
Encyclopedia of Indian Religions

Series Editor
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Editors

Buddhism and Jainism

With 187 Figures and 1 Table

 Springer

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ISBN 978-94-024-0851-5 ISBN 978-94-024-0852-2 (eBook)
ISBN 978-94-024-0853-9 (print and electronic bundle)
DOI 10.1007/978-94-024-0852-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016953015

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Printed on acid-free paper

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The registered company address is: Van Godewijkstraat 30, 3311 GX Dordrecht, The Netherlands

monks and nuns began to live in monasteries located in the vicinity of human settlements and became known as the *ārāmikās* (monastery dwellers). Originally, the monks were enjoined to live only on alms, but in courses of time, the rule was relaxed and they were allowed to accept invitations when extended to a particular Saṃgha as a body, or to a group of individual monks or nuns. Each Saṃgha was defined by a shared recitation of the Pātimokkha at the bimonthly *Uposatha* (confession ceremony) and an earmarked *sīma* (boundary) established for the purposes of the different ceremonies such as the *Vassāvāsa* (rainy retreat) and the *Uposatha*.

Initially, the general code of behavior followed by the Buddhists was not much different from the one followed by other ascetics. However, after the number of Buddhist monks and nuns grew substantially and it became imperative to have an appropriate code of conduct to control undisciplined members, the Buddha decided to formulate a disciplinary code of conduct (*Vinaya*) in tune with his own teaching (*buddhavacana*). Once this process of preparing the code of conduct began, revision, emendation, and expansion of these rules continued till final form in the shape of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* was achieved. All aspects of the lives of the *bhikkhus* and the *bhikkhunīs* have been dealt with in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. The code of conduct consists of matters relating to the probationary period and initiation, training under the *ācariya* and *upajjhāya*, daily chores of life pertaining to food, dress, and other articles of use, lodgings and the manner of residing in them, different religious ceremonies such as the *Uposatha*, the *Vassāvāsa*, the *Pavāraṇā*, and the *Kaṭhina*, ecclesiastical procedure for the imposition of punishment, as well as release from guilt, schism in the Saṃgha, and the procedure for settling disputes among the members. The *bhikkhus* and the *bhikkhunīs* were provided with separate codes of conduct by the Buddha.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bhikkhunī](#)
- ▶ [Dhamma](#)
- ▶ [Pātimokkha](#)

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Samjhanaa

- ▶ [Education \(Jainism\)](#)

Saṃkhāra

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Synonyms

Formations; [Saṃskāra \(Buddhism\)](#); [Saṃskāra](#) (Sanskrit)

Definition

The term *saṅkhāra* combines *kāra*, “making,” with the prefix *saṃ*, “together,” and thus has the literal sense of a “making together.” Such making together can convey an active as well as a passive sense, representing that which makes together and that which is made together.

In its early Buddhist usage, the term *saṅkhāra* thus has three main meanings:

- As the fourth of the five aggregates, *khandha*
- As the second link in the formula of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*
- As anything conditioned, this being the most general sense of the term

The Aggregate of *Saṅkhāras*

In early Buddhist thought, the individual is analyzed into five aggregates affected by clinging, which are bodily form, feeling, perception, *saṅkhāras*, and consciousness. The *saṅkhāras* as the fourth of these five aggregates represent the conative aspect of mental experience and thus stand predominantly for volition. In this role, the aggregate of *saṅkhāras* comprises past, present, and future volitional formations, be they internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, (concerned with what is) far or near.

While the aggregates of feeling and consciousness relate to the sense doors, the aggregates of perception and *saṅkhāras* relate to the sense objects, that is, to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects ([1], Vol. III, p. 60). This suggests that, whereas feeling and consciousness are to some degree more on the inner and receptive side of mental experience, perception and *saṅkhāras* reach out to the object, so to say, recognizing it and reacting to it. In short, as an aggregate the *saṅkhāras* represent that part of the mind which reacts to experience.

