

THE SACRED BODHI TREE THAT FOUND IN THE MYANMAR HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS OF MONARCHICAL TIME

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Abstract

The Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under the shade of the Banyan tree (*Ficus religiosa*) which have been born simultaneously with him. Based on this fact, Myanmar kings held very high esteem to the sacred Bodhi tree and worshipped it as *Paribhoga Ceti*. With the aim of propagating and sustaining Buddhism, therefore, Myanmar kings used to plant respectfully the sacred Bodhi tree within the premises of pagodas and monasteries as a utensil of Lord Buddha. To honour Buddhism within their kingdom, moreover, Myanmar kings built a number of religious buildings and donated them to *Sāsana* throughout dynasties. Furthermore, they planted the sacred Bodhi tree and built religious buildings at Buddha Gaya of India, the sacred land for Buddhists. In fact, Myanmar kings renovated Mahabodhi Ceti and preserved the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya as possible as they could throughout history. From Bagan to Konbaung period, they sent Buddhist missionaries to Buddha Gaya to make donations, to renovate religious buildings and to conserve the sacred Bodhi tree. Since Bagan period, king and people of Myanmar used to pour water and fragrances at the foot of the sacred Bodhi tree in order to make sure it does not die of drought during the hot summer as well as to honour it as the symbol of the enlightenment of Lord Buddha. Thus, pouring water at the foot of sacred Bodhi trees on the full moon day of *Kason* became a religious tradition of Myanmar since monarchical time. In fact, planting the sacred Bodhi trees was supportive not only for the propagation of Buddhism but also for the promotion of cordial relations with neighbouring countries. This paper is an attempt to reveal the importance of sacred Bodhi tree in Myanmar history with special references to stone inscriptions, parabaiks, the treatises on *Buddhavamsa*, Royal Orders and other relevant historical documents.

Keywords: Bodhi tree, the Buddha, Buddhism

Introduction

In *Bhadrakalpa* - period of time which is distinguished by enlightenment of five successive Buddhas, each Buddha attained or would attain enlightenment under different sacred trees. *Kakusandha* Buddha (the first Buddha of the *Bhadrakalpa*) attained enlightenment under Koukou (kind of rain tree) tree. *Koṇāgamana* Buddha (the second Buddha of the *Bhadrakalpa*) attained enlightenment under Yeithahpan (kind of fig usually found near watercourses) tree. *Kassapa* Buddha (the third Buddha of the *Bhadrakalpa*) attained enlightenment under sacred Banyan tree. *Gautama* Buddha attained enlightenment under sacred Bodhi (*Ficus religiosa*) tree.² Hence the sacred Bodhi tree and Throne on which the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment became the first symbols³ of Lord Buddha and they are worshipped reverently by the Buddhists.

In fact, the sacred Bodhi tree is a distinctive one because the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment at the foot of that tree as well as it was one of seven persons born or things appeared at the same moment when prince *Siddhattha* was born.⁴ The original sacred Bodhi tree and Throne were situated at Buddha Gaya of India. According to old records, Emperor Asoka built a ceti at Buddha Gaya by enshrining the original sacred Bodhi tree and Throne since around 2000 years

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² Tripitaka Sayadaw U Vicittasarabivamsa, နိင်္ဂီတော်ဗုဒ္ဓသာသန မဟာဗုဒ္ဓဝင်/ပထမတွဲ (ဒုတိယပိုင်း) *State Buddha Sasana Great Life of Lord Buddha*, Vol. I, (Part 2), Yangon, Department of Religious Affairs, 1977, p. 579

³ Figure of Bodhi tree, figure of Stupa, figure of the Wheel of Dharma.

⁴ Princess Yaśodharā, Prince Ānanda, Chandra Amat (high official of Royal Court), Kaludāri Amat, Kandaka Horse, Four Big Gold Pots and Sacred Bo-tree.

ago. His successors who believed in Buddhism renovated the ceti.¹ This ceti; Mahabodhi, became a significant monument of Buddha Gaya. In fact, the sacred Bodhi tree that could be seen in the west of Mahabodhi Ceti nowadays is not the original one. According to the historical records, a Hindu king; *Sasanka*, cut down the original Bodhi tree and destroyed it. But a new Bodhi tree sprouted from a root of original tree. When the new tree also fell down to the ground in 1870, Sir Alexander Canning who took charge of the renovation works of Mahabodhi Ceti under the instructions of British Government at that time, cut a branch of fallen Bodhi tree and planted it at the original place of sacred tree.² Nowadays pilgrims can worship that re-planted sacred Bodhi tree at Buddha Gaya. Some records say that Emperor Asoka cut the southern branch of original sacred Bodhi tree by making a vow to propagate Buddhism. Then he sent his daughter *Singhamitta Theri* (female member of the Buddhist Order) to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to plant it there. Thus, the tree that grew out of the southern branch of original sacred Bodhi tree thrived as *Singhamitta* Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura city of Ceylon. Then the Ceylonese planted the seeds of that Bodhi tree all over Ceylon to worship as the symbol of Lord Buddha. Myanmar kings also brought respectfully some small Bodhi trees from Ceylon and planted them within their kingdom.

