

Sānkara, it could be taken in the broader sense of non-agent. The word *anādarah*, literally means 'unconcerned' or 'indifferent', i.e. not moved by external event. These qualities are in fact applied to the macrocosmic self but not to the transmigrating self. Prof. Wijesekera also draws attention to the fact that in the Sāṅkhya Kārikas it is asserted that it is only in association with the *linga*, i.e. the transmigrating subtle body, that the normally indifferent (*udāsīna*) Puruṣa becomes agent.

Taking, in the light of this, Prof. Wijesekera takes *vado*, in Sāti's definition in a broader sense of 'agent' in general without confining to merely speaking. Similarly *vedeyyo* is taken to be the 'agent of experience'. While Buddhaghosa takes the rejection of Sāti's statement by the Buddha as a flat denial of any surviving factor such as *viññāna*, some modern scholars have shown that what the Buddha has denied is the identity of the consciousness that runs and continues in *samsāra* with the living consciousness. It is this empirical consciousness that is called dependently originated. But the extra - empirical surviving consciousness is denied any quality of agency. It is the *gandhabba* which is necessary for a conception to take place and it is none other than the *Samvattanika viññāna*. Prof. Wijesekera adds, the history of the evolution of this and histological *gandhabba* shows that even some of the later Buddhist schools, interpreting the surviving factor as some being (*satta*) or personality (*puggala*) endowed with a full sense apparatus and even, in the opinion of some, a subtle, transporting (*ativālika*) body of some sort comparable to the *liṅga-s'arira*, had forgotten the exact import of the concept and ignored the term *gandhabba* completely". However all these shows that Sāti was not after all an ignoramus of little education as held by the Pāli commentators.

C. Witanachchi

Reference

- ¹Wijesekera, O. H. de A., *Buddhist and Vedic Studies*, Ed. Jayasuriya, M.H.F., Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1994, The concept of Viññāna in Theravāda Buddhism p. 103ff.; Pāli *vado Vedeyyo* and Upaniṣadic *Avākī-Anadaraḥ* p. 167ff.

SATI (Sanskrit *smṛti*), usually translated as mindfulness, or as awareness', constitutes a mental quality of crucial importance in early Buddhism. In order to comprehensively cover the main aspects of this important mental quality, the present article will consider *sati* in relation to memory, to sense restraint, as a factor of the noble eightfold path, as a factor of awakening, and in relation to concentration.

I. Sati and memory

The term *sati* is related to the verb *sarati*, to remember. This remembrance aspect of *sati* is personified by the Buddha's disciple most eminent in *sati*, Ānanda (A.1, 24), who is credited with the almost incredible feat of recalling all the discourses spoken by the Buddha (*Vin. II, 287* and *Thag.1024*).

This connotation of *sati* as memory appears also in its formal definition in the discourses, which runs: he is mindful, being endowed with highest discriminative mindfulness (so that) things said or done long ago are recalled and remembered' (*M. I, 356: satimāhoti, paramena satinepakkena samannāgato, cirakatam-pi cirabhāsitam-pi saritā annusaritā*). What this definition of *sati*, points to is that if *sati* is present memory will be able to function well.

Thus mindfulness being present (*uppaññitasati*) implies presence of mind, in so far as it is directly opposed to absent-mindedness (*muññhasati*). Presence of mind in the sense that, endowed with *sati*, one is widely awake in regard to the present moment. Due to such presence of mind, whatever one does or says will be clearly apprehended by the mind, and thus can be more easily remembered later on.

Sati is required not only to fully take in the moment to be remembered, but also to bring this moment back to mind at a later time. To 're-collect', then, becomes just a particular instance of a state of mind characterised by 'collectedness' and the absence of distraction.

The kind of mental state in which memory functions well can be characterised by a certain degree of breadth, in contrast to a narrow focus. It is this breadth that enables the mind to make the necessary connections between information received in the present moment and information to be remembered from the past. This quality becomes evident on those

occasions when one tries to recall a particular instance or fact but where, the more one applies one's mind, the less one is able to remember it. Yet, if the issue in question is laid aside for a while and the mind is in a state of relaxed receptivity, the information one was trying to remember may suddenly spring to mind.

The suggestion that the mental state in which *sati* is well established can be characterised as having 'breadth' instead of a narrow focus finds support in the *Lohicca Sutta*, which relates the absence of *sati* to a narrow state of mind (*parittacetasa*), while its presence leads to a broad and even boundless' state of mind (*appamānacetasā*- S. IV, 119-120). Based on this nuance of 'breadth of mind', *sati* can be understood to represent the ability to simultaneously maintain in one's mind the various elements and facets of a particular situation.