A discourse describes how someone with telepathic powers is able to recognize the operation of the *saṅkhāras* in another's mind ([2], Vol. III, p. 104). According to this passage, once the volitional direction of such a *saṅkhāra* has been recognized through the exercise of telepathic powers, it will be possible to predict the type of thought that is about to arise in the other person's mind. This indicates that the *saṅkhāras* as volitional formations represent the beginning stages of mental activity, the first inclination or tendency that precedes the arising of thought, whose nature is determined by the directional input provided by the *saṅkhāras*.

During later developments of Buddhist philosophy, the connotations of the term *saṅkhāra* as an aggregate expanded until it came to cover a wide range of meaning, becoming an umbrella term for various mental factors. In this way, the *saṅkhāras* came to stand for anything mental apart from the other three aggregates of feeling, perception, and consciousness.

This goes beyond the implications of the aggregate of *saṅkhāras* in the early Buddhist

discourses, which represents mainly the volitional aspect of mental experience. The fact that in descriptions of the aggregates the term *saṅkhāra* usually occurs in the plural form as well as the inherent nuance of the expression as a referent not only to what “makes together” but also to what “is made together” may have influenced the choice of the *saṅkhāras* as a heading for other mental factors and qualities.

Saṅkhāras in Dependent Arising

Early Buddhism analyzes the arising of *dukkha* – a term whose meaning ranges from barely noticeable dissatisfaction to outright suffering as inherent features of human existence – with the help of a series of conditions. The standard way of representing these conditions is by way of 12 links, which begin with ignorance as the root cause and lead up to the arising of *dukkha*.

In the context of this scheme, the *saṅkhāras* form the second link that leads from the first link of ignorance, *avijjā*, to the third link of consciousness, *viññāṇa*. According to the traditional interpretation, *saṅkhāras* in this context represent the karmically active volitional formations responsible for rebirth and continued existence. That is, in the context of dependent arising the *saṅkhāras* are the creative principle responsible for various forms of existence.

The function of the *saṅkhāras* in the context of rebirth can be seen, for example, in a discourse which describes how someone endowed with confidence or faith, morality, learning, generosity, and wisdom may have the aspiration to be reborn in a favorable situation as a human or in a heavenly realm. If this mental aspiration is developed and repeatedly cultivated, the person in question will indeed be reborn in that situation or realm ([3], Vol. III, p. 99). That is, repeatedly developing these types of *saṅkhāras* is what leads to the particular type of rebirth. Another discourse indicates that an aspiration for a favorable rebirth can also become effective if it is based on the meritorious deed of giving to recluses and Brahmins ([2], Vol. III, p. 258).

The importance of one's mental inclination is again highlighted in another discourse, which reports a discussion between the Buddha and two ascetics who had undertaken the practice of adopting the behavior of a dog and a cow, respectively ([3], Vol. I, p. 387). The discourse indicates that the mental inclination resulting from such a way of practice will simply lead to rebirth as a dog or a cow. The principle behind this is that *saṅkhāras* of a particular type will lead to a corresponding type of rebirth. Hence, someone whose *saṅkhāras* are similar to those of an animal will be reborn as an animal.

In more general terms, if *saṅkhāras* are of a harmful nature, for example, they will lead to a rebirth where harmful types of experiences are predominant. The same principle holds for *saṅkhāras* of a wholesome nature, which will lead to a positive type of rebirth. In this way, according to early Buddhism, each living being creates and forms its own character and existence, both in past lives and at every moment of present existence. This continuous process of creating and forming takes place through the medium of *saṅkhāras*.

Saṅkhāras in General

The term *saṅkhāra* in its general sense can cover all five aggregates. Such a usage occurs in a verse by a monk, who told a gang of criminals intending to murder him that he was free from fear, since from his perspective there was no "I" to be killed, but only *saṅkhāras* will pass away ([4], 715). A similar usage recurs in a verse by a nun ([1], Vol. I, p. 135), who in reply to a challenge points out that the challenger's notion of a (substantial) "being" was mistaken, since in reality there is just a heap of *saṅkhāras*.

As mentioned above, the term *saṅkhāra* can assume an active as well as a passive sense. In the case of the more general usage of the term, the active mode underlies occurrences where the expression *saṅkhāra* represents the cause or condition for something, while in the passive mode the *saṅkhāras* stand for whatever is a product of conditions.

