

QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP: ABSTAINING FROM FOUR TYPES OF BIASE

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Abstract

The development and success of an organization depend not only on each individual but also on the leader of the organization. A leader must maintain fairness towards those they are leading. Only by being free from biased practices and corruption can one be a person of complete moral integrity. This paper outlines the four types of bias. These biases – desire(*chandāgati*), aversion(*dosāgati*), delusion(*mohāgati*), and fear(*bhayāgati*) – are mental distortions that lead to unethical conduct in both personal societal contexts. *Agati* or bias is not a positive quality of a leader but rather represents pitfalls that a leader must avoid to maintain ethical and effective leadership. The concept of *Agati* is closely related to the moral and ethical standards that Buddhist literature holds for leaders, particularly in how one should exercise one's power and judgment. This paper explores the concept of *Agati* in Buddhist literature, examining its significance and ethical implications through the analysis of Pāli canonical texts, commentaries and other texts using descriptive and explanatory methods. This paper aims to overcome *Agati* in order to cultivate moral clarity and ethical decision-making, according to the Buddhist principles, and to disappear of corruption in the society. In this paper, it can be found that individuals engaging in *agati* experience downfall, whereas those who avoid *agati* attain success in life.

Keywords: *agati*, desire, aversion, delusion, fear, leader

Introduction

In every organization in the world, it is necessary to have a leader. There are many principles that one must practice to be a good leader. Just as there are principles to follow, there are also things to avoid. Among them, corruption or bias is one of the things to avoid. A good leader must refrain from bias. A leader has the responsibility to ensure justice, unity and peace within the organization they lead. Only when a society is free from bias can there be justice, peace and stability. Each individual has a responsibility to contribute to a society free from partiality. However, acts of corruption are prevalent in society, leading to bias and injustice. It is found in Pāli literature that disadvantages resulting from corruption, as well as advantages of being free from corruption, are described. In Buddhist literature, *Agati* refers to the four kinds of bias or wrong paths that lead to moral corruption and poor judgment.

Materials and Methods

Data used in this research paper are collected from the Pāli texts, Commentaries and other texts. In writing this research, descriptive and explanatory methods are used.

Research Questions

1. Why is avoiding bias (*agati*) important for leadership?
2. What are the advantages of avoiding bias (*agati*)?
3. What are the disadvantages of pursuing bias (*agati*)?

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The Meaning of *Agati*

The Pāli word “*Agati*” means partiality, corruption, going towards what should not be pursued, or moving where one should not go, deviating from rightful path, and wrong course of action¹. Pursuing of *Agati* refers to committing the act of partiality. In society, there are many forms of partiality. Leaders of the societies need to be free from partiality. However, due to various reasons, some leaders commit acts of injustice and partiality. There are numerous reasons behind such acts of corruption, but in Pāli literature, *agati* refers to the four wrong paths or biases that lead to poor judgment and unethical actions. These are:

- (1) *Chandāgati* (bias due to desire),
- (2) *Dosāgati* (bias due to aversion),
- (3) *Mohāgati* (bias due to delusion),
- (4) *Bhayāgati* (bias due to fear).²

These biases are viewed as obstacles that distort judgment, leading to unethical behavior. These biases are not only personal afflictions but can also influence larger societal and political decisions, leading to widespread corruption and injustice. Leaders are expected to uphold ethical principles and maintain impartiality, fairness, and wisdom in their decisions. A leader who is free from *Agati* is considered more capable of making just and moral decisions that benefit the people they lead. In the Jātaka Pāli text, the qualities of an ideal ruler or leader are described such as:

- (1) *Dāna* (Generosity)
- (2) *Sīla* (Moral Conduct)
- (3) *Pariccāga* (Self-Sacrifice)
- (4) *Ajjava* (Honesty)
- (5) *Maddava* (Gentleness)
- (6) *Tapa* (Self-Control)
- (7) *Akkodha* (Non-Anger)
- (8) *Avihimsa* (Non-Violence)
- (9) *Khantī* (Patience)
- (10) *Avirodha* (Non-Opposition to Justice).³

To practice these virtues, a leader must actively avoid the *Agati* biases. The presence of any of these biases can corrupt leadership and lead to unethical decisions, injustice, and suffering. A leader who succumbs to *Agati* violates these virtues by allowing personal desires, biases, or emotions to cloud their judgment.

