaññā*), 3) smell (*gandhasaññā*), 4) taste (*rasasaññā*), 5) touch (*phoṭṭhabbasaññā*) and 6) mental object (*dhammasaññā*).¹ Moreover, as with *vedanā*, the canonical definition of *saññā* does not shed much light on the meaning of the term since the verb used to define *saññā* (*sañjānāti*) refers to the root from which

¹A. iii, 413.

the term *saññā* is derived.² Fortunately, the *Samyuttanikāya* offers us a glimpse of what *saññā* could mean by expanding on the former definition:

it is called 'recognition' because it 'recognizes'. What does it 'recognize'? It 'recognizes' [regarding the organ of sight] such things as blue, yellow, red, white, etc.,... Because it 'recognizes', it is therefore called 'recognition'.³

Words such as “to be conscious” and “consciousness”⁴ or “to perceive” and “perception”⁵ are often used to translate the term *saññā*. However, the choice for my translation is grounded in the opinion that both “perception” and “consciousness” carry misleading connotations with regard to the word *saññā*. The word “recognition”, on the other hand, tends to imply that the subject imposes certain categories upon the percept in order to classify it. The term “recognition” can definitely not be mistakenly ascribed to the concept of *viññāṇa*. To use our reference from the *Samyuttanikāya* as a supporting example for this decision, we may say that the words “to perceive” and “to be conscious of” would suggest that the blueness, yellowness or redness of the object is inherent in the object itself, whereas saying “to recognize” implies that the colour (which may not be exactly blue, yellow or red, if such pristine colours indeed exist) is “categorized” by being linked to previous labellings that have been assimilated in the past. In fact, the word ‘blue’ names nothing but a concept, and different people form different concepts around the same sensation. For example, a certain person may

²*Sañjānātisañjānātīti kho avuso, tasmā saññā vuccati.* M. , 293.

³*Kiñca bhikkhave saññam vadetha? Sañjānātīti kho bhikkhave tasmā saññā ti vuccati. Kiñ casañjānātī? Nīlam pi sañjānāti pītukam pi sañjānāti lohitaṅkam pi sañjānāti odātam pi sañjānāti. Sañjānātīti kho bhikkhave tasmā saññā vuccati.* S. iii, 87.

⁴As F.L. Woodward translated these two words in *Kindred Sayings*, vol. iii, p. 74.

⁵As I.B. Horner has used in *Middle Length Sayings*, vol. i, p. 352.

classify two colours endowed with different tones as “blue” while another person having been subjected to different conditioning or, to alleviate the connotation implied, “having been brought up” differently, may recognize these colours as indigo and marine. Both had an extremely similar sensory experience, yet their recognition differed. To further exemplify our point, we may bring in the classic dialogue between King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena concerning the definition of “chariot”.⁶ King Milinda was unable to define the chariot facing him without referring to all its constituents taken simultaneously. The chariot is a mere category, a mental conceptualization used by the *saññā* to order, to classify the various sensory experiences resulting from the contact with the external object that we normally term “chariot”. This faculty of recognition leads to the formation of concepts, usually rendered in Pāli by the expression *paññattī*.⁷ The *Aṅguttaranikāya* further supports our analogy by elaborating on the result of *saññā*, saying that “*saññā* always results in a ‘concept’ [*vohāra*, expression of worldly usage]: whatever is conceptualized has previously been ‘*saññānized*’”.⁸ This is very similar to the Sanskrit equivalent of the term *saññā* (*saṃjñā*) which usually means “name”, “technical term” or “notion”.⁹

⁶Mil. 27 ff. This simile had already been used by the Therī Vajirā in her discussion with Māra. *Nayidha sattūpalabbhati. Yathā hi aṅgasambhārā. Hoti saddo ratho iti. Evaṃ khandhesu santesu. Hoti satti sammuti.* S. i, 135.

⁷For further information on *paññattī*, refer to A.K. Warder’s article on “The Concept of a Concept” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 1971), especially p. 189.

⁸*Katamo ca bhikkhave saññānaṃ vipāko? Vohāravapakāham bhikkhave saññā vadāmi; yathā yathā naṃ sañjānāti, tathā tathā voharati ‘evaṃ saññā ahoṣin’ ti.* A. iii, 413-414.

⁹Vasubandhu says that one is aware of blue (*nīlaṃ vijānāti*), but one ascribes the notion of blue to the perception (*nīlaṃ iti saṃjānāti*). “La notion (*saṃjñā*) consiste dans la préhension des caractères.” La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośa*, i, p. 28.

The *Vibhaṅga* classifies *saññās* into three categories: wholesome (*kusala*), unwholesome (*akusala*) and neutral (*avyākata*).¹⁰ Neither canonical nor commentarial literature sheds much light on these classifications; however, before establishing a correlation between *saññā* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, we will attempt to clarify what is meant by “unwholesome” and “wholesome” *saññās*.

4.2 The negative aspect of *saññā*

Like *vedanā*, *saññā* can also be perceived as an obstacle to one’s spiritual progress. As mentioned above, the *Vibhaṅga* establishes a distinction between “wholesome” and “unwholesome” *saññās*, but unfortunately does not clarify what is implied by these terms. The *Suttanipāta*, however, mentions that “one has not even the slightest *saññā* as regards to what is seen, heard or said; how can anyone in the world here doubt about such *brāhmaṇa* — i.e., one who has not even the slightest *saññā* — who does not hold a view (*diṭṭhi*)?”¹¹ This passage implies, first, that true *brāhmaṇas*¹² are freed from the control of *saññā*; second, that *saññā* is associated with the

¹⁰*Tividhena saññākkhandho: atthi kusalo, atthi akusalo, atthi avyākato.* Vbh. 28.

¹¹*Tassīdha diṭṭhe va sute mute vā pakappitā n’atthi aṇū pi saññā: taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ diṭṭhimanādiyānaṃ denīdha lokasmiṃ vikappayeyya.* Sn. 802.

¹²In Buddhist terminology, the term *brāhmaṇa* was redefined and is not limited to those individual belonging to this particular social group. Instead, the *sutta* literature defines a *brāhmaṇa* as one who is established in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (see *Kūṭadantasutta*, D. i, 127-149). *Brāhmaṇa* in the Buddhist sense is often employed as a synonym of *arahant*.

generation of views (*diṭṭhi*), which emerges from ignorance (*avijjā*)¹³ and is therefore linked to craving and to conducing to an unwholesome future.¹⁴ By emancipating themselves from the hold of the *saññā*, these *brāhmaṇas* have automatically eradicated the possibility of the arising of new views and of craving. The *Suttanipāta* also states that “the destruction of sorrow follows from the eradication of *saññā*”.¹⁵ This view is grounded in the fact that *saññā* is seen as the cause of “obsessions”¹⁶ (*papañca*),¹⁷ which hinder spiritual progress.¹⁸

In order to thoroughly understand the negative aspect of *saññā*, we first need to briefly analyze the word *papañca*. The term *papañca* itself is problematic, for it seems to have been used differently in *sutta*, *abhidhammic*

¹³S. i, 145; ii, 153.

¹⁴A. i, 22-23.

¹⁵...*saññāya uparodhanā evaṃ dukkhakkhayo hoti*. Sn. 732.

¹⁶The term *papañca* literally means “proliferation” and may refer to the proliferation of thoughts that govern our behaviour without our being aware of it. This is why I translated the term as “obsession”. However, as Richard Hayes noted, “the term ‘*prapañca*’, when used in the context of a Buddhist work is virtually devoid of any precise meaning. [...] [The terms ‘*prapañca*’ and ‘*dr̥ṣṭi*’] may be regarded as variables that are capable of being given a more or less precise meaning by the Buddhist who uses them. Despite being variables, they do have a constant feature, which is that every Buddhist uses these words to connote wrongful uses of the mind. So, whenever we encounter the terms in a given text, all we can know for sure is that they refer to mental habits that have to be got rid of if we are to attain the greatest good.” *Dignaga on the Interpretation of Signs* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988) p. 68, note 35. For a detailed analysis of the term, however, the reader should refer to Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda’s *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* (Kandy: B.P.S., 1986), a work entirely devoted to the study of *papañca*.

¹⁷*saññānidānā hi papañcasāṅkhā*. Sn. 874. The *Niddesa* equates *papañcā* and *papañcasāṅkhā*. *Papañcā yeva papañcasāṅkhā*. Nid. i, 280; 344.

¹⁸M. 1, 65; S. i, 100; iv, 52, 71; A. ii, 161; iii, 393, ect.

and commentarial literatures. In the *suttas*, the term *papañca* seems to be interchangeable with the concept of “wrong views” (*diṭṭhi*). For example, the *Suttanipāṭa* clearly states that the ground of *papañca* lies in the belief that “I am the thinker”.¹⁹ The *Saṃyuttanikāya* goes even further by stating that most human beings approach reality with *papañca*, but if one has removed the worldly things (*gehasita*) which are the product of the mind, one moves towards renunciation (*nekkhammasita*).²⁰ The *Sāratthappakāsinī* vaguely explains the term *papañcasaññā* used in this particular passage as the notion of *papañca* created by “unwholesome” *saññās*.²¹ This leads us to a narrower interpretation of the term, where *papañca* is used, more or less, as a synonym of desire, wrong views and conceit.²²

The *Pāli Text Society Dictionary* has translated the compound *papañcasaññā* as *idée fixe*, a translation which, I feel, renders very adequately the meaning of the term, for the *Papañcasūdanī* explains the term as “the faculty of recognition associated with the obsessions related to wrong views

¹⁹*Mantā 'ham asmi*. Sn. 916.

²⁰This is a loose translation of the following verse:

*Papañcasaññā itaritarā narā
papañcayantā upayanti saññino
manomayam gehasitañca sabbaṃ
panujja nekkhammasitam iriyati*. S. iv, 71.

²¹*Kilesasaññāya papañcasaññā nāma hutvā*. S.A. ii, 382. Interesting to note is that the term *kilesa* is often associated with the mind-defiling passions. See Nyānātiloka's *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 80.

²²*Taṇhūdiṭṭhimānappabhedam papañcam*. SnA. II, 431. Similar at Nid. I, 280; 344-345 and Net. 37.

and craving”.²³ However, clarifications on *papañca* are found in the *Majjhimanikāya* where the term is used within a small causal chain reflecting a psychological process:

*cakkhuṃ c'āvuso pañicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tato nidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasāṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu.*²⁴

Visual consciousness arises on account of visual forms and the eye, the meeting of these three is contact (*phassa*), on account of contact there is a sensation (*vedanā*), what one senses (as a sensation), one recognizes (*sañjānāti*, from *saññā*), what one recognizes, one “thinks about” (*vitakka*),²⁵ what one thinks about, one is obsessed with, what obsesses one is the cause of the number of obsessions which assail a person with regard to past, present or future visual forms cognizable by the eye.

According to this, and as we have previously seen, contact is a necessary element for the arising of sensations, and sensations in their own turn are a ground for the arousal of recognition. However, recognition constitutes a further ground for the appearance of “thinking about” and obsessions (*papañca*). This passage evidences that the *saññākkhandha* definitely follows *vedanākkhandha* and precedes *papañca*.

The concept of *papañca* is also closely associated with desire. As one of the verses of the *Theragathā* reports:

²³*Papañcasaññā ti taṇhādīṭṭhipapañcasampayuttā saññā.* MA. ii, 75.

²⁴M. i, 111-112. Similar occurrences of the formula also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc.

²⁵On the term *vitakka*, see D. ii, 277. In his translation of the *Dīghanikāya*, Maurice Walshe supports the translation of the term as “thinking”. See *Thus Have I Heard* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987) p. 587, note 611.

one who follows [his] *papañca* is [like] a deer delighting in *papañca* who has failed to attain nibbāna, the peace from bondage and the unsurpassable.²⁶

This metaphorical passage does not directly point to the association of *papañca* and desire; however, E. R. Sarathchandhra expanded the image and arrived at the following. One ruled by his *papañca* is comparable to a deer who follows a mirage thinking that it is a pool of water. The deer is thirsty and believes that the mirage (*papañca*) will quench his thirst, just as people seek happiness and are convinced that sensual desires will fulfil their wish.²⁷ Of course, *papañca* cannot be directly correlated with craving (*taṇhā*), but it definitely can be associated with the emergence of craving because, as the *Sakkapañhasutta* states, envy (*issā*) and avarice (*macchariya*), as well as desire (*chanda*²⁸), have their origin in *papañcasaññā*.²⁹ Therefore, it would seem that both *saññā* and the more precise term of *papañcasaññā* are necessary conditions for the arousal of craving (*taṇhā*), the link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* that follows *vedanā*.

We need to stress, however, that *papañca* and *papañcasaññā* are not elements of the *saññākkhandha* itself. As we have seen, the *saññākkhandha* is seen as the cause (or one of the causes) of *papañca*,³⁰ but *papañca* is never

²⁶*Yo papañcam anuyutto papañcābhirato mago, cirādhāyī so nibbānaṃ yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ.* Th. i, vs. 989.

²⁷E.R. Sarathchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception* (Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1958) p. 10.

²⁸*Chanda* is equated by the commentary of the text to *taṇhā*, desire, craving.

²⁹D. ii, 277-278.

³⁰Sn. 874.

said to be part of the *saññākkhandha* itself. Furthermore, the causal chain of the *Majjhimanikāya* mentioned on page 120 implied that *saññā* is a necessary condition for “thinking about” (*vitakka*), which in turn is responsible for *papañca*. Also worth noting is that this same causal chain implicitly establishes a delineation between the *saññākkhandha* and the *saṅkhārakkhandha* since, as we will see later, *vitakka* is one of the members of the *saṅkhārakkhandha* and it would be illogical if *papañca*, which follows *vitakka*, belonged to the *saññākkhandha*.³¹

According to the sixth book of the *Abhidhamma*, the *saññākkhandha* needs to be differentiated from *diṭṭhisaññā*. Only the *Yamaka* refers to this nuance, while other texts, such as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*,³² imply that the faculty of recognition, the fact of having recognized, and the state of having perceived, all belong to the *saññākkhandha*. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* does not seem to admit a distinction between the various *saññās*, while the *Yamaka* does. This apparent contradiction might be due primarily to a semantic misunderstanding of the term *diṭṭhisaññā*. The Pāli Text Society Dictionary translates the word *diṭṭhi* as “view, theory, belief, dogma” and, unless preceded by the adjective *sammā*, it usually carries a negative connotation. However, to my knowledge, the compound *diṭṭhisaññā* has almost never been used in the sutta literature and seems to be an expression particular to the

³¹In fact, if we adopt the *sutta* hypothesis mentioned on page 118 that *papañca* is a synonym of *diṭṭhi*, *papañca* is automatically classified under the *saṅkhārakkhandha* category, for *diṭṭhi* is explicitly described as one of the fifty elements that fall into the category of *saṅkhārakkhandha* (see page 158).

³²*Katamo tasmim samye saññākkhandho hoti? Yā tasmim samaye saññā sañjānā sañjānitattarā — ayaṁ tasmim samaye saññākkhandho hoti.* Dhs. 17.

Yamaka.³³ The *Yamaka* commentary elucidates the term by equating it to the previously discussed concept of *papañcasaññā*³⁴ which is, as we have seen, intimately related to craving (*taṇhā*).

However, this nuance between the *saññākkhandha* and *diṭṭhisaññā* — defined as *papañcasaññā* by the *Pañcappakaraṇatthakathā* — indicates that the *saññākkhandha* does not include *papañca* and that craving is not inevitably generated by the *saññākkhandha* itself. In fact, *papañca* — as well as *diṭṭhisaññā* — would fall into the category of *saṅkhārakkhandha* and not of the *saññākkhandha*. For, as the *Nettipakaraṇa* stated, “*papañcas* are craving, views, conceit and whatever *saṅkhāras* are activated by them”.³⁵ The same text further supports this statement by saying that “whatever is *papañca*, whatever are the *saṅkhāras* and whatever are the delighting in the past, future and present, all these are the same”.³⁶ The *Yamaka* does not classify *diṭṭhisaññā* (and *papañca*) as *saññākkhandha* because it belongs to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. As stated in footnote #17, *saññā* is often seen as the cause of *papañca*. The *saññākkhandha* is the ground for the development of *papañca* (*diṭṭhi*). We have to stress, however, that *papañca* itself does not

³³One occurrence of the term has been found in the *Mahāniddeśa* of the *Khuddakanikāya* where it is equated to wrong views. Nid. 93.

³⁴*Saññāyamake tāva diṭṭhisaññā ti papañcasaññā ti ādīsu āgatā diṭṭhisaññā*. *Pañcappakaraṇatthakathā*, edited by C.A.F. Rhys Davids (*Journal of the P.T.S.*, vol. vi, 1910-12) p. 59.

³⁵*Papañcā nāma taṇhādiṭṭhimānā tadabhisāṅkhātā ca saṅkhārā*. Net. 37.

³⁶*Yo cāpi papañco, ye ca saṅkhārā yā ca atītānāgatapaccuppannassa abhinandana, idaṃ ekattaṃ*. Net. 38.

belong to the *saññākkhandha*, for the latter is merely a function that triggers the arising of the former, which, in fact, partakes to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*.

4.3 The “wholesome” aspect of *saññā*

As we have mentioned previously, *saññā* is not always represented as a hindrance to salvation. The *Āṅguttaranikāya*, for example, provides us with an example of the positive value of *saññā*. Once, the closest disciple of the Buddha, Ānanda, came to report that the monk Girimānanda had been struck by a severe disease. The Buddha then told Ānanda to visit Girimānanda and recite to the sick man the “ten *saññās*”; from this mere recitation, it is said, “there are grounds to believe that the sickness will be allayed”.³⁷ These “ten *saññās*” consisted of 1) the recognition of impermanence (*aniccasaññā*), 2) the recognition of selflessness (*anattasaññā*), 3) the recognition of unpleasantness (*asubhasaññā*), 4) the recognition of danger (*ādīnasaññā*), 5) the recognition of abandoning (*pahānasaññā*), 6) the recognition of dispassion (*virāgasaññā*), 7) the recognition of cessation (*nirodhasaññā*), 8) the recognition of disenchantment with the entire world (*sabbaloka anabhiratasaññā*), 9) the recognition of the impermanence in reference to all compounded things (*sabbe saṅkhāresu aniccasaññā*), and 10) the mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpanasati*).

³⁷*Sace kho tvam Ānanda Girimānandassa bhikkhuno upasaṅkamitvā dasa saññā bhāseyyāsi, thānam kho pan' etaṃ vijjati, yaṃ Girimānandassa bhikkhuno dasasaññā sutvā so ābādho thānaso paṭipassambheyya. A. v, 108.*

We may wonder why the Buddha thought that there were grounds to believe that the mere recitation of these ten recognitions might alleviate the suffering of Girimānanda. As evidenced by the *Asibandhakaputtasutta*,³⁸ the Buddha did not subscribe to the belief that the power of words could alter one's destiny, hence for him to say that mere recitation of the "ten *saññās*" will improve Girimānanda's future is incongruent. However, we may speculate that what was meant by his discussion with Ānanda is that upon hearing the "ten *saññās*", Girimānanda might be urged to develop these recognitions, which action would result, if not in the alleviation of the sickness itself, in the palliation of "unhappiness" caused by the disease.

We notice that, just as we had the *āmisā* and *nirāmisā vedanās*, we also find two kinds of *saññās*: those that lead to sorrow and unhappiness³⁹ because of their generating of *papañca*, and those that improve one's future by approaching reality through the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇā* — *anicca*, *anatta*, and *dukkha*)⁴⁰ and seven other perspectives which, taken all together, constitute the "ten *saññās*" enumerated in the *Girimānandasutta*. Not only the *Girimānandasutta* refers to this "wholesome" aspect of *saññā*. For example, seven of these "wholesome" *saññās* are enumerated in the *Dīghanikāya*, where it is said that they are conducive to

³⁸S. iv, 310.

³⁹As mentioned in Sn. 732; 802.

⁴⁰*Dukkha* is indirectly implied by the reference to *asubha* and *ādīna*.