Planting and worshipping the sacred Bodhi tree by Myanmar Kings that found in Historical Literatures

Buddhist Myanmar kings revered Lord Buddha and supported Buddhism with the aim of flourishing and propagating it. They also planted sacred Bodhi trees and venerated as *Paribhoga Ceti* with the purpose of *thriving* and sustaining Buddhism. Moreover, Myanmar kings used to plant sacred Bodhi trees as evidence of the proliferation of Buddhism.³ By studying the historical evidence of Bagan period, however, it can be seen that Bagan kings did not plant and worship the sacred Bodhi trees though they provided and propagated Buddhism. In “*Ancient Myanmar Chronicle*” written by Dr. Than Tun, it can only be seen that an anonymous queen of Bagan planted small Bodhi trees which grown out of the seeds of sacred tree of Buddha Gaya⁴ around the monastery that she donated.⁵ *Sasana Linkara Treatise*” written by Mahadhammathingyan and “*Glass Palace Chronicle*” describe that King Uzana (1322 – 1342) of Pinya tried to thrive and sustain Buddhism by planting sacred Bodhi tree in ME 702 (1340).⁶

During Taungoo period, Rāmadhipati or King Dhammazedi (1472 – 1492) sent twenty-two monks to Ceylon on 21 January 1476. Those monks arrived back at Bago on 12 October 1476 and consecrated the ground for Kalyāni ordination hall on 23 November 1476. Then the king planted the sacred Bodhi tree there by enshrining Kalyāni Ceti.⁷ In fact, the king promoted religious

¹ မြန်မာ့စွယ်စုံကျမ်း၊ အတွဲ (၈)၊ Myanmar Encyclopedia, Vol. 8, Yangon, Sarpay Beikman Press, 1963, pp. 73-74

² Ibid, p. 151

³ (a) စမ္ဘူဒီပဉ္စဆောင်းကျမ်း၊ Zambudhipa Oksaung Treatise, Furnivall and Pe Maung Tin (edited), Yangon, Burma Research Society, 1960, p. 42

(b) Dr Than Tun, အဓိဋ္ဌိတော်ထံကသမိုင်း၊ History in Royal Order, Yangon, Seikku Cho Cho, 2011, p. 32 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, History in Royal Order)

⁴ Dr Than Tun, ခေတ်ဟောင်းမြန်မာရာဇဝင်၊ Ancient Myanmar Chronicle, Yangon, Maha Dagon Publishing House, 1969 (2nd Reprint), p. 214 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, Ancient Myanmar Chronicle)

⁵ Ibid, p. 253

⁶ (a) Mahadhammathingyan, သာသနာလင်္ကာရစာတမ်း၊ Sasana Linkara Treatise, Yangon, Hanthawady Press, 1956, p. 126

(b) မှန်နန်းမဟာရာဇဝင်တော်ကြီး (သုံးတွဲပေါင်း)၊ Glass Palace Chronicle (Consolidation of three volumes), Yangon, Sarthugyi Publishing House, 2008, p. 229

⁷ Dr Than Tun, မြန်မာ့သမိုင်းလစ်ကွက်များ (မြန်မာ-အင်္ဂလိပ်)၊ Missing Points in Myanmar History (Myanmar-English bilingual version) Yangon, Monywa Sarpay, 2003, pp. 66-70

relations not only with Ceylon but also with India. He sent a Buddhist missionary to Buddha Gaya to copy the blueprint of Buddha Gaya Monastery and to plant the seed of sacred Bodhi tree there.¹

During Nyaungyan period, Sanay Min (1698 – 1714) built a pagoda on the cemetery ground of his father; Minye Kyawhtin. He also planted sacred Bodhi trees around the pagoda. Hence the pagoda came to be known as Mahabodhi Pagoda.² In 1705, he put five Bodhi trees that brought from Ceylon in golden pots and planted them in the premises of the pagoda while the musicians beating royal drums at the auspicious time.³ Thus Sanay Min supported Buddha *Sāsana* by planting Bodhi tree.

