

Effective use of Information Technology (IT) for propagation of Buddhism

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Preface

On the occasion of United Nations Day of Vesak, The Fourth International Buddhist Conference, May 26-29, BE 2550 (CE 2007), Bangkok, Thailand I am very delighted to present this paper as a part of workshop on '*Dissemination of Buddhism through Modern Technology*'.

Modern technology should be effectively used for Buddhist Missionary activity. The message of loving-kindness, compassion can spread all over globe with the usage of modern technology. Information Technology (IT) is a tool for propagation of Dhamma.

More and more young masses can be motivated to be involved in Dhamma activity with the help of modern technology. Lack of knowledge and information on time is one of the major reasons behind backwardness of many. The dissemination of modern technology will empower the people as well as Buddhist perspective will spread message of loving-kindness and compassion. Effective communication is the key for building a healthy world based on Equality, Liberty and Fraternity that Dhamma preached.

I would like to thank the organizers of the 'The International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak Celebrations 2007/2005'. I thank my parents (Aai and Nana), wife (Pallavi), brother and sister for supporting my Buddhist missionary activities. Special thanks to Dr. Richard Gombrich (OCBS), Dr. Geoffrey Bamford (OCBS), Dr. Khammai Dhammasami from Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies (OCBS), UK [<http://www.ocbs.org>].

Dhammaduta Sumedh
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28th May 2007

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the methodology for effective use of Information Technology (IT) for propagation of Buddhism. Cost effectiveness, Availability of Information, Advantages, Challenges and Action points are discussed. 'Actions' which we can take are also elaborated. More stress is given on the necessity of arranging workshops, trainings, building techno-social volunteers, effective communication and networking.

1. Introduction

Tathagat BUDDHA gave initiation to some individuals, and gave them this advice: "Spread this religion." In that way, *Yesha* and his forty friends were converted to Buddhism. Tathagat said to him, "What is this religion like? It is [in Pali:]

*"Caratha bhikkhave carikam
bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya
Laknukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya;
bhikkhave dhammam ādikalyānam
majjhekalyānam pariyosānakalyānam"*

[Bhikkhus, go out in all eight directions for the welfare of many people, for the friendship of many people, for compassion for the world; DHAMMA is welfare in the beginning, welfare in the middle, conducive to welfare in the end.]

"An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering."

-Bodhisattva Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Buddhist Revivalist, Founding Father, modern India

In modern era Information Technology (IT) is the tool available for propagation and communication.

2. Information Technology (IT) a Revolution

"Information Technology (IT) is convergence of Computer, Electronics and Media."

The intention of this paper is to create awareness among masses about Information Technology revolution because '**INTERNET**' is '**Access to Knowledge**'. In last 15 years IT has created a huge impact on world society. 21st century will divide world society based on the power of Access to Knowledge. Lack of knowledge will create a huge gap in society. 'Availability of Information' and 'Access to Knowledge' creates very big impact on progress of all human beings. Effective use of Information Technology (IT) will help to reduce the knowledge gap as well as it will help to propagate 'Buddha Dhamma'.

For propagation of ideas and thoughts every one needs media and IT is the fast and very effective communication media.

3. Methodology for effective use of Information (IT)

1. Web and Portals - Promoting maximum organizations and institutions involved in Dhamma activity to bring their work on Web or Internet. This can communicate the world about their activities and presence at any part of the globe.
2. Networking Universities and Organizations – IT is a networking tool to connect people and organizations at global level. Directory of all such institutions can be developed and maintained.
3. Digitization - Books can be digitized and made available for access to masses. In the library context, digitization usually refers to the process of converting a paper- or film-based document into electronic form. The electronic conversion is accomplished through imaging a process whereby a document is scanned and an electronic representation of the original, in the form of a bitmap image, is produced.
4. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) - 'Optical Character Recognition' is a subsequent to Digitization, process that transforms a bitmapped image of printed text into text code, thereby making it machine-readable. For preservation original manuscripts OCR is an useful technique. Manuscripts available in different parts of the world can be well preserved.
5. Information Repository – A repository can be developed for texts, data, old books and new books. e-Library is growing concept where texts and e-books are available online.
6. Effective search engine – When data or information grows we need effective search engines also. Customized engines can be developed for particular organizations as well as available tools can be used.
7. IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) – IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) is a system where a digital television service is delivered using the Internet Protocol over a network infrastructure, which may include delivery by a broadband connection. In coming future IPTV will be a big media revolution. It will be cost effective as well as targeting to mass users. Development of such IPTV is possible with the help of few technical experts. Users can be anywhere in the corner of the world.