This nuance of 'breadth of mind' has found its expression in a simile in the *Dvedhāvītakka Sutta*, which describes a cowherd who had to closely watch over his cows to prevent them from straying into the fields where the crop was ripe. But once the crop was harvested, he was able to relax, sit under a tree, and watch over them from a distance. To express this comparatively relaxed and distant manner of observation, *sati* is used (*M. 1, 117: sati karaṇīyam*). The disposition suggested by this simile is a calm and detached type of observation, a quite literally broad state of mind that watches over the whole of a situation.

Another simile supporting this quality of overseeing a situation from a detached position occurs in a verse in the *Theragāthā* which compares the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* to climbing on to an elevated platform or tower (*Thag. 765*). Connotations of uninvolved detachment are confirmed by the context of this passage, which contrasts the tower image to being carried away by the stream of desire. This tower simile brings out quite vividly the ability to oversee a whole situation and thereby be aware of its various aspects.

This ability of overseeing a situation as a quality of *sati* is described in yet another simile found in the *Magga Saṃyutta*, which compares *sati* to a careful charioteer (*S.V, 6*). The qualities evoked by this simile are careful and balanced supervision.

This quality of balanced supervision is a central function of *sati* among the faculties (*indriya*) and powers (*bala*). These faculties and powers are altogether five: confidence (*saddhā*), energy (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Among these, *sati* is placed in the middle position, indicating its central function of balancing and monitoring the other faculties and powers, by becoming aware of excesses or deficiencies.

2. *Sati* in relation to *indriya saṃvara*

Sati as a mental quality is closely related to attention (*manasikāra*), a basic function which, according to the definition of *nāma* found in the discourses *M. 1, 53*), is present in any kind of mental state. This basic faculty of ordinary attention characterises the initial split seconds of bare cognising of an object, before one begins to recognise, identify and conceptualise. *Sati* can be understood as a further development and temporal extension of this type of attention, thereby adding clarity and depth to the usually much too short fraction of time occupied by bare attention in the perceptual process.

This 'bare attention' aspect of *sati* has an intriguing potential, since it is capable of leading to a de-automatisation of mental mechanisms. Through bare *sati* one is able to see things just as they are, unadulterated by habitual reactions and projections. By bringing the perceptual process into the full light of awareness, one becomes conscious of automatic and habitual responses to perceptual data. Full awareness of these automatic responses is the necessary preliminary step to changing detrimental mental habits.

Sati as bare attention is particularly relevant to restraint at the sense doors (*indriya saṃvara*). In this aspect of the gradual path, the practitioner is encouraged to retain bare *sati* in regard to all sense-input. Through the simple presence of undisrupted and bare mindfulness, the mind is 'restrained' from amplifying and proliferating the received information in various ways.

This quality of careful supervision occurs in a simile in which *sati* is personified by the gatekeeper of a town (*A. IV, 110-111*). This town has energy (*virīya*) as its troops and wisdom *paññā* as its fortification,

while the function of the gatekeeper *sati* is to recognise the genuine citizens of the town and to allow them to enter the gates. This simile brings out the restraining function of bare *sati*. Just as the presence of the gatekeeper prevents those not entitled from entering the town, so too the presence of well-established *sati* prevents the arising of unwholesome associations and reactions at the sense doors. The same protective role of *sati* underlies also other passages, which introduce *sati* as the one factor that guards the mind (*D.* III, 269 and *A.* V, 30), or as a mental quality able to exert a controlling influence on thoughts and intentions (*A.* IV, 385).

Such controlling or restraining of the mind is however a gradual process, as depicted in the *Dantabhūmisutta*, which compares *satipaṭṭhāna* to the taming of a wild elephant *Dantabhūmisutta* (*M.* 111, 136). Just as a recently caught elephant has to be gradually weaned of his forest habits, so too *satipaṭṭhāna* will gradually wean a monk from memories and intentions related to the household life.

The ability of guarding the mind is in particular a benefit of mindfulness directed to the body. Once one has learned to be aware of the body, to be 'with' the body during its natural activities instead of being carried away by various thoughts and ideas, one is mentally anchored in the body and thereby less prone to be carried away by mental distraction. This aspect of *sati* can be found in another simile, which depicts a man carrying a bowl brimful of oil on his head through a crowd watching a beautiful girl singing and dancing. (*S.* V, 170). He is followed by another man with a drawn sword, ready to cut off his head if even one drop of the oil is spilled. To preserve his life, the man carrying the oil has to apply his full attention to each step and movement, without allowing the commotion around the girl to distract him. The image of carrying an object on the head in particular points to the balance and centeredness that accompany bodily activities carried out with *sati*. Another important aspect of this simile is that it relates awareness of the body's activities to sense restraint.

