

ABHIRATI AND ANABHIRATI THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPORT

by

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A point of great significance to the student of early Buddhist thought is the tentative nature of the solution to problems of translation and interpretation of Pali Canonical writings, particularly regarding terms of psychological and philosophical import.¹ This short article presented for the *Silver Jubilee Volume* of the *Vidyodaya Journal of Arts, Science and Letters* consists of a brief discussion of two such terms occurring in Pali literature which have so far received scant attention of scholars with the possible exception of the late lamented Miss I. B. Horner in her translation of the *Vinayapitaka*.² Although the general meaning of *abhirati* and *anabhirati* appears to be clear at first sight, a closer examination of the terms would reveal that they, in their technical use, are of specific significance, to judge by the subtle nuances in their application. It is evidently a justifiable reason that they should be subject to a closer scrutiny as the terms do not appear to have received adequate attention so far.

The Pali Text Society's Dictionary (*PED*) gives the general meanings of these two terms along with several textual references,³ while the Critical Pali Dictionary (*CPD*) gives a more comprehensive list of references where the terms occur in literature.⁴ The Encyclopaedia of Buddhism (Vols. I and II edited in the years 1961-68) sheds no new light in this respect,⁵ as *abhirati* is briefly referred to in it—but that too, in a Mahāyāna cosmological context⁶—while the term *anabhirati* by itself finds no exposition at all although it appears in compounds that are to be taken as proper names.⁷

In Sanskrit literature the term *abhirati* is of extremely rare occurrence and, whenever it does occur, it conveys no special technical sense, while the negative form *anabhirati* is practically unknown.

Bohtlingk and Roth in their *Worterbuch* cite *Hitopadesa* (1, 129) and *Raghuvamśa* (IX, 7) for *abhirati* and explain it as (1) the finding of pleasure or enjoyment in anything (*das Vergnügen-Finden an Etwas*) and (2) among Buddhists, the name of a world (*N. einer Welt bei den Buddhisten*), the latter observation being based on Burnouf's translation of *Saddharmapundarikāsūtra* into French.⁸ Mayrhofer in his *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Woterbuch des Altindischen*, Heidelberg, 1956, has nothing to offer.

The application of \sqrt{ram} , 'to enjoy' in Sanskrit appears, however, in varying contexts, its stem-form being visible in its derivatives, e.g. *ramya*, *ramana*, etc. Furthermore, perhaps due to a psychological connection among words of similar sound,⁹ \sqrt{ram} which primarily meant 'to be or make content'¹⁰ seems to have taken the special sense, 'to take pleasure,' through association with roots *ran* and *lam* which specifically carry the latter meaning.¹¹ From this stage onwards it appears as if \sqrt{ram} has had its own development. It is quite possible that in this process this root acquired the peculiar significance it now possesses, as may be inferred, for instance, from the nominal form *rati* which carries both the general¹² and the special sense.¹³

However, it may be noted that *abhirati* and *anabhirati* have found their way to the repertory of Buddhist terms with a developed "Buddhistic" meaning although traces of the original general sense can occasionally be noted in the verbal forms as attested in Pali literature. Buddhist terminology is replete with a wealth of terms denoting happiness and contentment in the spiritual sense and *abhirati* too has to be counted among them. And, as in the case of many other terms of pre-Buddhist usage acquiring new meanings in Buddhist texts, it may be said that, as Buddhist terms, *abhirati* and its negative have acquired new dimensions in concept and magnitude, no doubt, through impact with the psychological and philosophical outlook of Buddhist thought. The elevation of *abhirati* to a *Buddhaksetra* in Mahāyāna cosmology could therefore be appreciated.¹⁴

While in Sanskrit usage *abhirati* denotes any form of sensuous delight,¹⁵ Buddhist thought has lifted this term above the sensuous plane, filling the vacuum, as it were, with a term of its own, viz. *kāmarati*—which quite significantly, does not appear in non-Buddhist Sanskrit usage. In the Pali Canon, therefore, *abhirati* (together with its participial form *abhirata*)¹⁶ has acquired a new connotation unknown to Brahmanical tradition.