In the Mahācattārīsaka Sutta, the Buddha specifically addresses the four *agati*, explaining how a person may act out of desire, aversion, delusion, or fear. The Buddha delivered that decisions and judgments must not be influenced by fear, as it leads to partiality and the corruption of justice.⁴

¹ Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga Pāli, (2007), 483-484.

² Dīghanikāya, Sīlakkhanda Vagga Pāli, (1956), 191.

³ Jātaka Pāli (Dutiyo Bhāgo), (1961), 92.

⁴ Majjhima Nikāya, Uparipannāsa Pāli, (1956), 116.

***Chandāgati* (Bias due to Desire)**

The word *chandāgati* means behaving the wrong action of bias due to desire or attachment¹. A leader driven by *chandāgati* may show favoritism or engage in corruption for personal gain. *Chandāgati* can lead a leader to favour friends or family members, promoting nepotism in every institution. *Chandāgati* arises when a person acts out of excessive attachment, passion, or desire for something. One may favour someone in decision-making because of personal affection or *Chandāgati* that arises in one.

Nature of *Chandāgati*

As *chandāgati* refers to the bias that arises from excessive desire or attachment, it can lead individuals to favor those they are attracted to or to pursue selfish gain at the expense of ethical principles. The craving (*taṇhā*) influences *chandāgati*. The nature of craving can be found in the Dhammapada Pāli texts as follow:

“The craving of one given to heedless living grows like a creeper. Like the monkey seeking fruits in the forest, he leaps from life to life.”²

“Just as a tree, though cut down, sprouts up again if its roots remain uncut and firm, even so until the craving that lies dormant is rooted out, suffering springs up again and again.”³

“Beset by craving, people run about like an entrapped hare. Therefore, one who yearns to be passion-free should destroy his own craving.”⁴

Overcoming *Chandāgati*

Focusing on mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*) is crucial in overcoming biases, including those driven by desire. In the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, it emphasizes the practice of insight meditation to see the true nature of phenomena, leading to the reduction of attachment or desire. Practicing of mindfulness (*Sati*) in the Sutta outlines the importance of mindfulness in observing one’s own thoughts and feelings about pleasure, which can help on managing and overcoming desire.⁵

In the Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta, it explains that understanding the impermanence of sensual pleasures helps in overcoming desire. Recognizing that pleasures are transient can reduce attachment.⁶

The Story of the King and the Golden Goose (Mahā Haṃsa Jātaka)

This is the story of a king who becomes enamored with a golden goose. In his desire to possess the goose, the king makes unjust decisions, harming others in the process. His bias of desire clouds his judgment, causing him disregard fairness and compassion. In this tale, a golden goose, the bodhisatta, was sought by a king who initially wants to possess it because of his

¹ Vinaya Piṭaka, Pārājika Pāli, (2007), 348.

² Dhammapada, (2007), 61.

³ Dhammapada, (2007), 62.

⁴ Dhammapada, (2007), 62.

⁵ Dīghanikāya, Mahāvagga Pāli, (1956), 231.

⁶ Majjhimanikāya, Mūlapaṇṇāsa Pāli, (1956), 242.

affection for his wife. However, the goose teaches the king valuable lessons about righteousness, compassion, and the futility of greed, leading and the king to change his ways.¹

This story exemplifies how *chandagati* can corrupt leadership. The king's desire leads to actions that betray his duty to protect and serve his people. It emphasizes the need for restraint and impartiality in decision-making, qualities that are compromised when desire becomes the motivating force.

