

WORKING PAPER: VI

TRAVELS BY LEADERS: MYANMAR

Himanshu Prabha Ray

Susan Mishra



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1. Introduction

The duration of the ‘Project Sailing to Suvarnabhumi’ being till December 2018, the themes of ‘Travels by Leaders’ and ‘Colonial Intervention’, listed in the Bibliography, shall be the subject matter of the Working Papers. The theme ‘Travels by Leaders’ will be address first and in context of Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand. This working paper will explore various aspects of travels by leaders to and from India and Myanmar in the 19th and early 20th century and the ensuing impact on the socio, political, religious and educational realms. The term leaders in the paper relates not only to political nationalist leaders, but assumes a broader definition incorporating religious and social leaders, literary figures (Alāol), the various missions sent by the Myanmar rulers (Bodawphaya of the Konbuang dynasty) and the movement of communities, (Brahmins from Manipur and north India) – all of which highlight the multidimensional interactions between India and Myanmar. As most British records and scholarly articles use Burma instead of Myanmar, this paper shall follow the same as it deals primarily upto pre Independence era.

India and Myanmar share a common political border clearly demarcated in modern political terms. This political marker was often blurred, fluid and constantly changing in the past and thus negating a clear line dividing India from Myanmar. For instance King Bodawphaya annexed Manipur in 1814 and Assam in 1817 which became a part of the largest

Burmese empire. During the colonial period, Burma was annexed by the British through the three Anglo Burmese Wars (1824-1885) and Burma became a province of British India.

Even though the historical- cultural linkages between these two countries date back to the ancient times, it was during the British rule that evidence of large scale migrations of Indians to Myanmar is observed. “The geographical contiguity, with India sharing both land and maritime boundaries with Burma, facilitated large-scale migration of Indians into Burma.”¹ This migration can be attributed to British policies of promoting labour movement to colonies,² the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the passing of the Burma Land Act.³

The introduction of steam ships further accelerated migration and movements across India and Burma. In the first decade after British annexation, movement of labourers was on slow moving Indian owned sailing vessels. In 1861 the first regular monthly steamship service between Calcutta, Akyab and Rangoon was started by The British India Steam Navigation Company⁴. By 1870 over 100 sailings a year took place between Calcutta, Akyab and Rangoon.⁵ By 1880 there were weekly runs from Calcutta and Madras to the ports in Burma and in the 1890’s the Indian owned Bengal Burma Steam Navigation company provided regular service between Chittagong and Burma.⁶ The number of Indian coolies that travelled in the steamers to Pegu in 1880-81 was 40,000 coolies.⁷

According to the 1872 census, there were 16,000 Indians in Rangoon constituting only about 16 % of residents. In the 1901 census, the number had increased to 120,000 persons which accounted for approximately half of the population of the city.⁸ It has been estimated that at the beginning of the 20th century, a quarter million Indians were arriving in Burma every year. In 1921, immigration reached 887,007 people⁹ and “by 1931, the number of Indians in Myanmar had exceeded 1 million.”¹⁰

The migrants to Burma consisted of the labourers, the educated Indians and the money lending Chettiers. Burma’s expanding ‘rice frontier’, and its becoming the largest exporter of rice were critical factors migration of labour and the movement of the Chettiar community into Burma¹¹. The plantation economy in Burma led to a higher demand of labour in the country and unskilled Tamil and Telugu labourers and farmers initially dominated this migration flow. “Sittwe was one of the busiest rice-exporting ports in the world in the late 19th century, and in 1931 there were 2,10,990 Indians who made up 97 per cent of the city’s population .”¹² “The laboring poor, both skilled and unskilled workers formed the third class. Indians contributed to more than half of the technical or skilled personnel in the economy. They were essential workers in railways, inland water transport, road transport, electricity, post, telegraph telephone and radio communications, and exploitation of natural resources, including minerals, mineral oil, timber, rice and other agricultural products. In trade, Indians constituted about 17.3 percent of the total workers.”¹³

Another class of Indian migrants were teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and accountants, clerical and administrative staff, who worked in the colonial revenue, executive, educational and municipal department, medical, executive, judicial, revenue and municipal systems of administration in Burma. “The first Chettiers seem to have arrived in Burma in 1826 along with Indian (‘Madrassi’) troops and labourers in the train of the British campaign in Tenasserim. The first formal Chettiar ‘office’ was established in Moulmein in 1850, by 1905 there were an estimated 30 Chettiar offices in Burma and according to the

Burma Provincial Banking Enquiry Report (BPBE), the most dependable source on the extent of Chettiar operations, this number had increased to 1,650 by 1930.”¹⁴

These varied communities in Burma were the one of the motivating factors for Mahatma Gandhi’s last and final visit to Burma in 1929, which was politically motivated.