During the time of Badon Min (1782 – 1819), two monks from Ceylon arrived at Myanmar capital on 12 March 1806. They brought five sacred Bodhi trees together with them. The king planted one of them in the west of Mingun Pahtodawgyi and four others within the walls of Shwechetho Pagoda of Yadanāthainga.⁴ The Royal Order issued on 18 March 1806 expresses that the monks from Ceylon brought seven Bodhi trees to Myanmar capital city. The king ordered those supervisors had to be assigned to welcome the sacred trees with mass celebrations.⁵ People had to carry Bodhi trees from wharf to the palace by putting them on the palanquins each.⁶ After welcoming ceremony, the trees were put in golden pots respectively. Two of them were planted in the premises of Mahamuni Pagoda. Other two were planted in the premises of Shwechetho Pagoda of Yadanāthainga and the last three were planted near Mingun Pahtodawgyi. As Badon Min had cordial relations with Ceylon, king of the latter sent five more Bodhi trees to Myanmar. Those trees arrived at Myanmar capital on 27 March 1806. Of these trees, one was planted at Shwechetho Pagoda, another was at Aungmyaylawka Pagoda of Sagaing and another was at Mahamuni Pagoda of Mandalay. The rest two were planted at Mingun. Every Bodhi tree was planted at the auspicious time predicted by royal Brahmins. In order to be alive those Bodhi trees well, the ground had to be dug up to fifteen feet depth and put fertilized soil in the pits before planting. Around Bodhi trees, moreover, walls were built to prevent the destruction of animals and fire.⁷ In transporting Bodhi trees to plant to respective places, they were put on carriages at prescribed auspicious days and pulled them with ropes by courtiers who wore *nipā*⁸ and *baung*.⁹ In transporting Bodhi trees to Mingun, they were put on *Hlawkā*¹⁰ at the wharf and send them to the other side of the river.¹¹ The king also issued Royal Order for the gardeners who looked after the sacred Bodhi trees to pour eight buckets of water a day at the foot of each tree in order to alive and flourish them well.¹² On 1 October 1809, the king received gifts that presented by the governors of *Gālipura* and *Kolambūra* towns of Ceylon. The gifts were conch shell, ivory, fragrance, fabric, treatises on medicine, two

¹ Dr Than Tun, *မြန်မာ့သမိုင်းပုံပြင် Myanmar History Told in Pictures*, Yangon, Monywa Sarpay, 2004, p. 175

² Twinthin Taikwun Mahasithu U Tun Nyo, *မဟာရာဇဝင်သစ် (ညောင်ရမ်းဆက်)၊ တတိယတွဲ၊ New Great Chronicle (Nyaungyan Dynasty)*, Vol. III, Yangon, Yapyae Book House, 1997, p. 125

³ Dr Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma A.D.1598-1885*, Vol. III, A.D.1751-1781, Kyoto, The Center For South East Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1985. p. 115

⁴ U Maung Maung Tin, *ကုန်းဘောင်ဆက် မဟာရာဇဝင်ကြီး (ဒုတိယတွဲ)၊ Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, Yangon, Yapyae Publishing House, 4th Reprint, 2004, p. 110 (Hereafter cited as Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, II)

⁵ Dr Than Tun, *The Royal Orders of Burma A.D.1598-1885*, Vol. V, A.D.1788-1806, Kyoto, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986. p.832 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, *ROB*, V)

⁶ Than Tun, *ROB*, V, p. 834

⁷ Ibid, p. 841

⁸ Cloth that dyed red colour.

⁹ Kind of fillet or turban worn by royal princes.

¹⁰ Ancient royal boat with high and ornamented prow and stern. Myanmar Language Commission, *Myanmar Dictionary*, Yangon, Printing and Press Department, 1991, p. 349

¹¹ Than Tun, *ROB*, V, p-849

¹² Ibid, p. 852

bronze Buddha images, nine relics, a branch of sacred Bodhi tree that has nine feet length and four small Bodhi trees. The king worshipped reverently the Buddha images and relics, and planted Bodhi trees within the walls of Shinphyu¹ Pagoda.² According to above mentioned evidences, it can be said that Myanmar's relations with Ceylon flourished as a cordial one during the reign of Badon Min mainly based on the fact that both countries laid stress on the propagation of Buddhism. During this period, monks from Ceylon came to Myanmar for many times by carrying sacred Bodhi trees and treatises.