***Dosāgati*(Bias Due To Aversion)**

Dosagati can be defined as “wrong course through hatred”.² *Dosagati* can results in a leader discriminating against certain groups out of personal dislike or hatred. An individual influenced by *Dosagati* may make unfair or harmful decisions due to personal grudges or dislike.

The Nature of *Dosāgati*

Dosagati arises from hatred, anger, or aversion, causing one to act unjustly toward those they dislike or resent. When a person is guided by anger or hostility, the person may make unfair judgments or acts unjustly towards others. It is often associated with resentment, prejudice, or vindictiveness. *Dosagatai* obstructs one's ability to act with wisdom and compassion.

The danger of harboring anger and teaching that hatred does not cease through hatred but only through love are described in the Dhammapada Pāḷi as follow:

“He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me, he robbed me.” Those who harbor such thoughts do not still their hatred.”³

“He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me, he robbed me.” Those who do not harbor such thoughts still their hatred.”⁴

“Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.”⁵

Therefore, a leader or each individual should avoid from harboring anger that leads to wrong conduct or decision through hatred or personal dislikes.

Overcoming *Dosāgati*

Loving-kindness is a primary antidote to hatred. It is the sincere wish for the happiness and well-being of all beings. In the Mettā Sutta, it describes that developing loving-kindness brings about peace and destroys hatred. Practicing loving-kindness can counteract the mind's tendency to fall into hatred.⁶

Understanding the law of kamma can help reduce hatred by fostering mindfulness of the consequences of actions. When one realizes that hatred harmful actions bring about suffering, it becomes easier to abstain from ill-will. In the Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta, it is explained that how

¹ Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā, Pañcamo Bhāgo, (1959), 377-407.

² Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga Pāḷi, (2007), 395.

³ Dhammapada, (2007), 13.

⁴ Dhammapada, (2007), 13.

⁵ Dhammapada, (2007), 14.

⁶ Suttanipāta, (2007), 300.

one's action influences future experiences. By reflecting on how hateful thoughts lead to negative karmic results, one can become more inclined to abandon anger and adopt wholesome mental states.¹

In the Attadanda Sutta, it conveys that fear and hatred arise from attachment and ignorance. Understanding the consequences of such mental state helps in abandoning them.²

Compassion is another antidote to hatred. When one sees that other beings suffer just like oneself, it becomes harder to harbor ill-will against them. In the Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta, the Buddha advises his son Rāhula to develop compassion toward all beings to counteract harmful thoughts and behaviors.³

Developing patience and forgiveness are powerful practices in overcoming hatred. By practicing patience in the face of anger or provocation, one avoids harmful speech and actions driven by hatred. The Buddha explains, in the Akkosa Sutta, how one should respond to anger with calmness and patience, like a well-trained elephant that does not retaliate when attacked.⁴

Equanimity known as *Upekkhā* is the balanced, calm state of mind that helps to avoid falling into extremes like hatred or attachment. In the Subha Sutta, the Buddha speaks of the importance of equanimity as a virtue that balances the mind, preventing it from succumbing to anger or ill-will.⁵

The Story of the Monkey King and the Human King (Mahākapi Jātaka)

This is the Jātaka tale named Mahākapi Jātaka about a human king harbours deep aversion towards a wise monkey king, despite the latter's kindness. The human king's hatred blinds him to the monkey king's virtues, leading to cruel and unfair treatment. In this story, the wise and kind monkey king saves his troop from the human king, who harbors jealousy and hatred towards him despite the monkey king's goodwill. To save his troop, the monkey king forms a bridge with his own body, allowing the monkeys to escape across a river. Despite his heroic act, the human king shoots the monkey king with an arrow. However, before dying, the monkey king advised the human king on the importance of compassion and kindness. Deeply moved by the monkey's sacrifice, the human king repents and gives him a proper burial, learning a valuable lesson in compassion and leadership.⁶

Mohāgāti (Bias Due to Delusion)

Mohagati leads to poor judgment based on ignorance or misunderstanding. *Mohagati* can cloud a leader's judgment, leading them to make uniformed or harmful decisions. *Mohagati* means "delusion or ignorance".⁷ This bias occurs when a person is misled by ignorance, confusion, or misunderstanding. Delusion clouds one's ability to discern right from wrong,

¹ Majjhimanikāya, Uparipaṇṇāsa, (1956), 243.

