



## MYANMAR AND SĀSANĀ

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### ABSTRACT :

Myanmar is our golden land country. The Union of Myanmar is a country located at the center of a tripod of East Asia, South Asia, and South East Asia. The Union of Myanmar is home to 135 ethnic races. Although there are 135 ethnic races, they are connected by natural and man-made communications. Myanmar is very interesting and valuable country regarding with the Buddhism and the Buddha's Sāsana. Sāsana means the dispensation of the Buddha.

**KEYWORDS :** golden land country , natural and man-made communications.

### INTRODUCTION

Sāsana is a Pali loan word used by the old Burmese for religion, especially that of the Buddha and for the year of the religion reckoned from the death of the Buddha. There are three kinds of Sāsana:

- (1) Learning the Buddha's Teaching, *Pariyatti Sāsana*
- (2) Practical application of the Buddha's Teaching, *Patipatti Sāsana*
- (3) The realization of the Buddha's Teaching, i.e., attainment of *Jhāna*, *Magga*, *Phala* and *Nibbāna*, *Pativedha Sāsana*.

If we want to say about Myanmar, we have to say Sāsana. Without Sāsana, we cannot say about our country, Myanmar. Myanmar and Sāsana are interrelating and connecting each other like Mutual condition (*Aññamañña paccaya*).

The arrival of Buddhism took place in the very year of the Buddha's enlightenment. The legend of Shwe Dagon Pagoda, Yangon, is the story of the arrival of the Buddha Sāsana to Myanmar. In accordance with the Myanmar tradition of Shwe Dagon pagoda, the arrival of hair relics to Myanmar, is as follow. *Taphussa* and *Bhallika* are merchant generation in Tigon town in the *Ukkalāpa* division of Myanmar and they sailed to trade with the barge from Tigon town to *Mijjhima* region in India.

At that time, *Siddhtha Gotama* renounced the royal luxury and took a retreat and practice don austerity for six years and he won Bodhi-tree and throne like dais and sojourned at the root of *Rajayatana* Lin Lun tree or *Buchanania* tree in the *Uruvela* forest near *Nerajar* river in Magadha. When they saw the Buddha who sojourned at the root of *Buchanania* tree as seven days in each retreat they offered to the Buddha with honey snack and crisp snack delightfully. Since *Gautama* attained Buddhahood, he did not meals for the whole 49 days.

When *Taphussa* and *Ballika* offered honey snack, Buddha ate it as his first meal in the *Maha Sakarit* year (*Bowdawlzana* Era/ Great Era) 103. The two brother became the foremost persons who got the chance to offer first meal to the Buddha and took the two refuges, the refuge in the Buddha and refuge in the *Dhamma*. When they asked something to pay homage on the behalf of Buddha himself, the Buddha gave them eight holy hairs which were brought with respect and honour back to Myanmar.

When they came back to *Okkalā* or *Ukkālāpa* division, the *Okkalā* king and peoples built the stupa in which enshrine the Buddha's holy hairs. The height of those superimposed pagoda was 44 elbow's length and known as *Tigumbha* pagoda. This legend is mentioned in the Shwe Dagon stone inscription, set up by king *Dhammazedi* (AD 1472-1492) of *Hanthawaddi* kingdom.

The name of this pagoda deviated from *Trigum*, *Tigum* to Dagon and later it is known today as Shwe Dagon golden pagoda in Yangon which is now the biggest and highest pagoda in the world. There is a saying that "in Myanmar, the source of dispensation is Shwe Dagon." Myanmar is proud to claim to receive the Buddha *Sāsanā* in the very year of *Gotama* Buddha's enlightenment and many thanks to repeated advent of the Buddha *Sāsanā* and continuous support of successive kings, governments and people Buddhism flourishes till today. *Theravāda* Buddhism has been firmly established in Myanmar and it has been flourishing till today.

Historically, Myanmar has been a Buddhist country since 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. *Theravāda* Buddhism has been the predominant religion particularly. It is a great majority of Myanmar. *Theravāda* Buddhism is being patronized, supported, purified and promoted within and outside our country, Myanmar. Since the time of the Buddha's demise (*Mahāparinibbāna*) till today there had been held Six Buddhist Councils. Of them, the last two, the Fifth and the Sixth Buddhist Councils took place in Myanmar.