In fact, Badon Min promoted cordial relations not only with Ceylon but also with India mainly based on the sacred Bodhi tree. The king heard many times about the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya via the words addressed formally by Brahmins, hermits and traders of India. Consequently, he wanted to know more extensively about the sacred tree. On 12 October 1808, therefore, he sent Wātheikhta Brahmin, Shwedaung Thāgathu; governor of Rammāwady, Zeyakyawthu, Zeyakyawhtin and Zeyakyawswa to Mizzimadesa or India in order to inquire about the sacred Bodhi tree and to bring *tripitaka* and treatises on worldly affairs to Myanmar.³ The delegation went to Buddha Gaya and drew the illustrations of the foundation platform of sacred Bodhi tree, Nerañjarā and Anawmā Rivers and Muchalindā Lake there. On this occasion, Mahapalagiriguthanzi, the one who took charge of the management of Maha Bodhi area, gifted Myanmar delegation two small sacred Bodhi trees, earth from the original place of sacred tree, three stone images of Lord Buddha, small models of Sandamuni stupa and written verses to worship those sacred things. After receiving the gifts, Myanmar delegation returned home and arrived back at Sagaing on 18 May 1810. The king put Buddha images at the virtuous place of the palace under pyatthat (multi-staged roof with an odd numbers of tiers) and allowed the people to pay homage to the images. Two sacred Bodhi trees were carried to Mingun on golden carriages by spreading white umbrellas over them. Then the sacred trees were planted in the north of Pahtodawgyi by putting them together with Buddha Gaya earth in multi-plied pots that made up of iron layer, bronze layer, silver layer, alloy of gold and copper layer and gold layer which were decorated with rubies and other precious stones. On this occasion, the trees were planted by Badon Min himself. Then two layers wall was also built to protect the sacred Bodhi trees. The walls had eight decorated archways, two brick turrets and 128 figures of guardian spirits around the wall. The king also erected a stone inscription that recorded his deeds within the wall.⁴ By seeing this event, it is obvious that Badon Min revered the sacred Bodhi trees as religious ones and planted them in the premises of pagoda with great respect. In sending religious mission to India, moreover, Badon Min might have hidden intention to inquire about the political situation of India.

During Konbaung period, Sagaing Min or Bagyidaw (1819 – 1837) had strong desire to worship the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya and to donate several kinds of offertories to it since his Crown Prince-hood. When he gained throne, therefore, Sagaing Min prepared benefactions for sacred Bodhi tree; bouquet-shaped offertory decorated with gold, silver and rubies, pop-corn, umbrella, pennant, bent bamboo stick tied to a flagstaff, paper streamer designed like a flower, long-necked pot for religious use, and a stone pillar that inscribed his donations. He poured water symbolically for his offertories on 3 December 1821. In order to donate them to the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya, the king sent a mission which was composed of Court Brahmin *Mahārajinda Aggamāha Dhammarajaguru*, minister for royal audience hall Mahaminhla Thagathu and other

¹ The Pagoda that built by Sagaing Min in the north of Mingun Pahtodawgyi.

² Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, p. 132

³ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, p. 128

⁴ (a) Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, pp. 131 – 136

(b) သုသာန်တမဟာရာဇဝင်ကြီး၊ *Thuthawdhita Great Chronicle*, Vol. III of the compilation of six volumes, Yangon, Seikku Cho Cho, 2015, pp. 1038 – 1043

court officials together with five hundred soldiers to India.¹ This event reveals that Sagaing Min revered the Sacred Bodhi tree that represents enlightenment of Lord Buddha.

During the reign of Sagaing Min, the First Anglo-Myanmar War broke out in 1824 and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. A clause of Yandabo Treaty prescribed to exchange diplomatic missions which are composed of fifty members each led by an official between two countries. According to this clause, Myanmar court sent a mission led by Wundauktaw (officer who assisted the Hluttaw ministers) Mingyimahasithu to England. The mission was composed of royal clerk Minhla Nandakyawhtin, Athounsaye (official entrusted with the management of construction works and royal occasion) Narashwedaung Nawrahta and fifty members. En route, the mission went into Buddha Gaya to pay homage the sacred Bodhi tree while passing through India. Members of the mission had already read about the sacred Bodhi tree in the religious writings. Those writings say that the sacred tree has the height of 100 taungs² (measure for length of eighteen inches). When they measured the actual height of sacred tree on ground, however, they found that it only has 80 taungs³ from bottom to top. Concerning this differentiation, they recorded their opinion that the branches of the tree spread to the sides and consequently current height deviated from the height that recorded in religious writings.⁴ They also saw the gold and silver padeithabins (tree-shaped stand where various articles of offering are hung) that donated by Myanmar kings and stone inscriptions that recorded these donations. Brahmins and preeminent persons who looking after the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya offered a Sakyamuni Buddha image and three small Bodhi trees to the mission for Myanmar king. On 19 September 1833, Sagaing Min himself welcomed these offertories by deploying his army and navy of royal entourage.⁵ But the king did not plant the small Bodhi trees immediately. With the aim of thriving and sustaining the trees for the long run, at first, he chose auspicious places to plant the trees in consultation with venerable monks led by the head monk of Sangha order, royal princes and ministers. Then the king himself planted sacred Bodhi trees in the southwest of his palace by celebrating grand festivities on 4 November 1834. The king also built two layers of wall with decorated archways around the sacred trees.⁶ Myanmar people generally assumed that the monks and king had the obligation to promote and protect Buddhism. In religious affairs, the head monk of Sangha order was the most influential one. When Myanmar king and people wanted to build pagodas and monasteries, therefore, they had to address formally their tentative ideas and plans to the former. By planting and worshipping the sacred Bodhi trees reverently, Sagaing Min tried his best to flourish Buddhism.