["spiritual"] prosperity rather than decline.⁴¹ Six of them are enumerated in the *Āṅguttaranikāya* and qualified as integral constituents of knowledge (*vijjā*).⁴² And finally, enumerations of five of these *saññās* are found in the *Dīghanikāya*, where they are described as leading to the maturity of liberation,⁴³ and in the *Āṅguttaranikāya*,⁴⁴ where they are described as being very fruitful, merging in and leading to the deathless (*nibbāna*).

To my knowledge, the whole Pāli canon along with its commentaries supports the view that *saññā* can be "wholesome" when it is geared towards the recognition of elements essential for liberation. What is important to note is that three main elements are explicitly or implicitly incorporated in all of these lists: the recognitions of impermanence (*anicca*), of suffering (*dukkha*) and of not-self (*anatta*). As hinted above, these three main elements that recur in the various enumerations of "wholesome" *saññās*

⁴¹*Yāvākīvaṇ ca bhikkhave bhikkhū anicca-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, anatta-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, asubha-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, ādīnava-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, pahāna-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, virāga-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, nirodha-saññaṃ bhāvēssanti, vuddhi yeva bhikkhave bhikkhūnaṃ pātikaṅkhā no parihāni.* D. ii, 79. The seven recognitions mentioned by this passage are those of: impermanence, non-self, unpleasantness, overcoming, dispassion and cessation. It seems clear that prosperity is used in the "spiritual" sense in this very context for the Buddha is addressing a monastic audience.

⁴²*Cha yime bhikkhave dhammā vijjābhāgiyā. Katame cha? Aniccasaññā, anicce dukkhasaññā dukkhe anattasaññā, pahānasaññā, virāgasaññā, nirodhasaññā.* A. iii, 334. These six recognitions are: impermanence, suffering amidst what is impermanent, not-self amidst what is suffering, overcoming, dispassion and cessation.

⁴³*Pañca vimutti-paripācāniyā saññā. Aniccasaññā, anicce dukkhasaññā, dukkhe anatta-saññā, pahānasaññā, virāgasaññā.* These are the recognitions of impermanence, of suffering amidst impermanence, of not-self amidst suffering, of overcoming and of dispassion. D. iii, 243.

⁴⁴*Pañc'imā bhikkhave saññā bhāvitā bahulikātā mahapphalā honti mahānisaṃsā amatogadhā amatapariyosānā. Katamā pañca? Asubhasaññā maraṇasaññā ādīnavasaññā āhāre paṭikkūlasaññā sabbaloke anabhirataṣaṇṇā.* A. iii, 79. These are the recognitions of unpleasantness, of death, of danger, unwholesomeness with regard to food, and of disenchantment with the whole world.

constitute the basis for wisdom (*paññā*). In order to attain the goal, whether *nirupādisesa* or *sopādisesa nibbāna*, or even *saññāvedayitanirodha*, what is definitely required by the practitioner is to have developed *paññā* through *vipassanā*, insight, which in turn is cultivated by the awareness of impermanence, suffering and not-self. As Buddhaghosa himself stated in the *Visuddhimagga*, there are eighteen major kinds of *vipassanā*⁴⁵ and six of these eighteen have been mentioned by the various enumerations of “wholesome” *saññās* seen previously. These are: *anicca*, *anatta*, *dukkha*, *virāga*, *nirodha*, and *ādina*. The cultivation of these “wholesome” *saññās* will not lead to the further generation of craving, but will help to develop wisdom (*paññā*) through which one can escape the cycle of life and death and the chain of dependent origination.

We may rightly ask whether or not this “wholesome” *saññā* actually belongs to the *saññākkhandha*. Buddhaghosa argues in the *Visuddhimagga* that the function of *saññā* as one of the *khandhas* is simply to recognize an object as “blue”, “yellow” and so forth. The *saññākkhandha*, according to this particular text, cannot lead to the penetration of the characteristics of existence: one could not, through the faculty of recognition, grasp at the deepest level the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and

⁴⁵Vsm. 695. The eighteen contemplations (*anupassanā*) enumerated there are those of: impermanence, suffering, not-self, aversion, detachment, cessation, abandoning, destruction, vanishing, change, unconditioned, desirelessness, emptiness, higher wisdom regarding all phenomena, knowledge and vision of reality as it is (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*), danger, reflecting and turning away. Those that are underlined are included in at least one of the enumerations of “positive” *saññās*.

selflessness.⁴⁶ Buddhaghosa continues by establishing through a metaphor a radical difference between the *saññākkhandha* and *paññā* (wisdom). While the former merely recognizes the appearance of objects, the latter analyzes every object and perceives it as it is, that is from a Buddhist point of view, as impermanent, painful and not-self. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the *saññākkhandha* itself cannot deeply apprehend these three characteristics of existence. Yet, from our review of the different “wholesome” *saññās*, we have seen that there can be a recognition of impermanence (*aniccasaññā*), of suffering (*dukkhasaññā*) and of not-self (*anattasaññā*). As evidenced by the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*,⁴⁷ there are “five *saññās* leading to liberation”⁴⁸ (*pañca vimutti-paripācaniyā saññā*). Also interesting to note is that three of these five *saññās* are contemplations of the three characteristics of existence (*anicca*, *anatta*, *dukkha*).⁴⁹ The *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* implies not only that the object of *saññā* can be the three characteristics of existence, but also that these very recognitions can lead to liberation through the development of *paññā*.

⁴⁶Vsm. 437.

⁴⁷DA. iii, 1033.

⁴⁸In this expression, the term “liberation” (*vimutti*) is explicitly correlated to the state of arahantship.

⁴⁹DA. iii, 1033.

4.4 Nuance between “positive” *saññā* and the *saññākkhandha*

As evidenced by the *Visuddhimagga*, the primary function of the *saññākkhandha* is to interpret by means of a *nimitta*, a sign.⁵⁰ The term *nimitta*, in this particular context, refers to the outward appearances of an object and excludes the more subtle attributes that characterize every phenomena of existence. For example, a particular kind of “deliverance” described as “signless” (*animitta*) is described in the *Atthasālinī* as being the result of the practice of the threefold contemplation.⁵¹ By observing the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and selflessness (*anatta*), one attains the deliverance known as the “signless”. The *nimittas*, in this context, are the beliefs in permanence, delight and self, which are all outward appearance not reflecting reality as it really is — i.e., as characterized by the *tilakkhanas*. We can say that while the *saññākkhandha* itself is concerned with recognizing the outward appearances, the *nimittas*, the “positive” *saññās* apprehend the *animittas*. Since the “positive” *saññās* do not apprehend *nimittas*, they cannot be classified as members of the *saññākkhandha*, for the latter only deals with appearances.

⁵⁰*Sañjānapaccayanimittakaraṇasā. Vsm. 462.*

⁵¹*Animittavipassanāṃ kathesi. Vipassanā hi niccanimittāṃ sukhanimittāṃ attanimittāṃ ca ugghāṭeti, tasmā animittā ti. DhsA. 221.*

4.5 *Saññākkhandha* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

According to the formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *vedanā* is a necessary condition for the arising of the next link, craving (*taṇhā*). However, in the chapter on *vedanā* we saw that not all sensations generate craving.⁵² Whether a certain sensation will produce craving depends, as stated previously, on how it is approached. Depending on the approach, craving will either arise or not arise. *Saññā* is primarily responsible for this particular approach to sensation.

Whenever something is sensed, it is also recognized.⁵³ *Saññā* always accompanies and follows *vedanā*,⁵⁴ but depending on the particular orientation of the *saññā*, one may generate craving or start cultivating wisdom (*paññā*). The *saññākkhandha* lies between the two links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*: *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. We have just seen that it follows the *vedanākkhandha*, and the causal chain of page 120 implies that it also precedes *taṇhā*. As we will see in the next chapter, *taṇhā* and the following two links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* fall into the category of the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. The causal chain of page 120 places *saññā* between *vedanā* and *vitakka*. Since the latter belongs to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, it is

⁵²See page 106 ff.

⁵³*yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti*. M. i, 111-112. Similar occurrences also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc.

⁵⁴This is also evidenced by the causal chain of page 120.

evident that the *saññākkhandhā* finds its place in between the *vedanākkhandha* and the *saṅkhārakkhandha*.

Saññā imposes categories on and classifies our sensations. The texts usually give the example that a certain sensation is interpreted as “blue” or “yellow”.⁵⁵ But this categorization goes much further by classifying sensations as “worth craving for”, and “worth hating”. However, if the recognition that interprets the sensation is one of the “positive *saññās*”, no craving or aversion will be generated, for the recognition itself will signal that this particular sensation is not “worth craving for” since it is impermanent, suffering and selfless. Yet since the sensation is interpreted by a recognition that leads to *papañca* (similar to *diṭṭhi*), one will come under the illusion that this particular sensation is permanent, a source of pleasure or associated with the self. According to Buddhism, it is these particular views that are responsible for our misperception of reality and our bondage to *saṃsāra*, for they are grounds for craving.

As Buddhaghosa stated in the *Visuddhimagga*, the *saññākkhandha* [necessarily associated with *papañca*] has the function of interpreting by means of signs that are apprehended, like the blind men who describe an elephant.⁵⁶ The comparison with the blind men probably refers to a story

⁵⁵S. iii, 87.

⁵⁶*Yathā gahitanimittavasena abhinivesakaraṇapaccupaṭṭhānā, hatthidassaka-andhā viya.* Vsm. 462.

of the *Udāna*⁵⁷ where men blind from birth were asked to describe an elephant by touching only a certain part of the animal. They all arrived at a different description depending on the part of the animal they were examining. Those touching the tail said that the elephant was like a broom, those feeling the leg said that it was like a pillar. The blind men soon started arguing and quarrelling with one another, for each claimed to have the correct perception of the animal.⁵⁸ They were all correct in their own way, but since their interpretation of the reality was based on their previous limited experiences, they could not perceive the totality of the truth and the reality as it is (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*).⁵⁹ However, if the “unwholesome” *saññās* were replaced by one or many of the various “positive” *saññās*, craving would not be generated, understanding of reality as it is would arise and wisdom (*paññā*) would be developed.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter, we have seen that the main function of the *saññākkhandha* is to recognize and interpret sensations through the imposition of certain categories. We have also elaborated a scheme dividing

⁵⁷Ud. 68-69. Although the simile found in the *Udāna* was used by the Buddha to explain to the king why different ascetics perceives the “doctrine” (*dhamma*) differently, Buddhaghosa has appropriated this parable and made it relevant to the function that *saññā* performs.

⁵⁸*Te ediso hatthī, n’ediso hatthī, n’ediso hatthī, ediso hatthī’ ti aññamaññaṃ muṭṭhihi saṃyujjhimsu.* Ud. 69.

⁵⁹Noteworthy is that knowledge and vision according to reality (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*) is one of the eighteen major kinds of insight (*vipassanā*) mentioned in footnote #45.

saññās in two. The “wholesome” *saññās* are recognitions of, in short, the three characteristics of existence. These do not belong to the *saññākkhandha* as such. The “unwholesome” *saññās*, on the other hand, are simply certain interpretations of reality that are not conducive to insight and that generate *papañca*. The *saññākkhandha* is essentially constituted of these “unwholesome” *saññās*. Unless the *saññās* of an individual are governed by the “wholesome” *saññās*, one is likely to generate craving and aversion, clinging, and becoming, all of which fall under the next aggregate: *saṅkhāra*.

Chapter 5

The *Saṅkhārakkhandha*

5.1 Introduction to the concept of *saṅkhāra*

In order to unravel the specific function of the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, we first need to understand the meaning of the word *saṅkhāra* in its larger context. The term *saṅkhāra* is one of the Pāli words most highly endowed with philosophical implications. Stcherbatsky remarked that “the word and conception *samskhāra* performs a conspicuous part in all Indian philosophical systems. It usually means some latent mysterious power, which later on reveals itself in some potent fact”.¹ In her introduction to the translation of the *Majjhimanikāya*,² I.B. Horner referred to a passage from the *Pāli Text Dictionary* to stress the semantic depth of the word *saṅkhāra*: “one of the most difficult terms in Buddhist metaphysics, in which the blending of the subjective-objective view of the world and of happening, peculiar to the East, is so complete, that it is almost impossible for Occidental terminology to get at the root of its meaning in a translation”.³ Mrs. Rhys Davids, another pioneer in the Western study of Theravāda Buddhism, expressed her bewilderment regarding the significance of the term:

¹Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 18.

²*Middle Length Sayings*, vol. i, p. xxiv.

³*Pāli English Dictionary*, p. 664.

We are only at the threshold of its problems, and it is hence not strange if we find them as baffling as, let us say, our own confused usage of many psychological terms — feeling, will, mind — about which we ourselves greatly differ, would prove to an inquiring Buddhist. If I have not attempted to go into the crux of the *sankhāra-skandha* [sic], it is because neither the Manual [the *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*] nor its Commentary brings us any nearer to a satisfactory hypothesis.⁴

The exact meaning of this “mysterious power” still remains obscure. As Bandusena Madanayake has pointed out in his doctoral thesis, “thirty scholars have put forward as many different meanings” for this single term.⁵ One of the reasons for this diversity of translations might be the fact that within Pāli language itself, *saṅkhāra* possesses many meanings. Surendranath Dasgupta has explained the polysemy encountered in the Pāli canon by the fact that

The Buddha was one of the [...] earliest thinkers to introduce proper philosophical terms and phraseology with a distinct philosophical method and he had often to use the same word in more or less different senses. Some of the philosophical terms at least are therefore rather elastic when compared with the terms of precise and definite meaning which we find in later Sanskrit thought.⁶

Yet many scholars, such as Hans Wolfgang Schumann, suggested that the rather wide semantic field associated with the word *saṅkhāra* was nonexistent at the time of the Buddha. According to Schumann, this diversity of meanings resulted from the growth of exegesis on the earlier *sutta* literature and from the development of an intricate and systematic philosophical system

⁴*Buddhist Psychology*, p. lxxxi.

⁵Bandu W. Madanayake, “The Study of Saṅkhāras in Early Buddhism” (University of Toronto, PhD. Diss., 1987) p. 2.

⁶Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol i, p. 86.

1 that arose many centuries after the death of the Buddha.⁷ I.B. Horner herself divided *saṅkhāra* into four different categories, each possessing a different meaning. This classification consists of *saṅkhāra* 1) as one of the *khandhas*, 2) as one of the *nidānas* of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, 3) as a “sort” of activity associated with the body, speech and mind (*kāya*, *vacī* and *citta*) and finally 4) as “properties” when associated with the term *āyu*.⁸ Schumann, in his monograph *Bedeutung und Bedeutungsentwicklung des Terminus Saṅkhāra im Frühen Buddhismus*, has elaborated a similar scheme by classifying the various interpretations of the term into four categories.⁹ From the combination of I. B. Horner and Hans Schumann, I have elaborated a more extensive scheme divided into five categories: 1) *saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata-dhamma*, being a synonym of its cognate form *saṅkhata*, 2) as a *paccaya*, 3) as *āyu-saṅkhāra*, 4) as the member of the compounded words *sasaṅkhāra* and *asaṅkhāra* and finally, 5) as one of the *pañcakkhandhas*.

The task of this chapter consists primarily in uncovering the basic meaning that links the various contexts in which the term appears, and secondarily in arriving at a precise interpretation of *saṅkhārakkhandha* and its function within the theory of dependent origination. I shall not venture

⁷Hans Wolfgang Schumann, *Bedeutung und Bedeutungsentwicklung des Terminus Saṅkhāra im frühen Buddhismus* (Bonn: PhD. Diss., Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1957) p. 84 ff.

⁸*Middle Length Sayings*, vol. i, p. xxiv-xxv.

⁹Schumann, *Bedeutung und Bedeutungsentwicklung des Terminus Saṅkhāra im Frühen Buddhismus*, p. 45 ff.

to find an English equivalent to account for the different native connotations of *saṅkhāra* since, as we saw above, this undertaking is doomed to failure. Rather, I shall try to provide an extensive (and, I hope, comprehensive) explanation of *saṅkhāra* that will provide us with a certain understanding of the general meaning of the word by stressing the simultaneous presence of its causal and effective dimension. To achieve this task, I shall first analyze the different contexts of the word by adhering to the fivefold scheme that I have derived from Schumman and Horner's classification of *saṅkhāra*. I shall not discuss *saṅkhārakkhandha* within the scheme. Once the different contexts have been presented, and the meaning of the term within these specific environments understood, I shall then proceed to clarify the general import of the term *saṅkhāra*, and then examine the specific function of *saṅkhāra* as one of the *pañcakkhandhas*. I feel that this is the most appropriate methodology because it will offer us a general understanding of the term *saṅkhāra* before narrowing it down to *saṅkhārakkhandha*. Once this is achieved, I shall establish the role of *saṅkhārakkhandha* within the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

5.2 *Saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata*

Throughout the Pāli canon, the concept of *saṅkhāra* is closely associated with the *saṅkhata-dhamma*.¹⁰ The usual definition of the term runs thus: “it is called *saṅkhāra* because it ‘produces’ *saṅkhata*”.¹¹ Because the Pāli word for what we have translated as “to produce” is *abhisaṅkharoti*, a cognate of *saṅkhāra*, the deciphering of this definition is rendered more difficult. The *Atthasālinī* provides us with a description of *saṅkhata* that may clarify our previous definition of *saṅkhāra*. “The *saṅkhata* are made, having been assembled by conditions, and whatever is not *saṅkhata* is *asaṅkhata*.”¹² S. Z. Aung, in his appendix to the translation of the *Abhidhammattasaṅgaha*, emphasizes that although the notion of being compounded is implied by the term *saṅkhata*, the idea of being conditioned and having been caused is the closest to the definition of the term.¹³ These conditions, or causes, that produce the *saṅkhata-dhammas* seem to be *saṅkhāras* as well.

A definite relation between the two concepts (viz. *saṅkhāra* as a cause, and *saṅkhāra* as an effect, i.e. *saṅkhata-dhamma*) is evident, but the texts even suggest that there is no difference at all between them. In the *sutta* literature, a few instances are found where the two first characteristics of

¹⁰Refer to page 26 for a discussion of the *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata* groups.

¹¹*Saṅkhataṃ abhisāṅkharontīti bhikkhave tasmā saṅkhārā ti vuccanti.* S. iii, 87.

¹²*Paccayehi samāgantvā katā ti saṅkhata, na saṅkhata ti asaṅkhatā.* DhA. 47.

¹³Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 273.

existence (*tilakkhaṇā*), i.e. impermanence (*anicca*) and dissatisfaction (*dukkha*), are used to qualify the term *saṅkhāra*. In these same passages, however, the third characteristic of existence, selflessness (*anatta*) is an attribute of the notion *dhamma* rather than *saṅkhāra*:

*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ti;
Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā ti;
Sabbe dhammā anattā ti.*¹⁴

I do not think that, here, the term *dhamma* is used in a different sense than *saṅkhāra*. We have to understand that the Buddha's teaching was quite innovative for his period: he was one of the few teachers who introduced a system devoid of any conception of personal entity lasting through time. If the Buddha had said "*sabbe saṅkhārā anattā*", meaning that all the *saṅkhata-dhammas* are substanceless, people might have wrongly inferred that, because the *saṅkhata-dhammas* are *anatta*, the *asaṅkhata-dhamma* must be *atta*, and must have a permanent entity. The *asaṅkhata-dhamma* which, in the Theravāda tradition, is restricted to a unique component (*nibbāna*), is also devoid of any permanent entity (*atta*). In order to avoid the misunderstanding that *sabbe saṅkhārā anattā* could potentially imply, the term *saṅkhāra* is replaced by *dhamma* in this particular context. Moreover, by stating "*sabbe dhammā anattā*", the text suggests that not only all the *saṅkhātadhammā* are *anatta*, but that the only *asaṅkhātadhamma* accepted by the Theravāda tradition — i.e., *nibbāna* — is *anatta* as well. The commentary

¹⁴S. i, 200; D. ii, 157; also Kvu. ii, 531.

on this passage also mentions that *saṅkhāra* is a synonym of *saṅkhata*, the latter referring to any element (*dhamma*) which has been conditioned.¹⁵

Therefore, we may affirm that *saṅkhāra*, as a *saṅkhata*, refers to all the principles of existence except *nibbāna* (and other *dhammas* considered by other traditions as *asaṅkhata*). Stcherbatsky presented an interesting theory as to why the *saṅkhata-dhammas* are called *saṅkhāra*:

... the elements of existence were regarded as something similar to energies (*saṃskṛta dhamma* [skr. equivalent for *saṅkhata-dhamma*]) than to substantial elements. ... Since the energies [*saṅkhata-dhamma*] never worked in isolation, but always in mutual interdependence according to causal law, they were called “synergies” cooperators (*saṃskāra* [skr. equivalent for *saṅkhāra*]).¹⁶

Thus, in certain contexts, *saṅkhata-dhammas* (or simply *saṅkhatas*) are synonymous with *saṅkhāra* because they were previously “produced”, they were conditioned and, most of all, because they do not subsist independently of other *saṅkhatas*, they are “cooperators”. This definition of *saṅkhāra* is valid for the entire universe: the individual microcosm (the five aggregates) is included in the term¹⁷ and so is the macrocosm, the entire phenomenal world we live in.¹⁸ Therefore, everything but *nibbāna* is *saṅkhāra*. Everything that has been compounded and has a cause is a *saṅkhāra* in the sense of *saṅkhata-dhamma*.