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8. Audio and Video on demand – Audio and Video creates impact on people's mind. Online availability of Dhamma Audio/Video Tapes, Conference and Workshop can be recorded and that can be made available for the people.
9. Video Conferences – For conducting meetings where people can not be present physically; Video conference is a good solution. Because of IT revolution the Video Conferencing is becoming cheaper and cost effective. People can talk online with quality video cameras.
10. Security – Awareness about information security is also equally important. Now many tools are available for securing the data.
11. Creating more awareness for effective use of IT – Most important point is propagation among masses. It is need of time for creating more awareness among people to use modern technology for their welfare. Use of modern technology will increase efficiency for propagation and networking. It will also help people to find like minded people.

4. Advantages

4.1 Few advantages -

- Preservation of original texts, old manuscripts in their original format is possible
- Repository of information will be accessible to common people
- Internet is a strong and powerful MEDIA which can be used to reach maximum masses.
- Internet reduces Communication Gap
- Very cheap, cost effective compared to other available means of communication
- Fast communication channel at global level
- Can build good network all over world of like minded people of same profession and interests

4.2 Cost Effectiveness -

Biggest advantage of using modern technology is to reduce the cost and to reach maximum people. IT is very helpful to reduce cost.

Compared to existing media the IT is a cost effective media. Exchanging knowledge using IT is cheaper than other available resources as well as transfer of data and knowledge is very huge in every sector using IT.

Current trend in IT is that few people are involved and rests of the people are not aware of the actual cost. So profit making people are misusing the power of knowledge. Awareness of IT among maximum people this will help in reduction of the cost.

To maintain and update central data, cost effective locations available all over world can be used.

5. Challenges

“An educated man without character and humility was more dangerous than a beast. If his education was detrimental to the welfare of poor, he was a curse to society.”

- Bodhisattva Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Creating more awareness about IT and motivation to use IT among the organizations, institutions and individuals involved in Dhamma Propagation is a challenging task. At least in the present scenario the Buddhist world is not effectively utilizing the great opportunity and modern technology resources.

The misuse of IT by few people will deprive many people from different opportunities. Those who have latest information on will progress but who do not have will surely lag behind. This will create social imbalance in recent future.

The percentage of IT user and IT aware women is less compared to men; this gap should be reduced as soon as possible.

6. Actions

In present situation apart from few developed countries rest of the world is still away from IT revolution and its advantages. Most of the common masses do not know even basic usage of Internet.

1. **Workshops** - The intention behind conducting workshops is to motivate institutes, organizations and individuals to use IT for Dhamma work. IT is not only for few engineers of few highly educated people but it for each and every individual. Awareness among masses can be created. Such workshops can be arranged and Young Buddhist Volunteers will be the valuable and useful asset for conducting such techno-social programs. Every Buddhist Institution even it is a very small should be aware of IT and its advantages for networking worldwide organizations. Remote places in different part of globe can be well connected.
2. **Trainings** –Trainings will build confidence among people. Basic use of Internet and other features for IT should be available for every person. The introductory course can be small so that at least people should know the usage and advantages. Once confidence and interest is build then some people can trained as volunteers' for maintenance and other IT related activity. Audio Chat, Video Chat is possible now and at very lowers costs. Trainings for usage of IT can be arranged for Buddhist Monks (Bhikkhus) and Buddhist Nuns (Bhikkhunis), Dhammacharis, Dhammadutas, Active Buddhist missionaries and lay Buddhists.
3. **Motivating young people** – It is the responsibility of young people of Dhamma Propagation. IT will be a tool to involve young people in Dhamma Work. Dhamma Centres can be a multiple activity centres and young people can be involved in institutional and organizational work.
4. **Information Repository** - Development of data, information repository. Maximum available information can be brought on web. Such efforts are going on in different part but we need better communication between such distributed activities.
5. **Effective Search Engine** – For information search an effective search engine is also necessary. There are few good search are available as well as customized search engines can be developed.