An example of the active sense can be found in a passage which explains that unwholesome things arise due to a cause, *sasaṅkhārā*, not without a cause ([5], Vol. I, p. 82). The same general sense recurs in another passage according to which pain or pleasure arises due to a cause, *sasaṅkhārā* ([1], Vol. V, p. 213). In these instances, *saṅkhāra* refers to the presence of a "cause" or a "condition."

The passive mode of the term *saṅkhāras* in its general usage stands for all conditioned phenomena. Examples of this usage can be found in two discourses ([2], Vol. II, p. 198 and [1], Vol. III, p. 146), which describe the splendor and immense wealth possessed by a former king, all of which has changed and passed away. The word used in this context to refer to the former splendor and wealth is *saṅkhāra*. A similar usage occurs in another discourse, which describes a worldwide drought that leads to the drying up of all water and the destruction of all life, illustrating the impermanent nature of all *saṅkhāras* ([5], Vol. IV, p. 100). Thus, all of existence can be covered by the term *saṅkhāra*, in the sense of things that are produced through conditions.

The same general usage underlies what according to tradition was the last instruction given by the Buddha before passing away, which highlights the impermanent nature of all conditioned phenomena, *vayadhammā saṅkhārā* ([2], Vol. II, p. 156). This theme recurs in a set of stanzas, according to which all *saṅkhāras* are impermanent and unsatisfactory and all dharmas are not-self ([6], 277–279).

Of all *saṅkhāras* (in the sense of conditioned phenomena), the noble eightfold path is the best ([5], Vol. II, p. 34). This noble eightfold path is a summary of what according to early Buddhism is required for progress to liberation, namely, rightly directed view, intentions, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Although the noble eightfold path is conditioned and thus takes part in what is covered by the term *saṅkhāra* in its widest usage, the goal itself is beyond all *saṅkhāras* ([6], 154). According to early Buddhism, Nirvāṇa is neither "formed" nor "made up" or "conditioned," but rather is "unconditioned," *asaṅkhata* ([7], p. 80).

Thus, only Nirvāṇa lies beyond the range of *saṅkhāras* even in their most general sense, being in fact the “stilling of all *saṅkhāras*.” Such stilling of all *saṅkhāras*, a stanza exclaims, is happiness indeed ([6], 368, 381).

Cross-References

- ▶ [Causality \(Buddhism\)](#)
- ▶ [Khandha](#)
- ▶ [Paṭicca Samuppāda](#)

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Sammāditṭhi

- ▶ [Ethics \(Buddhism\)](#)

Saṃsāra

- ▶ [Rebirth \(Buddhism\)](#)

Saṃsāra (Buddhism)

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Synonyms

[Bhavacakka](#); [Bhavacakra](#); [Transmigration](#)

Definition

Nonstop cycle of birth, decay-and-death, rebirth, redecay-and-redeath whose beginning is unknown and which is characterized by mental and physical suffering.

In Buddhism, the term *saṃsāra* (transmigration lit. faring on, journeying, circulating, continuously flowing [like a river]) refers to the nonstop cycle of birth (*jāti*), decay-and-death (*jarāmaraṇa*), rebirth (*abhi-jāti*, *āgati*), and redecay-and-redeath. This process is also known as *bhavacakka* (Sk, *bhavacakra*) ([9], pp. 529, 576) that arises out of *avijjā* (Sk, *avidyā*, ignorance) and is characterized by impermanence and psychophysical suffering (Pāli, *dukkha*; Sk, *duḥkha*) ([1], Vol. ii, p. 6). The commencement of this process cannot be known with certainty. In fact, it is viewed as beginningless. As described by the Buddha to monks in one of the suttas: “Incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on. The earliest point is not revealed of the running on, fairing on, of beings cloaked in ignorance, tied to craving” ([5], Vol. ii, p. 120). Every living being (*jīva*) in the universe participates in this process of one existence after another (*gati bhavābhava cuti upapatti*). [8], p. 664) running into myriads of existences. In the Buddhist view of *saṃsāra*, “beings generally rise and fall, and fall and rise through the various realms, now experiencing unhappiness, now experiencing happiness. This precisely is the nature of *saṃsāra*: wandering from life to life with no particular direction or purpose” ([2], p. 119). The only way