



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE ABHIṆHA SUTTA FROM THE AṄGUTTARA NIKĀYA

Vilasadhmma

**Research Scholar, Centre For Mahayana Buddhist Studies,
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar , Andhra Pradesh, India.**

ABSTRACT:

The general conception of Paccavekkhana as mindful or wise reflection, is as a key principle in Buddhist meditation practice to get the knowledge which is associated with fear of Saṃsara or evil (saṃvegañāṇa) for the mediator. This study has affirmed Paccavekkhañāṇa as an approach to clear understanding of reality through initial training of mind as a primary behavioral modification to meditative concentration for Buddhist soteriology. The term 'Paccavekkhana' is characterized as the integrative intent for the sila-samādhi-pañña framework of Buddhist praxis. The Paccavekkhanā practice is most crucial for spiritual practice and it is actually a pragmatic advice for one's daily living. Hence, a right understanding of its value, internalization of it through a cultivation, and practical way of transforming Paccavekkhañāṇa into "walking the talk" via a daily check-list would give rise to a systematic and self-rectifying slant in one's dhamma faring in this AbhiṆha Sutta. This Sutta will be analyzed.



KEYWORDS: Paccavekkhana, Jāti, Jarā, Maraṇa, Nānābhāvavinābhāva, kamma.

INTRODUCTION:

People like to remain beautiful with youthful strength forever until their death. But old age is not at all welcoming phenomenon for majority who are in ignorance. People forget that they will die one day it is inevitable for all who were born in this world in some way or other reason. Since people believe that they do not want to hear about death because they think that hearing about death is unlucky for them. They live happily as if they will never die. Actually, old age, sickness and death are common events that were occurred in every one's life. If there is birth, there must be death for sure. All beings meet one another one day to separate later and they will face separation and departure in their lives. For one who never reflects these things will feel sorrow when he faces the loss of what is desired or wished. Sometimes one's properties are destroyed by five enemies, if he did not contemplate on *Kamma* and its result; he will be worried about the loss of his properties though he is proud of his own properties. Some people have strong attachment to their complexion, beautiful figure and good health but they will feel sorrow if their skin, figure and health are deteriorated in one way.

Birth, old age and death are the natural in all beings. It is the prevalence of birth (*Jāti*), old age (*Jarā*), and death (*Maraṇa*) that necessitates the appearance of Buddha in this world. It is stated that because of these three aspects of existence, birth, decay and death, the Buddha arises in the world to show the way out of the cycle of *saṃsāra*: "Monks, were not three states found existing in the world, the Buddha would not arise in the world, an Arahant rightly enlightened; nor would the *dhamma* discipline

proclaimed by the Buddha be shown in the world. The three states are: Birth, decay and death. These three states found existing in the world; the Buddha would not arise in the world. But since these three states are found therefore the Buddha does arise in the world, an Arahant rightly enlightened, and the *dhamma* discipline proclaimed by the Wayfarer is shown in the world” Only when these things exist in this world, the Buddha appears and preaches the *Dhamma* in order to be free from all sufferings. All beings that wander the round of rebirths will come across the five things depicted in this *AbhiṆha Sutta*.

The Occurrence of the AbhiṆha Sutta

Among the *Pāḷi* texts, there are two kinds of *AbhiṆha Suttas*. They are: *AbhiṆhapaccavekkhitabbathāna Sutta* in *Pañcakanipata*¹, *Aṅguttaranikaya* and *Pabbajita-abhiṆha Sutta* in *Dasaka-Nipata*², *Anguttaranikaya*. This *Sutta* is known as *AbhiṆha Sutta* among the Buddhists.

In the *Pāḷi*, commentary and sub-commentary, it is mentioned as *Abhinhapaccavekkhitabbathāna Sutta*. In this work, an emphasis is given to analyze on the *Abhinhapaccavekkhitabbathāna Sutta*, in *Pañcakanipata* from *Aṅguttaranikaya*.

