

## **A STUDY ON THE BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES**

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### **Abstract**

This paper studies the biographical sources. They are one of the important sources of reference service in a library. They give not only information about people who are or were well-known, their birth, deaths and the descriptions of their lives and achievements but also inspiration and entertainment for readers. Biographical sources reflect a person's experiences thoughts and feelings. The paper includes background history of biographical sources and their types, characteristics and usefulness as a reference work. It uses Survey research method was used to collect the biographical sources. It is provided to librarians for reference service and readers to know valuable and useful biographical information.

**Key words:** biographical sources, reference sources

### **Introduction**

Most people who read books tend to have a particular type of book they favor. Some of the readers read novels, some even focus on a certain genre, like science fiction or mysteries. Some read extensively and largely exclusively in their area of career focus. Reading a great biographical books can be allowed the reader to see the world in new ways.

Today, libraries give many services to readers and scholars. After collecting the information sources, they are arranged symmetrically according to classification scheme. These procedures are called technical services that include collection, cataloguing and classification of library materials. Librarians provide many services for readers and scholars depending on library materials especially books. Main function of a library to fulfill is the need of users that at right time and right information. Among the information sources, reference books are essential to provide right information for scholars and research students. Biographical sources are one of the reference sources for users who want to know about a person. They can motivate people to be a very good person. This provide basic facts about individual. Usually, these

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provide answers to the following questions; what has been written by a particular author? From when he got his education? Which positions have been held by him? What is his full name? Where he was born? What is his address? Some of these sources also provide portraits or photographs, which have an additional value. Questions relating to biographical information occur in all types and sizes of libraries. Very often indexes are appended, which help one to know about leading figures in particular field and occupation.

A biography is defined as written life of a person. People in general interest in the lives of great men as well as others who are notable in some way. Biography in one of the most popular field of study providing information, inspiration and entertainment.

A biography is a detailed description of a person's life. It involves more than just the basic facts like education, work, relationships, and death, it portrays a person's experience of these life events. A biography presents a true life story, highlighting various aspects of his or her life, including intimate details of experience, and may include an analysis of the subject's personality.

Biographical sources of information form important sources of information. These tell us about the dates of birth and death, qualifications, the position held, and the contributions. The amount and kind of information varies from one biographical source to another. Some may be a listing of a few essential facts and, some may be a long interpretative essay. Librarians have to select the most useful biographical sources for reference services.

This paper is focused on the study of biographical sources. It is one type of the direct reference sources. Biographical reference sources provide information about people who are or were well known, their birth and death dates and descriptions of their lives and accomplishments. Some of the sources provide long essays on each biographies covered. With the result, such sources can be extremely useful for one who wants to write an article or a speech or requires detailed information about a person. These would also provide basic facts about each individual covered. They are helpful to understand a person because they tell us about actual people and events. Biography transmits a mirror image of the individual human being in his

immediate life experience. So, they are very important not only to know a person's biography but also to learn the past events.

Biographical sources divided into two main classes, collective biography and individual biography. Collective biography is a collection of group such as same professional, same period and same public figures. Sometimes it is a collection of famous group in a nation or all over the world. Individual biography is simply an account of someone's life written by another person.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Main objectives of the presenting of the research paper are;

- to share the knowledge of the biographical sources
- to show how the biographical sources are important in providing the reference service
- to know that the biographical sources are more valuable and useful lessons in life
- to take advantage of the experience of others by reading biographies of historical figures
- to help librarians for selection of Myanmar biographies for libraries
- to know that biographies might give an event more depth and detail than a general history book
- to describe how importance biographical sources are in Myanmar Literature

### **Scope of the Study**

It includes background history of biographical sources that covers from the Bagan Period to until now. Moreover, the meaning of biography and types are discussed. It also presents characteristics of biographical sources.

## **Method of the Study**

In this study, the required data were collected through literature survey. So, the necessary information was collected from various documentary sources, such as books, encyclopedia and online e-resources.

