

## CONCEPT OF SAÑKHARA DUKKHA

### Dhammasari

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**Paper Received On:** 21 JULY 2021

**Peer Reviewed On:** 31 JULY 2021

**Published On:** 1 SEPT 2021



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### Introduction

The term *sañkhāra* has various shade of meaning according to the different contexts. It has a multiple combination with other Buddhist philosophical terms, which totally has an effect on its original meaning and brings about a much wider and complicated import of this term. It can be said that the term *sañkhāra* is much more flexible compared with other Buddhist philosophical terms. In the five *Nikāyas*, it appears in combinations with different words as *dukkha* and *upadhi*. Now the different combinations of this term, *sañkhāradukkha*, will be explained in the paper. It is found in *Dukkha-pañhāsutta* *Dukkhatā sutta* (*Sanyuttanikāya*) and *Saṅgiti sutta* (*Dighanikāya*). In these suttas, the term *sañkhāradukkha* appears as one of three kinds of *dukkha*, namely, *dukkha-dukkha* (intrinsic suffering), *vipariṇāma dukkha* (suffering in change) and *sañkhāra dukkha* (suffering due to formation). In the *Dutiya vedanā sutta* of the *Itivuttaka*, it is indirectly expressed using the word '*adukkhamasukhan*' as its synonym. It is necessary to mention here the verse of the *Itivuttaka* which indirectly states the three kinds of *dukkha*. The verse is as follows;

*Yosukhandukkhato adda, dukkhamaddakkhisallato,*

*Adukkhamasukhansantan, adakkhi nananiccato.*

One who sees pleasurable feeling as suffering, painful feeling as a dart and neither-painful-nor-pleasurable feeling as impermanence.

### Word-formation of *Dukkha* and its Types

It is so essential to make a through examination of the meaning of *dukkha* and its types for a person who wants to realize the connotation of '*sañkhāradukkha*'. The word *dukkha* is traditionally formed of '*du*' and '*khan*'. '*Du*' means 'bad' like '*du*' in the word  
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'duputta' (bad son), and 'kham' implies 'empty' just as space is called 'khan' because it is vacant. *Dukkha* is bad because it is the haunt of many dangers, and it is empty because it is devoid of the lastingness, beauty, pleasure, and self, conceived by the rash people. The *Pāli* word '*dukkha*' is equivalent to the Sanskrit word '*duhkha*' (*duh+kha*). The Sanskrit word '*dukkha*' means 'uneasy, uncomfortable, and unpleasant, pain, sorrow, and trouble'. '*Kha*' in Sanskrit also means 'whole or empty space'. The *Pāli* term '*dukkha*' has a much wider meaning than the Sanskrit word because the implication of '*dukkha*' in *Pāli* can embrace every phase of things in the world as well as uneasiness and pain. The '*Visuddhimagga*' states the meaning of '*dukkha*' and its characteristics. The following four meanings of '*dukkha*' run as follows;

"Suffering has meaning of oppressing, of being formed, of burning, of changing. These are suffering's four meanings, which are real, not changeable and not otherwise."

The '*Visuddhimagga*' mentions the characteristic of '*dukkha*'. The truth of suffering has the characteristic of afflicting. Its function is to burn and it is manifested as occurrence or as the course of existence.

The complete list of *dukkha* can be found in the '*Mahānidessa*', and the '*Cūlanidessa*'. Here it should be divided into two types; (i) the first type belongs to all kinds of suffering; (ii) the second belongs to each particular name described in the definition of '*dukkha*'. Seven kinds of suffering are included in the first type. They are as follows;

- (1) *Dukkha-dukkha* = intrinsic suffering.
- (2) *Vipariṇāmadukkha* = suffering because of change.
- (3) *Saṅkhāradukkha* = suffering due to formations.
- (4) *Paticchannadukkha* (*apākatadukkha*) = concealed suffering (evident suffering).
- (5) *Appaticchannadukkha* (*pākatadukkha*) = exposed suffering (evident suffering).
- (6) *Pariyāya dukkha* = indirect suffering.
- (7) *Nipariyāya dukkha* = direct suffering.

