



Original Article

Digital Transformation and Moral Responsibility: Insights from the Study of Pāli Language

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Abstract

Transformation is a regular process of the laws of creation. Change affects the living world. Man has been continuously trying to bring about change in human life since ancient times, inspired by transformational thinking. Man has made transformational progress in modern times with science and technology. But with this change, man is forgetting his original nature. He is sacrificing his moral values for transformational thoughts. Digital transformation is one example of the effect by which man is forgetting moral responsibility. This paper encourages the study of ancient language culture of India to remind man of his moral values. The ancient language in which there is a teaching of moral values. This ancient language is being studied today in the form of Tipitaka literature under the name of Pāli language. This literature has collected the teachings of Buddha on moral principles. The teachings on wisdom, virtue, compassion, friendship and right perception encourage man to increase moral awareness.

Keywords: Sīla, Paññā, Karuṇā, Pāli Tipitaka, Buddha, Suttas.

Introduction

The revolutionary progress of science and technology in modern times has brought about a radical change in human society. The transformation of digital technology has improved human physical life with all its conveniences. Information technology has improved the efficiency of relations between administration, education, economy and society. But this activity has created challenges in terms of responsibility, privacy and moral sensitivity. Due to new technological experiments, man is seen to be moving away from social obligations by thinking independently. The gap in moral responsibility between two individuals and groups is increasing.

Language plays an important role in communication in human society. Rite (Sanskrit) is an important factor in human life. With proper rite, human life and society are enriched and developed with a moral basis. Indian tradition has a legacy of ancient moral culture. Language literature is enriched and moral teachings in literature guide man properly. Literature in Pāli language is a legacy of moral teachings of an ancient Indian knowledge tradition. Gautam Buddha's teachings on moral values to man through Pāli language have been collected in this literature. Pāli literature is being studied at the academic level today as the Pāli Tipitaka literature. This literature teaches the principles of morality, moral (virtue) responsibility, restraint, forgiveness, tolerance, intellectual development (wisdom), mental health and development, physical health and healthy living through the medium of the Pāli language. Following these principles encourages the evaluation of human virtue in this modern digital age.

Objectives:

1. To examine the concept of moral responsibility in the context of digital transformation.
2. To analyse the key ethical principles found in Buddhist teachings in the Pāli language.
3. To highlight how Pāli Buddhist ethics can contribute to the promotion of human values in the digital age.
4. To provide an ethical framework for responsible digital behaviour based on ethical principles in Buddhist philosophy.

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Research Methodology:

A qualitative and descriptive methodology has been adopted for this research paper. The research is primarily based on textual analysis of selected Pāli Tipitaka sources, including Tipitaka, commentaries, and related Buddhist ethical literature. Secondary sources such as academic books, research articles, and contemporary studies on digital ethics have also been consulted.

Pāli Literature:

Pāli language was one of the Prakrit dialects of India during the time of the Buddha. During the Buddha's time, this language was the common language spoken by the common people. Gautama Buddha preached his moral values through this language. Through this Pāli language, the Buddha explains the solution to the suffering and problems of human life. In modern times, Pāli is known as the 'Pāli' because it preserves the 'Buddhist discourses' known as the 'Tipitaka', which includes the original teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha has stated the theory that all suffering and problems in human life are due to ignorance. If ignorance is removed, the problems in human life can be avoided. To prove this, he states the following theory from the Pāli Suttas.

“Tatra kho, bhikkhave, sutarā ariyasāvako paṭiccasamuppādaññeva sādhuṃ yoniso manasi karoti – ‘Iti imasmim sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati; imasmim asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati’² |

suttapiṭaka » saṃyuttanikāya » nidānavaggaṇāli » Natumhasuttaṃ

This sutta teaches, if this is, then this will happen, if this arises, then that will arise. And if this is not, then this will not happen, if this does not arise, then that will not arise. Pāli language is a collection of Buddhist ethical thoughts. It is said to be that Philosophy is the study of fundamental questions about life, knowledge, reality, existence, morality, and human thought³. In Pāli literature Buddhist philosophy explains the fundamental questions and problems of human life. Why do problems arise in human life? The answer to this question is found in the Buddhist philosophical doctrines in Pāli language. In modern human life, technological development has advanced faster than ethical reflection, leading to ethical dilemmas in digital behaviour and decision-making. To resolve these ethical dilemmas, adopting the ethics of Buddhist philosophy in human life, alongside technological development, will become necessary.

Teachings of Ethics in Pail Language:

About 2500 years ago in India, the Buddha taught moral conduct and principles for the benefit and well-being of humanity. The Buddha taught how humans should treat other humans and animals in order to live a happy and prosperous life. The Buddha also taught that hatred, aversion, jealousy, anger, hostility, quarrels, violence, war, injustice and oppression are unwholesome, harmful and destructive to a person's personal and social development. To help people stay away from such unwholesome, harmful and destructive things, the Buddha preached the virtues of morality. Buddha assured that by following these virtues, a person will find happiness, joy and prosperity in their lives. For this purpose, the Buddha preached the practice of virtues. Man should develop his own wisdom and practice virtue in life. The five precepts are prescribed for practicing moral values. These five precepts for the common man to lead an ethical life. These five precepts are as follows.

1. Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi |

I take the vow of abstaining from violence against animals/living beings.

2. Ādinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi |

I take the vow of abstaining from taking what is not given.

3. Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi |

I take the vow of abstaining from sexual misconduct.

4. Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi |

I take the vow of abstaining from lie speech.

5. Surā, meraya, majja, pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi |

I take the vow of abstaining from intoxicants, which are causes of intemperate behaviour.

Through these five precepts one can decide not to do evil. When one can decide do not to kill, steal, misbehaviour, lie that makes good human being. This is the way of utmost happiness. To achieve this happiness there is a way which is known as the Noble Eight-fold path, leading to extinction of suffering. This known in Pali literature as ‘Dukkha nirodha gāmini paṭipadā’, means the way of cessation of suffering.

‘Sammā Diṭṭhi’- Right understanding,

‘Sammā Saṃkappo’- Right thought,

‘Sammā Vācā’- Right speech,

‘Sammā Kammanto’-Right action,

‘Sammā Ājivo, - Right livelihood,

‘Sammā Vāyāmo’- Right efforts,

‘Sammā sati’ - Right mindfulness,

‘Sammā Samādhi,’ -Right concentration.

Vinayapiṭak⁵ -Mahāvagga Pāli -Pañcavaggiyakathā

Through this Noble Eight-Fold path, human kind can stop all sufferings in his/ her life and has given a well self-discipline. By this discipline where no one can hurt to others, and always help to others with understand the law of nature. This Noble Eight-Fold path includes three components, which are Sīlā (Virtue), Samādhi (Meditative Concentration), Pannā (Wisdom). A person who practices the Sīlā (Virtue) and Samādhi (Meditative Concentration) lives happily in life. And one who develops Pannā (Wisdom) gets all success in life. For wisdom alone is capable of penetrating into the realities of one's own life, of the world in which one lives⁴.

The Contribution of Ethics in Pali to the Promotion of Human Values in the Digital Age:

The Sīlā is the moral discipline according to the Buddha's teachings. The Sīlā is the foundation of the Buddhist path and governs ethical conduct in personal and social life. The principle of non-violence or non-harming guides ethical conduct by discouraging actions that cause suffering. In the digital age, this principle extends to respecting privacy, avoiding digital exploitation, and ensuring that technologies such as artificial intelligence and data systems are developed and used in ways that protect human dignity and well-being. The Sīlā promotes integrity, transparency, and accountability in technological development and digital governance, ensuring that innovation is consistent with human values and social well-being. The ethical principle of Sammā Vācā, a component of the Noble Eightfold Path, emphasizes abstaining from falsehood, harmful speech, and divisive communication. Applied to digital platforms, this principle promotes truthfulness, respect, and civility in online discourse, countering the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and digital aggression.

Compassion (Karūṇā) and Digital Empathy:

Karūṇā (compassion) lies at the heart of Buddhist ethics and calls for sensitivity to the suffering of others. In digital environments, compassion encourages empathy toward diverse perspectives, discourages cyberbullying, and supports inclusive online communities. Compassionate engagement humanizes digital interaction and reinforces ethical responsibility in virtual spaces.

Mindfulness (Sati) and Ethical Digital Awareness:

The practice of mindfulness which is called sati in pali encourages conscious awareness of mental states, intentions, and actions. In the digital context, mindfulness fosters responsible engagement with technology by reducing impulsive online behaviour, emotional reactivity, and uncritical consumption of information. Mindful digital awareness supports ethical decision-making and promotes mental well-being in an environment characterized by constant connectivity and distraction.

Wisdom (Paññā) and Critical Digital Literacy:

Paññā (wisdom) enables discernment between wholesome and unwholesome actions. In an era of information overload, Buddhist wisdom supports critical thinking, ethical evaluation of digital content, and resistance to manipulation, propaganda, and false narratives. This contributes to informed and responsible digital citizenship. The Buddhist concept of the Middle Path advocates moderation and balance. Applied to digital life, it encourages mindful technology use, helping individuals avoid digital addiction, excessive screen time, and consumerism driven by online media. This balance supports both psychological health and ethical living.

Overall, Pāli Buddhist ethics contribute significantly to promoting human values such as empathy, truthfulness, moderation, wisdom, and responsibility. By integrating these ethical principles into digital life, individuals and societies can ensure that technological progress supports human dignity, social harmony, and sustainable well-being.

Conclusion:

Digital transformation presents both opportunities and ethical challenges, requiring a deeper understanding of moral responsibility. Pali Buddhist ethics, although based on ancient teachings, offers timeless ethical guidance for the digital age. Principles such as mindfulness, ethical behaviour, understanding, and compassion provide a comprehensive framework for addressing issues such as digital misuse, moral distancing, and the loss of human values.

By incorporating Buddhist ethical understanding into discussions of digital transformation, individuals and societies can adopt responsible digital behaviour based on moral awareness and human dignity. The study concludes that Pali Buddhist ethics remains valuable and valuable for making ethical decisions and promoting human values in an increasingly digital world.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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