As already noted, *abhirati* is among the terms of Buddhist usage denoting non-sensuous happiness or spiritual contentment. In this respect *abhirati* may be reckoned among conceptual categories like *pīti* and *passaddhi* though perhaps it cannot be placed on a par with them. However, they are all terms betraying the peculiar eudaemonistic tone characteristic of the ethical life as advocated in Buddhism. Furthermore, it may be inferred from the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (A.v. 122) that the bhikkhu is able to discharge his normal functions in a state of constant ease and joy when *abhirati* is present in him. Likewise, the Vinaya alludes to the enjoyment of the religious life under the Buddha as the *paramā abhirati*, 'the highest enjoyment'.¹⁷ Viewed in this light, *abhirati* may be looked upon as a constituent element of *paccuppannasukha*, 'ease of the present,' i.e. of this life, guaranteed by the Buddha for those who follow his Teaching. It may be noted that in the Dhammasamādānasuttas (M. i, 309 ff. and 317 ff.),

while evaluating the characteristics of his doctrine, the Buddha is represented as claiming that the acceptance of his Teaching allows a pleasant life both here and hereafter: *paccuppannasukhañ-c'eva ayatiñ-ca sukhavipākam*.¹⁸

Moreover, *abhirati* needs constant renewal and cultivation since a loss of *abhirati* spells spiritual disaster to the bhikkhu. *Abhirati* needs to be constantly present in his life. Sometimes realizing such loss and an intrusion of *anabhirati* the bhikkhu himself strives to regain it,¹⁹ while on occasion, another has to draw his attention to it with words to the effect: *abhiramatu āyasmā brahmacariye*: 'may the venerable one take delight in the higher life' (A. iii, 97; 99). The Buddha too is said to have egged on Nanda, his step-brother: *abhirama Nanda abhirama* (Ud. 23) to achieve it. Thus, basically *abhirati* may be said to be the frame of mind that the bhikkhu is expected to develop towards *brahmacariya*—the religious life as recognized in Buddhism. It is perhaps with reference to this application of the term *abhirati* that the CPD gives the definition: 'pleasure, delighting in . . . esp. content with (solitude or) monastic life.' It will be observed, however, that even as discussed so far, the spectrum of ideas resulting from this term is wider than that covered by this definition. This will be seen from some of the contexts in which the term occurs. While the literal meaning of \sqrt{ram} as already observed, is also to be found in the early Pali texts,²⁰ the nominal form *abhirati* is always used in relation to the Buddhist religious life as led by the bhikkhu, while the past participle *abhirata* is less frequently used. Thus, the line *tatrābhiratim-iccheyya hitvā kāme akiñcano*, 'he, with no obsession, shunning sensual enjoyment, shall wish for delight therein'²¹ makes a pointed reference to the religious life. It is very significant that *abhirati* and *kāma* are presented here as disparate categories, thus enabling a better appreciation of the content of the former. The episode concerning Sudinna in the Vinaya is also of value in this respect. Sudinna tells his parents that he leads the religious life delighted: *abhirato aham brahmacariyam carāmi* (Vin. iii, 77). It should be borne in mind that the life of *brahmacariya* is here considered *abhirata* in the face of an offer of household pleasures by Sudinna's parents in the most attractive terms possible (Vin. iii, 16 ff.). This too serves to show the specific import the term had acquired in Buddhism.

The Majjhima- and Aṅguttara-nikāyas, for instance, associate the verb *abhiramati* directly with *brahmacariya*, e.g. *yam tumhe abhirameyyātha brahmacariye*, 'since you take delight in the higher life' (M. i, 463), *abhiramatu āyasmā brahmacariye*, 'let the venerable one take delight in the higher life' (A. iii, 97; 99), While the Udāna has the words *abhiramissām'aham bhante . . . brahmacariye* 'I shall, Sir, take delight in the higher life' (Ud. 23), the Paramatthadīpanī speaks of *abhirati* directly in relation to the life of *brahmacariya*: *abhirati brahmacariyavāse* (UdA. 172).²² Thus, the emphasis on the *abhirati* that the bhikkhu is expected to take in the religious life is reiterated, as success in *brahmacariya*, no doubt, has *abhirati* as a pre-requisite, which itself is not readily achieved.

The Saṃyuttanikāya, in particular, refers to this difficulty of achieving *abhirati*: *pabbajitena paṇ'āvuso kim dukkaran-ti. pabbajitena kho āvuso abhirati dukkarā 'ti.* 'What, again, O friend, is difficult of achievement by a recluse? Delight (in the higher life), indeed, friend, is difficult of achievement by a recluse.' (S. iv, 260).²³ Furthermore, it appears that "the attaining of truth and righteousness" (*dhammānudhammapaṭipatti*)—the *modus vivendi* to arahantship—difficult in itself should be founded on *abhirati*: *abhiratena paṇ'āvuso . . . kim dukkaran-ti. abhiratena kho āvuso dhammānudhammapaṭipatti dukkarā 'ti.* 'What, again, O friend, is difficult of achievement by one who has taken delight (in the higher life)? The attainment of truth and righteousness, indeed, friend, is difficult of achievement by one who has taken delight (in the higher life)' (*loc. cit.*). Accordingly, it will be noted that *abhirati*, though basic, is of relative significance in the training of the bhikkhu.