Everyone cannot avoid these five things as mentioned in the *AbhiṆhapaccavekkhitabbathāna Sutta*. One who goes to deep forest should hold or keep knife, stick, weapon, etc., to stand against the danger of wild animals. It is not sure for one who goes in to the deep forest to face wild animals whereas it is sure for one who wanders in *Saṃsāra* surely facing these five terrible things mentioned in *AbhiṆha Sutta*. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha preached these ever contemplation things to hold as a weapon for everyone who wanders in *Saṃsāra*.

Etymological Point of Views on Terms in the Sutta

In the *AbhiṆhapaccavekkhitabbathāna Sutta*, there are many terms which are difficult to understand like; *AbhiṆha*, *Paccavekkhitabba*, and *Ṭhāna*. One who study this *sutta* should analyses these terms should be explained etymologically and analytically to understand these terms easily.

One who wants to contemplate on old age, sickness, death, separation and *kamma* and its results needs to grasp the meaning and the definition of the terms of them etymologically. Only when one understands precisely and thoroughly the definition of them, he can easily and correctly contemplate on these five things. Therefore, it is right time to state Etymological point of views of these terms in the *Sutta* with special reference to some discourses, commentaries and sub-commentaries with literary reviews.

Herein, Concise *Pāḷi*-English Dictionary states that The *Pāḷi* word ‘*AbhiṆha*’ (*Abhiṅṣṇa*, in Sanskrit.) means repeated, continuous, frequent, and habitual. The meaning of *AbhiṆha* is constantly or again and again. The Buddha admonished monks and laities to reflect on these five things again and again to get rid of prides. One who forgets these five things may commit any mistakes based on prides. So, the Buddha said ‘*Abhiṅṣaṃ*’³.

The term ‘*Paccavekkhitabba*’ or ‘*Paccavekkhana*’ or *pratyavekshana* (Skt.) is translated as ‘consideration, review, reflection, contemplation, looking at’ which is de-rived from *pati+ava+ikkh+a* which means wise consideration, contemplation, and reflection.

Dhammasangani commentary says that *dhammānaṃ sabhāvaṃ pati ikkhatīti paccavekkhaṇā*⁴; contemplation on the law of nature. Hence, the word *paccavekkhaṇā* has the sense of continually looking back upon, reflection upon the object, that is, recalling its true purpose. The word *paccavekkhana* is also used in the late sense.

¹ An. II. p.64.

² An. III. p.325.

³ T.W Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pāḷi i-En English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, 1997), p.64.

⁴ Abhi.A. I. p.269.

The word *paccavekkhanā* use in the *Pāḷi* canon *paccavekkhaṇāṇā*, “retrospective knowledge”. It means the recollected mental image obtained in mental concentration, or to any inner experience just passed, such as any dhyana, or supramundane path or path fruition.

Paṭisañcikkhaṇā, *Anupassaṇā*, *Anuvitakkatā*, *Yonisomanasikārā*, are also synonymous with the word *paccavekkhaṇā*. By studying these words etymologically one can understand easily the meaning of *paccavekkhanā*.

Paṭisañcikkhaṇā is derived from the words *paṭi+saṃ+cikkha*. Here, *paṭi* means ‘back (to)’, *saṃ* means ‘together, nearby’ and *cikkhati* means ‘tells’. So, the meaning of *Paṭisañcikkhaṇā* is thinking over, discriminates, considers, reflects.

Anupassanā is derived from words ‘*anu* and *passanā*’. Here, *anu* means ‘again and again’ and *passanā* means seeing. So, the term *Anupassanā* means ‘contemplation again and again’⁵.

Anuvitakkā is derived from the words *anu+vitakka*. *Anu* means continuing, following and *Vitakketi* means to thinking. Therefore, *anuvitakketi* means ‘to keep on thinking’.

