

Anicca or anicchā

[A revised version of fb180825 piya]

To translate **anicca** (“impermanent”) as “actually” meaning “something not liked” is bad grammar and wrong view. It should make informed Buddhists wonder if the speaker, his teacher and other Sinhala monks with such a view are familiar with the basic or “core” teachings of early Buddhism at all.

Academic qualification is emphasized by most Sinhala monks for status, employment and wealth, outshading even basic sutta understanding and meditation. Question: Do any of such monks actually carefully study the suttas, or are they simply perpetuating the private truths (*pacceka,sacca*) and received wisdom, the *micchā,ditṭhi* of their teachers?

In **the (Ahita) Thera Sutta** (A 5.88), the Buddha warns us that even great elder monks (or nuns, we may add), despite (or because of) their great seniority, fame, wealth and learning, may have wrong views (SD 40a.16)¹.

The “Sinhala Plosive Aberration” (SPA), a helpful term for our discussion, refers to the idiosyncratic confusion and misuse or misreading of -c- and -ch- when a native Sinhala transliterate Pali into romanized English. I have already responded to this problem with “*passati*” (to see) and “*phassati*” (to touch), kindly pointed out by Kavee (in a Facebook posting in 2018).

Here, the confusion is between **anicca**, from *a*, “not” + *nicca* [Sanskrit *nitya*], “permanent,” and **anicchā**, from *a*, “not” + *icchā*, “wish, desire” [from *viṣ*]. It needs to be urgently corrected; otherwise, we will be the laughing stock of informed Buddhists and philologists. There is no way, no sutta support at all, that *anicca* can ever be translated as “not liked” or “not wished for” (*anicchā*).

“Not liked” better describes the nature of **dukkha** (suffering). It may, in a way, also describe *anicca*, but only partly. For example, when a pleasant feeling goes away, we do *not* like it. But when a painful feeling goes away, we clearly *like* it. Hence, it is wrong to say that *anicca* means “not liked.”²

Some observations

The Sinhala monk who promoted the *anicchā* controversy seems to know a lot of Buddhist “facts,” even beautifully puts them together to sound like good Dhamma. However, an informed Buddhist or scholar can only listen with disbelief. He does not seem to be familiar enough with the suttas. Note the following:

(1) His sequence of the sense-bases (*āyatana*) could be better. He listed them as “eye, nose, tongue, ear ...” when it should be “eye, ear, nose, tongue ...” This suggests he has not been

¹ See **(Ahita) Thera Sutta** (A 5.88), [SD 40a.16](#).

² See **Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44,24/1:303), [SD 40a.9](#).

“reciting” the Dhamma, an important training for a Buddhist monk. Instead of reciting the alphabet as “A B C D E ... ,” it’s as if one recites it as: “A B E D C ... “

(2) **Dhamma-s,savana** means “listening to the Dhamma,” not “discussing Dhamma,” which is *dhamma,sācakchā*. A minor point, yes, but it is magnified when the error is made by someone who should know better or should have corrected himself.

If we follow this wrong view, what are we teaching the masses? A new sequence of the *āyatana*?

(3) To say that **anattā** is “meaninglessness” is philosophically interesting, but this is only one aspect of this basic characteristics that underlies all “principles” (*sabbe dhammā anattā*). It also means that there is no abiding essence in any existence: it is always dynamic and impermanent.³

Characteristic and defilement

(1) **The Uddesa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 138) says: “Whatever is impermanent must change, become other” (*vipariṇāmati aññathā hoti*).⁴ Based on this teaching, is there any way we can translate *anicca* as “not liked”? If we do so, would it not mean that we are rejecting the suttas?

(2) The most serious error in stating that *anicca* as meaning “not liking” is to confuse a “characteristic” (*lakkaṇa*) with a human reaction on account of “defilement” (*kilesa*). This should give us some serious thought.

Stand up for the Dhamma

I seriously hope that more **lay Sinhala Buddhists** should dedicate their lives to studying and teaching the Dhamma in the spirit of Anagarika Dhammapala. Without a proper in-depth mastery of the suttas, we will be held hostage by teachers who are caught in worldliness and worldly views than upholding and transmitting what the Buddha has taught.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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³ See **the Dhamma Niyāma Sutta** (A 3.134), [SD 26.8](#).

⁴ M 138,20 ([SD 33.14](#)).