Sense restraint comes up again in another simile, which compares mindfulness of the body to a strong post, to which six different wild animals are bound (*S.* IV, 198). Since the animals are firmly bound to the post, however much they may struggle to escape,

sooner or later they have to give up and sit or lie down next to the post. In a similar way, mindfulness of the body can become a 'strong post' for 'taming' the six senses. This simile illustrates the benefit of being grounded in the experience of the present moment through mindfulness of the body. Lacking such grounding through body awareness, attachment and clinging can easily find an opportunity to arise.

The relevance of *sati* in relation to sense restraint comes up again in a simile found in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which compares the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* to a cowherd's skill in knowing the proper pasture for his cows (*A.* V, 352). Another discourse employs the same image to describe the situation of a monkey who has to avoid straying into regions visited by hunters (*S.* V, 148). Just as the monkey, wishing to be safe, has to keep to its proper pasture, so too practitioners of the path should keep to their proper pasture, which is *satipaṭṭhāna*. The need to keep to one's proper pasture comes up again in a parallel simile depicting a quail, which in this way can avoid getting caught by a falcon (*S.* V, 146). This set of images concerned with proper pasture point to the restraining role of *sati* in regard to sense input.

3. *Sammāsati*

In the noble eightfold path, *sati* occupies the middle position in the three factored path-section directly concerned with mental training (*sammā vāyāma*, *sammā sati*, *sammā samādhi*). This position of *sati* in between the two mental qualities of energy and concentration is found also in the enumeration of the faculties and powers. This position mirrors a natural progression in the development of *sati*, since in the early stages of practice a considerable degree of energy is required to counter distraction, while well-established *sati* in turn leads to an increasingly concentrated and calm state of mind.

Numerous discourses mention "wrong" mindfulness (*micchā sati*), indicating that certain forms of *sati* can be quite different from right mindfulness.¹ These references to wrong types of *sati* to some extent disagree with the presentation in the Pāli commentaries of *sati* as an exclusively wholesome mental factor, (*DhsA.* 250, the Sarvāstivāda tradition however considers *sati* to be an indeterminate mental factor). At first sight this presentation may seem convincing,

in view of the many wholesome repercussions of *sati*. Yet this presentation of the commentaries causes a practical difficulty: how to reconcile *sati* as a wholesome factor with *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation of the hindrances, if wholesome and unwholesome mental qualities cannot coexist in the same state of mind? The *satipaṭṭhāna* interactions for contemplating a hindrance clearly refer to such a hindrance being present at the time of practice, *M.* 1, 60: "he knows: 'there is in me' ". *atthi me ajjhataṃ*". The *satipaṭṭhāna* Sub commentary (1, 373, Burm. ed.) attempts to solve this contradiction by presenting *satipaṭṭhāna* of a defiled state of mind as a quick alternation between mind-moments associated with *sati* and those under the influence of defilements. The problem with this explanation is, however, that with either the defilement or else *sati* being absent, *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation of the presence of a defilement in one's mind becomes impossible.

The problem with this commentarial explanation is that it can lead to the mistaken notion that *satipaṭṭhāna* cannot be practised with a defiled state of mind. This, however, is a serious underestimation of "the potential of *sati*, whose scope includes whatever happens in the mind. *Sati* is to know and clearly recognize whatever is taking place, especially so when a negativity has arisen in the mind. In fact, the Buddha clearly declared that *sati* is beneficial on all occasions, *satiṅca, sabbatthikam vadāmi* (*S.V.*, 1 15), thus there is no need to reserve it only for those occasions when all is well and the mind is at peace.

The standard definition of *sammā sati* speaks invariably of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. A close examination of these four *satipaṭṭhānas* reveals that the meditator is never instructed to actively interfere with what happens in the mind. If a mental hindrance arises, for example, the task of *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation is to know that the hindrance is present, to know what has led to its arising, and to know what will lead to its disappearance. A more active intervention is no longer the domain of *satipaṭṭhāna*, but rather belongs to the province of right effort (*sammā vāyāna*).

The need to distinguish clearly between a first stage of observation and a second stage of taking action is, according to the Buddha, an essential feature of his way of teaching (*It.* 33). The simple reason for this approach is that only the preliminary step of calmly

assessing a situation without immediately reacting enables one to then undertake the appropriate action.