(1) *Dukkha dukkha* is the name of mental pain (*dukkha vedanā*), which itself is suffering with its nature and trait. So, it is said 'intrinsic suffering'. It can indicate any kind of painfulness people have in their mind. According to the *Sacca-yamaka*, there is the distinction between these two words '*dukkha*' (suffering) and '*dukkha-sacca*' (the Truth of Suffering). It states that the *dukkha-dukkha* can be counted as a *dukkha* as well as *dukkha-*

*sacca*, but the remaining two types, *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and *saṅkhāra-dukkha*, are comprised only of '*dukkha-sacca*', not of '*dukkha*'. Here there is need to say that the type of *dukkha-dukkha*' is applied in the name of '*kāyika-dukkha* and *cetasika-dukkha*' in the *Sacca-yamaka*.

(2) *Vipariṇāmadukkkha* is the name of pleasurable physical sensations arising from agreeable tactile impressions known as a *kāyasukha* and joyful state of mind arising from reviewing pleasant sense-objects known as *Cetasikasukha*. These two forms of happy states please everyone, every creature. All beings go after these two happy states day and night, even risk their lives and when these are attained, their happiness knows no bound. Nevertheless, while they are rejoicing with blissful contentment, if the sense-objects which have given them such intense delight and enjoyment disappear or get destroyed, great would be their agitation followed by intense distress.

When the wealth they have accumulated in the form of gold, money or property suddenly gets lost for different reasons, when death or separation comes to one's beloved member of the family, spouse or children, intense grief and distress ensue, which may even cause mental derangement. Thus, these two forms of happiness, *kāyasukha* and *cetasikasukha*, are also a type of suffering known as the *vipariṇāma dukkha*, suffering because of change. While they last, they may appear very enjoyable, only to be replaced by extreme grief and despair when they vanish. It seems superficially agreeable the moment one enjoys it. But when it ceases, it leaves psychologically emptiness which torments and gives more painful feeling. Therefore, the pleasant feeling is called *vipariṇāmadukka* (suffering in change).

(3) The neutral condition which by its nature is neither painful nor pleasurable is termed equanimous feeling, *upekkhāvedanā*. This neutral equanimity does not exist permanently. It needs constant maintenance of necessary conditions for continuity of this medial state. This implies laborious effort which, of course, is *dukkha*. Hence this equanimous feeling, neither painful nor pleasurable, is termed *saṅkhāradukkkha*. In addition to this equanimous feeling, all the other formations of *nāma* and *rūpa* of the mundane sphere are also called *saṅkhāra-dukkha* as they need constant conditioning. Feeling of happiness also requires constant conditioning for its maintenance and as such should be classified as *saṅkhāra dukkha*, but the commentators left it out of this classification as it had been given a separate name as *vipariṇāmadukkkha*. Nevertheless, it should be regarded as

*saṅkhāradukkha* too since it is very plain that considerable application is needed for its maintenance.

The equanimous feeling and the remaining formations of three planes are called '*saṅkhāradukkha*' (suffering due to formations) because they are oppressed by the arising and disappearing (*udaya-vaya*). Here is a formula whatever is impermanent is suffering in the '*Aṅguttaranikāya*'. "According to this formula, the former two kinds of suffering are also included in the *saṅkhāradukkha*," states Ven. Mahāsi Sayadaw in his work named '*Visuddhimagga-Myanmar Translation*'. Excluding the *Nibbāna*, everything in three planes enters into the range of '*saṅkhāradukkha*'.

There is a different definition of the word '*saṅkhāra-dukkha*' which is found in the *Paramatthadīpani*, the exposition of the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*. Ledi Sayadaw, the author of *Paramatthadīpani*, gives new connotation of the term '*saṅkhāradukkha*,' which is more coherent and less complicated than the commentarial notes. According to Ledi Sayadaw, the term '*saṅkhāra-dukkha*' implies "the act of performing good and bad deeds, searching for food, keeping one's body, various kinds of preparation for living and so on." The *Vijjāmagga-dīpani* divides '*saṅkhāradukkha*' into two kinds, namely, *santatisaṅkhāradukkha* and *khaṇikasaṅkhāradukkha*. '*Santatisaṅkhāradukkha*' is the effort to bring about *Santati*, e.g., to cook rice one has to harvest corn, to reap it and to store it. Those kinds of works are called '*santatisaṅkhāradukkha*'. From *Abhidhamma* aspect, mind and matter arise and perish every moment and every second. These changes of phenomena are so rapid that any worldly knowledge cannot perceive them. The rapid arising and disappearing of things are called '*khaṇikasaṅkhāradukkha*'.