¹⁵*Tattha aniccā vata saṅkhārā ti ādisu vutta sabbe pi sappaccaya dhammā saṅkhatā saṅkhāra nāma.* DA. ii, 230.

¹⁶Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, vol. i, p. 5.

¹⁷S. iii, 144.

¹⁸The *Sammohavinodanī* correlates the words *anekadhātu-nānādhātuloka* with *upādinna^{saṅkhāraloka}*. VbhA. 456.

5.3 *Saṅkhāra as a paccaya*

Within the complex theory of dependent origination, *saṅkhāra* is inserted as a link between ignorance (*avijjā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).¹⁹ This means that on account of ignorance, *saṅkhāras* come into being and generate a consciousness. It seems that within the *paṭiccasamuppāda* the term *saṅkhāra* has a meaning radically different from the one previously ascribed to “*saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata*” since there is no explicit textual evidence of *saṅkhata-dhammas* producing consciousness.

The *Vibhaṅga* defines *saṅkhāra* produced by ignorance (and implicitly generating a future consciousness) as *cetanā*,²⁰ a word usually translated as “volition”. The *sutta* literature also has a similar definition of *saṅkhāra*: the *Saṃyuttanikāya* equates the term with the six groups of *cetanās*, which are defined therein with respect to the six sense-doors.²¹

Cetanā is clearly explained in the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, where the Buddha states that what he calls *cetanā* is simply *kamma*, and that one who “cetanizes” is one who generates *kamma* either by body, words or mind.²²

¹⁹*Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā; saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇa*. S. ii, 5.

²⁰*Tattha katamo avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāro? Yā cetanā sañcetanā sañcetaṇitattam, ayam vuccati avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāro*. Vbh. 144. A similar passage is also found at Vbh. 173.

²¹*Katamā ca bhikkhave saṅkhārā? Chayime bhikkhave cetanākayā. Rūpa... sadda... gandha.... rasa.... phoṭṭhabba... dhammasañcetanā ime vuccanti bhikkhave saṅkhārā*. S. iii, 60.

²²*Cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi; cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*. A. iii, 415.

E. M. Hare, in his translation of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, renders this phrase as: “Monks, I say that determinate thought (*cetanā*) is action (*kamma*). When one determines, one acts by deed, word or thought”.²³ Another example of the relation between *saṅkhāra* (or *cetanā*) and *kamma* is symbolically exemplified in the *Rathakāravagga* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*. In this *sutta*, a “wheel-maker” explains to the king that the wheel (indirectly referring to the *kamma*-concept) “kept rolling as long as the impulse that set the motion (*abhisāṅkhārassa gati*) lasted. It then circled and fell to the ground”.²⁴ The term *abhisāṅkhāra*²⁵ is a synonym of *cetanā* and refers here to the dynamism and momentum usually associated with *kamma*. For this reason, as pointed out by Mrs. Padmasiri de Silva, *saṅkhāra* is often considered synonymous with the concept of *cetanā* or *kamma*.²⁶ These pieces of textual evidence support the relation that the highly respected Burmese meditation teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, drew between *kamma* and *saṅkhāra*:

In this connection, we should understand that each action — either by deed, word, or thought — leaves behind a force of action, *saṅkhāra* (or *kamma* in popular terminology), which goes to the credit or debit account²⁷ of the individual, according to whether the action is good or bad. There is, therefore, an accumulation of *saṅkhāras* (or *kamma*) with everyone, which function as the

²³*Gradual Sayings*, vol. iii, p. 294.

²⁴*Taṃ pavattitaṃ samāṇaṃ yāvatikā abhisāṅkhārassa gati tāvatikaṃ gantvā ciṅgulāyitvā bhūmiyaṃ papati.* A. i, 111.

²⁵The interchangeability of the terms *abhisāṅkhāra* and *saṅkhāra* is evidenced by the *Saṃyuttanikāya* (S. iii, 87) and the *Dīghanikāya* (D. i, 18) where the function of *saṅkhāra* is said to be “*abhisāṅkharoti*”.

²⁶M.W. Padmasiri de Silva, *Buddhist and Freudian Psychology* (Colombo: Lakehouse Investments, 1973) 117; also see Aung’s *Compendium of Philosophy* p. 274.

²⁷The use of this particular metaphor is probably due to the fact that U Ba Khin was the accountant general of Burma.

supply-source of energy to sustain life, which is inevitably followed by suffering and death.²⁸

The *Vibhaṅga* further states that *saṅkhāras* produced by ignorance are threefold: meritorious *saṅkhāras* (*puññābhisaṅkhāra*), non-meritorious *saṅkhāras* (*apuññābhisaṅkhāra*) and “unshakable” *saṅkhāras* (*āneñjābhisaṅkhāra*).²⁹ Meritorious *saṅkhāras* are defined as being profitable *cetanās* — i.e. *kammas* — that will yield their results either in the sensual sphere or in the fine material sphere; these meritorious “actions” (of body, speech and mind) consist of charity, morality and meditation.³⁰ The non-meritorious *saṅkhāras* are explained as being unprofitable *kammas*, results of which will be reaped only in the sensual sphere.³¹ The unshakable *saṅkhāras* are said to be wholesome *kammas* producing a result in any of the four immaterial spheres.³² This division of *saṅkhāras* into meritorious, non-meritorious and unshakable further stresses the relation between *saṅkhāra*

²⁸Thray Sithu Sayagyi U Ba Khin, "The Essentials of Buddha-Dhamma in meditative practice", *Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal: A Collection Commemorating the Teaching of Sayagyi U Ba Khin*, (Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute, 1991) p. 31.

²⁹*Tattha katame avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā? Puññābhisaṅkhāro apuññābhisaṅkhāro āneñjābhisaṅkhāro.* Vbh. 135.

³⁰*Tattha katamo puññābhisaṅkhāro? Kusalā cetanā kāmāvacarā rūpāvacarā dānamayā sīlamayā bhāvanāmayā, ayam vuccati puññābhisaṅkhāro.* Vbh. 135.

³¹*Tattha katamo apuññābhisaṅkhāro? Akusalā cetanā kāmāvacarā: ayam vuccati apuññābhisaṅkhāro.* Vbh. 135.

³²*Tattha katamo āneñjābhisaṅkhāro? Kusalā cetanā arūpāvacarā: ayam vuccati āneñjābhisaṅkhāro.* Vbh. 135.

and *kamma*, since the *Vibhaṅga* states that these three divisions constitute the entire field of the *kamma*-process.³³

The *Vimohavinodanī* further elucidates the meaning of *saṅkhāra* as being threefold: the *saṅkhāras* of body, speech and mind. The *saṅkhāras* of body are initiated by the body and express themselves through the body. The *saṅkhāras* of speech and mind are initiated by speech and the mind and express themselves through speech and the mind respectively.³⁴ According to the *Yamaka*, the *saṅkhāras* of body are said to originate from breathing in and breathing out; the *saṅkhāras* of speech, from reflection and investigation which “denote the whole mental process of thinking”;³⁵ the mental *saṅkhāras*, from “recognition” (*saññā*) and “sensation” (*vedanā*) or, in other words, all the principles associated with the mind except reflection and investigation.³⁶ I do not believe that *kāyasaṅkhāras* arise from the mere function of respiration, but since breathing is essential for the subsistence of the body and the performance of any other action, it is considered to be the precursor of any further *kāyasaṅkhāras*. Similarly, reflection and investigation

³³*Tattha katamo kammabhavo? Puññābhisāṅkhāro apuññābhisāṅkhāro ñeñjābhisāṅkhāro: ayaṃ vuccati kammabhavo.* Vbh. 137. The compound *kammabhava* literally means “kammic existence”. However, this term is used in a technical sense and refers to links eight, nine and ten of the theory of dependent origination. See pages 163 and following for further detail on this concept.

³⁴*Kāyena pavattiito, kāyato vā pavatto, kāyassa vā saṅkhāro ti kāyasaṅkhāro. Vacī-saṅkhāra--citta-saṅkhāresu pi es’ eva nayo.* VbhA. 142.

³⁵*P.T.S. Dictionary*, p. 620.

³⁶*Tayo saṅkhārā: kāya-saṅkhāro vacīsaṅkhāro cittasaṅkhāro. Assāsapassāsā kāyasaṅkhāro, vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro, saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāro, ṭhapetvā vitakkavicāre sabbe pi cittasampayuttakā dhammā cittasaṅkhāro.* Ymk. i, 229.

are not inherently *vacīsaṅkhāras* but, because these functions precede all verbal activities, they are regarded as the foundation stone that allows a person to speak and generate *vacīsaṅkhāras*. The mental *saṅkhāras* are said to arise from “recognition” and “sensation”.³⁷ *Saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*, therefore, is not simply mere deeds, but also physical, vocal or mental actions that generate a force that will yield certain consequences in the future. Both of these, the kammically charged action and the future consequences, are *saṅkhāras* in the sense of *saṅkhata-dhammas*, but only the former could be classified under *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*.

5.4 *Saṅkhāra* as an *āyusaṅkhāra*

Another type of *saṅkhāra* is also mentioned in the Pāli canon. The *Kathāvatthu* alludes to the Buddha entering into *parinibbāna* only after he had “let loose” his *āyusaṅkhāra*.³⁸ The *sutta* literature, mainly in the discourses referring to the Buddha’s death, also makes a few allusions to this word.³⁹ It also seems that the term *bhavaṣaṅkhāra* was used as a synonym of *āyusaṅkhāra*. The *Aṅguttaranikāya* employs this expression to state that when the Buddha had released his *bhavaṣaṅkhāra*, he broke apart the “coat of

³⁷Ymk. i, 229.

³⁸*Cāpāle cetiye āyusaṅkhāro ossaṭṭho, Kusinārāyam Bhagavā parinibbuto ti?* Kvu. ii, 559.

³⁹Such as in D. ii, 99; 108.

mail”⁴⁰ that originates from one’s own person.⁴¹ None of the commentaries explain the meaning of these two terms, yet the words themselves tend to suggest a kind of “life principle”, a vital energy without which life ceases, and which offers the necessary fuel to produce a rebirth. This is reminiscent of our interpretation of *saṅkhāra* as *paccaya*, where the term *saṅkhāra* was correlated with the dynamism and momentum associated with the concept of *kamma*. The only nuance is that the *āyusaṅkhāra* (as well as the *bhavaṣaṅkhāra*) refers to a specific force — not simply any kammic force, but the one responsible for rebirth. Both *āyusaṅkhāra* and *bhavaṣaṅkhāra* refer to the force responsible for generating a new existence.

5.5 *Sasaṅkhāra* and *asaṅkhāra*

The fourth usage of the word *saṅkhāra* is found in the compounds *asaṅkhāra* and *sasaṅkhāra*, the latter appearing in relation to the word *parinibbāyin* in the *sutta* literature, and usually in conjunction with the term *citta* in the *Abhidhamma* texts.

⁴⁰*Kavaca*; the *P.T.S. Dictionary* (p. 200) says that the word applies to “existence”, probably because the latter is made of many factors and combinations, or in other words, that life is the expression of an intricately knitted mail of *saṅkhata-dhammas*.

⁴¹*Tulan atulaṇ ca sambhavaṇ bhavaṣaṅkhāraṇ avassaji muni ajjhatarato samāhito abhindi kavacam iv’ attasambhavan ti.* A. iv, 312.

While discussing the different methods of attaining *nibbāna*, the *Saṃyuttanikāya* states that if someone eradicates the five fetters of the lower sort, then that person attains *nibbāna* “without *saṅkhāra*” and, following a similar procedure, one can achieve *nibbāna* “with *saṅkhāras*”.⁴² Although the meaning of this sentence is obscure because no textual distinction is implied as to the nuance in the procedure to follow in order to enter either *nibbāna* “with *saṅkhāras*” or *nibbāna* “without *saṅkhāra*”, the meaning of these two terms seems evident. *Asaṅkhāra* means “without *saṅkhāra*”, while *sasaṅkhāra* means “with *saṅkhāras*”. Therefore, the term *asaṅkhāra* applied to *nibbāna* tends to suggest that *nibbāna* has been reached while the experiencer still possesses a karmic residue.⁴³ According to the tradition, the Buddha attained *nibbāna* at the age of thirty-five, but remained alive some forty-five more years. Because he “came back” to teach in the *kāmaloka*, we might postulate that he still had certain stock of *kamma* which allowed (or constrained) him to come back into this world; he had not yet entered *nirupādisesanibbāna*. When he reached *nirupādisesanibbāna*, no more karmic residue was present, thus no force could hold him to this world. The problem we encounter is that in the *suttas*, the words *sasaṅkhāra* and *asaṅkhāra* are used not in reference to *nibbāna*, but to *parinibbāna*, a state which cannot be thought of as possessing a karmic residue. A further difficulty emerges from the fact that Pāli is a highly inflected language; we often find two or more

⁴²No ce pañcannam orambhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayā asaṅkhāraparinibbāyī hoti. Atha pañcannam orambhāgiyānaṃ saṃyoganānaṃ parikkhayā sasaṅkhāraparinibbāyī hoti. S. v, 70. The same passage is found at A. i, 233.

⁴³The *Atthasālinī* apparently agrees with this interpretation since Buddhaghosa defines *sasaṅkhāra* as “with *saṅkhāras*”. Tass’ attho saha saṅkhārenā ti sasaṅkhāro. DhA. 156.

declined words losing their case endings and being compounded (concatenated) together. Sometimes, only through a careful analysis (and often, mere speculation) can we unveil the syntactic relation uniting the members of the compounds. The compounds *sa-saṅkhāra-parinibbāyī* and *a-saṅkhāra-parinibbāyī* are severely ambiguous. From one perspective, the first member (*asaṅkhāra* or *sasaṅkhāra*) could be interpreted as an attribute of the word *parinibbāyī*,⁴⁴ hence meaning “one who has attained the state of *parinibbāna* which has (or has no) *saṅkhāras*”. Although grammatically logical, this analysis is highly improbable since, as we have mentioned earlier, *parinibbāna* cannot be understood as possessed of *saṅkhāras*. *Parinibbāna* is, by definition, fully free of *saṅkhāras*. The other alternative would be to approach the compounds as reflecting an instrumental or ablative case relation,⁴⁵ hence attributing quite a different meaning to the compounds: one who has attained *parinibbāna* from (or because of) *saṅkhāras* (or from the lack of it in the case of *asaṅkhāraparinibbāyī*). Fortunately, the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* sheds light on the problem. According to the commentary on the *Dīghanikāya*, both *asaṅkhāra* and *sasaṅkhāra* are analyzed as being instrumental and related to *parinibbāyī*. The commentator further elaborates by defining *asaṅkhāra* as “without effort, with ease and pleasure”, and *sasaṅkhāra* as “with efforts, difficulty and dukkha”.⁴⁶

⁴⁴*Bahuvrīhī* compound.

⁴⁵Instrumental or ablative *tatpuruṣa*.

⁴⁶*Asaṅkhārena appayogena akilamanto sukhena patto asaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī nāma. Sasaṅkhārena sappayogena kilamanto dukkhena patto sasaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī nāma.* DA. iii, 1030; similar definitions are found in the *Sāratthappakāsinī* (SA. iii, 142) and the *Manorathapūraṇī* (AA. ii, 350).

The *Abhidhamma* literature strengthens the commentarial definition of *sasaṅkhāra* and *asaṅkhāra* by emphasizing that one who has completely eradicated the fetters and thereby perceives the noble path “without efforts” is called a person who has achieved *parinibbāna* “without efforts”; similarly, one who eradicates the fetters through striving and thereby perceives the noble path, is called a person who achieved *parinibbāna* “with efforts”.⁴⁷ The *Atthāsalinī* further elucidates the meaning of the term *sasaṅkhāra* (which the commentator considers to be a new word in Buddhist terminology)⁴⁸ with a narrative. A monk had certain duties to perform such as sweeping the courtyard, taking care of an elder monk, and listening to the *Dhamma*, but was not naturally inclined to fulfill them. Yet, either by self-instigation or by being admonished by another monk, he realized the disadvantages of abstaining from his duty and the advantages of carrying it out, and ultimately performed what he had to do. This action of his, triggered by instigation and necessitating efforts on his part, is called an action which gives birth to a wholesome mental state because of *saṅkhāras* (“with effort”).⁴⁹ According to Mrs. Rhys Davids, all the thoughts (*citta*) which are not called *sasaṅkhāra*, are implicitly included in the concept of *asaṅkhāra*.⁵⁰

⁴⁷*So asaṅkhārena ariyamaggaṃ sañjaneti upariṭṭhimānaṃ saññojanānaṃ [saṇḍojanānaṃ] pahānāya: ayaṃ vuccati puggalo asaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī. [...] So sasaṅkhārena ariyamaggaṃ sañjaneti upariṭṭhimānaṃ saññojanānaṃ pahānāya: ayaṃ vuccati puggalo sasaṅkhāra-parinibbāyī.* Pug. 17.

⁴⁸*Imamsiṃ tāva dutiyacittaniddese sasaṅkhārenā ti idam eva apubbaṃ.* DhsA. 156.

⁴⁹Dhs. 156.

⁵⁰C.A.F. Rhys Davids, trans., *Buddhist Psychology*, p. lxvii.

The story of Bāhiya Dārucīriya⁵¹ serves as a good illustration of *asaṅkhāraparinibbāyī* within Theravāda Buddhism. The elderly ascetic Bāhiya, who was living in the vicinity of what is now Bombay, decided to travel all the way to Sāvattthi to seek advice from the Buddha. When he arrived in the capital city of Kosala, he met the Buddha and received a few words of inspiration. While he was listening, he suddenly reached enlightenment. Later, the Buddha said that Bāhiya Dārucīriya was the supreme example of those who comprehended the truth instantly (*khippābhiññāṇam*).⁵² Bāhiya Dārucīriya's story exemplifies the unexpected attainment of *nibbāna*, a realization devoid of proximate conscious striving (*asaṅkhāra*).

Both in the *sutta* and *abhidhammic* literatures, the term *sasaṅkhāra* seems to refer to a thought, action or state attained by instigation or mental efforts that constrain the natural tendency of the individual, while *asaṅkhāra* points to a thought, action or state that has arisen effortlessly, without instigation, in accord with personal inner tendencies. The *Atthasālinī* offers a list of synonyms of *sasaṅkhāra* ("with energy, with preparation, with effort, with the grasping of a cause"⁵³), all of which indicate that the term implies a conscious instigation on the part of the individual. We see that in the

⁵¹G.P. Malasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, ii, p. 281 ff.

⁵²A. i, 24.

⁵³*Tena sasaṅkhārena saussāhena sappayogena sa-upāyena sappaccayagahaṇenā ti attho.* DhsA. 156.

context of *sasaṅkhāra* and *asaṅkhāra*, the term *saṅkhāra* also refers to a certain dynamism or force of action, as with *saṅkhāra* as *paccaya*.⁵⁴

5.6 The generic meaning of *saṅkhāra*

Now that we have explained the meaning of *saṅkhāra* within the first four divisions of our fivefold classification, I shall try to extract the essence of the term and to underline the general meaning of this puzzling concept.