Shin *Dhammakhandha* and Shin *Waṇṇayatana* from Ceylon came to Mandalay Yadanabon Capital during the reign of King Mindon in 1859. They brought the eyetooth and relics of Lord Buddha, Sacred Bodhi tree, *Dakkhiṇasākhā* (image of Buddha curved from the southern branch of sacred Bodhi tree), and the pictures of pagoda, monastery and ordination hall that offered by the venerable monks of Ceylon to Myanmar king.⁷ The king himself carried the eyetooth and

¹ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, p. 224

² 50 yards

³ 40 yards

⁴ Ma Kyan, “ဘင်္ဂလားသွား မြန်မာသံတော်အဖွဲ့ (အေဒီ ၁၈၃၀)”၊ “Myanmar Diplomatic Mission that went to Bengal (AD 1830), *The Collection of already printed papers that commemorated Silver Jubilee*, Yangon, Department of Historical Research, 1982, pp. 188-189

⁵ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, pp. 327-328

⁶ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, p. 330

⁷(a) သီဟိုဠ်ကျွန်းက စွယ်တော်ဓါတ်တော်ရုပ်ပွားတော်ပင့်ခဲ့သည့် အဆောင်မြို့ပုသိမ်တော်တို့ပေးချက် ကျီးသံမေတ္တာစာ၊ Kyee-thē homily written in a sympathetic vein for the ones who brought the tooth relics of Lord Buddha and Buddha images from Ceylon, Universities' Central Library, Parabaik – 194511

relics of Lord Buddha from the wharf to the palace on 14 June 1859. The other images and sacred Bodhi tree had to be carried by princes and Atwinwuns. These sacred things were put at Shwenandawoo Pagoda and made a devotional offering by the king.¹ Then King Mindon planted the sacred Bodhi tree that donated by Ceylon monks within the wall of Mahamuni pagoda on 3 December 1860. He also built a small wall with three decorated archways around the tree to protect it. The occasion was supervised by the head of Sangha order and joined by the princes, ministers and courtiers.² Eyetooth and relics of Lord Buddha were enshrined in the second repository hall of Mahalawka Marazein Ceti on 15 March 1862.³ Another sacred Bodhi tree that presented by *Majjimadesa* was also planted by the king himself in the northeast of Kyauktawgyi pagoda with royal festivities on 25 April 1865.⁴ Moreover King Mindon planted sacred Bodhi trees in the northeast corner of Kyauktawgyi pagoda compound on 9 May 1865 and the southwest corner of the same pagoda compound on 11 July 1865.⁵ With the aim of supporting Buddhism, King Mindon not only planted sacred Bodhi trees within his kingdom but also sent religious missions to Buddha Gaya in order to renovate the religious buildings, conserve the sacred Bodhi tree and to make donation there.

King Mindon sent an embassy led by U Cheint⁶ to Bengal on 2 December 1874.⁷ U Cheint recorded the itinerary of Myanmar embassy to Bengal as well as its tour to Buddha Gaya to make donations to sacred Bodhi tree in details. According to this record, King Mindon gave the embassy twenty-seven boxes of offertories for the sacred Bodhi tree.⁸ Leader of the embassy U Cheint and members; royal clerk Naymyo Minhtinsithu, Ahmayei (amanuensis of the royal court) Naymyo Minhtinkyawkhauung, Nawrahta Thirisithu and royal servants brought the offertories of the king to Buddha Gaya. King's offertories were 511 diamonds, 311 emeralds, 3966 rubies and 623 pearls. In addition to these precious things, the embassy had to carry the offertories of princes, princesses and royal relatives; golden umbrella, pennant, bent bamboo stick tied to a flagstaff, paper streamer designed like a flower, and bouquet-shaped offertories decorated with gold and silver. The embassy brought these offertories on Sekkya Yinmon Steamer to India and donated them to the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya on behalf of royal family.⁹

At Buddha Gaya, members of embassy kept eight precepts for three days as well as offered food, 1,000 flowers, 1,000 candles and 1,000 open oil lamps to the sacred Bodhi tree. They also

(b) U Maung Maung Tin, *ကုန်းဘောင်ဆက် မဟာရာဇဝင်ကြီး (တတိယတွဲ)* *Great Chronicle of Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, Yangon, Yarpay Publishing House, 4th Reprint, 2004, pp. 195-197 (Hereafter cited as Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. III)