The Fifth Buddhist Council took place in Mandalay, Myanmar in 1871 A.D. in the reign of King Mindon who is supporter and promoter of *Theravāda* Buddhism. The king Mindon supported to held the fifth Buddhist Council, presided over by venerable *Jāgarābhivamsa* and 2400 monks, in the city of *Ratanapun* at Mandalay in the year 1871 AD (Buddhist Era 2415). The chief objective of this meeting was to recite all the teachings of the Buddha and examine them in minute detail to see if any of them had been altered, distorted or dropped.

It was also to inscribe the entire *Tipitaka* on 729 marble slabs, the world's largest book that still stands in the Kuthodaw pagoda at the foot of Mandalay hill. The Fifth Buddhist council was a Myanmar affair, and most other Buddhist countries were not involved in it. It is not generally recognized outside Myanmar. Its results were limited to the Myanmar edition of *Pāli* canon only. Mandalay is the second capital city of Myanmar and there is famous pagoda well known as *Mahā Muni* Image at Mandalay.

Eighty-three years after the convening of the Fifth Buddhist Council, the Sixth Buddhist Council was convened at Kaba Aye Pagoda in Yangon in 1954 in the *Mahā Pāsana* Cave, sponsored by the Burmese Government led by the Prime Minister, the Honorable U Nu. Yangon is capital city of Myanmar. Seven hundred and twenty-nine large marble slabs set up in the wide precincts of *Mahā Loka Mārazein* Pagoda at the foot of Mandalay Hill in the reign of King Mindon. This so called "The largest book in the world", and this stands till today. And Kyaik Hti Yoe Pagoda is the very famous pagoda and the destination of pilgrims, hikers, and mountaineers over the world.

These large marble slabs of *Mahā Loka Mārazein* Pagoda, Kaba Aye Pagoda, *Māha Pāsana* Cave, and all appertaining religious monuments and buildings stand till today as commemorative monuments of the last two Buddhist Councils convened in Myanmar. It is very auspicious and pleasurable that Buddha *Sāsanā* and Theravada Buddhism came to stay and flourished in the entire of Myanmar. Theravada Buddhism is the main core of Myanmar culture. The World Buddhist Summit was convened in December 2004, at Yangon, Myanmar. Sitagu Sayadaw organized this World Buddhist Summit Conference attended 300 participants and delegation from 38-countries.

It is not only appropriate but also auspicious to choose as the venue of the Conference. Therefore, the holding of the Buddhist Summit on a global scale in Myanmar is very auspicious for Myanmar, its people, participating Buddhist countries and their delegations. And the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of International Association of *Theravāda* Buddhist Universities, was convened in March (6, 7, 8) 2009, at Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Sagaing Hills, Sagaing, Myanmar sponsored, organized, and hosted by Sitagu Sayadaw Dr. *Ashin Nanissara* who is Chancellor of 3-Sitagu International Buddhist Academies of Yangon, Mandalay, and Sagaing. The Union of Myanmar maintains friendly relations with all countries.

Myanmar is a Buddhist country where Theravada Buddhism predominates. There is no state religion but all other religions peacefully co-exist with it. Ministry for Religious Affairs takes charge of all religions in the country. There are two State *Pariyatti Sāsana* Universities, one at Yangon and one at Mandalay established by Venerable *Vicittasārābhiva*sa *Tipi*akadhara *Dhammabha*āgārika, known as Minkon Sayadaw. And there are two other private Buddha Universities in Yangon and Mandalay. And the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Yangon, established in 1998.

This University is providing free tuition, free messing, free lodging, and free medical care to those foreigners regardless of race, creed and gender, whether monk, nun or layman or laywoman to pursue the study of *Theravāda* Buddhism, theory and practice, leading to Diploma degree, post-graduate degrees up to Ph.D. Every year enrolment and admission cover a wide range of foreign nationalities not only from other Buddhist countries and those from ASEAN countries but also from the Americas, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and even South Africa. There is also in Yangon a training centre for Myanmar monks for serving as missionary abroad.

And there are three Sitagu International Buddhist Academies founded by Sitagu Sayadaw Dr. *Ashin Nanissara*. In 1992, Sitagu Sayadaw was initiated Sitagu International Buddhist Academy located in Sagaing Hills, Sagaing and it was opened in 1996. In 2007, Sitagu Sayadaw was established and opened Sitagu Buddhist Academy in Yangon and he was also established and opened Sitagu Buddhist Academy in Mandalay in 2009. The foreign scholars are admitted for long-term and short-term courses in Buddhist studies in these Academies. And Sayadaw started to establish the International *Vipassanā*Academy in Sagaing Hills, Sagaing in 2010.