## **Background History of Biographical Sources**

Myanmar has a very ancient civilization and its people have a good system of recording historical events. Myanmar Scholars wrote the beginning of biographical literature was Bagan inscriptions. Many Bagan inscriptions and other ancient inscriptions of Myanmar are the earliest historical records of the lives of kings, rulers, and subject of that time. Myazedi Inscription and Shwesigon Mon Inscription are the most famous inscriptions.

Myazedi Inscription<sup>1</sup> was inscribed in 1117AD by Razakumar, son of Kyansittha and Thumbula(U Sauk Pan). Razakumar donated a golden image and other things for his father and he had inscribed the Myazedi Inscription. This inscription revealed the life story of their family.

Another inscription tells the biography of Kyansittha and is known as Shwesigon Mon Inscription<sup>2</sup>. It was inscribed by King Kyansittha, it was erected on the Shwesigon pagoda compound and another copy was erected near the Tharapa Gate. It is as famous as Shwesigon Inscription, but the recorded information are not about Shwesigon pagoda. It fully recorded the life and reign of King Kyansittha. This inscription is not only a record of donations of Kyansittha but also like a declaration to the public.

Other type of biographical source is Yazawin. It is described the lineage of Myanmar kings. The prominent Myanmar historical sources are: U Kalar's Maha Yazawin Daw Gyi, the Great Chronicle and Hman-nan Maha Yazawin Daw Gyi (The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings). These historical texts are about Myanmar kings and historical events from the earliest times to

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<sup>1</sup>. *Myazedi Inscription in four Languages* (Pyu, Mon, Pali and Burmese, Rangoon National Museum, 1960).

<sup>2</sup>. Yin Yin Sein, *Analytical Study of Selected Myanmar Biography and Autobiography Published in Myanmar*. MRes, Thesis (Yangon: University of Yangon, 2002), 7 (Hereafter cited Yin Yin Sein)

the Konbaung period. They are the root of biographical literature and historical record.

Moreover, Ayedawbon Kyans were sources for early biographies of kings and historical events. They are monographs which give historical accounts of royal campaigns and lives of Myanmar kings. Razadirit Ayedawbon is now widely accepted as being translated by Banya Dala, a Mon Minister and General who served under King Bayinnaung. It was first published in 1877 under the title of Razadirit Ayedawbon by the British Burma News Press.

The Razadirit Ayedawbon was compiled and translated into Myanmar language from Mon historical records. In 1952, Sithu U Kaung, Burma Historical Commission Chairman requested the Mon Scholar Naing Pan Hla who accordingly edited and published the Mon version of Razadirit Ayedawbon for the Burma Research Society. Naing Pan Hla translated it into the Myanmar version and published it in 1977.<sup>3</sup>

Inscription, Yazawin and Ayedawbon Kyans were the most important sources in Myanmar literature. They told the biography of Myanmar kings and their functions. In the early period, biographical sources were the life of Myanmar kings. The biography of monks and the significant persons were later recorded. In 1851, the biography of Sayadawmyaeiathtoke-patti (Lives of the Venerable monks) was compiled by Min Hla Thiha Thu, a court official of Kingdom of Bagan (1846-1853). It contains the lives of one hundred and five noted monks, beginning from Shin Maha Thilawuntha to Gywe Cho Sayadaw Nyana Wuntha.<sup>4</sup>

In 1879 Mingyi Maha Thiri Zeyathu (Maing Khaing Myosa U Yan), the Royal librarian and keeper of the Royal Archives under King Mindon and King Thibaw wrote the biographies of four famous monk-poets. Shin Rathathara, Shin Teyzawthara, Shin Agga Thamadi and Shin Thilawuntha. Beside them, tombstones are the very important sources of biography. (Example. U Yan's tombstone). It is an evident for next generation.

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<sup>3</sup> Yin Yin Sein, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 9.