We have seen that *saṅkhāra*, as a *saṅkhata*, refers to all the principles of existence, i.e. everything that exists except, of course, *nibbāna* which is considered to be an *asaṅkhata-dhamma*. In this context, *saṅkhāra* is a synonym of *sankhāta-dhammas* since all the *saṅkhata-dhammas* are considered to have been conditioned. As mentioned before, this particular definition of *saṅkhāra* means “the entire universe”, within and without, i.e. the individual microcosm made up of the five aggregates, and the macrocosm, the entire phenomenal world we live in. In short, *saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata* refers to everything but *nibbāna*, everything that causes and that is caused.

Saṅkhāra as a *paccaya* was defined in terms of two divisions. First we examined the various *saṅkhāras* divided into *puñña*, *apuñña* and *āneñja*, each being respectively described as meritorious *kamm*as, unprofitable *kamm*as,

⁵⁴This leads to a further problem: can *nibbāna* (an *asaṅkhata-dhamma*) be produced or caused by anything (such as the practice of the eightfold noble path)? This puzzling question is deliberately put aside now in order to examine it more in depth in an essay solely devoted to it.

and wholesome *kammas* producing a result in any of the four immaterial spheres.⁵⁵ Then, the word was described in terms of *kāya*, *vacī* and *citta*, referring to physical, verbal and mental actions. In this context, *saṅkhāra* seems to mean any action that will ultimately bring about a result; here, *saṅkhāra* is non-different from *cetanā* which latter is often equated with *kamma*.⁵⁶ *Saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya* is the initiating action itself (mental, vocal or physical), and the kammic force that will yield an effect. However, this effect, although not included in *saṅkhāra* as *paccaya*, falls under the definition of *saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata*, for the result of a particular *saṅkhāra* (or *kamma*) is nothing but a *saṅkhata-dhamma*.

Saṅkhāra as *āyusaṅkhāra* is a synonym of *bhava-saṅkhāra*, the energy which is responsible for sustaining life. Here, it is important to mention that at the instant of death, the *āyusaṅkhāra* is not necessarily extinct. In most cases, it is still present, and manifests itself as the energy that keeps an individual bound to the wheel of transmigration. On the other hand, if eradicated, no more rebirth occurs and the “person” enters into *nirupādisesanibbāna*. Because the *āyusaṅkhāra* and the *bhava-saṅkhāra* are dependent on other activities, they are *saṅkhata-dhammas*, and since they constitute the energy that will eventually lead to rebirth, they can also be seen as *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*, for they definitely are a force.

⁵⁵Vbh. 135.

⁵⁶A. iii, 415.

Saṅkhāra as it appears in the compounds *asaṅkhāra* and *sasaṅkhāra* is interpreted slightly differently in the *sutta* and *abhidhammic* literatures. In the former, these compounds are used mainly as attributes of the state of *parinibbāna*, while in the latter, they not only qualify *parinibbāna*, but any mental states (*saṅkhata-dhammas*) as well. Although the qualified term varies depending on the *piṭaka*, the meaning of the qualifier remains the same. *Asaṅkhāra* refers to “something” which has arisen effortlessly, as a result of an individual’s inner tendencies. On the other hand, *sasaṅkhāra* points to something which was brought about by some kind of effort or striving. The meaning of *saṅkhāra* in these compounds is “conscious effort or instigation”.

Sasaṅkhāra means with effort or instigation, hence produced by “something”. When used as a qualifier to *parinibbāyī*, it means that someone has attained *parinibbāna* through conscious effort. *Asaṅkhāra* means the opposite. Within this context, the actual meaning of *saṅkhāra* implies the production of “something”, whether this thing be *nibbāna* or a mental state.

Throughout the four contexts outlined above, a generic meaning for the term *saṅkhāra* becomes evident. This underlying meaning is twofold. First, *saṅkhāra* is a productive force, like *cetanā*, which outflows from actions (again, mental, physical or verbal) and produces effects. Second, it comprises everything that exists, all compounded things; these are *saṅkhata-dhammas*. Some (such as anger, love, etc.) result from the “productive force” and are likely to become themselves “productive forces”. However, some of these *saṅkhata-dhammas* (such as external objects) are independent of the personal

psychological process and can by no means become “productive forces”. This twofold definition could also be approached from another perspective: “active” and “passive”. If we say that the meaning of *saṅkhāra* is “everything that is compounded”, then we can divide these *saṅkhata-dhammas* into “active” and “passive” components. The “active” *saṅkhāras* are those associated with the other four constituents of the individual (*pañcakkhandhas*), and likely to produce more *saṅkhata-dhammas*. The “passive” *saṅkhāras* (*saṅkhata-dhammas*) would be those independent from any aggregate and incapable of producing anything except, of course, the process of decaying inherent in all compounded things.

The “mysterious” term of *saṅkhāra*, as Stcherbatsky remarked, seems to have two distinct meanings. The first defines *saṅkhāra* as “generating” and “producing” and, in this sense, *saṅkhāra* is a force of action (verbal, mental or physical), depending on the functioning of the four other aggregates (*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, and *viññāṇa*). *Saṅkhāra* in this sense cannot function independently of these four aggregates. The second meaning describes the term as whatever is produced by this force of action (i.e., all the *saṅkhata-dhammas*). Before proceeding any further, let me offer an analogy that may clarify the twofold meaning of the term. *Saṅkhāra* could be compared to “cooking”. In fact, the verbal root *saṃskṛ* was often used to refer to culinary acts.⁵⁷ Surprisingly enough, a clear analysis of the word cooking does indeed shed light on the meaning of *saṅkhāra*. The *Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī*, one of the commentaries of Panīnī’s Sanskrit Grammar, explains the meaning

⁵⁷Refer for example to Sn. 241 where “well-prepared” (*susaṅkhata*) meat is mentioned.

of the word “cooking” (*pacati*) as a complex activity. According to this Sanskrit text, the action of “cooking” requires that someone undertakes several minor activities which ultimately lead to a result. For example, cooking rice, as our commentary explains, involves putting the rice into the vessel, pouring some water over it, washing the rice several times, placing the vessel on the fire with a suitable quantity of water, leaving it over the heat, testing a single rice grain, and so on. When all these minor activities are performed, the actual action of cooking is accomplished and leaves the performer with a specific result; in this case, the rice having become soft and edible (*viklittiḥ*). This rather intricate description of “cooking” is provided by the commentator to show that the word cooking itself implies two major elements: 1) a *kriyā*, or the bare action of cooking, including all the major activities it adumbrates, and 2) a *phala*, the result or the effect of these activities.⁵⁸ Similarly, the term *saṅkhāra* implies these two elements: 1) what is understood as “volition” or, to be more precise, a conation resulting in a volitional effort and eventually in an “action” (mental, vocal or physical), and 2) the bare effect, the result outflowing from previous “actions”. Any action will yield a result so long as it was performed with the base of craving towards sensations, or in other words, performed as the result of the activity of *saññā*, as a blind reaction towards the *vedanā*.

Although these two meanings are distinct, our discussion of the four previous categories of *saṅkhāra* could be combined and shaped to form a general meaning. *Saṅkhāra* (as a producing force) generates other *saṅkhāras*

⁵⁸*Vaiyākaraṇasiddhāntakaumudī*. Bhattaji Diksita ed. (Varanasi: Caukhamba Sanskrita Sirija Aphisa, 1969) p. 607.

(*saṅkhata-dhammas*). Yet, these *saṅkhata-dhammas* can, in turn, become a producing force and create more *saṅkhata-dhammas*. Whenever these *saṅkhata-dhammas* are associated with the four other aggregates (i.e., when the *saṅkhata-dhammas* are mental states and not external objects), they may very well become “active” or “productive” *saṅkhāras*. But if independent from the four aggregates, these *saṅkhata-dhammas* will remain “passive” *saṅkhāras*.

5.7 *Saṅkhāra* as a *khandha*

Now that we have ascribed a generic meaning to the concept of *saṅkhāra*, we are in a much better position to understand *saṅkhārakkhandha*. According to the *Vibhaṅga*, *saṅkhāra* as one of the constituents of the personality could be approached from different perspectives. Seen as “onefold”, the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is associated with the mind; as twofold, it is either with a cause or without a cause; as threefold, it is either positive, negative or neutral.⁵⁹ The first approach suggests that *saṅkhāras* are always associated with the mind (*citta*). The *Dhammasaṅgani* supports the *Vibhaṅga* by grouping the different kinds of *saṅkhāras* under three distinct types of mind (*kusala*, *akusala*, and *avyākata*).⁶⁰ This exhaustive listing of *saṅkhāras*

⁵⁹*Tattha katamo saṅkhārakkhandho? Ekavidhena saṅkhārakkhandho: cītasampayutto. Duvidhena saṅkhārakkhandho: atthi sahetu, atthi na hetu. Tividhena saṅkhārakkhandho: atthi kusalo, atthi akusalo, atthi avyākato...pe...evaṃ bahuvidhena saṅkhārakkhandho. Vbh. 72; there is also a similar passage at Vbh. 89.*

⁶⁰See Dhs. 18 for *kusala*, Dhs. 84-85 for *akusala*, and Dhs. 118 for *avyākata*.

classified under the only three possible kinds of mind supports both that *saṅkhāras* are associated with the mind, and the third approach mentioned by the *Vibhaṅga*, namely that *saṅkhāras* are either good, bad or neutral. (Refer to the following table for an overall view of these principles.) All these principles which have arisen in accordance with the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, and which exclude the *vedanākkhandhu*, the *saññākkhandha* and the *viññāṇakkhandha*, fall under the *saṅkhārakkhandha* category.⁶¹ There is a total number of fifty different principles falling under the category of *saṅkhārakkhandha* which I do not believe necessary to analyse independently.

⁶¹When the list includes the *saññākkhandha* and the *vedanākkhandha*, the enumeration is known as the list of mental concomitants (*cetasikas*); this is not the one exposed here.

Diagram V

The Fifty Elements of *saṅkhāra*

| <u>Avyākata-citta</u> | <u>Akusala</u> | <u>Kusala</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| phassa | phassa | phassa |
| cetanā | cetanā | cetanā |
| jīva | jīva | jīva |
| samādhi | samādhi | samādhi |
| manasikāra | manasikāra | manasikāra |
| vitakka | vitakka | vitakka |
| vicāra | vicāra | vicāra |
| adhimokkha | adhimokkha | adhimokkha |
| virīya | virīya | virīya |
| pīti | pīti | pīti |
| chanda | chanda | chanda |
| | moha | amoha (= paññā) |
| | ahiri | hiri |
| | anottappa | ottappa |
| | uddhacca | saddhā |
| | issā | sati |
| | macchariya | tatramajjhata |
| | kukkucca | adosa |
| | lobha | alobha |
| | diṭṭhi | kāyapassadhi |
| | māna | cittapassadhi |
| | thīna | kāyalahutā |
| | middha | cittalahutā |
| | vicikicchā | kāyamudutā |
| | dosa | cittamudutā |
| | | kāyakammaññutā |
| | | cittakammaññutā |
| | | kāyapaguññatā |
| | | cittapaguññatā |
| | | kāyojūkatā |
| | | cittojūkatā |
| | | kāyiduccaritavirati |
| | | vāciduccaritavirati |
| | | micchājīvavirati |
| | | karuṇā |
| | | muditā |

The second approach implied by the *Vibhaṅga* states that *saṅkhāras* can either be with or without *hetu*. Here *hetu* refers to “the six roots of action”, three being wholesome (non-aversion, non-craving and non-delusion) and three unwholesome (aversion, craving and delusion). This would imply that certain *saṅkhāras* can be “unconditioned”, in the sense of not having a cause (*ahetu*). This appears to be problematic, for, as we have seen, all *saṅkhāras* are conditioned. However, in this context, as A.K. Warder has pointed out, *hetu* is closer in meaning to *mūla* (root) than to “cause”.⁶² *Hetu*, in this specific sense, is one of the twenty-four *paccayas* of the *Paṭṭhāna*;⁶³ by extension, *ahetu* would refer to whatever is not *hetu*, i.e., the twenty-three remaining *paccayas*. The author of the *Vibhaṅga* must have used *ahetu* in the sense of the remaining twenty-three *paccayas*, otherwise his statement would contradict the rest of canonical literature.

As we have just seen, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* and the *Yamaka* strongly correlate *saṅkhārakkhandha* with the different types of mind, hence implying that *saṅkhārakkhandha* is an activity restricted to the mental realm. Here, we ought to call attention to our previous discussion on *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*⁶⁴ and correlate *saṅkhārakkhandha* with *saṅkhāras* of mind. In that section, we stated that “mental” *saṅkhāras* depend on “sensation” (*vedanā*) and “recognition” (*saññā*), each being one of the five aggregates. Although

⁶²Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, p. 310.

⁶³For further clarification on *saṅkhāra* as *hetu*, one of the twenty-four *paccayas*, refer to Ps. i, 50ff.

⁶⁴Refer to page 144 for a reminder on verbal, physical and mental *saṅkhāras*.

saṅkhārakkhandha and “mental” *saṅkhāras* are being correlated, we ought to stress that the realm of *saṅkhārakkhandha* is not restricted to “mental” *saṅkhāras*, it also includes verbal and physical *saṅkhāras*. We previously explained that verbal and physical *saṅkhāras* were both dependent on subtler activities, respectively “reflection and investigation” and “breathing in and breathing out”. I would go even further by suggesting that both verbal and physical *saṅkhāras* also depend on “mental” *saṅkhāras*. As the first verse of the *Dhammapāda* indicates, “mind leads all actions”, whether physical or verbal.⁶⁵ Any verbal or physical activity must be preceded by a mental activity. Therefore, although we should understand *saṅkhārakkhandha* as a “mental” *saṅkhāra*, its comprehensive meaning adumbrates the whole realm of *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*. *Saṅkhārakkhandha* is the same as *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya*.

The *Visuddhimagga* further clarifies our understanding of *saṅkhāra* as one of the aggregates by correlating the term with *saṅkhata-dhammas*. Buddhaghosa holds that the *saṅkhārakkhandha* should be understood as whatever has the characteristic of forming (*abhisāṅkharāṇalakkhaṇa*) and heaping things together.⁶⁶ The *Atthasālinī*, using a different style, defines the term in the same manner.⁶⁷ To say that the function or energy that gives

⁶⁵*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā; manasā ce paṇāpīṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā; tato naṃ dukkham anveti cakkam va vahato pōḍum.* Dh. i, 1.

⁶⁶*Yaṃ pana vuttam, yaṃ kiñci abhisāṅkharāṇalakkhaṇam sabban taṃ ekato kutvā saṅkhārakkhandho veditabbo ti, ettha abhisāṅkharāṇalakkhaṇam nāma rāsikarāṇalakkhaṇam.* Vsm. 462.

⁶⁷*Rāsaṭṭhena abhisāṅkharāṇaṭṭhena eko va saṅkhārakkhandho.* DhsA. 154.

birth to *saṅkhata-dhammas* is nothing but the *saṅkhārakkhandha* would be in perfect accord with these two sources. Yet the *Yamaka* introduces an important distinction: not all *saṅkhāras* belong to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. *Rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* (the other four aggregates) are *saṅkhāras*, but they are not *saṅkhārakkhandha*.⁶⁸ We find a similar distinction introduced in the *sutta* literature itself. The *Saṃyuttanikāya* states that *saṅkhāra* [-*khandha*] is thus called for it conditions the five aggregates of the next moment, or the next existence.⁶⁹ Although the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is associated with all the other *saṅkhāras*, these two groups have to be seen as distinct. This distinction elucidates the difference between *saṅkhāra* as an aggregate and *saṅkhāra* in general. The former is an active force, producing and gathering together the *saṅkhata-dhammas* (*saṅkhāra* as a *saṅkhata*) while the latter is more comprehensive and consists of any of the five aggregates, as well as any of the compounded principles (*saṅkhata-dhammas*).

The *saṅkhārakkhandha* is definitely a *saṅkhāra* in the sense of *saṅkhata-dhamma* since it has been formed and conditioned. Yet not all *saṅkhāras* are *saṅkhārakkhandha*, since they are not all endowed with the capacity of “forming” or generating more *saṅkhata-dhammas*. To me, it seems that a *saṅkhata-dhamma* — remember that this term also includes

⁶⁸Ymk. 16.

⁶⁹*Kiṃca bhikkhave saṅkhāre vadetha? Saṅkhataṃ abhisāṅkharontīti bhikkhave tasmā saṅkhārā ti vuccanti. Kiṃ ca saṅkhataṃ abhisāṅkharonti? Rūpaṃ rūpattāya saṅkhataṃ abhisāṅkharonti. Vedanaṃ... Saññaṃ... Saṅkhāre... Viññāṇaṃ... S. iii, 87. A similar distinction is found in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*: *Les saṃskāras, c'est tout ce qui est conditionné, mais on réserve le nom de saṃskāraskandha aux conditionnés qui ne rentrent ni dans les skandhas de rūpa, de vedanā, sa saññā et de vijñāna. La Vallée Poussin, Abhidharmakośa, i, p. 15.**

saṅkhārakkhandha — can only produce other *saṅkhata-dhammas* when working in conjunction with *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *rūpa*; in other words, only the *saṅkhārakkhandha* (which, by definition, is closely connected to the four other *khandhas*) can produce *saṅkhata-dhammas*. This implies that *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya* is simply a paraphrase of *saṅkhārakkhandha*. They both refer to a force that will generate an effect. The effect, however, although being *saṅkhata* in the sense that it has been caused, is not necessarily a *paccaya* or a *saṅkhārakkhandha* for it might not generate a further effect.

5.8 *Saṅkhārakkhandha* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

As we have seen in the previous chapters, each of the aggregates discussed so far has been directly correlated with distinct links of the theory of dependent origination. The *rūpakkkhandha* was equated with the six sense-doors (*saḷāyatanā*) and with *phassa*, the *vedanākkhandha* with *vedanā*, and the *saññākkhandha* was introduced between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. As for the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, we can also establish a relation between this particular aggregate and the second link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *saṅkhāra*, for we have seen in this chapter that *saṅkhārakkhandha* is the same as *saṅkhāra* as *paccaya*; both are forces that will generate a result. However, as explained in the introduction, this thesis is mainly concerned with the eight middle links of the theory of dependent origination, the links that are traditionally held to be representative of the present life. Since the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is one of

the five aggregates characterizing human existence, its function must also express itself within these very eight links, in the present.

According to the commentarial tradition of Theravāda Buddhism, the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, as well as the whole process of existence, is usually divided in two: a) the *kamma*-process (*kammabhava*) or the kammically active aspect of existence, being the cause of rebirth, and b) the regenerating or rebirth process (*uppattibhava*) or the kammically passive aspect of existence, arising due to the first process (*kammabhava*).⁷⁰ The active aspect of existence (*kammabhava*) determines the passive aspect (*uppattibhava*).⁷¹ The first five links of the present period of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* (i.e. links three to seven: *viññāṇa*, *nāmarūpa*, *saḷāyatanā*, *phassa* and *vedanā*) are part of the passive aspect, while the last three links of the present period (i.e. links eight to ten: *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava*) are part of the active aspect of existence. As illustrated in the following diagram:

⁷⁰Vsm. 200; 579.

⁷¹Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy*, p. 43.

Diagram VI

The *Paṭiccasamuppāda* at a glance

| | | | | |
|---------|-----|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| PAST | 1- | <i>avijjā</i> | ignorance | <i>KAMMABHAVA</i> |
| | 2- | <i>saṅkhāra</i> | (as a <i>paccaya</i>) | |
| PRESENT | 3- | <i>viññāṇa</i> | consciousness | <i>UPPATTIBHAVA</i> |
| | 4- | <i>nāmarūpa</i> | mind and matter | |
| | 5- | <i>saḷāyatana</i> | 6 sense-doors | |
| | 6- | <i>phassa</i> | contact | |
| | 7- | <i>vedanā</i> | sensation | <i>KAMMABHAVA</i> |
| | 8- | <i>taṇhā</i> | desire | |
| | 9- | <i>upādāna</i> | clinging | |
| FUTURE | 10- | <i>bhava</i> | becoming | <i>UPPATTIBHAVA</i> |
| | 11- | <i>jāti</i> | (re-) birth | |
| | 12- | <i>jarāmaraṇā...</i> | old age, death... | |

According to this, *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* are part of the *kammabhava* of the present existence. Since we have previously defined *kammabhava* as the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, we can state that the kamma-process is identical with *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* and arrive at a distinct correlation between these three links and the *saṅkhārakkhandha*.