Thus, although *sati* furnishes the necessary information for a wise deployment of right effort and will monitor the countermeasures by noting if these are excessive or deficient, nevertheless *sati* remains aloof quality of uninvolved and detached observation. *Sati* can interact with other, much more active factors of the mind, yet by itself it does not interfere. Such uninvolved and detached receptivity is a crucial characteristic of *sati*. The purpose of *sati* is solely to make things conscious, not to eliminate them. *Sati* silently observes, like a spectator at a play, without in any way interfering. Such silent and non-reactive observation can at times suffice to curb unwholesomeness, so that an application of *sati* can have quite active consequences. Yet *sati*'s activity is confined to detached observation. That is, *sati* does not change experience, it deepens it.

This non-interfering quality of *sati* is required to enable one to clearly observe the building up of reactions and their underlying motives. As soon as one becomes in any way involved in a reaction, the detached observational vantage point is lost. The detached receptivity of *sati* enables one to step back from the situation at hand and thereby to become an unbiased observer of one's subjective involvement and of the entire situation. This detached distance allows for a more objective perspective, a characteristic illustrated in the above-mentioned similes of climbing onto a tower.

According to a discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the detached but receptive stance of *satipaṭṭhāna* constitutes a 'middle path', since it avoids the two extremes of self mortification and sense indulgence (*A.* 1, 295). The receptivity of *sati*, in the absence of both suppression and reaction, allows personal shortcomings and unjustified reactions to unfold before the watchful stance of the meditator, without being suppressed by the affective investment inherent in one's self-image. Maintaining the presence of *sati* in this way is closely related to the ability to tolerate a high degree of cognitive dissonance, since the witnessing of one's own shortcomings ordinarily leads to unconscious attempts at reducing the resulting feeling of discomfort by avoiding or even altering the perceived information.

This shift towards a more objective and uninvolved perspective introduces an important element of sobriety into self-observation. The element of sobriety, inherent in the presence of *sati* comes up in an entertaining canonical description of a particular celestial realm, whose divine inhabitants get so intoxicated with sensual indulgence that they lose all *sati*. As a consequence of being without *sati*, they fall from their elevated celestial position and are reborn in a lower realm (*D. I*, 19 and *D. III*, 31). The reverse case is also documented in another discourse, where negligent monks, reborn in an inferior celestial realm, on regaining their *sati* are at once able to ascend to a higher realm (*D. II*, 272). Both instances illustrate the edifying power of *sati* and its wholesome repercussions.

4. *Sati* as a *bojjhaṅga*

The wholesome repercussions of well established *sati* become particularly evident when its role among the factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅga*) is considered, where *sati* assumes the starting position. Here *sati* constitutes the foundation for those factors that bring about realisation.

The supportive role of *sati*, in the development of wisdom is reflected in a verse from the *Sutta Nipāta*, according to which *sati* keeps the streams in this world in check, so that the faculty of wisdom can cut them off (*Sn.* 1035). This verse points in particular to the role of *sati* in relation to restraint at the sense doors (*indriya saṃvara*) as a basis for the development of wisdom.

This preparatory role of *sati* for the development of wisdom is illustrated again in another simile, which compares *sati* to the probe of a surgeon (*M.* 11, 260). Like the surgeon's probe, whose function is to provide information about the wound for subsequent treatment, so too the 'probe' *sati* can be used to carefully gather information, thereby preparing the ground for subsequent action.

This ground-preparing quality is conveyed again by another simile, relating *sati* to the goad and the ploughshare of a farmer (*S. I*, 172 and *Sn.* 77). Just as a farmer has to first plough the ground in order to be able to sow, so too *sati* fulfils an important preparatory role for the arising of the other *bojjhaṅgas*. The fact

that ploughshare and goad are mentioned together in this simile points moreover to the need to combine clarity of direction with balanced effort in developing *sati*, since the farmer has to execute two tasks at the same time: with the goad in his one hand he has to ensure the straightness of the furrow by keeping the oxen moving in a straight line, while with the other hand he has to exert just the right amount of pressure on the ploughshare, avoiding that it gets either stuck because he has pushed it too deeply into the ground or else only scratches over the surface due to lack of pressure.

This role of *sati* in support of the arising of wisdom occurs again in another simile, which associates the parts of an elephant's body with mental qualities and factors. Here *sati* is compared to the elephant's neck, the natural support for its head, which in the same simile represents wisdom (*A. III*, 346). The choice of the elephant's neck is of additional significance, since it is a characteristic of both elephants and Buddhas to look around by turning with the whole body instead of only with the head (*M. II*, 137). The elephant's neck, then, represents the quality of giving full attention to a matter at hand as a feature of *sati*.