(c) Kandymyo Sitke Minhtinyaza, *မန္တလေးရတနာပုံ မဟာရာဇဝင်တော်ကြီး* *Great Chronicle of Mandalay Yadanabon*, Mandalay, Tetnaylin Press, 1969, p. 178 (Hereafter cited as Minhtinyaza, *Great Chronicle of Yadanabon*)

¹ J.G. Scott, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and Shan State*, Part. I, Vol. I, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing and Stationery, 1900, p. 45

² (a) Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. III, p. 204

(b) Minhtinyaza, *Great Chronicle of Yadanabon*, pp. 109 – 110

³ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. III, p. 197

⁴ (a) Minhtinyaza, *Great Chronicle of Yadanabon*, pp. 127, 324

(b) Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. III, p. 224

⁵ Dr Than Tun, *နယ်လှည့်ရာဇဝင် (သုံးတွဲပေါင်း)* *Going on the Tour Chronicle* (Consolidation of three volumes), Yangon, Pyae Zon Publishing House, 2004, p. 216 (Hereafter cited as Than Tun, *Going on the Tour Chronicle*)

⁶ Governor of Myaung Hla, Wundauk Mingyi (officer who assisted the Hluttaw minister) Thirimaha Zeyathu

⁷ U Cheint, *ဘင်္ဂလားသွား သံအဖွဲ့မှတ်တမ်း* *Record of the Embassy that went to Bengal*, Mandalay, Kyeepwayay Press, 2009, pp. 10-11 (Hereafter cited as Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*)

⁸ Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*, p. 8

⁹ Sitagu Sayadaw Ashin Nyanissara, *မင်းတုန်းမင်းတရားကြီး၏ မဟာဗောဓိရွှေညောင်တော် ကျောက်စာ သံပိုင်းမော်ကွန်း* *Mahabodhi Shwe Nyaung Daw Inscription of King Mindon*, Pali-Myanmar bilingual version, Sitagu International Buddhist Missionary Association, 2015

poured water at the foot of sacred tree with golden cup in numbers equal to the age of King Mindon at every morning and night. They prayed for the long lives of king, queens, princes, princesses, royal relatives and courtiers as well as for flourishing of Sasana within the kingdom.¹ On behalf of King Mindon, moreover, members of Myanmar embassy asked Mahandhaki Zawgyi (preeminent person) who took charge of the management of Mahabodhi area, to allow them to build a monastery near sacred Bodhi tree. This monastery will be used to live by monks and lay persons who look after the sacred Bodhi tree. They also asked him to allow them to renovate the deteriorated walls that encircled the sacred tree.² Mahandhaki Zawgyi replied to the embassy that “Hindu kings of India were not interested in the renovation of Mahabodhi area. Pilgrims from China and Siam did not ask any plot of land at Buddha Gaya. Even Badon Min and Sagaing Min did not ask any plot of land though they sent deputations to Buddha Gaya to make donations. King Mindon was the only one who asked a plot of land at Buddha Gaya.”³ Finally Myanmar embassy got a plot of land that had the area of 12 Katta⁴ to build a monastery near sacred Bodhi tree.⁵ According to old sayings, the religious land that donated by Indian kings to sacred Bodhi tree had the length of six taings⁶ from north to south and the width of two taings from east to west.⁷ Now the Myanmar embassy got permission from Zawgyi to build a monastery at Buddha Gaya and to renovate the walls surrounded the sacred tree. The embassy left permanently the ex-monks Nga Bo Cho and Nga Bo Han at Buddha Gaya in order to conserve the sacred tree. They were allowed to use five muu (muu is one tenth of a Myanmar kyat of Konbaung period) to offer food at sacred tree in the early morning, two muu and one pē (pē is one twentieth of old Myanmar kyat) to offer flowers and another two muu and one pē to offer open oil lamps at night daily. Hence they can use total one kyat per day for offertories for sacred Bodhi tree. Myanmar embassy gave away 1,000 visses of bronze in charity to the beggars too. Moreover it also copied the inscription that recorded the donations of Sagaing Min at Buddha Gaya. But members of the embassy could not copy the rest inscriptions that recorded the donations of previous kings including Asoka because almost all of them had already been broken. Finally, the embassy brought a broken branch of sacred Bodhi tree, the earth from the place of Aparazita Throne and the small models of Mahabodhi Ceti and returned home. It arrived back at home on 30 January 1875.⁸

During the reign of King Mindon, the Crown Prince of United Kingdom; Prince of Wales visited India on 7 November 1875.⁹ The king sent a goodwill delegation led by Kinwunmingyi Thadoemahasithu to Calcutta (now Kolkata) to pay a courtesy call on the Crown Prince. King Mindon also assigned the delegation with the task “to go to the sacred Bodhi tree and Mahabodhi Ceti of Buddha Gaya, to make a list of the renovation works for deteriorated walls of those sacred things and to fix the plot of land for constructing a brick public rest house for pilgrims.”¹⁰ After the courtesy call, therefore, Kingwunmyingyi went to Buddha Gaya and carried out the assigned tasks. Moreover, he could fix the place for constructing public rest house there in consultation with *Mahantagījoaugyī*. Thus, the goodwill delegation led by Kinwunmingyi performed both tasks for politics and religion during its visit to India.