The word *yonisomanasikāra* is derived from words of *yoniso* and *manasikāra*. The *Pāḷi* English Dictionary says ‘*yoniso*’ is in ablative case, and is defined as ‘down to its origin or foundation, i.e., thoroughly, orderly, wisely, properly, judiciously’. The term ‘*yonī*’ can mean ‘womb’; ‘realm of existence’, ‘nature’; or ‘thoroughness’, ‘knowledge’, ‘insight’. *Manasikāra* means ‘attention, pondering, and fixed thought’. The verbal form of this term is ‘*manasi karoti*’ which means ‘to fix the mind intently, to bear in mind, take to heart, ponder, think upon, consider, recognize’. Therefore, *Yonisomanasikāra* means wise reflection⁶.

The word ‘*thāna*’ is translated as place, condition, reason, cause and thing in *Ṭipitaka Pāḷi-Myanmar Dictionary*. Here, definition of thing is more proper for this word. The literal meaning of *Paccavekkhitabba-thāna* means ought to be contemplated upon the five things. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha said that essence of this *Sutta*. It is ought to be contemplated upon the five natural inevitable things by everyone again and again. (*Paccavekkhaṇā*).

MEDITATIONAL POINT OF VIEWS ON THE SUTTA

The Buddha preached two types of meditation such as *Samathabhāvanā*, and *Vipassanabhāvanā* (Tranquility meditation and Insight meditation). All Buddha’s Teachings have three stages, namely, *Sīla*, (morality) *Samādhi* (tranquility) and *Paññā* (wisdom). Of them, to acquire higher wisdom, tranquility plays an essential role in Buddhism. It is not too easy to attain higher knowledge without tranquility. The Buddha guided and gave many ways to increase concentration in his many discourses.

The Buddha taught His disciples to contemplate old age, sickness, death, separation or departure through tranquility meditation in this *AbhiṆha Sutta*. Besides, the Buddha preached inward seeing way called insight meditation way in *Sammāsa Sutta*⁷. This way is to see directly to objects. With the strength of mindfulness, concentration, effort and wisdom, seeing things as they really are is called inward seeing way. In this chapter, therefore, contemplation on old age, sickness, death, separation or departure through tranquility meditation and contemplation on reality through insight meditation should be studied by comparing on *AbhiṆha Sutta* in *Aṅguttaranikāya* and *Sammāsa Sutta* in *Saṃyuttanikāya*. The Buddha addressed to contemplate on the five natural inevitable things through tranquility meditation in this *Sutta*.

FIVE REFLECTIONS DESCRIBED IN ABHIṆHA SUTTA

In order to cultivate the knowledge which is associated with fear of *Saṃsāra* or evil (*saṃvegaṇā*), and a motivation to practice meditation, one should contemplate on these five things again and again or constantly.

⁵ T.W Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pāḷi-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, 1997), p.39.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 521, 559-560

⁷ S. II. p.329.

1. "I am sure to become old; I cannot pass away from ageing."
2. "I am sure to become sick; I cannot pass away from sickness."
3. "I am sure to die, I cannot pass away from death."
4. "I must be separated and parted from all that is dear and beloved to me."
5. "I am the owner of my actions, heir of my actions; actions are the cause (from which I have sprung), actions are my relations, actions are my protection. Whatever actions I do, good or bad, of these I shall become the heir of them." "There are five facts. O monks, which ought to be often reflected upon by everyone whether man or woman, householder or one gone forth as a monk."⁸

THE PURPOSE OF PREACHING THE ABHIṆHA SUTTA

Firstly, the most interesting thing in this *Sutta* is the purpose of delivering this *sutta* by the Buddha.

The Buddha addressed this *Sutta* to develop the knowledge which is associated with the fear of *Saṃsāra* or old age or evil deeds (*Saṃvegañāṇa*), to get rid of the three prides⁹ and to endure the attack of Eight Kinds of Vicissitude (*Attha-Lokadhammas*)¹⁰. It supports one to a meditator to eradicate the defilements¹¹.

While one practicing by reflection (*paccavekkhanā*) on the old age, sickness, death, separation, and *Kamma* as mentioned in this *Sutta*, paths (*magga*) arise in him. And from following, cultivating, and often developing that path (*magga*), he abandons the mental fetters (*saṃyojana*)¹², and eliminates the latent tendencies (*anusaya*)¹³. One can prevent the non-arisen defilements, and helps to remove the arisen defilements and three kinds of *Madas* (prides) by practicing reflection mentioned in *AbhiṆha Sutta*.