In the early colonial period few biographies were published. A prominent biography was “Athtokepattihtu” (Distinguished lives). This book was published by the Myanmar Awba Press in 1906. It contains Ba-me Sayadaw and eleven short accounts of other persons. It was the first published source of biographical literature.<sup>5</sup> Myanmar biographies and autobiographies were rarely published in the colonial period. Biographical writing was developed only in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and different types of biographies were published in Myanmar literary field. It has long been one of the most popular forms of prose.

Biographical literature was developed with the movement of independence. In 1920, Myanmar had great nationalist movements and the Myanmar people demanded political and educational reforms. Many national schools were established and people became interested in Myanmar literature and history.

In the early 1930s U Thein Maung, a journalist, and editor of the Thuriya (Sun) monthly, produced biographies of Min Ye Kyaw Swa, General Bandoola, King Bayinnaung, the emperor; and Alaungphaya, founder of the Konbaung dynasty. U Po Kya’s, Myanmar Gonyi and U Thein Maung’s Burmese Heroes Series books had influenced the young people activated for nationalist movement. But some historians said that the author had adapted the historical events for a good readable story and that some facts are wrong.<sup>6</sup>

In 1937 U Thein Pe Myint wrote a fictionalized biography of U Lun (Thakin Kodaw Mhaing)<sup>7</sup>, the national poet and patron of the Nationalist Dobama Movement. The book is in two parts. Part one describes the boyhood of Saya Lun. The part two describes the family life and life as an editor, national college teacher and the relationship of author and biographer. U Thein Pe Myint presented Saya Lun’s patriotism and activities for nationalist

<sup>5</sup> Yin Yin Sein, 8.

<sup>6</sup> OD;vSMudKif (yg&\*l) ESifhtjcm;? twåKyÜwådpmay ?  
&efukef? pmayAdrmef? 1971/ 10/ (aemifwGif  
OD;vSMudKif (yg&\*l) [knTef;rnf)

<sup>7</sup> Thein Pe Myint, *Thakin Kodaw Mhaing Athtoke-patti*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Yangon: Bamakhit Sarpay,1974).

movement, but one weakness is that it does not emphasize upon Saya Lun's literary writings.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1940s Myanmar was struggled for independence and these historical events gave births too many biographies, autobiographies and memoirs. After the independence many biographies, autobiographies and memoirs were published about the struggle for independence and rebellion against the Japanese occupation.

The Burma Translation Society (Sarpay Beikman) was established and then it published the Myanmar Encyclopedia and compiled biographies of famous Myanmar, and published Myanmar biography books.

After the World War II, Thu Lo Lu was one of the famous biographical books. It was written by Jawngaw Ma Ma Lay. It describes her late husband, Jawngaw U Chit Mg.

Biographical sources reflect the condition of the period, noble and famous person's activities and their feeling.

### **Meaning of Biography**

The word of biography comes from the Greek words "bios" meaning a life and "graphein" meaning to write. Therefore "biography" means writing of a life.<sup>9</sup> A biography is simply a bio that gives an account of detailed description about the life of a person. It contains basic facts such as childhood, education, career, relationship, family and etc. Athtoke-patti comes from Pali word often used in Myanmar literature. According to Oxford Dictionary, it is (i) an account of someone's life written by someone else: (ii) biographies as a branch of literature.<sup>10</sup> The biographical information can be obtained from the following sources of information. Almanacs, biographical dictionaries, dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, literary handbooks and manuals, obituary columns of newspapers, etc. Most of them include brief biographical information.

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<sup>8</sup> OD; vSMudKif (yg&\*l)? 11/

<sup>9</sup>. Yin YinSein, 3.

<sup>10</sup>. *Oxford Dictionary* (England: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Biography is the story of a real person's life written by someone other than that person. It is found that autobiography, individual biography and collective biography, memoirs, diaries are included in the autobiography. There is a direct focus on an event and the biographer might give an event more depth and detail than a general history book would and perhaps give it a human slant. It should be used as sources for reference service in a library.

### **Types of Biographical Sources**

Main types of biographical sources are two types; collective and individual biography. There are many sources to get the biographical information beside the books. The biographical information can be obtained from the following sources of information. Almanacs, biographical dictionaries, dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, literary handbooks and manuals, obituary columns of newspapers, etc. Periodical and newspapers indexes are also valuable sources. In this paper, the study covers biographical sources based on books.