Myanmar kings worshipped the sacred Bodhi trees of Buddha Gaya and Ceylon as well as planted the sacred Bodhi trees that brought from those places within their kingdom as the symbol

¹ Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*, p. 65

² Ibid, p. 68

³ Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*, p. 73

⁴ Unit of measure for the area of plot of land

⁵ Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*, p. 114

⁶ Unit of measure for distance approximately two miles

⁷ Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*, p. 66

⁸ Cheint, *Embassy to Bengal*, p. 69

⁹ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. III, p. 282

¹⁰ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. III, pp. 282-283

of Lord Buddha. They also worshipped the leaves that dropped from the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya. In fact, the sacred Bodhi tree is a utensil of Lord Buddha and hence anyone must not cut its branches. However, some branches of sacred tree sometimes detach from its trunk for several reasons. On this occasion, Buddhists can use them to curve the Buddha images called *Dakhiṇasākhā*.¹ In order to curve Buddha images from southern branch of sacred Bodhi tree from Gaya, firstly the dry branch has to be pounded to make wood powder. Then the wood powder is kneaded with oleoresin. Finally, the chunk of wood powder could be curved by sculptors to make *Dakhiṇasākhā* images. These images that made in Ceylon use to be worshipped in Myanmar too.²

Myanmar kings from Bagan to Konbaung period planted the sacred Bodhi tree as they wanted to imagine that the Lord Buddha is alive forever. Moreover, the pictures of Lord Buddha and sacred Bodhi tree used to be illustrated reverently on the walls of pagodas with fine arts. To thrive and flourish such sacred tree that symbolizes Lord Buddha and *Sāsanā*, Buddhist Myanmar people use to pour water at the foot of sacred tree in the hottest time of summer. Thus, the water pouring festival at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree became a religious tradition of Myanmar.

Myanmar Kings and Water Pouring Festival

Kason is the noblest month for Buddhists as the most auspicious events concerning Lord Buddha happened in this month. Like a Myanmar old saying “*Tagū: yeikon, Kason yeikhan*” (water runs out in the month of *Tagū*., water dries up in the month of *Kason*), *Kason* is the hottest month of the year and consequently water in lakes, ponds, creeks and wells dries up in this month. In this context, the Myanmar Buddhists use to pour water at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree to make sure it does not die of drought during the hottest time of the year. Thus, the practice of pouring water at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree became a religious tradition of Myanmar. In fact, Buddhists believed that worshipping the sacred Bodhi tree where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment underneath is equal to the worshipping Lord Buddha himself. Based on this belief, Myanmar Buddhists used to pour water and fragrances at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree on the full moon day of *Kason*, the Buddha Day.

By studying some inscriptions, it can be said that the tradition of pouring water at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree was initiated since Bagan period. Inscription of Thingyi Nyaung Auk³ which was inscribed in 1201 and inscription of Thikhin Yazathu and Ami Bwa Saw⁴ which was inscribed in 1290 show that pouring water at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree was conducted since Bagan period. King and people of Myanmar celebrated the pouring water festival at the foot of sacred tree to make sure it does not die of drought during the hottest month of summer i.e. *Kason*. They offered flowers and open oil lamps to the sacred tree and poured water at its foot.⁵

King Thalun issued a royal order on 31 March 1638 to make arrangements for *Kason* pouring water festival. It instructs that -

“On fifteenth waxing day of *Kason* of ME 1000 (1638), play royal musical instruments at the time of appearing the Withakha (astron) star on the sky. Deploy troops of royal entourage 250 men each at east, west, left, and right side of the palace (total 1000 troops) to pour water. Bring 1000 long-necked pots for religious use

¹ *Myanmar Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, pp. 73-74

² Than Tun, *History in Royal Order*, p. 188

³ Nyeing Maung, U, ရှေးဟောင်းမြန်မာကျောက်စာများ၊ ပထမတွဲ၊ *Old Myanmar Inscriptions*, Vol. I, Yangon, Archaeological Department, 1967, p. 72