This appears to present a problem: according to the *Vibhaṅga*, *bhava* itself is defined as composed of *kammabhava* and of *uppattibhava*⁷² and its

⁷²*Tattha katamo upādānapaccayā bhavo? Duvidhena bhavo: atthi kammabhavo, atthi uppattibhavo. Vbh. 136; 137.*

commentary explains the terms in the same way we defined them.⁷³ This seems to imply that the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is only part of the concept of *bhava*, the one that is *kammabhava*.

If we refer back to the list of fifty types of *saṅkhāras* on page 158, we see that *vitakka* and *vicāra* are both included in *saṅkhāra*. These two terms are precursors to the concept of *papañca* previously discussed;⁷⁴ without any of these three, craving could not arise because, as the *Sakkapañhasutta* states, envy (*issā*) and avarice (*macchhariya*), as well as desire (*chanda*⁷⁵) have their origin in *papañca*.⁷⁶ We can say that the commentarial tradition is correct in affirming that the three links of *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* belong to the *kammabhava*, for *vitakka* and *vicāra* both precede *taṇhā* and these two elements are included in *saṅkhāra*.⁷⁷ However, this statement does not reject the theory that *bhava* itself can be divided into *kammabhava* and *uppattibhava*. Logically, there is no reason why *kammabhava* could not

⁷³VbhA. i83.

⁷⁴As evidenced by the causal chain of the *Majjhimanikāya*: *Cakkhuṃ c'āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānaṃ tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tato nidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasāṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu*. Visual consciousness arises on account of visual forms and the eye, the meeting of these three is contact (*phassa*), on account of contact there is a sensation, what one senses (as a sensation), one recognizes, what one recognizes, one "thinks about" (*vitakka*), what one thinks about, one is obsessed with, what obsesses one is the cause of the number of obsessions which assail a person in regard to past, present or future visual forms cognisable by the eye. M. i, 111-112. Similar occurrences of the formula also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc.

⁷⁵*Chanda* is equated by the commentary of the text to *taṇhā*, desire, craving.

⁷⁶D. ii, 277-278.

⁷⁷Refer to the list of elements belonging to *saṅkhāra* on page 158.

occupy a certain place in *bhava* itself, but that its function extends to more than one link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. *Kammabhava* (or the *saṅkhārakkhandha*) can and does belong to *bhava* and to *taṇhā* and *upādāna*.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter, we have seen that not all *saṅkhāras* belong to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, since they are not all endowed with the capacity of “forming” or generating more *saṅkhata-dhammas*. A *saṅkhata-dhamma* can only produce other *saṅkhata-dhammas* when working in conjunction with *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *rūpa*; in other words, only the *saṅkhārakkhandha* can produce *saṅkhata-dhammas*. This implies that *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya* is simply a paraphrase of *saṅkhārakkhandha*. They both refer to a force that will generate an effect. The effect, however, although being *saṅkhata* in the sense that it has been caused, is not necessarily a *paccaya* or a *saṅkhārakkhandha* for it might not generate a further effect.

We have also situated the *saṅkhārakkhandha* within the present period of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, i.e., taking the place of the three links of *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava*. We now ought to discuss the element that is generated by this active force. This leads us to our next and last aggregate: *viññāṇa*.

Chapter 6

The *Viññāṇakkhandha*

6.1 Introduction to the concept of *viññāṇa*

In the traditional enumeration of the *khandhas*, *viññāṇa* is the fifth aggregate, commonly understood as “consciousness”. As with the previous four aggregates, six kinds of *viññāṇa* exist, with each designation dependent upon the *āyatanas* through which the faculty performs its function.¹ Therefore, we find *viññāṇa* associated with each of the six sense-doors. The canonical definition of this aggregate is again as obscure as those of the previous *khandhas*. The Pāli canon tells us that *viññāṇa* is so called because it “*viññāṇizes*.”² This definition could make sense only to native speakers of Pāli who had already interiorized through linguistic and cultural reinforcement the significance of “to *viññāṇize*”. Unfortunately, most of us are therefore left without the slightest hint as to its meaning.

We are compelled to search elsewhere for clues that will help us define this aggregate. We find that *viññāṇa* does display the earmark characteristics of all *sāṅkhatadhammas*: namely the truths of impermanence and selflessness.

¹*Chayime āvuso viññāṇakāyā: cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ sotavīññāṇaṃ ghānavīññāṇaṃ jivhāvīññāṇaṃ kāṇvīññāṇaṃ manovīññāṇaṃ.* M. i, 53; also M. i, 259; iii, 216, 281.

²*Vijānāti vijānāti kho āvuso, tasmā viññāṇaṇ ti vuccatīti.* M. i, 292.

For example, the *Cullavedallasutta* condemns the attempt to regard not only *viññāṇa* but any of the five aggregates as the seat of individuality (*atta*).³ while the *Alagaddūpamasutta* stresses that *viññāṇa* itself is impermanent.⁴ And it is mentioned elsewhere that those who believe that *viññāṇa* has a destiny of its own, distinct from the other four *khandhas*, are misled as to its true nature.⁵ Therefore, it is clear that within the realm of Pāli canonical Buddhism, neither *viññāṇa* nor any of the aggregates can be considered as permanent or as occupying the place of a everlasting self.

Yet scholars such as Mrs. Rhys Davids⁶ argued that textual evidence does not always portray *viññāṇa* as an impermanent element. Their main argument is that *viññāṇa* is often approached as the seat of individuality, the residing place of the self, or of a permanent entity. They supported their theory by canonical evidence which, according to them, refers to *viññāṇa* in the sense of “self”. At least two of these occurrences can be observed.⁷ After the death of certain monks who had reached arahanthood (Bhikkhu Godhika and Vakkhali), the evil spirit Māra searched in vain for their

³*Sutavā ariyasāvako...na rūpaṃ attato samanupassati...na vedanaṃ...na saññāṃ...na saṅkhāre...na viññāṇaṃ attato samanupassati, na viññāṇavantaṃ attānaṃ, na attāni viññāṇaṃ na viññāṇasmim attānaṃ. M. i, 300.*

⁴*Taṃ kiṃ maññatha bhikkhave. Viññāṇaṃ niccam va aniccaṃ vā ti? Aniccaṃ bhante. M. i, 138. Also S. iv, 67-68.*

⁵*Yo bhikkhave evaṃ vadeyya: aham aññatra rūpā aññatra vedanāya aññatra saññāya aññatra sakkhārehi viññāṇassa āgatiṃ vā gatiṃ vā cutiṃ vā upapattiṃ vā vuddhiṃ vā virūhiṃ vā vepullaṃ vā paññāpessāmi ti n'etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati. S. iii, 53.*

⁶C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology: an Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pāli Literature* (London: Luzac & Co., 1924) p. 22.

⁷S. iii, 124; S. i, 121.

viññāṇas since the latter had utterly ceased to arise. According to Mrs. Rhys Davids, this definitely indicates that after death, the *viññāṇa* of a non-liberated person is expected to go somewhere before being “reincarnated” again, therefore implying the existence of some sort of permanent entity which travels from body to body. Mrs. Rhys Davids also brought to our attention that the verb “to arise” (*uppajjati* or *uppatti*), usually used in reference to *viññāṇa*, was occasionally replaced by “to descend” (*avakkhanti*).⁸ Once again, she interpreted this as alluding to a permanent entity, a kind of “soul” which descends into a body. Viewed in this manner, these few examples contradict the core doctrine of impermanence in general, as well as the theories of the impermanence of *viññāṇa* itself⁹ and the concept of “wrong belief in a self” (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*).¹⁰ Mrs. Rhys Davids therefore suggested that the notion of a transmigrating entity must have been an intrusion of popular belief into Buddhism, mere “folklore speech”,¹¹ for, when contrasted with the emphasis given to the concepts of *anicca* and *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* throughout the entire realm of Buddhist literature, these pieces of evidence are far too scarce to be taken seriously.

However, this particular interpretation of these passages is, I believe, a result of a misunderstanding of the concept of impermanence and of the

⁸C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology: an Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pāli Literature*, p. 22.

⁹S. ii, 94; iv, 67; D. i, 21.

¹⁰M. i, 300.

¹¹C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology: an Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pāli Literature*, p. 22.

core theory of dependent origination. *Viññāṇa* is characterized by impermanence in the sense that it arises and passes away at every moment. Yet Buddhism stresses that new instances of *viññāṇa* continually arise in an unbroken causal sequence. As Dr. Richard Hayes has remarked in an informal exchange: “Accepting that a continuum of moments of mental events moves from one physical body to another, or even lives outside a physical body for a while, does not commit one either to a view of permanence or to a view that the continuum is a self”.¹² A continuing sequence of causally related *viññāṇas* need not imply, as Rhys Davids suggested, any kind of permanence. Therefore, we are left with no substantial grounds for affirming that the passages mentioned above represent the “intrusion of folklore speech”. These passages are still congruent with the mainstream canonical interpretation of *viññāṇa*. As Lilian Silburn has explained:

*C'est autour de vijñāna [Pāli: viññāṇa] que graviteront les erreurs de la continuité personnelle, à commencer par celle de Sāti, un des disciples du Buddha, jusqu'à celle des Bouddhologues occidentaux qui s'acharnent à découvrir une personne qui dure et transmigre dans un vijñāna que tant de textes pourtant décrivent comme conditionné et évanescent. [...] à chaque instant apparaît un vijñāna conditionné par un vijñāna précédent; il y a une certaine continuité parce que les moments de conscience dépendent de leurs conditions et se succèdent sans interruption; mais il n'y a pas de continuité d'un principe qui demeurerait essentiellement le même en dépit de ces changements.*¹³

This concept of ever-changing *viññāṇa*, of “non-entity”, seems in complete accord with William James’s understanding of consciousness:

To deny plumply that “consciousness” exists seems so absurd on the face of it — for undeniably “thoughts” do exist — that I fear some readers would follow me no further. Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the

¹²Electronic-mail message, received from Dr. Richard Hayes in Mars 1992.

¹³Lilian Silburn, *Instant et cause*, p. 207-208.

word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function.¹⁴

Therefore, to elucidate the meaning of *viññāṇa* we should, as James recommended, approach it as an abstract function, an intangible mental operation, just as we have approached all the other mental aggregates.

6.2 The function of *viññāṇa*

Many scholars hold that the function of *viññāṇa* consists merely in apprehending the bare phenomenal world, “the immediately known thing which on the mental side is in opposition with the entire brain process”.¹⁵ As to this particular interpretation of *viññāṇa*, let us quote Th. Stcherbatsky:

It [*viññāṇa*] represents pure consciousness, or pure sensation, without any content. Its content is placed in the objective part which contains the definite sensation (*sparśa*), feelings (*vedanā*), ideas (*saṃjñā*), volition (*cetanā*)...¹⁶

He continued by saying that:

...*viññāṇa* and its synonyms, *cittā*, *manāḥ*, represent pure sensations, the same as the *kalpanapodha pratyakṣa* of Dīnāga, and *saṃjñā* corresponds to definite ideas. Every construction (*kalpana*), every abstraction (*udgrahana*), every definite (*parichinna*) representation, such as blue and yellow, long and short, male and female, friend and enemy, happy and miserable — this is all brought under the head of ideas (*saṃjñā*) as distinguished from *viññāṇa* = pure sensation.¹⁷

Stcherbatsky's theory receives support from other scholars such as E. R. Sarathchandra, who advocates that when the term *viññāṇa* was “applied to

¹⁴William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (London: Longmans, Greens, 1912) p. 4.

¹⁵William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950) p. 142.

¹⁶Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 13.

¹⁷Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism*, p. 16.

the psychology of perception, it meant not full cognition, but bare sensation, a sort of anoetic sentience that occurs before the object is completely apprehended".¹⁸ Jayatilleke also supports this statement by quoting the *Vibhaṅgāṭṭha-katha*, according to which visual cognition (*viññāṇa*) means mere visual perception.¹⁹

The theory that correlates *viññāṇa* with bare sensations devoid of any content seems to be inconsistent with certain passages of the Pāli canon, since the *Majjhimanikāya* indicates that the function of *viññāṇa* is to "*viññāṇize*" what is pleasant, unpleasant and neither pleasant nor unpleasant.²⁰ If, as Stcherbatsky and Saratchandra proposed, *viññāṇa* was pure sensation without any content, then it would be impossible for the *viññāṇa* to "*viññāṇize*" anything pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This would be possible only if the pleasantness, etc., that the faculty *viññāṇizes*, were intrinsic to the object (be it sensation or mere external form) being approached. Nevertheless, if the pleasantness were intrinsic to the object, then no difference would be found between *viññāṇa* and *vedanā*, which latter is also said to be "pleasant, unpleasant or neutral".

¹⁸Saratchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception*, p. 4.

¹⁹Jayatilleke, *Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 436. *Cakkhuvīññāṇam paṇ' ettha dassanamattam viññāṇa eva hoti.*

²⁰*Kiṇ ca vijānāti: sukhan ti pi vijānāti, dukkhan ti pi vijānāti, adukkhamasukhan ti pi vijānāti.* M. i, 292; M. iii, 242.

The Pāli canon also explains *viññāṇa* differently. As Sarathchandra has mentioned, “*viññāṇa* in the earliest texts was almost synonymous with *saññā*”.²¹ One of the items of canonical evidence supporting this theory states that *viññāṇa* is so called because it *viññāṇizes* flavours as sour and bitter, acid and sweet, salty and insipid.²² If we may recall our definition of *saññā* (see page 115), it is the recognition of a certain colour as blue, red or yellow which can be extended to the recognition of a certain sound as flute, drum or trumpet, or a certain flavour as sour, bitter or sweet, and so on. Hence, according to this interpretation, *viññāṇa* seems almost identical to *saññā*.

These numerous different interpretations of *viññāṇa* have succeeded in confusing many scholars who have attempted to circumscribe the meaning of the term. The general meaning of *viññāṇa* is pure consciousness, mere attention, but what remains obscure is whether this consciousness or attention is of pure percepts devoid of any categorization, of something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, or of a certain categorization. By examining these three possible definitions for *viññāṇa*, we notice 1) that pure percepts refer to our definition of *mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya rūpa* (secondary matter) or of *phassa* (see page 78), 2) that something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral can be correlated with our interpretation of *vedanā*, and 3) that the categorization

²¹Sarathchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception*, p. 16.

²²*Kiñca bhikkhave viññāṇaṃ vadetha. Vijānātīti kho bhikkhave tasmā viññāṇaṃ ti vuccati. Kiñca vijānāti. Ambilam pi vijānāti. Tittakam pi vijānāti. Kaṭukam pi vijānāti madhukam pi vijānāti. Khārikam pi vijānāti. Akhārikam pi vijānāti. Loṇakam pi vijānāti. Aloṇakam pi vijānāti. Vijānātīti kho bhikkhave tasmā viññāṇaṃ ti vuccati. S. iii, 87.*

is in line with our explanation of *saññā*. I feel that it would be a mistake to assign the function of *viññāṇa* to only one of these three possibilities. *Viññāṇa* can be applied to *phassa*, *vedanā* and *saññā*. The "mystical" sense of *viññāṇa* may be elucidated if looked at as a function which is applied throughout the *nāmarūpa* phenomenon. *Viññāṇa* is probably the faculty needed for the cognition of pure percept, of sensation and of conceptualization as well; it is not independent of any of these three *khandhas*. Since none of the aggregates has the capacity of being self-conscious, only *viññāṇa* can be considered as performing the function of consciousness or attention.

In our discussion of *phassa* (see page 78 ff.), we saw that in order for a stimulus to be perceived, the presence of three elements is required. There must be a sense-object (*visaya*), a sense-organ (*indriya*) and attention or consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Only when these three elements come together can a stimulus be perceived. This implies, however, that *viññāṇa* itself is present before the stimulus has appeared, and that the former is independent of the latter. *Viññāṇa* as pure consciousness or mere attention does not necessarily need to be conscious of or attentive to something in order to exist.

6.3 *Viññāṇa* and *paññā*

As pointed out by Jayatilleke,²³ another aspect of *viññāṇa* is its similarity to *paññā*, wisdom. The *Mahāvedallasutta*²⁴ correlates *paññā* with *viññāṇa* since the former is also characterized by cognition, but in this case, the objects cognized are restricted to the four Noble Truths. However, the same source mentions a difference between the two terms: “while *viññāṇa* needs to be thoroughly understood, *paññā* needs to be developed”.²⁵ As Jayatilleke concludes, this fifth *khandha* “seems to be the general term for ‘cognition’, while *paññā* is more or less restricted in connotation to the cognition of spiritual truths”.²⁶ Therefore, from now on, when the term *viññāṇa* is translated as “consciousness”, we shall bear in mind that although the function of what we call “consciousness” is mere cognition, what is cognized is either pure percepts (*rūpa*), percepts loaded with either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral connotations (*vedanā*), or conceptualizations resulting from the activity of *saññā* on the sense-data.

Finally, we need to mention the two conditions without which “consciousness” cannot appear. As stated in the *Majjhimanikāya*:

²³Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 434.

²⁴M. i, 292.

²⁵*Paññā bhāvetabbā viññāṇaṃ parinñeyyaṃ, idaṃ nesaṃ nānākaraṇaṃ*. M. i, 293.

²⁶Jayatilleke, *The Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 435.

Whenever there is a functioning sense-organ (eye, ear, tongue, nose, body and mind), a sense-object (visual form, sound, taste, smell, touch and thought) entering into the field of the sense-organ then, with these brought together, there is the manifestation of the part of consciousness referring to the specific sense-organ".²⁷

From this same Pāli passage, Jayatilleke has read three conditions: to the two we have mentioned, he adds "an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind" which, he says, is the English equivalent of *tajjo samannāhāro hoti*.²⁸ His elaboration of three conditions refutes the references found in the sutta literature, which mentions only two conditions, namely the sense-door and a respective sense-object.²⁹ Furthermore, while the Pāli Text Society Dictionary renders *samannāhāro* as "bringing together", it seems that Jayatilleke has somehow stretched the meaning to an "appropriate act of attention". Even if he were correct in his English rendering of *samannāhāro*, what is this "mind" which applies the "act of attention"? No "entity" shapes the individual other than the five aggregates, and, because of our systematic discussion of the *khandhas*, we know that neither *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* or *saṅkhāra* is responsible for anything that resembles "an appropriate act of attention". Rather, it seems that the "act of attention" is precisely the function of *viññāṇa*.

²⁷*Yato ca kho āvuso ajjhattikaṃ c'eva cakkhuṃ aparibhinnaṃ hoti bāhirā ca rūpā āpāthaṃ āgacchanti tajjo ca samannāhāro hoti, evaṃ tajjassa viññāṇabhāṅgassa pātubhāvo hoti.* M. i, 190.

²⁸Jayatilleke, *The Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 435.

²⁹*Cakkhuṃ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇam.* S. iv, 86; M. i, 259.

5.4 Nuances between *viññāṇa* and *mano*

Many canonical and commentarial passages equate the terms *viññāṇa* and *mano*. For example, the *Brahmajālasutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* indicate that *citta* and *mano* are both synonyms of *viññāṇa*.³⁰ Bhikkhu Nārada in the introduction of his translation of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* stated that “*citta, ceta, cittuppāda, nāma, mana, viññāṇa* are all used as synonymous terms in Abhidhamma. Hence, from the Abhidhamma standpoint no distinction is made between mind and consciousness.”³¹ However, I would be more inclined to say that within the *sutta* literature, these terms were used more or less synonymously and that only in later abhidhammic and commentarial sources did the distinctions between them become more important. Yet we must acknowledge that even in the *suttas*, an implicit distinction is established between these terms.³²

Since we have already discussed the concept of *mano* in the chapter on *rūpa* (see page 64), we shall only stress here the difference between the “mental sense-organ” (*mano*) and *viññāṇa* itself. In our discussion on “secondary matter”, we saw that matter in general forms the six sense-objects:

³⁰*Cittān ti va mano ti va viññāṇaṃ ti.* D. i, 21. *Viññāṇaṃ cittāṃ, mano ti atthato ekaṃ.* Vsm. 452.