#### **(a) Collective Biography**

Collective biography is meant lives of a number of persons selected or grouped or assembled in alphabetic form or according to class, profession and etc.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes it is written by single author. Biographical dictionaries are collective work of sketches of people's lives. In addition to biographical dictionaries, directories, almanacs such as general and subject encyclopedias, often include biographical essays. They are lists, and identifies notable persons giving significant data about each. Almanacs and directories give brief biographical information. It has a great usefulness as a quick guide to information concerning a number of persons.

Example. – *pmqdkawmfrsm;twåKyÜwåd* [armi fokw]  
 – *jynfolcspfaomtEkynm&Sifrsm;*  
 [vlxka':trm]

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<sup>11</sup> Krishan Kumar. *Reference service* ( New Delhi: Vika, 1998).

**(b) Individual Biography**

Individual biography is a description of someone's life and character.<sup>12</sup> It is commonly implied by the word biography and includes within itself all variations of substance and treatment. Life's of rulers, soldiers, generals, statesmen, religious leaders of teachers, path breakers in art, learning or science, represent and old and familiar type of biography. It includes autobiography, memoirs, reminiscences, diaries and journals, confessions, and letters. An individual biography is likely to provide more information than a collective biographical sources. It usually deals with not only biographical data but also actual events.

Example

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rjruav;ESifhvSdKifxdyfacgifwif\b0ESifhpmay
[vSordef]
- olvdkvl [*sme, fausmfrrav;]
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**(i) Autobiography**

Autobiography is a branch of biography. It is most commonly defined as the biography of a person narrated by that person or the story of a person's life as told by himself or herself. Autobiography in its primary form is a continuous, organized story of a person life experience, complete or partial.<sup>13</sup> A good autobiography should be honest, simple and above all interesting. It is to explain or justify their actions. Many of the world's greatest works of literature are autobiographies. Autobiographies are usually written by politicians and writers. Among the writers, P. Monin's P. Monin, and Maha Swe's Maha Swe are very popular autobiographies. It is studied biographical data, their idea, feeling and thoughts.

Autobiographical writing may takes various forms. The most familiar ones are memoirs, reminiscences, diaries, journals, confessions, letters and

<sup>12</sup> Timothy James, *Advantages and disadvantage of an autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 15. (Hereafter cited as Timothy James)

<sup>13</sup> Timothy James, 21.

correspondence. It may provide information for a memoir, autobiography or biography. Authors use autobiographies not only share events that occurred in their lifetime, but help future

generations relating to those events by explaining their effect on the lives of those who lived through them. The prime objective of a writer of an autobiography is the narration of his own life. It is a primary source of information.

Example. - *yDrdk;ESif;* [yDrdk;ESif;]

- ' \*kefwm&mESifh ol \uAsm

[ ' \*kefwm&m]

### (ii) Memoirs

A memoir is slightly different in character from an autobiography. While an autobiography typically focuses on the “life and times” of the writer, a memoir has a narrower, more intimate focus on his or her own memories, feelings and emotions.<sup>14</sup> Memoirs have often been written by politicians or military leaders and writers as a way to record and publish an account of their public exploits. It represents a form that belongs to both autobiography and biography. The term “memoirs” usually denotes autobiographical narrative or reminiscences, informal and often more or less, fragmentary. The singular “memoir” usually means an account of a person’s life written by another person.

Example - *uRefawmfhb0ZwfaMumif;* [aomfwmaqG]

### (iii) Reminiscences

Reminiscences at their best are both valuable and delightful. In reminiscences, observation and experience stored up in a rich and varied life are drawn from memory and told simply and spontaneously to a reader listener illuminating by ways of life and thought and casting revealing side-lights on famous or interesting people. It is a story told about a part event remembered by the narrator. Memoirs and reminiscences which are personal description in personal history.