² Suttanipāta, (2007), 424.

³ Majjhimanikāya, Uparipaṇṇāsa, (1956), 83.

⁴ Saṃyuttanikāya, Sagāthāvaggasamyutta Pāli, (1957), 163.

⁵ Majjhimanikāya, Majjhimaṇṇāsa, (1956), 413.

⁶ Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā (Tatiyo Bhāgo), (1959), 349.

⁷ Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga Pāli, (2007), 395.

leading to poor decisions based on false beliefs or misinterpretations. Ignorance can also involve self-deception, where one fails to see one's own faults.

The Nature of *Mohāgati*

Mohāgati is the tendency or path of delusion that clouds understanding of reality, leading to ignorance and suffering. *Mohāgati* refers to actions or decisions based on delusion or ignorance. When one is driven by confusion or a lack of clear understanding, they make wrong judgments.

In the Avijjā Sutta, *avijja* or ignorance is identified as the root cause of unwholesome actions. It is said that because of *avijja*, beings wander in *samsāra*. In this sutta, *moha* (delusion) is synonymous with *avijja*, highlighting its fundamental role in keeping beings trapped in the cycle of suffering.¹

It explains in the Dvedhavitakka Sutta how wrong thoughts are rooted in delusion, and how delusion leads to mental proliferation, fueling attachment and aversion. Delusion is contrasted with wisdom (*paññā*), which leads to liberation from suffering.²

Overcoming *Mohāgati*

Regularly listening to and contemplating the Dhamma helps dispel ignorance. Knowledge of the Dhamma provides clarity on the nature of existence, leading one away from the wrong path of delusion. The Sappurisa Sutta explains the characteristics of a true person and emphasizes the importance of learning and understanding the Dhamma as a means to overcome delusion.³

Wisdom is the direct antidote to delusion. Through the cultivation of wisdom, one understands the true nature of existence, leading to the eradication of ignorance. In the Mahāvedalla Sutta, it discusses the relationship between wisdom and ignorance. It states that delusion can be overcome by developing wisdom.⁴

The Mahā Dhammapāla Jātaka

This jātika highlights how the Buddha, in a past life, exemplified wisdom and the avoidance of biases, specifically ignorance and delusion. In this jātika, the Bodhisatta is born as Dhammapāla, the son of a wealthy and virtuous family in Bārāṇasī. The family was known for their righteous conduct, and Dhammapāla was raised with great care and devotion. One day, he was sent to learn under a famous teacher. The teacher, however, was greedy and negligent, teaching only for money and favor, rather than out of genuine concern for his student's understanding. The teacher failed to teach the children properly.

The father of Dhammapāla, being wise, recognized that the teacher's ignorance and greed were affecting the education of his son. He decided to confront the teacher about his negligence. He lost his reputation and wealth. In the end, Dhammapāla's father explained to the teacher that being guided by ignorance (*Mohagati*) leads to suffering and misguided actions. He advised the teacher to avoid biases and to cultivate wisdom and sincerity in teaching. The father's wisdom

¹ Aṅguttara Nikāya III, (1960), 346.

² Majjhimanikāya, Mūlapaṇṇāsa, (1956), 161.

³ Majjhimanikāya, Uparipaṇṇāsa, (1956), 86.