³¹Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 9.

³²For a more detailed study of the distinction between *mano*, *viññāṇa* and other Pāli and Sanskrit concepts often translated by the English words “consciousness” or “mind”, refer to Herbert V. Guenther's *Philosophy and psychology in the Abhidharma* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 197?) p. 15-49.

touch (*phoṭṭhabbāyatana*), sound (*saddāyatana*), taste (*rāsāyatana*), smell (*gandhāyatana*), visual forms (*rūpāyatana*) and thoughts (*dhammāyatana*). There are also six faculties or sense-organs that allow us to perceive them: the tactile organ (*kāyāyatana*), the auditory organ (*śotāyatana*), the gustatory organ (*jivhāyatana*), the olfactory organ (*gandhāyatana*), the visual organ (*cakkhāyatana*), and finally the mental sense-organ (*manāyatana*). However, we have seen that such perception is only possible when there is a “contact” between the sense-object, the sense-organ and the respective consciousness (*viññāṇa*). *Manāyatana* on its own, without the function of *viññāṇa*, cannot induce perception. Like the other five sense-organs, *manāyatana* is dependent on *viññāṇa* to bring the object to the attention of the subject. *Manāyatana* is purely a sense-organ that cannot function without *viññāṇa*. However, there is a substantial difference between *manāyatana* and the other sense-organs. The latter can only apprehend their respective sense-objects. *Manāyatana*, on the other hand, only apprehends “thoughts” (*dhammāyatana*), yet these very thoughts are derived from the contact of other sense-objects with their respective sense-doors. As Kalupahana has elucidated:

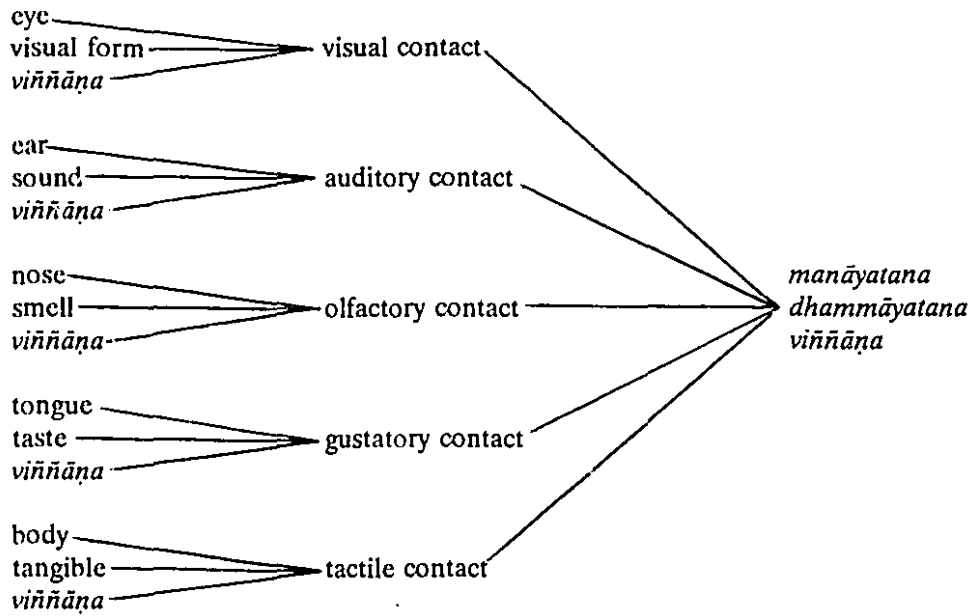
In fact, its [*mano*’s] function is to assist in bringing back the impression produced by the other sense faculties and, as such, constitutes a form of “reflection”. *Mano*, therefore, has “concept” (*dhammā*) as its objects, and these are generally considered substitutes for percepts. ... While *mano* is performing this special function, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) continues to flow uninterrupted like a stream fed by all the faculties including *mano*.³³

The *Uṇṇābho Brāhmaṇo Sutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* explains the function of *mano*. According to this text, each of the first five sense-organs (*indriya*) have different scope and range, none of which are interchangeable.

³³Kalupahana, *Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 30.

In other words, the eye cannot perceive smell. Yet *mano* is the ground common to them all in the sense that it is able to interact with all the other sense-organs.³⁴ The text does not imply that *mano* perceives smell, visual forms, etc., but only that it can perceive the concept (*dhamma*) that was derived from the percept apprehended by one of the first five sense-doors. The following diagram will help further clarify the distinction of *manāyatana* and *viññāṇa*.

Diagram VII
Mano and Viññāṇa



³⁴ Pañcimāṇi brāhmaṇa indriyāṇi nānāvisayāṇi nānāgocarāṇi na aññamaññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhonti. Katamāṇi pañca? Cakkhurindriyaṃ, pe... Kāyindriyaṃ. Imesaṃ kho brāhmaṇa pañcannam indriyāṇaṃ nānāvisayāṇaṃ nānāgocarāṇaṃ na aññamaññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ mano paṭisaraṇaṃ mano ca nesaṃ gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhoti ti. S. v, 218.

The diagram makes clear that *mano* is endowed with a special function, distinct from that of all the other sense-doors. *Mano* has the ability to survey the fields (*gocara*) of the other senses. We have to understand that the term “field” does not refer to the sense-object itself, but to the actual contact that has taken place between the sense-object, the sense-door and the respective *viññāṇa*. The sense-object as such is merely a potential object of perception, and as long as it has not been apprehended by the senses and the consciousness, it definitely cannot become an object of *mano*. Once a contact has taken place, a percept arises. This percept may be either visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory or tactile. In its turn, the percept becomes a potential object of *mano*, potential in the sense that not all percepts come in contact with *mano* and a *viññāṇa*. However, when it does come in contact with these two other faculties, the percept itself is technically termed *dhammāyatana* for it becomes the direct object of *mano*.

The main distinction between *viññāṇa* and *mano*, however, boils down to Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s enigmatic statement found in his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*:

Viññāṇa (rendered by “consciousness”) is, loosely, more or less a synonym of *mano* and *citta*; technically, it is bare cognition considered apart from feeling [*vedanā*], perception [*saññā*] or formations [*saṅkhāra*]. *Mano* (rendered by “mind”), when used technically, is confined to the sixth internal base for contact.³⁵

Mano is often employed as synonym of *viññāṇa* or *citta*,³⁶ yet we found obvious preferences in use in canonical literature. *Viññāṇa* is often associated

³⁵*The Path of Purification*, p. 507, note 35.

³⁶Such as in S. ii, 94: *cittam iti pi mano iti pi*.

with sense cognition in general, while *mano* frequently refers to the intellectual activity triggered by the contact of the *dhammāyatana* and *viññāṇa*,³⁷ a function similar to that of *manas* in Nyāya philosophy where it is “the instrument through which the objects of sense affect the soul”.³⁸

6.5 *Paṭisandhiviññāṇa* and *cuticitta*

In later Buddhist scholasticism, *viññāṇa* is often interpreted as being either a rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhiviññāṇa*), or a death-consciousness (*cuticitta*) — more literally, a “departing” consciousness.³⁹ The death-consciousness constitutes the last consciousness of one’s life, whereas the rebirth-consciousness consists of the very first consciousness of a being, the factor that triggers the stream of consciousness which characterises one’s existence. The latter is wholly conditioned by previous *saṅkhāras*, *kammas* from previous lives. As Bhikkhu Nārada explained:

Dependent on past conditioning activities [*saṅkhāras*] arises relinking or rebirth consciousness in a subsequent birth. It is so called because it links the past with the present, and is the initial consciousness one experiences at the moment of conception.⁴⁰

³⁷Refer to our previous discussion on *mano* on page 64.

³⁸Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1986) p. 1233.

³⁹The reader may note that the term *citta* has been used instead of *viññāṇa* in the expression *cuticitta*. However, in this specific context, both terms are synonymous. With regard to the interchangeability of these two terms, see page 177, especially footnote # 30.

⁴⁰Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 422.

This idea of rebirth-consciousness may be misleading. We must be careful not to get carried away into construing a permanent entity which is transferred from one body to another. As Venerable Nāgasena explained to King Milinda, that which transmigrates from one life to another is neither the same nor another — “*na ca so na ca añño*”.⁴¹ In the *Visudhimagga*, Buddhaghosa explains this “transmigration” of consciousness very clearly:

But it should be understood that it [the *viññāṇa*] has neither come here from the previous becoming nor has it become manifest without the kamma, the formations, the pushing, the objective field, etc., as a cause. And here, let the illustration of this consciousness be such things as an echo, a light, a seal, a seal impression, a looking-glass image, for the fact of its not coming here from the previous becoming and for the fact that it arises owing to causes that are included in past becomings. For just as an echo, a light, a seal impression, and a shadow, have respectively sound, etc., as their cause and come into being without going elsewhere, so also this consciousness.⁴²

The *cuticitta* and *paṭisandhiviññāṇa* respectively stand for the death-consciousness and the relinking-consciousness. However, their meaning is not limited to these two particular types of consciousness. They represent more than the last and first consciousness, for *viññāṇa* in general is also subject to the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇā*): *anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha*. At every moment, each consciousness arises and passes away, continually yielding its place to a new one. Thus every consciousness must have the quality of both *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*, in the sense that it arose from the previous consciousness, and *cuticitta*, in the sense that the *paṭisandhiviññāṇa* that has arisen must also die. The quality of this latter *viññāṇa* (which becomes a *cuticitta* at the time of death) will engender a new *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*. Birth,

⁴¹Mil. 40.

⁴²*The Path of Purification*, p. 639.

death and rebirth do not occur only at the beginning and the end of life. From a microcosmic point of view, this cycle repeats itself at each and every moment and each time a new consciousness is engendered.

6.6 *Viññāṇa* and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

Like the four previous *khandhas*, *viññāṇa* holds a specific place in the theory of dependent origination. As one of the *nidānas*, *viññāṇa* is the third link of the chain, preceding *nāmarūpa*, *saḷāyatana* and *phassa*, the last two being part of the *rūpakkhandha*. I will not attempt in this chapter to explain why *viññāṇa*, which is the fifth member in the traditional enumeration of the *khandhas*, occupies a place that precedes all the other *khandhas* in the *paṭiccasamuppāda*; this will be accomplished in the next chapter (see page 188). I shall instead attempt here to explain the function of *viññāṇa* in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and describe its relation to the *viññāṇakkhandha*.

We have to note that the explanation of the *viññāṇanidāna* is often limited to the first consciousness that enters the mother's womb,⁴³ which would be a *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*. To my knowledge, no such statement is found in the *sutta* literature itself. In later literature, however, we find that the *viññāṇanidāna* is associated not only with the nineteen types of relinking-

⁴³See for example Nyānātiloka's *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 121-122.

consciousness,⁴⁴ but also with the other types of consciousness that may arise from this “original” consciousness. The *Vibhaṅga*, for example, defines *viññāṇanidāna* as consciousness (*citta*, *mano*, *viññāṇa*, *manoviññāṇadhātu*), the mind base (*manāyatana*), the controlling faculty of mind (*manindriya*), and the *viññāṇakkhandha* itself.⁴⁵ Therefore, the third link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* includes the whole *viññāṇakkhandha* and not merely the *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*.

6.7 Summary

In this chapter, we have seen that *viññāṇa* is variously translated. Some scholars hold that it means “bare sensation”, some, “pure consciousness” and others, “the cognition of something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral”. However, none of these theories seems to be totally accurate, since *viññāṇa* is responsible for the cognition of all of these. Hence we defined the term as mere consciousness, whether that consciousness is of *rūpa*, *vedanā* or *saññā*. We have also seen the difference between *mano* — one of the six sense-organs —, and *viññāṇa* itself. Both are necessary for perception of thoughts or concepts (*dhammas*), but only the latter is necessary for the apprehension of stimuli from any of the other sense-organs. Finally, we have established a correlation between the third link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* —

⁴⁴Nārada, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 361. These nineteen types of consciousness are described in Anuruddha’s *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (*Journal of the P.T.S.*, 1884) p. 21-23.

⁴⁵*Tattha katamaṃ saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ? Yaṃ cittaṃ mano mānaṃ hadayaṃ paṇḍaraṃ mano manāyatanaṃ manindriyaṃ viññāṇaṃ viññāṇakkhandho tajjā manoviññāṇadhātu: idaṃ vuccati saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ.* Vbh. 144.

viññāṇanidāna — and the *viññāṇakkhandha*. Now that we have discussed the function of each of the five aggregates, we may consider ourselves at last adequately equipped to explore their interrelation.

Chapter 7

Interrelation of the *Khandhas*

7.1 Preliminary remarks

In the previous chapters, we discussed each of the five *khandhas* separately, without attempting to establish an in-depth correlation between them. However, the simple understanding of the purport of these aggregates leaves us with merely a superficial insight into Buddhist psychology. The knowledge that *rūpa* is equated with the six sense-doors and bare perception, *vedanā* with sensation, *saññā* with recognition, *saṅkhāra* with any type of actions that will produce an effect, and *viññāṇa* with consciousness, fails to shed much light on either the workings of the mind or the path leading to salvation. It is rather our understanding of the relationship between each of the *khandhas* that will considerably increase our insight into Buddhist psychology.

The order in which the five aggregates have been presented in this thesis reflects the stereotypical canonical enumeration of these sole constituents of the individual. To my knowledge, canonical literature does not offer a different order for the *khandhas*.¹ Unfortunately, aside from the

¹Rhys Davids and Steede stated in their *Pāli Text Society Pāli-English Dictionary* (p. 233) that one incidence of a different enumeration has been found in the *Saṃyuttanikāya: Rūpaṃ* (continued...)

traditional order in which the aggregates are enumerated, no hint as to their interrelation is given in the *sutta* literature. Our only alternative is to deduce the operational process of the *khandhas* from the core theories of Buddhism. This is where we can present evidence supporting the particular order of the five aggregates, for I feel that the function of each of the *khandhas*, in their respective order, can be directly correlated with the theory of dependent origination, especially with the eight middle links. Because three of the *khandhas* — *saṅkhāra*, *viññāṇa* and *vedanā* — as well as the entire psycho-physical phenomenon termed *nāmarūpa*, are included in the chain of dependent origination, the latter appears to be intimately related to the five aggregates. In this chapter, we shall first address the “order problem” that presents itself when trying to establish a correlation with the five aggregates and the eight middle links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Second, we shall examine each of the middle links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in turn and point out which of the five aggregates can be correlated with them. We will discover that all the aggregates but *saññā* play an obvious role in this middle division. Third, we will attempt to adduce evidence supporting the implicit, yet crucial, presence of *saññā* between the two links of *vedanā* and *taṇhā*.

¹(...continued)

vedayitāṃ saññāṃ viññāṇāṃ yaṅca saṅkhataṃ neso ham asmi netam me. (S. i. 112) Yet, although the aggregate *saṅkhāra* seems *prima facie* to have been placed after *viññāṇa*, we must stress that the term *saṅkhataṃ* in this particular context comprises the four preceding elements. As the translation of this passage shows: “Matter, sensation, recognition, consciousness, that which is conditioned, is not I”. Therefore, we could hardly say that this particular passage offers a different sequence in the enumeration of the aggregates. It only explicitly states that matter, sensations, recognition and consciousness and that which is conditioned cannot be identified with the self.

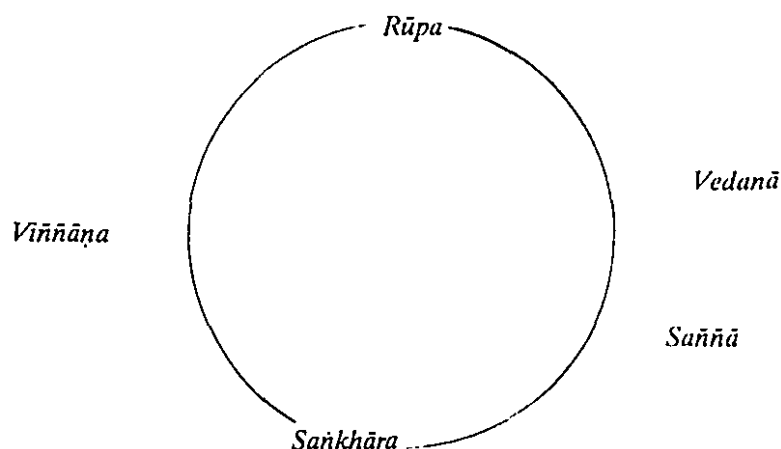
7.2 The “order problem”

Before we proceed to analyze the *paṭiccasamuppāda* from the perspective of the five aggregates, we ought to address the “order problem”. In the traditional enumeration of the *pañcakkhandhas*, *viññāṇa* appears as the last aggregate. At first approach, this fact can be puzzling, for how can the functions of *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra* be accomplished if no prior consciousness is present to cognize and to come in contact with the external world? This would imply the impossibility of having either “mere perception”, a sensation, or even a recognition imposed on sense-data, for nothing could have been cognized by a *viññāṇa* yet. The curious point remains as to why *viññāṇa* has consistently been listed as the final constituent of the five *khandhas* throughout the bulk of canonical literature. Perhaps the solution to this problem can be explained fairly simply.

The concept of revolution, which finds an evident expression in the theory of rebirth, seems to be essential to Buddhism. According to this theory, death is a natural and unavoidable sequence of birth, and death is also inevitably followed by another birth — unless, of course, one has escaped the *samsaric* cycle by becoming an *arahant*. It seems that in many Buddhist enumerations — such as the five *indriyas*, and the eightfold noble path — the final element revolves and comes back to condition or reinforce the first member. However, there has been a controversy amongst scholars on whether the different elements of these enumerations are to be construed

sequentially or cyclically.² It is not the intent of this thesis to prove that a cyclical perspective is definitively at work within the five *indriyas* or the eightfold noble path. Such an approach is plausible, yet a more exhaustive study would be required to establish this theory. Moreover, whether the five *indriyas* or the eightfold noble path can be approached from a cyclical perspective may not be crucial for the purpose of this thesis, for textual references seem to indicate that the five aggregates are definitely subject to such an approach. This implies that the last element of the five *khandhas* would also become the first, that *viññāṇa* revolves from its “last” position to become the “first” of the aggregates (please consult diagram VIII).

Diagram VIII
The Wheel of the Five Aggregates



²K. N. Jayatilleke, in his work *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, deals with the concept of *saddhā* (trust) as the first member of the five *indriyas* and shows that two distinct interpretative trends can be observed. While Tillman Vetter's *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* offers evidence that the eightfold noble path can be construed both cyclically and sequentially.

This theory finds support in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself, wherein *viññāṇa* is placed before the *nāmarūpa nidāna*. As seen previously, the five aggregates themselves constitute the category *nāmarūpa*, and since the last of the aggregates is *viññāṇa*, it will again engender a new set of aggregates, and this until one breaks the chain of *saṃsāra*. The fact that consciousness “engenders” *nāmarūpa* emphasizes this cyclic aspect of the five aggregates. This theory is further supported by two major canonical passages. The first is found in the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, where Sāriputta — the Buddha’s disciple known as the commander-in-chief of Dhamma (*Dhammasenapatti*)³ — explained to Mahākoṭṭhita that *nāmarūpa* is conditioned by *viññāṇa* and that the latter is also conditioned by the former.⁴ The second passage is from the *Dīghanikāya* where the Bodhisattva Vipassī is said to have reflected on the nature of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and of mind and body (*nāmarūpa*). The result of his reflection is the same as that of Sāriputta: *viññāṇa* conditions *nāmarūpa* and vice versa.⁵ This clearly shows that *viññāṇa* can either be approached as the last aggregate, as portrayed in the standard enumeration

³The *Anupadasutta* offers a long eulogy of Sāriputta by the Buddha. (M. iii, 25 ff.) Sāriputta is also known as the chief amongst disciples (*aggasāvaka*).

⁴*Apica [sic] viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpanti. [...] Api ca nāmarūpapaccayā viññāṇanti* S. ii, 113.