The aim and objective of the establishment of all Sitagu International Buddhist Academies is to promote and make spread the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* within the country and abroad as well. The slogan of the Academy is "*Bhasaye jotaye Dhammam*" teach and illuminate the *Dhamma* for all. *Abhidhammā* teaching, *Vipassanā* practice and meditation centres are run by senior monks, nuns and laymen and laywomen in Yangon, Mandalay, Sagaing, and some other major cities and towns. Prominent meditation centres are Mogok, Mahasi, Chen Myey, Hpa-auk, and Thae Inn gu.

Besides, with a view to nurturing youths in Buddhist culture especially in Buddhist ethics, morals and civics monastic education has been reintroduced at the primary level with the support of the Government and other societies. For pilgrimages abroad the Ministry of Religious Affairs arranges organized economy class tours to sacred places and sites in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka enabling Myanmar Buddhists to visit them within their means. If all of you want to know about Myanmar and you want to take a pilgrimage or sightseeing tour to religious, historical and cultural sites of our country, you should come, see, and inquire to Myanmar with yourself.

Myanmar is very well known country regarding to Buddha *Sāsana* and *Theravāda* Buddhism abroad. But sometimes some quarters of the world received wrong information or misinformation or lack of genuine information. Therefore, some societies and some countries didn't know the real value of Myanmar and they should try to know, to see, to accept properly and clearly the economic, political, social, cultural, nationality, religion, etc. of the Myanmar. Now Myanmar is standing under the protection of the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Sanghā*, the Triple Gem, and very peaceful country.

The view of the people of Myanmar was taintless and clear and their morality was steadfast. Besides, there was a discourse called *Mangala Sutta* of the Buddha which served like a constitution which are system of laws, customs and principles according to which a country is administered. On account of the teaching of the Buddha, the people of Myanmar knew how to love their families, the country and the nation and humanity, how to take refuge in the three Gems and believe in them, how to support the *Sāsana*.

Buddhist Myanmar, who are devoted to the dispensation of the Buddha, supported and used to offer the abbot and the monks the food on the monastery. Myanmar lay people, on completion of a new house and moving in into new premises, celebrate the occasion by inviting *bhikkhus* and friends to the ceremony. They also fed the listening audience and donated. They listened the teaching, poured water

symbolically after donation that whoever hears, take equal share. The people, who want to accept their share of good deeds, recite *Sādhu! Sādhu!Sādhu!*

According to the Buddha teaching, saying "*Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*" will relatively bring them prosperity and success. The successive Buddhist people and government of Myanmar promoted to develop the affairs of religion. They repaired, refurbished and embellish the old pagoda, which was partially built by several kings, and built new pagodas. Myanmar people, who were striving for the all-round development of the *Sāsanā*, were as good and noble lay congregation in Myanmar Buddhist history. Therefore, there were so many monks in Myanmar. So Myanmar was as a gilded city alive with tinkling bells and the swishing sounds of monks' robes.

There were many religions in Myanmar but only Buddhism was flourishing all over the Myanmar people within a few centuries. The Buddha *Sāsanā* is suitable for all kinds of human nature and applicable to people of all ages without changing their cultures of abandoning their traditions. Most of the citizens of Myanmar attained the effectiveness of the Buddha's sermon and the Buddhism was shone as sunlight in Myanmar until now.

As a conclusion, Myanmar is metaphorically called the "Land of Pagodas". It is also the "Land of Images". It abounds in cultural heritage sites created by nature as well as by man. Almost every city and major town has prominent pagodas and temples and almost all hillocks and mountain summits are topped by stupas of some antiquity. Buddha Images and Statues are objects of veneration and artistic marvel. As I already told above, Myanmar and *Sāsanā*, *Sāsanā* and Myanmar are going together from the time of arrival of Buddha *Sāsanā* till today. We cannot separate Myanmar and *Sāsanā* till the world endure. Therefore, we only invite all of you cordially to visit Myanmar and see yourselves.

### Buddha-Sāsanam Ciram Titthatu!

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