⁴ Nyeing Maung, U, ရှေးဟောင်းမြန်မာကျောက်စာများ၊ တတိယတွဲ၊ *Old Myanmar Inscriptions*, Vol. III, Yangon, Archaeological Department, 1982, p. 157

⁵ Than Tun, *History in Royal Order*, p. 56

together with 1000 pennants. Pour water at the foot of sacred Bodhi trees and Buddha images while beating royal drums by musicians. Carry bottles of rose water, glass bottles, and golden and silver long-necked pots to the festival. Minsters have to manage this occasion.”¹

King Thalun carried out good deeds in ME 1000. The Kason water pouring festival was held under the patronage of king and ministers.² People of Inwa went to Htee Hlaing Shin pagoda to pour water at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree there.³

During Konbaung period, Sagaing Min carried out the water pouring festival at the foot of sacred Bodhi trees that planted at the pagodas on 26 April 1820.⁴ King Mindon also held water pouring festival at the foot of sacred Bodhi trees on the full moon day of Kason. King Thibaw (1878 – 1885) carried reverently the sacred Bodhi tree that brought from Buddha Gaya during the reign of King Mindon, to Kyaungdawgyar pagoda and held water pouring festival at the foot of it annually. By seeing these occasions, it can be said that Myanmar kings poured water at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree on the full moon day of Kason since Bagan period.

During monarchical time, however, Myanmar kings did not use to pour water at the foot of every Bodhi tree. They only used to pour water only at the foot of sacred Bodhi tree that descended from the original sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya. On this occasion, they aimed at worshipping the original sacred Bodhi tree underneath the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, thriving the sacred Bodhi tree during the hottest time of the year and wishing the rain to fall at the earliest occasion.⁵ If the rain fell at the earliest opportunity, it would make the climate temperate. Such early rain would be very supportive of the cultivation of the country. Hence it can be said that Kason water pouring festival is not only a religious occasion but also the socio-economic one. During monarchical time, Myanmar kings also cleaned the Buddha images that worshipped in the palace on this occasion. They also celebrated royal festival magnificently on this occasion.⁶ In order to hold Kason water pouring festival, preparations had to be made since fourteenth waxing day of Kason. Courtiers had to draw water with 250 long-necked pots for each side of royal courtyard. Then pennants and tendons of sprig of Eugenia had to be inserted in the pots. Royal entertainments had to be hold in the northern courtyard of palace for the whole night. At the very early morning of Kason full moon day, ten long-necked pots of water had to be poured for each Buddha image and each sacred Bodhi tree by Wundauks and royal clerks. Commoners were also allowed to do donations for the festival.⁷ Hence it can be said that Kason water pouring festival concerns with all people, and it is held throughout Myanmar history since Bagan period up to today without fail.

¹ Dr. ThanTun, *The Royal Orders of Burma A.D.1598-1885*, Vol. I, A.D.1598-1648, Kyoto, The Center For South East Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1983, p. 354

² Minister Thiri Uzana (Inyon Ywasar), *လောကဗျူဟာကျမ်း (အင်္ဂုစာတမ်း)၊ Treatise on Legion of the World (Inyon Treatise)*, Yangon, Central Press, 1968, 3rd Reprint, pp. 355-399 (Hereafter cited as Thiri Uzana, *Treatise on Legion of the World*)

³ U Kala, *မဟာရာဇဝင်ကြီး (တတိယအုပ်)၊ Great Chronicle (Vol. III)*, Yangon, Yarpay Publishing House, 2006, 3rd Reprint, p. 278

⁴ Maung Maung Tin, *Konbaung Dynasty*, Vol. II, p. 196

⁵ Thiri Uzana, *Treatise on Legion of the World*, p. 299

⁶ Than Tun, *Going on the Tour Chronicle*, p. 287

⁷ Dr Toe Hla, *မြန်မာ့ကျင့်ဝတ်သိက္ခာနှင့် လူမှုတန်ဖိုး၊ Myanmar rules of conduct, practice of moral uprightness and social value*, Yangon, Linyadanar Publishing House, 2005, pp. 122-123 (Hereafter cited as Toe Hla, *Myanmar social value*)

Conclusion

According to the historical documents, kings and people made donations and renovations for the sacred Bodhi tree with the belief that the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment under that tree and venerated as *Paribhoga Ceti*. Myanmar kings worshipped reverently the sacred Bodhi tree of Buddha Gaya and Ceylon to make good merits. They also planted the sacred Bodhi trees that descended from the former in the premises of pagodas and monasteries within their kingdom. They built walls to protect the sacred trees too. Myanmar kings and people also poured water and fragrances at the foot of sacred Bodhi trees to be green and lush on the full moon day of Kason. This tradition thrived in Myanmar since Bagan period and continues to flourish until the present time.

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