⁵*Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa etad ahosi: “Kimhi nu kho sati nāmarūpaṃ hoti, kim paccayā nāmarūpan ti?” Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa yonisomanasikārā ahu paññāya abhisamayo: “Viññāṇe kho sati nāmarūpaṃ hoti, viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpan ti.” Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa etad ahosi: “Kimhi nu kho sati viññāṇaṃ hoti, kim paccayā viññāṇan ti?” Atha kho bhikkhave Vipassissa Bodhisattassa yonisomanasikārā ahu paññāya abhisamayo: “Nāmarūpe kho sati viññāṇaṃ hoti, nāmarūpapaccayā viññāṇan ti.”* D. ii, 32. It is interesting to note that this reflection of the Bodhisattva Vipassī involves a slightly different formulae of the theory of dependent origination. This formulae includes only ten links instead of twelve, excluding ignorance (*avijjā*) and (*saṅkhāra*) -- the two first links of the more well known formulae -- from its list. A similar formulae is also found at S. ii, 104.

of the *pañcakkhandhas*, or as the first, for *viññāṇa* is necessary for the arising of the other four aggregates. Having shown that *viññāṇa* can be placed as the first or last member of the *pañcakkhandhas*, we may begin our actual analysis of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

7.3 The five aggregates and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

In diagram IX, the twelve links (*nidāna*) of the chain of dependent origination were divided into three traditional categories — past, present and future. Each of these divisions represents an alternative means of explaining the concept of *nāmarūpa* when taken in its largest sense, inclusive of the five aggregates. For the purpose of this thesis, we shall limit our analysis to the second division, where the presence of the five *khandhas* is clearest, and we shall clearly demonstrate the presence of the aggregates within these eight links. The eight elements linked in this second group can be considered as a mere rewording, a more detailed explanation of the psychosomatic process set in motion by *nāmarūpa*.

Diagram IX

The *Paṭiccasamuppāda* from a *nāmarūpa* perspective

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----|---------------------------------------|---------|
| <i>NĀMARŪPA</i> | 1- | <i>avijjā</i> (ignorance) | PAST |
| | 2- | <i>saṅkhāra</i> (karmic activities) | |
| <i>NĀMARŪPA</i> | 3- | <i>viññāṇa</i> (consciousness) | PRESENT |
| | 4- | <i>nāmarūpa</i> (mind & Matter) | |
| | 5- | <i>saḷāyatanā</i> (six sense-doors) | |
| | 6- | <i>phassa</i> (contact) | |
| | 7- | <i>vedanā</i> (sensation) | |
| | 8- | <i>taṇhā</i> (craving) | |
| | 9- | <i>upādāna</i> (clinging) | |
| | 10- | <i>bhava</i> (becoming) | |
| <i>NĀMARŪPA</i> | 11- | <i>jāti</i> (birth; rebirth) | FUTURE |
| | 12- | <i>jarāmaraṇa</i> (old age and death) | |

The first link enumerated in the middle group of the theory of dependent origination is *viññāṇa*. As we have just discussed, while *viññāṇa* is the last member of the *pañcakkhandhas*, it can also very well be considered the first. According to the traditional interpretation of the theory of dependent origination, consciousness as a member of the chain is nothing but a *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*.⁶ But as we have seen, every consciousness is a *paṭisandhiviññāṇa* at the moment of its emergence, and a *cuticitta* at the

⁶Vsm. 528. For clarification on the term *paṭisandhi*, see page 181.

moment of its dissolution. As soon as the consciousness emerges, however, *nāmarūpa* arises.⁷

Many passages explain the second link of the middle group, *nāmarūpa*, as that which comprises all the five aggregates. The term *nāmarūpa* itself was already employed in pre-Buddhist philosophical systems. As Saratchandra has pointed out:

The expression *nāmarūpa*, borrowed from the earlier upanishadic literature, possessed two meanings. In one sense it referred to the empirical individual who, in the Upanishads too, enjoyed only a relative reality. But sometimes it was used as a comprehensive term which included the entire phenomenal worlds comprising mind and matter.⁸

Buddhism also ascribes these two meanings to the term. In the context of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* however, the meaning of the term is limited to the psycho-physical structure of the individual. As noted by the authors of the *Pāli Text Dictionary*,⁹ the commentary on the *Dhammapada* states that the four mental aggregates plus the material aggregate constitute *nāmarūpa*.¹⁰ Throughout

⁷*Idha paṭisandhi viññāṇaṃ okkanti nāmarūpaṃ...* Ps. i, 52; also found at Vsm. 600. "Here [in this present life] there is a relinking which is consciousness, there is an appearance which is *nāmarūpa*." The word *okkanti* literally means descent, but can also imply appearance; certain translators such as Ñāṇamoli have juxtaposed the phrase "into the mother's womb" to the term. This addition was probably inspired by a sentence of the *Dīghanikāya* where it is explicitly stated that if a *viññāṇa* does not enter the mother's womb, *nāmarūpa* cannot be engendered: *Viññāṇaṃ va hi Ānanda mātu kucchim na okkamissatha, api nu kho nāmarūpaṃ mātu kucchismim samucchissathāti.* D. ii, 63.

⁸Saratchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception*, p. 7.

⁹*Pāli Text Dictionary*, p. 350.

¹⁰*Vedanādiyaṃ catunnaṃ rūpakkhandaṃ cā ti pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ vasena pavattaṃ nāmarūpaṃ.* DhA. iv, 100.

Pāli literature,¹¹ sundry passages support this statement. Yet, oddly enough, we also find repeated an explicit contradiction of this definition of *nāmarūpa*. This was previously noted by Étienne Lamotte who remarked that “*par mentalité [nāma], il faut entendre les trois skandha mentaux à l'exclusion du vijñāna.*”¹² Although materiality (*rūpa*) is always characterized by the *rūpakkhandha*, the mind (*nāma*), in certain passages, is defined only in terms of three aggregates — *vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra* — instead of four.¹³ This particular interpretation excludes *viññāṇa* from the *nāma* category. Although there is an apparent contradiction, the problem might not be as severe as it initially seems, because the simple presence of the material aggregate along with the three first mental aggregates implies the presence of *viññāṇa*. Since *saṅkhāra* is listed as one of the mental aggregates, *viññāṇa* must naturally follow for, according to the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *saṅkhāra* gives rise to *viññāṇa* (*saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇam*). Moreover, as we have seen on pages 190 ff., the category *nāmarūpa* itself conditions *viññāṇa*. Perhaps certain sources have excluded *viññāṇa* from the definition of *nāmarūpa* simply in order to avoid duplication,¹⁴ or perhaps they assumed its presence to be so self-

¹¹*Nāman ti cattāro arūpakkhandhā, rūpan ti rūpakkhandha.* AA. ii, 154. A similar statement is also found at DhsA. 392.

¹²Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, p. 40.

¹³For example, the *Vibhaṅga* excludes *viññāṇa* from *nāma*: *Vedanākkhandho saññākkhandho saṅkhārakkhandho: idaṃ vuccati viññāṇapaccayā nāmaṃ* (Vbh. 144.) The *Visuddhimagga* also states that *nāma* only includes the three aggregates starting with *vedanā*: *nāman ti ārammanabhimukharāṃ namanato vedanādayo tayo khandhā.* (Vsm. 558) This view is not shared by Vasubandhu who stated in his *Abhidharmakośa* that “*les quatre skandhas immatériels, vedanā, saṃjñā, saṃskāras, vijñāna, sont nommés nāman, car nāman signifie ‘ce qui se ploie’, namatīti nāma*”. La Vallée Poussin, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, ii, p. 94.

¹⁴Although duplication was not a technique that the compilers of the Pāli Canon denigrated.

evident that they failed to warrant mention. Whatever the reason, whether consciousness is explicitly mentioned in the list or not, its function is always and undoubtedly present: on the one hand, *nāmarūpa* arises on the ground of *viññāṇa*, and on the other, *saṅkhāra* inevitably generates a *viññāṇa*. Therefore, the term *nāmarūpa* must contain all the five aggregates as they have been explained in the previous pages.

The third *nīdāna* of this middle group is *saḷāyatanā* (the six sense-doors), which is usually described as the six organs of cognition, namely the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and thinking organs. Each of these sense-doors is then further divided into internal (*ajjhata*) and external (*bāhira*). However, as mentioned previously,¹⁵ within the formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself, the term *saḷāyatanā* includes only the six sense-organs (*ajjhata*) and not their respective objects. We can therefore establish a direct correlation with the *saḷāyatanā*-link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the five sense-organs that partly constitute the *rūpakkhanda*.

The fourth link of the middle group, *phassa*, a term usually translated as contact or sense-impression, arises from the six sense-doors. But as we have seen on page 78, *phassa* is bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective content. We can establish a further correlation here between the sense-objects (*bāhirasaḷāyatanā*) and the *rūpakkhanda*. The sense-objects, which belong to the *rūpakkhanda*, are potential objects of perception, but

¹⁵See page 77.

because of the congregating of consciousness, sense-organs, and sense-objects, they become actual objects of perception and are termed *phassa*.

Phassa conditions the fifth link of the middle group, *vedanā*. To describe *vedanā* as one of the *nidānas* is not necessary since it has already been discussed as one of the *khandhas*, and we can rightly assume that the meaning of the term is the same in both contexts.

The sixth and seventh links which follow the *vedanānidāna* are *taṇhā* (craving)¹⁶ and *upādāna* (clinging). The latter term is most often defined as an intensified form of craving.¹⁷ Since both *taṇhā* and *upādāna* are considered to be different intensities of craving, they can be dealt with together. Craving always first expresses itself at the mental level, but very rarely does it remain confined to that realm: through verbal and physical deeds, craving shapes life. Since *taṇhā* cannot express itself without a mental, verbal or physical action, we can equate both *taṇhā* and *upādāna* with part of *sankhāra*, namely the activity arisen from a mental conation. To return to the

¹⁶As Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli pointed out in his translation of the *Nettipakaraṇaṃ*, the literal translation of *taṇhā* is “thirst”, but the term *taṇhā* in Pāli literature is never used to refer to “thirst” itself. Instead, the word *pipāsa* is employed when “thirst” is intended. [*The Guide* 15, note 42/1] Moreover, our common understanding of “craving” may be misleading since *taṇhā* refers to both craving and aversion. According to Buddhism, craving reflects our discontentment with the present moment, with reality as it is. We desire, crave for something because of a deep inner dissatisfaction and because of our inability to accept reality as it presents itself. Craving is nothing but aversion towards our immediate situation. Similarly, aversion manifests itself as the craving for a better condition. The word *taṇhā* refers to both craving and aversion and henceforth, whenever the word “craving” is employed, aversion is also intended since both are nothing but the two faces of the same coin.

¹⁷According to the *Visuddhimagga*, “Clinging is characterized by ‘seizing’ (*gahaṇa*), its property is not to release, and it manifests itself as a strong craving and as *diṭṭhi*.” *Gahaṇalakkhaṇaṃ upādānaṃ, amuñcanarasam, taṇhādālhatta-diṭṭhipaccupaṭṭhānaṃ*. Vsm. 528.

simile used to describe *saṅkhāra*, craving would correspond to the mere activity of cooking, without including the final product but leading to it.

The *sutta* literature mentions that craving is the conduit to becoming (*bhavaṇettī*);¹⁸ therefore craving leads us to the eighth link in our investigation — becoming (*bhava*). However, a distinction ought to be made between *bhava* as a general concept and *bhava* as one of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. According to Pāli literature, *bhava* in the general sense is divided into *kammabhava* and *uppatibhava*.¹⁹ The former refers to all actions that lead to becoming, what Nyātiloka explained as

the karmically active side of existence ... [while the latter refers to the] karma-produced rebirth or regenerating process, i.e. the karmically passive side of existence consisting in the arising and developing of the karma-produced and therefore morally neutral mental and bodily phenomena of existence.²⁰

Thus the *uppatibhava* is the result, the effect which outflows from the *kammabhava* and reproduces the five aggregates by generating a new *viññāṇa*.²¹ Yet *bhava* as one of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* does not include what we described as *uppatibhava*, for only *kammabhava* and not the latter is a condition for birth.²² Furthermore, *kammabhava* is not restricted

¹⁸S. iii, 190; v, 432.

¹⁹Vsm. 571; also Vbh. 137.

²⁰Nyātiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, p. 28.

²¹The *suttas* state that the five aggregates have craving or desire as their root. *Ime kho, bhikkhave, pañc' upādānakkhandhā chandamūlakā ti*. M. iii, 16; also at S. iii, 100. Furthermore, Buddhaghosa briefly explains the *uppatibhava* as the [five] aggregates generated by *kamma*. *Uppatibhavo pana saṅkhepato kammābhiniḍḍattā khandhā pabhedato navavidho hoti*. Vsm. 571.

²²*Bhavo ti pan'ettha kammabhavo va adhippeto, so hi jātiyā paccayo, na uppatibhavo*. Vsm. 575.

to the *bhavanidāna*, but includes the two previous links of the chain of dependent origination, i.e., craving and clinging,²³ for all the *kammās* leading to the general concept of *bhava* are included in *kammabhava*.²⁴

Here again, we notice an evident correlation with the *pañcakkhandhas*: the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is connected to the concept of *bhava*. As we saw on page 153, the underlying meaning of *saṅkhāra* is twofold. It is defined as a productive force and as whatever is compounded. The first aspect of *saṅkhāra* can be correlated with the *kammabhava*, i.e., to craving, clinging and the *bhavanidāna* itself, while the second aspect is nothing but the *upattibhava*.

Through this simple analysis of the middle group of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, we have now assigned four of the *khandhas* to the eight *nidānas* of the chain: with consciousness (*viññāṇa*), we have correlated the *viññāṇakkhandha*; with mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), the five aggregates; with the six sense-doors (*saḷāyatanā*), matter (*rūpa*); with contact (*phassa*), matter as well; with *vedanā*, *vedanā*; and with craving (*taṇhā*), clinging (*upādāna*) and becoming (*bhava*), *saṅkhāra*. The only aggregate that has been left untouched is *saññā*. Although it is not mentioned as a member of the chain of dependent origination, nor even alluded by its *nidānas*, its implicit presence plays a crucial role.

²³Vsm. 581.

²⁴*Sabbam pi bhavagāmikamman ti iminā pana cetanā sampayuttā abhijjhādayo vutta.* Vsm. 571.

7.4 The implicit presence of *saññā* within the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

This research has already demonstrated²⁵ that *saññā* comes in contact with sensations after they have arisen, and that *saññā* plays a crucial role in the emergence of craving, attachment and becoming — the three links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* that are correlated with *saṅkhāra*. This claim was based upon two major arguments. The first is supported by the canonical statement that [unwholesome] *saññā* leads to “obsessions” (*papañca*),²⁶ a concept similar to that of [micchā-] *diṭṭhi*,²⁷ and by Buddhaghosa’s statement that clinging (*upādāna*) is manifested as [micchā-] *diṭṭhi*.²⁸ It is important to stress that only “unwholesome” *saññā* (*kilesasaññā*) produce *papañca*.²⁹ Since *papañca* is basically interchangeable with *micchādiṭṭhi*, we could easily paraphrase Buddhaghosa’s statement and say that clinging is manifested as *papañca*. And as affirmed by the *Suttanipāta*, [unwholesome] *saññā* is responsible for the arising of *papañca*, therefore *saññā* must precede clinging. Since *saññā* always follows *vedanā*,³⁰ it must perform its function between

²⁵Refer to p. 130 and ff.

²⁶Sn. 874.

²⁷Refer to p. 118.

²⁸*Gaḥaṇalakkhaṇaṃ upādānaṃ, amuñcanarasaṃ, taṇhādaḥhatta-diṭṭhipaccupaṭṭhānaṃ*. Vsm. 528. Previously quoted in note #17 of this present chapter.

²⁹This was discussed on page 119 and evidenced by the *Sāratthappakāsini* (SA. ii, 382.).

³⁰*yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti*. M. i, 111.

vedanā and *upādāna*. Yet, we still ought to clarify whether *saññā* occurs between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*, or between *taṇhā* and *upādāna*.

This is where we used the second argument which is grounded in the causal chain of the *Majjhimanikāya*,³¹ a psychological theory that E.R. Sarathchandra has qualified as one of the earliest Buddhist formula of sense-consciousness.³² According to this formula,³³ “visual consciousness (*cakkhuviññāṇa*) arises on account of visual forms (*rūpa*) and the eye (*cakkhu*). The meeting of these three elements is contact (*phassa*)”, one of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which is a necessary condition for the arising of the next link: *vedanā*. The formula continues by stating that “whatever is felt (*vedeti*) as a sensation is recognized (*sañjānāti*)”, thus explicitly supporting our statement that *saññā* follows *vedanā*. Furthermore, this same formula affirms that “*saññā* is followed by three mental functions (*vitakka*, *papañca* and *papañcasāṅkhā*)” that fall into the category of *saṅkhārakkhandha*. Therefore, this implies that *saññā* operates precisely between the *vedanākkhandha* and the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. Since *taṇhā*, the link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* that follows *vedanā*, belongs to the

³¹M. i, 111-112. Similar occurrences of the formula also appear at M. i, 259; S. iv, 67, etc. Previously discussed on page 120.

³²Sarathchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception* 63. Sarathchandra quotes Mrs. Rhys Davids from *Buddhist Psychology* (p.63) and includes in parentheses that this formulae “is one of the earliest”.

³³*Cakkhuṃ c'āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tato nidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasāṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu.* M. i, 111-112.

saṅkhārakkhandha,³⁴ the activity of the *saññākkhandha* must take place before *taṇhā* and after *vedanā*. The commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* further supports this claim, for it places the activity of *saññā* between *vedanā* and *cetanā*,³⁵ a synonym of *saṅkhāra* as seen on page 141.

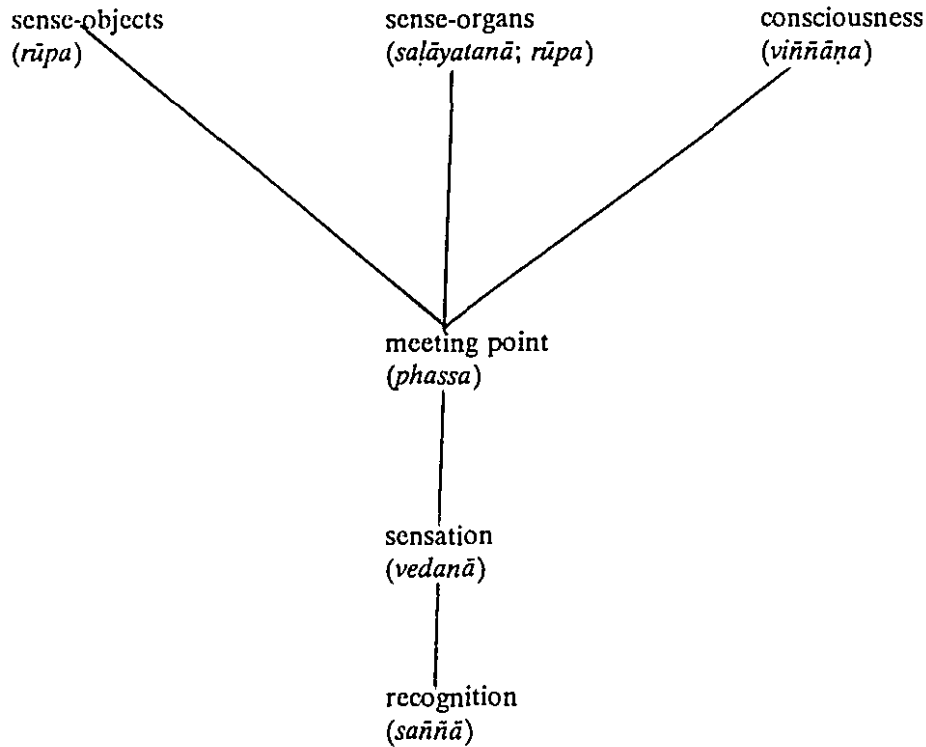
Stcherbatsky provided a diagram which clearly shows that the function of *saññā* is activated after the emergence of sensation (see Diagram X).³⁶

³⁴See page 164.

³⁵*Phassena pana phusitvā vedanāya vediyati saññāya sañjānati cetanāya ceteti.* DhsA. 107.