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<sup>14</sup> Yin Yin Sein, 5.

Example. – *olwdkUaw;? olwdkUb0? olwdkUtEkynm*  
[ewfarmufxGef; &Sdef]

#### **(iv) Diaries and Journals**

Diary is a type of autobiography. They are virtually the same, with some differences only in the terminology as use by the writer. Diaries generally are a factual consecutive record of objective experience. A diary is a record with discrete entries arranged by date reporting on what has happened over the course of a day or other period. A personal diary may include a person's experiences, and thoughts or feelings, including comments on current events outside the writer's direct experience. It is generally written not with the intention of being published as it stands, but for the author's own use, the word journal may be sometimes used for diary but generally a diary has diary entries, whereas journal-writing can be less frequent.

In Myanmar biographical literature, a very few diaries have come out. The Kinwun Mingyi's diary of Pyinthit Naingan Thwa Nayzin Humat Tan and Theikpan Mg Wa's diary of Oxford Takkatho are well-known. Jarneikyaw U Chit Mg's diary records the events of the period between 23.11.1943 to 17.8.1944. The dairy shows the politic, economic and social conditions of the country. It is a primary source of information.

Example. – *ppftwGif;aeUpOfrSwfwrf;*  
[odyÜHarmi f0]

#### **(v) Confessions**

They are subjective and introspective, outpourings of inner conflict, closely allied to the journals that reveal the inner life. It is a formal statement admitting that one is guilty of a crime.<sup>15</sup>

#### **(vi) Letters**

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<sup>15</sup> Yin Yin Sein, 6.

A letter is one person's written message to another pertaining to some matter of common concern. Letters can serve several purposes. Letters are closely allied to journals. Letters especially often deal with subjects or experiences of specialized interest.<sup>16</sup>

### **Characteristics of Biographical Sources**

1. Describe and discuss the life of a real person.
2. Information is based on fact.
3. Incidents, dialogue, and people are accurate and from a reliable sources using first person accounts when available.
4. The person's life story is told with respect to other people and events of the time in which they lived.
5. Develops an understanding of the places, times, events, and other people which the person lived.
6. Tells the story in a style and tone that the reader or listener can related to the person and believe in their humanness.
7. An international biographical dictionary is usually biased towards the country where published. Thus it may usually lay more emphasis on covering national of the country in which it is published.
8. A national biographical dictionary is likely to cover more nationals and provide more information about them than an international dictionary.
9. A special biographical dictionary is likely to provide more information than a general sources.
10. Books on state or district or local history usually provide more information about prominent persons than national biographical dictionaries. Also these are more likely to cover less prominent persons.
11. Newspaper and periodical indexes are excellent sources for obituaries, significant achievements, opinions and views held about notable persons.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

12. Encyclopedias are excellent sources for biographical information on person no longer alive. But for contemporaries, these are not as good as biographical dictionaries.
13. It is usually more difficult to locate the biography of a non -writer than a writer.
14. Well edited biographical source may provide descriptive as well as evaluative account.
15. A biographical source published at a given time is represented the opinions held at that time.

### **Conclusion**

Biographies and autobiographies provide not only interesting facts but also an insight into the individual's life and times as well as the political and social condition of the country. It is very popular type of Myanmar literature. The main purpose of a biography is to tell the new generation about the noble and famous person's idea, thought and feeling. Reading biographies provide the most valuable lessons in life. People who write autobiographies usually have an interesting story to tell about the trials and tribulation of their own lives. Many advantages can be learnt from them. So, biographical literature need to develop in Myanmar literature.

One of the best ways to take advantage of the experience of other is by reading biographies of historical figures, not academic tomes about history. These can be valuable and successful shortcuts to help everybody make improve and get results in most any area of their life. One will discover ideas and approaches on his own through the stories and experiences of others. Reading a biographical source about someone from a different era, a different background or a totally different set of life experiences will give the reader new perspective.

Nowadays, biographical sources have become more popular because documentary biographical films based on the lives of famous person get the more interested from the audience and successful by economically.

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