What the similes of "keeping the streams in check", of the "surgeon's probe", of the "plough share" and of the "elephant's neck" have in common is that they illustrate the preparatory role of *sati* for insight. According to these similes, *sati* is the mental quality that enables wisdom to arise.

5. *Sati* and concentration

The continuous presence of well-established *sati* is not only of relevance to the development of wisdom, but also constitutes an important requirement for attaining absorption *jhāna*. As the *Visuddhimagga* points out, without the support of *sati* concentration cannot reach the level of absorption (*Vism.* 514). *Sati* becomes particularly prominent when the third level of absorption (*jhāna*) is reached, expressed in the standard descriptions of the third *jhāna* by explicitly mentioning *sati* as a qualifying factor of this absorption. With the attainment of the fourth absorption, when the mind has reached such a degree of proficiency that it can be directed towards the

development of supernormal powers, *sati* also reaches a high degree of purity, due to its association with deep equanimity.

Even though *sati* has thus an important role to fulfill in regard to the development of deeper levels of concentration (*samādhi*), the characteristic functions of *sati* and concentration are quite distinct. While concentration corresponds to an enhancement of the selective function of the mind, by way of restricting the breadth of attention, *sati* on its own represents an enhancement of the recollective function, by way of expanding the breadth of attention. These two modes of mental functioning correspond to two different cortical control mechanisms in the brain. This difference, however, does not imply that the two are incompatible, since during absorption attainment both are present. Yet, during absorption *sati* becomes mainly presence of the mind, when it to some extent loses its natural breadth due to the strong focusing power of concentration.

The difference between these two becomes evident from the vocabulary employed in a discourse from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta* (S. V; 156). In this discourse the Buddha recommended that, if one is being distracted or sluggish while practising *satipaṭṭhāna*, one should temporarily change one's practice and develop a tranquility (*samatha*) object of meditation, in order to cultivate internal joy and serenity. This he termed a 'directed' form of meditation *paṇidhāya bhāvanā*. Once, however, the mind has been calmed, one can return to an 'undirected' mode of meditation (*apanidhāya bhāvanā*, namely the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*). The distinction drawn in this discourse between directed and undirected forms of meditation suggests that, considered on their own, these two modes of meditation are clearly different. At the same time, however, the whole discourse is concerned with their skilful interrelation, clearly demonstrating that whatever the degree of their difference, the two can be interrelated and supports each other.

The characteristic quality of concentration is to direct and apply the mind, focusing on a single object to the exclusion of everything else. Thus the development of concentration promotes a shift from the common structure of experience as a subject-object duality towards an experience of unity. Concentration, however, thereby excludes a broader awareness of

circumstances and of their interrelations. Yet, this awareness of circumstances and interrelations is essential in order to become aware of those characteristics of experience whose understanding leads to awakening. In this context, the broadly receptive quality of *sati* is particularly important.

Thus, although it plays an important part in the development of absorption, considered on its own *sati* is a mental quality distinct from concentration. Indeed, the reason why even the attainment of high levels of absorption by itself is insufficient for liberating insight is quite probably related to the inhibition of the broadly receptive observational qualities of awareness by the strong focusing power of absorption concentration. See also AWARENESS, SATIPATTHĀNA.

Anālayo

Reference

- ¹ • *Micchā sati* occurs e.g. at D. II, 353; D. III, 254; D. III, 287; D. III, 290; D. III, 291; M. I, 42; M. I, 118; M. III, 77; M. III, 140; S. II, 168; S. III, 109; S. V. 1; S. V, 12; S. V, 13; S. V, 16; S. V, 18—20; S. V, 23; S. V, 383; A. II, 220-229; A. III, 141; A. IV, 237; and A. V, 212-248.

SATIPATTHĀNA (Sanskrit *smṛtyupasthāna*), is a compound of *sati*, mindfulness or awareness, and *upaṭṭhāna*, with the *u* of the latter term being dropped due to vowel elision. The Pāli term *upaṭṭhāna* literally means 'placing near', and in the present context refers to a particular way of 'being present' and 'attending' to something with mindfulness. Thus *satipaṭṭhāna* means that *sati* is 'being present' in the sense of attending to the current situation. The word *satipaṭṭhāna* can then be translated as 'presence of mindfulness' or as 'attending with mindfulness'.

The Pāli commentaries (e.g. *MA*. I, 238 or *Vism.* 678) however derive *satipaṭṭhāna* from the word *paṭṭhāna*, 'foundation' or 'cause'. With this commentarial explanation *satipaṭṭhāna*, instead of representing a particular attitude of being aware, becomes a 'foundation of mindfulness' *paṭṭhāna* being understood to refer to the 'cause' for the establishment of *sati*. This moves emphasis from the activity to the

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