Like *abhirati* its negative form *anabhirati* has undergone a similar semantic development. *Anabhirati* is usually rendered as "discontent" or "disaffection,"²⁴ but in the context of the special sense accorded to *abhirati*, *anabhirati* would imply discontent with or rather the lack of sustained interest in the religious life. Such *anabhirati* could result from a number of causes ranging from a simple lack of interest in *brahmacariya* to more deep-seated psychological conditions of the bhikkhu. It is a set-back to *brahmacariya* and finds constant mention in the Vinaya. All forms of *anabhirati* except one (*v. infra*) are looked upon as undesirable states of the mind. They are a hindrance to the mental development of the bhikkhu. And within the context of *brahmacariya* an important two-fold division of *anabhirati* into a general and specialized sense is discernible.

As for the general sense, two references in the Suttavibhaṅga (Vin. iii, 19; 67) and one in the Dīghanikāya (D. iii, 29) may be examined.²⁵ As the two references in the Suttavibhaṅga are presented as case-histories, they afford us an opportunity to judge the nature of the *anabhirati* that the individuals concerned were subject to. It is stated that Sudinna was so deeply struck with remorse at his failure in *brahmacariya* that it led to his physical decline which was wrongly interpreted by his fellow monks as a decline due to *anabhirati*.²⁶ The allusion here is to general discontent and not to disaffection of any particular variety. The same assertion can be made regarding the reference at Vin. iii, 67 as well.²⁷ Even though the reference at D. iii, 29 savours of a mythical flavour it serves to illustrate our point. It speaks of a being (*satta*) born in a void (*suñña*) brahma-realm to whom *anabhirati* arises as a result of his lonesome stay in that abode for long.²⁸ In the case of bhikkhus afflicted with this general *anabhirati*, some would continue in that condition while others could be expected to leave the robes (*cf.* Vin. iii, 24). The

bhikkhu of the latter category is described by the Commentator as “full of longing and desirous of reverting to the lay-life” (*ukkanthito gihībhāvam patthayamāno*).

Coming to the specialized meaning of the term, it should be pointed out that *anabhirati* seems to have also had a special limited sense characterized by a sexual import. A vacuum created in the mind of a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni by non-interest in the religious life can also lead to sexual obsession. This is borne out by Buddhaghosa (VinA. 517). This fact has received the attention of Rhys Davids and Oldenberg,²⁹ although their comments on *anabhirati* do not appear to be quite precise.³⁰ Miss Horner has taken the term in certain contexts to mean the “dis-ease of unsatisfied sexual needs.”³¹ *Anabhirati* could therefore be interpreted as an “obsessional neurosis” as recognized in psychoanalysis.³² In this respect, the general psychological reaction of the bhikkhu, especially the weaker-minded one, towards the life of *pabbajjā* should not be ignored. Joachim Wach, who has devoted an authoritative study to “the peculiar social and psychological situation of the priest”, lays stress on the problems arising from the psychological reaction of the priest to this very situation.³³ Furthermore, sexual abstinence, unless willingly accepted, can result in tensions giving rise to abnormal conditions. This would be particularly true with the young bhikkhu.³⁴ The Vinaya refers to the bhikkhu or bhikkhuni so afflicted as “suffering (*pīṭita*) from *anabhirati*”.³⁵ The psychological situation of the bhikkhu can also involve a duality of attitudes—one conscious and the other unconscious—towards the life of *pabbajjā*. This is a possibility, for, whenever this special and limited sense of the term *anabhirati* could be observed, it is of interest to note that none of the bhikkhus or bhikkhunis who are said to have been afflicted with this condition is reported to have left the robes as a consequence. In such instances Buddhaghosa explains *anabhirata* as a person “with distracted thoughts and scorched with the heat of sexual passion, but not aspiring to laymanship” (*anabhirato ti vikkhittacitto kāmarāgaparilāhena paridayhamāno na pana gihībhāvam patthayamāno*).³⁶ Both in his *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* and *Sammohavinodani*, Buddhaghosa refers to a young bhikkhuni at Cittalapabbata (in Rohana) who is said to have died, due to such sexual passion.³⁷ Such bhikkhus and bhikkhunis seem to have generally continued to live in that condition,³⁸ although here too, exceptions cannot be ruled out (*loc. cit.*). This particular form of *anabhirati*, therefore, implies sexual torment that one may experience as a *pabbajitā* and appears to be the outcome of “the peculiar social and psychological situation of the priest” as mentioned above.