The Discourses Related to the AbhiṆha Sutta

One should learn other *Suttas* comparing with *AbhiṆha Sutta* from the *Pāḥi* cannon to understand clearly about *Paccavekkhaṇa*. *Sabbāsava Sutta*¹⁴, *Ādhipateyya Sutta*¹⁵, *Kesamutti Sutta*¹⁶, *Dasadhamma Sutta*¹⁷, *Ghosa Sutta*¹⁸, *Anumāna Sutta*¹⁹, *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta*²⁰, *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*²¹, *Piyajātika Sutta*²², *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*²³ are should be studied to a learner.

⁸ An. II. p.63.

⁹ Three prides-Yobbanamada (intoxication with youth)-Ārogyamada (intoxication with health)-Jīvitamada (intoxication with life)

¹⁰ Eight kinds of vicissitudes on their life (Lokadhammas)-gains properties (lābha), not gains properties, (albāha), fame (yasa), not fame (ayasa), praise (pasaṃsa), praise (ninda) pleasant (sukha) and unpleasant (dukkh)

¹¹ An. II. p.64-67

¹² Ten kinds of fetters (saṃyojana): Self-identity view (sakkāyadiṭṭhi), Persistent doubt (vicikicchā), Attachment to rituals and vows (sīlabbataparāmāsa), Sensual lust (kāmarāga), Repulsion (paṭigha), Greed for form existence (rūparāga), Greed for formless existence (arūparāga), Conceit (māna), Restlessness (uddhacca), Ignorance (avijjā).

¹³ Seven Kinds of Anusays: The latent tendency of sensual lust (kāmarāgānusaya), The latent tendency of aversion (paṭighānusaya), The latent tendency of conceit (mānānusaya), The latent tendency of views (diṭṭhānusaya), The latent tendency of doubt (vicikicchānusaya), The latent tendency of lust for existence (bhavarāgānusaya), The latent tendency of ignorance (avijjānusaya).

¹⁴ M. I. p.8.

¹⁵ An. I. p.146.

¹⁶ Ibid.p.189.

¹⁷ Ibid.p.325.

¹⁸ An. I. p.87.

¹⁹ M. I. p.312.

²⁰ Ibid.p.77.

²¹ S.V. p.368.

²² M.II.p.309.

²³ Dhi.II. p.231.

CONCLUSION

Pāḷi Canon has used the term ‘*paccavekkhana*’ (Reflection) extensively in this particular sutta and others whereby ‘*paccavekkhana*’ can also be referred to as meditative concentration. This is especially so while reflecting on the nine *vipassanā ñāṇa* (Insight knowledge) as mentioned by Ācārya Buddhaghosa in *Visuddhimagga*. *Paccavekkhana* or reflection is one of the basic trainings for those who have earnest wish to cultivate and maintain their pure spiritual life in the dispensation as advised in *AbhiṆha Sutta* “These five essentials (*dhamma*) must be reflected upon again and again by one who has gone forth (to live the holy life).”

Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that a bhikkhu should reflect wisely while using his four basic requisites i.e., robe, alms food, shelter and medicine for deeper understanding. Stringent practice as such advised to understand the ultimate meaning with wise reflection restraint our mind which could be overcome by greed, hatred, and ignorance. One could easily deviate from his or her spiritual path undertaken with defilement (*kilesa*) afflicted mind, running counter to, be away from the ultimate goal of every follower of the Buddha.

Continuous and habitual reflections enable one to purify one’s bodily, verbal and mental action with unblemished conduct. Eventually, one progresses in his or her spiritual path. Buddhist spiritual path is no mere religious rites, rituals or devotion. It is, in fact, a psychological transformation from the ordinary mind to inner peace with purified conduct, morality, development of wisdom leading to the final eradication of all defilements.

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