³⁶I have translated Stcherbatsky's Sanskrit terms into Pāli, and replaced some of the English equivalents by those that were used in this present work. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, vol. ii, 311.

Diagram X
The Emergence of sensation (*vedanā*)



As we demonstrated in the chapter on *vedanā*,³⁷ sensation in and of itself does not necessarily lead to craving. The *suttas* themselves distinguish between two kinds of sensations: those that are *āmisā* or *gehasitā* and others which are *nirāmisā* or *nekkhammasitā*. The difference is that the former act as potential agents in the future arising of craving while the latter do not. A certain *vedanā* may engender *taṇhā* only if it is accompanied by “unwholesome” *saññā*, for the latter is likely to give rise to *papañca*. Because

³⁷See page 106.

of this particular faculty of recognition, pleasant sensations are approached as likeable or dislikeable, and individuals very soon find themselves generating craving or aversion towards these sensations. Craving in turn generates more *saṅkhāras* and keeps the *bhavacakka* rotating.

The position traditionally attributed to *saññā* within the *pañcakkhandhas* is of crucial importance, since it is the relation between *vedanā* and *saññā* which is responsible for our bondage as well as our liberation. The *saññā* of an ordinary person (*puthujjana*) interprets and approaches the sensations as one's own property, considers them responsible for one's sorrow or happiness, and sets in motion the wheel of becoming; this would be what the *Sāratthappakāsinī* terms "unwholesome" *saññās*,³⁸ which in themselves constitute the *saññākkhandha*. The *Aṅguttaranikāya* indirectly states that a wise person utilizes ["wholesome"] *saññās* to develop *paññā*³⁹ and, not being misled as to the nature of sensations, does not generate craving or aversion, therefore putting a halt to the *bhavacakka*. This distinction between "unwholesome" and "wholesome" *saññā* is implicitly supported by many passages of the *Majjhimanikāya*. The function of *saññā*, as we remember, is to recognize and interpret perceptions through their principal marks (*nimitta*) and minor characteristics (*anubyañjana*). The texts state that those established in the noble discipline, when seeing a form with the eye, hearing a sound with the ears, etc., do not hold on to their principal

³⁸SA. ii, 382.

³⁹According to the *Girimānandasutta*, *paññā* is equated with the ten recognitions such as *aniccasaññā*, *anattasaññā*, *asubhasaññā*, and so on. A. v, 109.

marks (*nimitta*) and minor characteristics (*anubyañjana*), because doing so will lead to the arising of desire,⁴⁰ discontent and unwholesome states of mind.⁴¹ Therefore, since the function of *saññā* is precisely to hold to the principal marks and minor characteristics, we could say that [unwholesome] *saññā* is propitious to the emergence of desire. This is further evidenced by another passage of the *Majjhimanikāya*:

When he has seen a material shape (*rūpa*) through the eye, he feels attraction for agreeable material shapes, he feels repugnance for disagreeable material shapes; and he dwells without mindfulness aroused as to the body with a mind that is limited (*parittacetaso*), and he does not comprehend that freedom of mind (*cetavimutti*) and that freedom through intuitive wisdom (*paññāvimutti*) as they really are, whereby those evil unskilled states (*akusalā dhammā*) of his are stopped without remainder. Possessed thus of compliance and antipathy, whatever feelings (*vedanā*) he feels — pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant — he delights (*abhinandati*) in that feeling, welcomes (*abhivadati*) it and persists in cleaving (*ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati*) to it. From delighting in that feeling of his, from welcoming it, from persisting in cleaving to it, delight (*nandī*) arises; whatever is delight amid those feelings, that is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is birth; conditioned by birth, old age and dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair come into being. Such is the arising of this entire mass of anguish.⁴²

This passage clearly suggest that when a person generates attraction or repugnance to sensations (*vedanā*), craving — or actually, *nandī* — and attachment (*upādāna*) arise and the rest of links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* are automatically called in. What is important to notice is that attraction or repugnance are directly linked to the activity of *saññā*. When *saññā* is primarily focused on the principal marks (*nimitta*) and minor characteristics (*anubyañjana*) of the object, it is very likely that attraction or repugnance will

⁴⁰The word used is *abhijjā* which, according to the *Pāli Text Society Dictionary*, is synonymous with *lobha* and is closely connected with *taṇhā* and *upādāna*.

⁴¹M. i, 180-181; i, 270; i, 273; iii, 34-35.

⁴²M. i, 266. Translation from *Middle Length Sayings*, vol. i, p. 322-323.

be generated, and that craving and attachment will then follow. This is what is meant by “unwholesome” *saññā*. Tilmann Vetter has commented on the above passage:

One should not dwell on these impressions and thoughts a moment longer than is necessary to orientate oneself. If one goes too deeply into the principal marks [*nimitta*] of what is presented, or into minor features, than one cannot avoid the arising of desires and dejection and it will take a long time before these conditions disappear again.⁴³

However, Vetter seems to have left aside the “positive” aspect of *saññā*. It is clearly stated in the *Anguttaranikāya* that greed (*rāga*) cannot arise in one who is totally focused on the principal mark (*nimitta*) of *asubha*⁴⁴ — as we have seen, *asubha* is one of the ten *saññās* described in the *Girimānandasutta*. Although Vetter interprets the concept of *nimitta* as the principal marks of an object, we must stress that the principal marks of any phenomenon are the three characteristics of existence — *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha*. Vetter uses the term *nimitta* in the sense of “outward appearance”, while its signification also includes other characteristics. Yet, in the sense that Vetter uses the term, he is correct: one focusing on the principal marks which only reflect the outside appearance of an object will eventually generate desire. However, one focussing on the essential characteristics of every object — i.e., the three characteristics of existence and the other “positive *saññās*” — will eradicate greed. Therefore, when *saññā* is primarily focussed on these three characteristics of existence, craving cannot be generated, for the person will understand the true nature of the object as well as the danger of associating any form of delight (*abhinandati*) with it. The recognition of these three

⁴³Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, p. 24.

⁴⁴*Asubhanimittan ti'ssa vacanīyaṃ. Tassa asubhanimittam yoniso manasikarato anuppanno c'eva rāgo n'uppajjati uppanno ca rāgo pahīyati ti. A. i, 200-201.*

marks of existence, as well as the other characteristics described in the *Girimānandasutta*, is the function of *saññā* that we termed “wholesome”. We must stress, however, that these “wholesome” *saññās* do not belong to the *saññākkhandha*. As we saw on page 129, the essential function of the *saññākkhandha* is to apprehend a *nimitta* (sign). The fact that the three characteristics of existence — *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha* — are never considered *nimittas* and, furthermore, that they are classified as *animittas*, implies that the “wholesome” *saññā* does not apprehend *nimittas* and, therefore, does not belong to the *saññākkhandha*. It becomes clear that *saññā*, as “unwholesome” or “wholesome”, plays a crucial role between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*, for desire will or will not arise depending on the kind of *saññā* present. The inclusion of *saññā* between these two links of *vedanā* and *taṇhā* further clarifies the emergence of *saṅkhāra*.

As we have hitherto suggested, the first part of *saṅkhāra* does not refer to all activities but only to actions that have previously been conditioned by the *saññā*. In other words, any action performed with the base of craving or aversion — which arose due to the activity of *saññā* — is a *saṅkhāra*, since *saññā* predisposes a certain person to react blindly to the sensations. However, actions performed with wisdom as their foundation do not result in *saṅkhāra* since, as seen previously, sensations approached as impermanent cannot give rise to craving and aversion.

By mere analysis of this middle *nāmarūpa* group of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, we have explained every one of the *pañcakkhandhas*.

Diagram XI shows which elements of the middle link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* are correlated with which *khandha*.

| Diagram XI | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Correlation between the <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> and the <i>khandhas</i> | |
| <u>elements of the <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i></u> | <u>corresponding <i>khandha</i></u> |
| <i>viññāṇa</i> (consciousness) | <i>viññāṇa</i> |
| <i>nāmarūpa</i> (mind and matter) | the five <i>khandhas</i> |
| <i>saḷāyatanā</i> (the six sense-doors) | <i>rūpa</i> |
| <i>phassa</i> (sensory stimuli) | <i>rūpa</i> |
| <i>vedanā</i> (sensation) | <i>vedanā</i> |
| <----- | <i>saññā</i> |
| <i>taṇhā</i> (craving) | <i>saṅkkhāra</i> |
| <i>upādāna</i> (attachment) | <i>saṅkhāra</i> |
| <i>bhava</i> (becoming) | <i>saṅkhāra</i> |

7.5 Summary

We have seen, then, that each of the five aggregates finds a specific place in the theory of dependent origination. We have also explained that the *saññākkhandha* plays a critical role in the multiplication of misery, for it seems to be the faculty that is indirectly responsible for transforming *vedanā* into *taṇhā*. When *vedanā* is coloured by the faculty of recognition, craving

and attachment arise.⁴⁵ Yet, if one deactivates the inherently “unwholesome” *saññākkhandha*, or transforms it into the ten recognitions mentioned in the *Girimanandasutta*, *taṇhā* is no longer produced, because *paññā*, and not wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*), arises from the activity of this “wholesome” *saññā*. The chain of dependent origination is thus broken and the final goal of enlightenment is ultimately reached. However, this process of liberation is gradual in the sense that liberation is not necessarily attained the instant that one ceases to generate *saññā* and begins to develop *paññā*. Even when a person observes sensations with the understanding of their true nature (*anicca*, *anatta* and *dukkha*) and does not generate new cravings, the *bhavacakka* keeps turning. The force that activates the motion of the wheel results from *saṅkhāra*. Even when one does not produce new ones, old *saṅkhāras* will still continue to bear fruit in the form of new *viññāṇa*, *rūpa*, and *vedanā*. However, by failing to react or impose particular evaluations on these newly arisen *vedanās*, one does not generate new *kammas* and eradicates the fruits of the old *saṅkhāras*. In the presence of constant awareness, keen diligence and strong *paññā* — which arises from “wholesome” *saññā* —, new *saṅkhāras* cannot arise from sensations since “unwholesome” *saññā* no longer exists to react to sensations with craving and aversion. The old *saṅkhāras* will eventually all come up to the surface and pass away. As the Buddha once told Ānanda:

⁴⁵See p. 117 ff.

Indeed, all karmic activities (*saṅkhāra*) are transient. Arising and passing away is their true nature (*dharmīno*). When they arise and vanish, the tranquility attained from such eradication is the real happiness.⁴⁶

This process of eradication can be compared to the process of fasting. If one ceases to give food to the body, one does not die immediately the first meal is missed. Rather, one can survive without eating for perhaps two or three months. This is possible even though the body has to feed itself at every moment, because the body is able to break down and digest the old stock of food, i.e., all the fat and muscle previously accumulated. Not until this storage of nutriment has been consumed and only skin and bones remain will the body finally die, no more sustenance being available. In a similar manner, the *nāmarūpa* phenomenon needs to be fed at every moment by *saṅkhāras* which are constantly resulting from craving and aversion towards *vedanās*.⁴⁷ But if one remains in a state of equanimity characterized by *paññā*, and does not react to sensations, the past *saṅkhāras* that are responsible for the arising of these very sensations dissolve, and a time comes when not a single *saṅkhāra* is left to propel the *bhavacakka*. It is at this moment only that one attains or enters into “*nibbana* without residue” (*nirupādisesanibbāna*), the final goal of true liberation.

⁴⁶ *Aniccāvata saṅkhārā uppādavaya dhammino; uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukho ti.* D. ii, 199. This same passage was uttered by Sakka in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* at D. ii, 156.

⁴⁷ The *Majjhimanikāya* supports our simile by mentioning that four kinds of substance are found, namely material food, *phassa*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*. *Kaḷaṇṇikāro āhāro olāriko vā sukhumo vā, phasso duttiyo, manosañcetanā tatiyo, viññāṇam catuttho.* (M. i, 48.) Although the term *saṅkhāra* is not used explicitly in this text, the word used (*manosañcetanā*) can be directly related to *saṅkhāra*. Such is the description of *manosañcetanā* of the *Paramatthamañjūsā* (VsmA. 335; reported by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*, *The Path of Purification*, p. 372, note #2.)

Conclusion

Although many scholars have referred to the five aggregates in their works on Buddhism, none have thoroughly explained their respective functions. In attempting to explain the importance of this previously untreated subject, this thesis has circumscribed the meaning and the role of each of the five aggregates and has established a correlation between each of the aggregates and certain links of the *paṭīccasamuppāda*.

In our discussion of the *rūpakkhandha*, we discovered that the many classifications of this aggregate could be condensed and divided into two major categories: those elements belonging to the sense-organs, and those pertaining to the sense-objects. When approached from these two categories, the *rūpakkhandha* can be integrally correlated to two links of the *paṭīccasamuppāda*, namely *saḷāyatanā* and *phassa*, — “contact”. All the sense-organs except *mano* belong to *saḷāyatanā*, while the sense-objects along with *mano* are included in *phassa*. When these sense-objects are actually perceived, they, along with consciousness and the sense-organs, constitute *phassa*: bare sensory experience, devoid of any subjective inclination which possesses the potentiality to become a sensation (*vedanā*).

We understood that no distinction is found between the *vedanākkhandha* and *vedanā* as a member of the chain of dependent origination. We explored how *vedanā*, like *rūpa*, was also classified according

to different schemes, such as *nirāmisā*, *nekkhamasitā*, *āmisā* and *gehasitā*. We came to the conclusion that a certain means of approaching any *vedanā* would transform it into *nirāmisā* or *nekkhammasitā vedanā*, which are of an inoffensive nature, while an alternative approach would transform the *vedanā* into *āmisā* or *gehasitā vedanās*, which are endowed with a negative connotation because this type of sensation may act as agent in bringing about the future arising of craving and aversion. We have presented evidence which supports the thesis that the factor responsible for this second approach to *vedanā* is the next aggregate: *saññā* (recognition). It is this third aggregate that will transform the sensation into a *nirāmisā* (or *nekkhamasitā*) or an *āmisā* (or *gehasitā*). This transformation is thus responsible for the generation or eradication of craving.

The main function of the *saññākkhandha* is to recognize and interpret sensations through the imposition of certain categories. Yet not all *saññās* belong to the *saññākkhandha*. To clarify this nuance, it was necessary to elaborate a scheme dividing *saññās* into two categories. The “wholesome” *saññās* are recognitions of, in short, the three characteristics of existence. These do not belong to the *saññākkhandha* as such for they do not apprehend “signs” (*nimitta*). The “unwholesome” *saññās*, on the other hand, are simply certain interpretations of reality through the major signs. The latter type of *saññās* are not conducive to insight; they generate *papañca*, and essentially constitute the *saññākkhandha*. Upon recognizing, within the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the presence of the *saññākkhandha* between the two links of *vedanā* and *taṇhā*, we realized the major role played by this aggregate in the arising of craving and aversion, for unless an individual’s faculty of

recognition is governed by the “wholesome” *saññās*, that individual is likely to generate craving, clinging, and becoming, all of which fall under the next aggregate: *saṅkhāra*.

Again, the *saṅkhārakkhandha* was analyzed in terms of different schemes. We came to the conclusion that the *saṅkhārakkhandha* is definitely a *saṅkhāra* in the sense of *saṅkhata-dhamma* since it has been formed and conditioned. Yet not all *saṅkhāras* belong to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, since they are not all endowed with the capacity of “forming” or generating more *saṅkhata-dhammas*. A *saṅkhata-dhamma* can only produce other *saṅkhata-dhammas* when working in conjunction with *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *rūpa*; in other words, only the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, which, by definition, is closely connected to the four other *khandhas*, can produce *saṅkhata-dhammas*. This implies that *saṅkhāra* as a *paccaya* is simply a paraphrase of *saṅkhārakkhandha*. Both these terms refer to a force that will generate an effect. The effect, however, although being *saṅkhata* in the sense that it has been caused, does not necessarily belong to the *paccaya* or the *saṅkhārakkhandha* categories for it might not generate a further effect. We have also correlated the *saṅkhārakkhandha* with three of the links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*: *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* — the three links responsible for the emergence of a new existence, a new consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

We have seen that *viññāṇakkhandha* is variously translated. Some scholars hold that it means “bare sensation”, some, “pure consciousness” and others, the cognition of something pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. However, none of these suppositions seems to be totally accurate, since the

viññāṇakkhandha is responsible for the cognition of all of these. Hence we defined the term as “mere consciousness”, whether that consciousness be of *rūpa*, *vedanā* or *saññā*. We have also examined the difference between *mano* and *viññāṇa* itself. Both are necessary for perception of thoughts or concepts (*dhammas*), but only the latter is necessary for the apprehension of stimuli from any of the other sense-organs. Finally, we have established a correlation between the third link of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* — *viññāṇanidāna* — and the *viññāṇakkhandha*.

By correlating the five aggregates, in the order they traditionally appear,¹ with the theory of dependent origination, we have presented evidence supporting the significance of their traditional nomenclature. The traditional order of the five aggregates is in perfect harmony with the theory of dependent origination. If the order of the aggregates were arranged differently, there would be a definite contradiction between the two theories. Having correlated these two theories, we discovered that *viññāṇa*, which can cyclically manifest itself as either the last or first member, is a necessary condition for the arising of matter (*rūpa*), which in turns conditions sensations (*vedanā*). Sensation is necessary for the emergence of recognition (*saññā*) which might lead to karmic activities (*saṅkhāras*) if the recognition is unwholesome — and therefore belongs to the *saññākkhandha* —, or to wisdom (*paññā*) if the recognition is wholesome. If a *saṅkhāra* is generated, then the grounds for the arising of a new *viññāṇa* are prepared. Thus, the

¹With the sole exception of *viññāṇa* which appears as the last member and was moved to the first place, for reasons explained on p. 188 ff.

cycle is complete: from *viññāṇa* to *viññāṇa*. Beings are trapped within a quasi-eternal round of birth, death and rebirth.

The Buddhist tradition usually explains the process that binds beings to *saṃsāra* by use of the twelvefold chain of dependent origination in direct order (*anuloma*). This same process when viewed in the reverse order (*paṭiloma*) is perceived as a soteriological indicator by virtue of the implication that the chain can be broken. Thus the doctrine of dependent origination plays an irrevocably crucial role in Buddhism: it elucidates the process necessary for attaining enlightenment. It is probably for this reason that canonical literature states that “whoever understands the *paṭiccasamuppāda* understands the *dhamma*, and whoever understands the *dhamma* understands the *paṭiccasamuppāda*”.² While the theory of dependent origination has been allotted such great importance, the five aggregates have never received much emphasis in terms of the process that leads to *nibbāna*. Nevertheless, the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a process that takes place within every individual, and since Buddhism describes the individual as constituted of the five aggregates, these aggregates must mirror the process hinted at by the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. By correlating the five aggregates with the theory of dependent origination, I have presented evidence that shows how the process which binds beings to *saṃsāra* is reflected in the five aggregates, thus transposing Buddhist soteriology into a more concrete psychological framework.

²*Yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati, yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatīti.* M. i, 190-1.

Not having undergone training in modern psychology, I cannot establish parallels between Buddhist psychology — as evidenced by the function of the five aggregates — and modern psychology. Yet, since this thesis thoroughly explains the workings of each of the five aggregates, I believe that it could serve as a useful tool for those more familiar with modern psychology wishing to pursue this parallel. In *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, Kalupahana has already established certain correlations between Buddhist psychology and the theories of William James. Because the science of psychology has evolved tremendously since James, much work still remains to be done on the subject and, hopefully, this thesis will prove to be useful for those wishing to investigate the matter further.

This study should also have an impact on Buddhist hermeneutics. Buddhism admits different levels of truth (*sacca*). The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is classified as *paramatthasacca*, or the highest truth, while the five aggregates are usually categorized as *samuttisacca* — conventional truth — or as *paññattisacca* — doctrinal truth. So far, scholars have attempted to categorize canonical statements into one level of interpretation without trying to establish parallels between them. Each level has been approached as exclusive. This study of the five aggregates has revealed that correlations between different levels can be established — at least between the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the *pañcakkhandhās* — and, hopefully, might provide motivation for scholars to further investigate the matter between other elements classified into different levels of truth. This approach could lead to a more comprehensive Buddhist hermeneutics, where the levels of truths are not necessarily opposed to each other.

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