The problem of *anabhirati*, whatever its variety be, is also not to be ignored. The *anabhirata* bhikkhu is known to exist (*cf.* DhA. iii, 238), and his difficulties have to be sympathetically resolved. It has been seen earlier how a bhikkhu so concerned could himself take the initiative in this matter or how another

could draw his attention to it. The Mahāvagga, however, gives specific advice as to how this should be done within the organized monastic community. If, for instance, *anabhirati* has arisen in the preceptor it should be expelled (*vūpakāsetabbā*) from him by the resident-pupil or have another to do so or he should be spoken to in accord with the *dhamma* (Vin. i, 49). The same obligation is said to devolve on the preceptor if the resident pupil is in the same discomfiture (*ib.* i, 52). A bhikkhu overcome by *anabhirati* is entitled to call for similar assistance from the monastic community even during the Rains-retreat when the movements of the community are restricted. In case of *anabhirati* (as in a few other instances) other bhikkhus are enjoined to go to his aid “even if not sent for, all the more if sent for, and if the matter could be attended to in seven days” (Vin. i, 142)³⁹ The same is stated *mutatis mutandis* in respect of the bhikkhuni too who may suffer from *anabhirati* (*ib.* i, 144). The gravity of *anabhirati* in the life of the bhikkhu may be gauged from the fact that the other occasions when Vinaya rules governing the Rains-retreat are relaxed, in themselves of sufficiently serious nature to warrant such relaxation are: when a bhikkhu is ill (*gilāna*), or is suffering from remorse (*kukkucca*) or holds a wrong view (*ditthigata*), or has committed a grave offence (*garudhamma*) and deserves probation or when an Act of the Order has to be performed at his request (Vin. i, 142 ff.).

There is, however, one form of *anabhirati* advocated in Buddhism. This is *sabbaloke anabhirati*, the distaste for the entire world (stemming, no doubt, from non-attachment to sensory stimuli), the cultivation of which is recommended in the Pali Canon. In the Buddhist philosophy of detachment from the worldly sphere *sabbaloke anabhirati* assumes special significance. Accordingly *sabbaloke anabhiratasaññā* is counted among the tenfold perception (*dasa saññā*) that the bhikkhu is expected to cultivate (A. v, 105).⁴⁰ This is explained as the complete non-attachment of the bhikkhu to all forms of worldly bonds and to mental obstinacies and prejudices (A. v, 111). And the method to achieve this is set out in the Bojjhaṅgasamyutta (S. v, 132). *Sabbaloke anabhiratasaññā* is therefore accorded recognition in the Buddhist system of meditation.

ABBREVIATIONS

The abbreviations for Pali Texts refer to the standard editions issued by the Pali Text Society of London.

A.	Anguttaranikāya
Ap.	Apadāna
CPD.	A Critical Pali Dictionary, Copenhagen.
D.	Dīghanikāya
DA.	Dīghanikaya-Aṭṭhakathā
Dh.	Dhammapada
J.	Jātaka
M.	Majjhimanikāya
Miln.	Milindapanha
PED.	Pali-English Dictionary, Pali Text Society, London.
PvA.	Petavatthu-Aṭṭhakatha

S.	Samyuttanikāya
Sddhp.	Saddhammopāyana
Sn.	Suttanipāta
Ud.	Udāna
UdA.	Udāna-Aṭṭhakathā
Vbh.	Vibhanga
VbhA.	Vibhanga-Aṭṭhakathā
Vin.	Vinayapitaka
VinA.	Vinaya-Aṭṭhakathā

Other abbreviations used are those in common use.