(4) Such bodily and mental affliction as ear-ache, toothache, fever born of lust, fever born of hate, etc., is called *paticchannadukkha* (concealed suffering)' because it can only be known by questioning and the affliction is not obvious; it is also called *apākatadukkha* (unevident suffering)'. The suffering of that sort can be said 'individual suffering' which is difficult to be recognized by the other person.

(5) The misery produced by the thirty-two tortures, etc., is called *appaticchannadukkha* (exposed suffering) because it can be known without questioning, or *pākatadukkha* (evident suffering) because it is very obvious and easily noticeable.

(6) Except intrinsic suffering, all kinds of suffering stated in the exposition of the Truth of Suffering beginning with birth are also called *pariyāyadukkha* (indirect suffering)

because they act as the reasons for suffering. It cannot be said directly that they are themselves suffering because they are not associated with *consciousness accompanied by pain (Dukkha-sahagata-kāyaviññānacitta)*.

### **Three Kinds of *Dukkha* in the Human World**

In the case of men, mental and physical phenomena in their *khandhas* always burden them in three ways of *sankhata*, *santāpa* and *vipariṇāma*.

(1) *Saṅkhata dukkha*; as they have not to attempt very hard accumulating wholesome *kamma* (i.e., *saṅkhatadukkha*), their burden of *santāpa* is very heavy, and is a hundred thousand times greater than that of a *deva*. Their time of departure comes to them very quickly. Their life-span is an infinitesimal fraction compared to that of *deva*.

(2) How heavily the *khandhas* of men are burdened by way of *santāpamāyā* be explained as follows. The trouble with the conception in the womb of a mother, the trouble with being born, the trouble with the need to live warm when residing in a cool region during the cold weather, the trouble with living in torrid zone and exposing oneself to the heat of the scorching sun, the blowing of hot wind and the biting by flies and fleas, the immense trouble to be undertaken by a cultivator to cultivate his lands amidst those troubles for the purpose of his livelihood, the trouble of serving under a government, the trouble of having to transact civic duties, the trouble concerning one's kith and kin, the trouble of feeding the so-called body morning and evening so that it may live, the trouble of changing the postures every now and then as one is not able to remain for long in any one posture during one of the four modes of deportment, the trouble of supplying nutritive essence to the defilements that arise at the six sense-doors and which may be compared to ogres and demons. These are all suffering which are the common ways of the world.

There are other kinds of suffering like the troubles out of the enjoyment of sensuous pleasures, the troubles south of earning a livelihood by performing evil deeds, the trouble of maintaining wife and children, the trouble of becoming a man among people who profess a faith involving wrong views, thus dragging him to woeful plane as long as he remains in that clan or nation, the trouble arising from self-mortification by living near fire during the hot season and by remaining in the water during the cold season, etc., which are fruitless and are the practices of people of wrong views, the trouble connected with diseases, bruises, wounds and pains, and the immense troubles caused by external enemies, such as water, fire, thieves, rulers and those disliked. Thus, the burdens of *santāpa* for human beings, in the round of

*samsāra* are various and heavy. The body of human beings burdens them in such a manner by way of *santāpa*.

(3) Five aggregates of human beings torment them by way of changing (*vipariṇāma*). To be born in the human world is one opportunity, and even when a being arises as a man, he is liable to die at any moment from the time of conception in the mother's womb up to the end of the span of his life.

Thus, at the embryonic stage immediately formed after conception, a being has the appearance of a little drop of butter-oil scum attached to a fine woolen thread. Then follows the *abbuda* (an oval shaped tiny mass), then the *pesi* (the lump of flesh), then the *ghana* (clot), then the *pasākha* (off-shoot), in which later stage, arms, legs, etc., are forming. In the whole of the round of rebirths, a being arises and perishes countless times in any one of the above-mentioned stages of life. Thus, *khandha* of men burden them in four ways, and so this is purely *dukkha-saccā*.

Knowledge of *saṅkhāra* is an important factor that provides a clear insight of Buddhist philosophy. The comprehension of this term is indispensable key to open the treasury of Buddhist wisdom and to attain *Nibbāna*, the emancipation of all forms of suffering. From the previous explanations of *saṅkhāra*, it can be concluded that when either formulation of aggregates or Dependent Origination or all forms of mental and material phenomena are described in Buddhist scriptures, the term which is widely put into use by *Suttas*, commentaries and sub-commentaries is *saṅkhāra*.

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