6. **Preservation of original manuscripts** – I feel this is the major initiative and very necessary. Original manuscripts can be preserved in their original format with the help of modern technology. Reducing cost on technology as well as with the help of dedicated trained people this is an achievable task.
7. **Global Networking** - Establishing network and communication with worldwide distributed Buddhist Institutions/Organizations as well as Human Rights Organizations and organizations which are involved in social justice and empowerment of people.
8. **Other Initiatives** –
 - I. **Knowledge Community Centre (KCC)** – Setting up dedicated centres where basic training for use of IT can be provided to common masses. The ‘Knowledge Community Centre’ can be small or big as per the place and availability. KCC even with one computer and Internet connection will be a very valuable resource. This can be a regular activity. Young children as well as elderly people can attend such programs. Such social activity to learn some use new of technology will help to bring more people. Such Knowledge Community Centre within the institution, organizational set up or at remote places wherever Dhamma activities are carries out will help people to grow and exchange knowledge. It will also promote right livelihood among people who need it. Those young masses who have basic knowledge of IT will be helpful for carrying out such activities as well as it empower people.
 - II. **Cultural Exchange Programs** – As discussed earlier IT is useful for better Communication and co-ordination. This can be used for arranging ‘Cultural Exchange Programs’ especially for common lay Buddhists. People from developing or under-developed countries can not afford to meet people from other countries. This is certainly a big hurdle in propagation of Buddhism. Cultural Exchange Programs help people to build confidence and relationships across the border. The exposure and traveling to different places will bring people closer and connected.

7. Buddhist Movement in India

Buddhist revivalist movement in India began on 14th October 1956 after mass conversion ceremony in Nagpur, India under the leadership of Buddhist Revivalist Bodhisattva Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. On 15th March 1956 in an UNPUBLISHED PREFACE of the Buddhist Text also known as Buddhist Bible of Contemporary Buddhist Movement in India, "**The Buddha and His Dhamma**" Bodhisattva Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said: I may mention that this is one of the three books which will form a set for the proper understanding of Buddhism.

The other books are:

1. Buddha OR Karl Marx

http://www.ambedkarthoughts.com/buddha_or_karl_marx.html

2. Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India

http://www.ambedkarthoughts.com/revolution_and_counter_revolution.html

3. The Buddha and His Dhamma

http://www.ambedkarthoughts.com/volume_11_buddha_and_his_dhamma.html

8. Conclusion

All historical and important Buddhist Scriptures can be preserved in better and cost effective manner. The knowledge can be transferred to present and next generation with effective use of IT. Cost reduction in communication is the major factor which we can achieve using IT. The world can certainly be well connected, well informed about latest updates using IT. Exchange of knowledge and access to knowledge will empower people.

The '*Sangha*' of Buddhist Monks (Bhikkhus), Buddhist Nuns (Bhikkhunis) and organizations of lay Buddhists (Upasakas/Upasikas) will be well organized and united with the effective use of IT. Cost reduction will help maximum people to come together and work for the welfare of the masses and Dhamma Propagation. More young masses can be involved in Dhamma activities with the use of modern technologies.

"Globalization with capitalism may not be acceptable but Globalization with Buddhism is certainly acceptable because morals and ethics are embedded in the heart of Buddhist Philosophy and Dhamma preaches right livelihood".

Propagation of 'Buddha Dhamma' will help to reduce the poverty gap and bring social justice for every individual. IT will help to unite like minded people all over world for basic human rights, environment protection and to build a world society based on Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.

Buddhist Era is the Golden Era of Indian History. Now in 21st century to bring back Buddhism in its land of origin, India; effective use of Information Technology will play a crucial role. We hope that the International Buddhist Community will surely take an interest and active role in the present Buddhist Movement in India.

From Africa to America; each and every part of the world needs Dhamma and we need effective measures for propagation of Dhamma. Information Technology is the effective tool available to achieve our goal for empowerment of all human beings.

Namo Buddhai, Jai Bhim,

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"Annihilation of Caste"¹ is our motivation; our only destination is "Buddhism".

¹ <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/index.html>