⁴ Majjhimanikāya, Mūlapaṇṇāsa, (1956), 365.

and calm demeanor helped the teacher realize his delusion and greed, leading him to change his ways.¹

This story illustrates the importance of wisdom in overcoming delusion and emphasizes how biases such as ignorance, desire, fear, and anger can lead people astray. It also highlights the need for integrity and sincerity, especially in positions of authority and teaching, where one's actions deeply impact others.

***Bhayāgati* (Bias Due to Fear)**

Bhayāgati can be defined as that one does not act according to what is right due to fear of consequences, harm, or punishment.² Acting out of fear leads to decisions influenced by anxiety or concern over potential negative consequences. Fear can make individuals compromise their integrity, avoiding what is right in order to protect themselves from harm or loss. A person may fail to stand up for justice because they fear retaliation.

Bhayāgati might cause a leader to act unethically to protect their own power or avoid negative consequences. *Bhayāgati* results in decisions made to protect oneself rather than uphold justice or the welfare of others.

The Nature of *Bhayāgati*

Bhayāgati, or acting out of fear, refers to making unwholesome decisions, taking unjust actions, or adopting an improper course of conduct due to fear. Fear can cloud one's judgment, leading to partiality or unfairness.

In the Brahmajāla Sutta, it is mentioned that the four agati as paths one should avoid, especially for those in positions of judgment or authority. *Bhayāgati* is noted as one of the reasons why people make unjust or unethical decisions.³

The consequences of *kamma* can be found in the Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta. Although this sutta focuses on the workings of *kamma*, it emphasizes the importance of actions being free from the influences of fear, greed, hatred, or delusion. Decisions influenced by *Bhayāgati* lead to unwholesome karmic consequences.⁴

Overcoming *Bhayāgati*

To overcome *Bhayāgati*, it is needed to know why fear (*Bhayā*) arises in man. It is found that the five causes of fear are described in the Sāraṅga Sutta. They are –

- (1) Lack of Faith (*saddhā*)
- (2) Lack of Morality (*sīla*)
- (3) Lack of insight or Wisdom (*paññā*)
- (4) Laziness (*ālasya*)
- (5) Lack of Knowledge (*bahussuta*).⁵

¹ Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā (Catuttho Bhāgo), (1959), 49-55.

² Vinaya Piṭaka, Pārājika Pāli, (2007), 346.

³ Dīghanikāya, Sīlakkhandavagga, (1956), 1.

⁴ Majjhimanikāya, Uparipannāsa, (1956), 243.

⁵ Aṅguttara Nikāya II, (1960), 161.

These are the causes that lead to fear. By avoiding these five causes, one can overcome fear.

One has to cultivate mindfulness, wisdom, and moral integrity, ensuring that one's decisions are not influenced by fear or any of the other unwholesome states that lead to *agati*.

The Consequences of Pursuing and Avoiding *Agati*

It is stated in the Tatiya *agati* Sutta that if a person transgresses the law out of love, hatred, fear, or ignorance, that person's virtues and strengths will wane like the moon during the waning phase. If a person does not do so, that person's virtues and strengths will flourish like the moon during the waxing phase.¹

According to the Dhammapada verses (256), a person who behaves unjustly because of bias will face social consequences and damage the person's reputation.² In the Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta, it is stated that bias causes one to accumulate bad Kamma, which brings about suffering in this life and future life. Bad actions based on bias lead to unfavorable rebirths.³

Partiality can lead to conflicts, mistrust, and discord within families, communities, and societies, as described in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. Avoiding partiality leads to the development of virtues such as truthfulness, fairness, and wisdom. It is also stated in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta that by practicing impartiality, one fosters harmony and trust in relationships, whether in personal life or in society.⁴

In the Dhammapada verse (257), it is described that those who act justly without bias gain the respect and admiration of others, building a good reputation.⁵

It can now be known that pursuing *agati* will face such harmful consequences while avoiding *agati* can get many good benefits.