Notes

1. This has been noted, for example, by the late Professor K. N. Jayatilleke. — K. N. Jayatilleke, 'Some Problems of Translation and Interpretation,' I and II, in *The University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. 7, pp. 208-224, and Vol. 8, pp. 45-55.
2. I. B. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, Part I (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. X), London, 1949, p. 114, fn. 1.
3. *v.* PED, *s.vv.* *abhirati* and *anabhirati*.
4. *v.* CPD, Vol. I, *s.vv.* Also *v.* F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, *Pali Tipiṭakam Concordance*, London, 1956, Vol. I, *s.vv.*
5. *Ed.* G. P. Malalasekera, Vols. 1 and 2, Colombo, 1961-68.
6. *i.e.* as a *lokadhātu* or 'world-system' which forms the *kṣetra* (field) of the Buddha Akṣobhaya *v. ib.* I, p. 104.
7. *ib.* p. 504.
8. Burnouf, *Le Lotus de la bon Loi*, Paris, 1852. Also *cf. supra*, fn. 6.
9. *Cf.* Betty Heimann, *Indian and Western Philosophy: A Study in Contrasts*, London, 1937, p. 128 f.
10. *v.* W. D. Whitney, *The Roots, Verb-Forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language*, Leipzig, 1885, *s.v.*
11. *ib. s.vv.* *ran*, *ram*, *lam*.
12. *Cf. na sayyāsanabhogeṣu ratiṇi vindati karhiṇi*, Nalopākhyāna, II, 4a.
13. The Indian goddess of love is herself named Rati.
14. *v. supra*, fn. 6.
15. *Cf. Mrgayābhirati*, 'pleasures of the chase,' Raghuvamśa, IX, 7.
16. *Abhirata*, however, is to be seen occasionally in Pali in a secular sense too : e.g. *paṣaṇsābhirata* (Sddh. 563), *maṇḍanavibhūsanābhirata* (Miln. 163), *vihesābhirata* (Sn. 275), *sattāhābhirata* (Ap. 242).
17. Vin. iii, 104. *Cf.* VinA. 505.
18. Also *v.* D. iii, 229. *Cf.* M.i, 342 f.
19. S. I, 185 f. *Cf. Attanāva attano anabhiratiṇi vinodetvā abhiratiṇi uppādetvā (loc. cit.)*.
20. At Vin. iii, 13, occurs the Imperative *abhiramassu* and at Vin. iii, 104 *abhiramasi*, where the contexts clearly demand that they be understood in the ordinary sense. Also *cf.* Vin. iii, 14 and fn. 1.
21. Dh. 88; S. v, 24; A. v, 232 f.; 253 f.
22. Also *cf.* PvA. 61 (Paramatthadipani IV).
23. Also *cf.* A. V, 122.
24. *v.* PED *et* CPD, *s.v.*
25. Also *cf.* Vin. iii, 24 ff.; 67; D. I, 17; A. v, 122; Ud. 18 f.; Vbh 352; J. iii, 395; vi, 266.
26. Vin. iii, 19.
27. This concerns the resident-pupil of the Venerable Dalhika of Sāgala who through *anabhirati* contrived to suffer Defeat by stealing a garment from a shopkeeper but on assessing the value it was found to be worth less than 5 *māsaka*, the minimum value of an object when stolen disqualifies a monk from his status as a monk.

28. Cf. *Tassa tattha ekakassa digharattam nibbusitattā anabhirati-paritassanā uppañjati : aho rata aññe' pi sattā itthattam āgaccheyyunti.* D. iii. 29.
29. *Vinaya Texts III* (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XX), p. 77.
30. *Ib.* p. 77 fn. 3.
31. See *supra*, fn. 2.
32. Cf. Edward Glover, *Psycho-Analysis*, London and New York, 2nd Ed., 1949, p. 113.
33. Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, London, 1947, p. 376. Also cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 3rd Printing, (Mentor Books), New York, 1961, pp. 24 ff. where the priest is discussed from the psychological and neurological points of view.
34. Cf. S. i, 185 where it is stated how sexual torment arose in the young bhikkhu Vangisa. Also see Ud. 23.
35. Vin. ii, 110; iii, 35; 110 f.; iv, 260 f. Also cf. *ib.* v, 132; A. iii, 259.
36. VinA. 517. Also cf. Sāratthadipani, 641.
37. DA. 994; VbhA. 498. Also cf. E. W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Colombo, 1946, p. 119.
38. Cf. *anabhirato vā brahmacariyaṃ carissati*, Vin. v, 132 = A. iii, 259. Also v. A. iii, 109.
39. In Jainism, problems of sexual torment are expected to be met with great rigidity by imposing penances. v. S. B. Deo, *Jaina Monastic Jurisprudence*, Poona, 1960, p. 66 f.
40. Also v. A. iii, 79; iv, 46; 387; 465; v, 309 *et passim* for different combinations of other forms of *sañña* with *anabhiratasañña*. Cf. P. Vajirāñña Thera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, Colombo, 1962, p. 64, fn. 1.