Findings and Discussion

The development, stability, peace, prosperity and impartiality of an organization depend on the leader who is leading it. Therefore, it is very important for a leader to have good moral character and a high mental state. Among the principles of moral conduct to be followed, avoiding of corruption is also included as one of them. If a leader is free from the four forms of corruption, every nation, organization, and family will experience peace, prosperity, and unity. In this world, various forms of injustice, partiality, and oppression continue to occur in society. Whether among friends, within families, in schools, or at workplace, partiality and corruption, known as *agati* or unethical conduct persist. There are four reasons why people engage in corruption: partiality due to affection, partiality due to hatred, partiality due to ignorance, and partiality due to fear. If corruption spreads within an organization, starting from the leader down to the lower levels, that organization will lose its unity and begin to deteriorate. The negative

¹ Aṅgutanikāya I, (1960), 326.

² Dhammapada, (2007), 50.

³ Majjhimanikāya, Uparipaṇṇāsa, (1956), 243.

⁴ Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Pāli, (1956), 62.

⁵ Dhammapada, (2007), 50.

impact of corruption is immense, extending from the breakdown of individual integrity to the disintegration of unity to the entire nation.

Conclusion

This paper outlines the causes of corruption and examines its potential benefits and harms. The exemplary stories of Jātaka have also been presented for example in this paper. It aims to provide an understanding of the nature of bias and its consequences. The paper is presented with the hope that it may contribute, in part, to the elimination of corruption. An organization led by a leader free from the four types of misconduct will be stable and peaceful. In Pali literature, it has been observed that the negative consequences arise from engaging in bias or *agati*, while benefits are gained from refraining from bias or *agati*. Each individual within a society lack of corruption will be able to enjoy benefits such as stability, peace, fairness, and unity. A leader must govern impartially and fairly, free from bias. Among the qualities that a leader should possess is avoiding corruption or bias. If both the leader and each follower are free from corruption, it will result in a family, organization, society and the whole nation characterized by fairness, equality, peace, prosperity and justice.

When leaders embody the virtue of abstaining from the four types of bias (desire, aversion, delusion, and fear) they become a pillar of stability and integrity. This impartiality fosters trust and confidence within families, communities, and institutions. As Pāli literature consistently highlights, just governance based on Dhamma does not only benefit the leader, but radiates peace and unity outward like a lamp lighting other lamps. In such a society, justice becomes the norm, not the exception, leading to harmony among people regardless of social class or background.

The ripple effect of ethical leadership begins at the personal level and expands into national transformation. A leader who is free from bias can make decisions that are wise, inclusive, and beneficial for all. This contributes to the eradication of corruption and promotes fairness in the allocation of resources, education, and opportunities. In turn, families experience greater security and trust, communities thrive with cooperation, and the nation experiences long-term development rooted in moral governance and public confidence. Without justice at the top, development becomes an illusion; but with justice, prosperity follows naturally.

When both leaders and citizens commit to overcoming *agati*, social unity strengthens. Partiality creates division—within families, among ethnic groups, and between economic classes. However, impartiality creates bridges. A society that cultivates non-discrimination and fairness, as emphasized in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, is one where mutual respect grows. This results in fewer conflicts, more inclusive progress, and resilient institutions. Ultimately, it is not power or wealth that ensures national stability, but the moral strength and just conduct of its people—especially its leaders.

In essence, the practice of abstaining from the four types of bias (*chandāgati*, *dosāgati*, *mohāgati*, and *bhayāgati*) is not merely a personal ethical discipline, but a foundational principle for societal transformation. When individuals, especially those in leadership roles, cultivate fairness and clarity of mind, the effects ripple outward, restoring justice within institutions,

strengthening families through mutual respect, and building national unity rooted in moral conduct. Peace and prosperity do not arise from wealth alone, but from the inner purity of those who lead and serve. As taught in the Dhamma and exemplified in the Jātakas, the true path to societal development lies not in ambition or fear, but in wisdom, compassion, and impartiality. By walking this path, a nation may blossom not only in material progress, but in collective well-being and enduring harmony.

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