2. Political Leaders and Their Impact

The most prominent leader to have visited Burma is Mahatma Gandhi, whose ideals of ahimsa, *stayagraha* and non co-operation had a huge impact on the course of the freedom struggle in Burma. Gandhi travelled thrice to Burma, in 1902, 1915 and 1929, and of these the first two visits were primarily to meet his friend Dr. Pranjivan Mehta. Dr. Mehta and Gandhi had met each other while studying Law in London, and later Dr. Mehta moved to Rangoon where he had a jewellery business.¹⁵ Dr. Mehta was not only a close friend of Gandhi, but also a financier for Gandhi’s projects and had an influential role in planning the salt *satyagraha* in India when he visited Gandhi in 1926.¹⁶ “He was one of the most politically active men in Rangoon”¹⁷ and fought for improving the conditions of the Indian migrant labourers.¹⁸ He was also instrumental in aiding communication between the moderate Burmese nationalists and the INC.¹⁹ The posts held by him were- President of the Hindu Social Club and Shri Ramakrishna Society in Rangoon, member of All India Congress Committee of Burma, President of the Burma Provincial Congress Committee and in 1906 he started the Anglo Gujarati paper United Burma.²⁰ Mehta attended the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress in December 1915, spent several weeks with Gandhi, and had the ‘Lal Kothi’ or ‘Red Bungalow’, built near the Sabarmati Ashram. His pamphlet *Vernaculars as Media of Instruction in Indian Schools and Colleges* (1917), carried an ‘Introduction’ by Gandhi, stressed the need for the “adoption of the regional languages as the medium of instruction in educational institutions at all levels and adoption of Hindi as the national language of India.”²¹

Gandhi's first visit was to meet his friend Dr. Mehta and was a relatively short one. During his second visit Gandhi arrived in Rangoon on 17 March 1915 and stayed with Mehta for eight days. "Mehta assured Gandhi of financial assistance in the establishment of the Sabarmati Ashram, and Gandhi said that Mehta was not only 'the pillar of the Ashram, without him the Ashram would not have come into existence at all'."²² Mehta was ever ready to give most part of his wealth to Gandhi in his struggle for freedom and equality. Dr. Mehta more or less can be credited with preparing the ground for Gandhi's politically motivated tour of Burma in 1929. It is during this visit that he widely toured Burma delivering speeches at Rangoon, Moulmein, Paungde, Prome, Mandalay and Toungoo addressing varied sections of society from the labouring class, plantation workers, the wealthy Indians as well as the Buddhists and Arya Samjists.

The prime factors behind Mahatma Gandhi's decision to travel to Burma in 1929, where he stayed and toured for two weeks, were collection of funds for the Lajpat Rai Memorial fund and the propagation of the manufacture and use of home-made products, in other words *swadeshi*. Gandhi wanted Indians in Burma to contribute financially, evident from his speech, "Remember that I expect not only the Gujaratis, but the Bengalis, the Punjabis and the Tamilians to give as much as they can... The Chetties who deal in crores have lakhs of rupees worth of property may not disregard my claim. Let them not forget that I also belong to their lass, I am a Gujarati Chetti."²³ The ground for was prepared in Burma for Gandhi's ideals by the introduction of the *swadeshi* movement by monks such as U Ottama who had studied in India and had closely witnessed the activities of the Indian freedom movement. In 1917 the Young Men's Buddhist Association promoted women to safeguard their traditional dress- the longyi, thamein and the pinni jacket.²⁴ "Influenced by Gandhi's *swadeshi* movement the Burmese nationalist students seized upon cloth as a symbol of National identity and support to National economy."²⁵ Gandhi's visited Burma at a time when its people were acquainted with Gandhian techniques which was being applied by the Burmese nationalist leaders in their struggle against colonial rule.

The emergence of organised political agitation against British colonial rule in Burma can be traced to period 1906-1939. U Ottama figures as the prominent leader of the as a mass leader of GCBA after 1915 who firmly believed, propagated and practiced the Gandhian methods of Home Rule movement, boycott Non-cooperation movement and civil disobedience movement in the fight against colonial rule. During the 1920's known as the *wunthanu* (supporting one's own race) era in Burma, it was a peasant based anti-British nationalist movement which was conceived by the GCBA and supported by Buddhist monks.²⁶ It's main ideals were the preservation of one's lineage, preservation of one's traditional values and rejection of foreign ideas and products and the methods adopted were refusal to pay taxes, boycott of foreign goods and use of local goods as means of protest against the British Government.²⁷ "The influence of *swadeshi* movement of India was clearly discernable."²⁸ "Maung Maung and R. Taylor opine that it were the Wunthanu Athins who popularized the idea of a grass root protest along the line of principle of Dhamma. The *Dhammakatikas* preached the method of protest which has astonishing similarity with the Gandhian method of practicing Satyagraha."²⁹ The British manufactured items such as cigarettes, thin materials and imported textiles were boycotted³⁰ and the Gandhian slogan of native product became widely popular in Burma that signboard with '*wunthanu*' written on it could be seen almost in every home and shop and people purchased from shops with such signs.³¹ "U Ottama, faithful to his Gandhian ideals, did not advocate the use of violence in the anti-colonial struggle."³²

Gandhi as well as Burmese nationalist's shared the common aim of attaining freedom from British rule which fostered a mutual bond against colonialism. At its meeting in Pakokku on held during November 1925, the GCBA passed a resolution stating "As Burma and India are both desirous of Independence, and as the Indian National Congress and the Burmese General Council thinks and acts along similar principles, it is to be placed on record that the GCBA will give all support to Congress organisations in India and Burma."³³

At Moulmein he addressed a gathering of 5000 peasants and encouraged them to stop using foreign yarn and urged them to revise [their] taste for foreign. “You have got enough weavers in this beautiful land. But instead of working for the good of nation they are slaving away for a foreign capitalist because it is to foreign yarn that they are applying their skill and workmanship. If you will avoid helplessness, become self-contained and happy and not become semi starved as we in India are, you will take my word and revert to the spinning wheel while there is still time.”³⁴

Gandhi addressed the people of Prome by saying, “ I have no other and better guidance to offer to you than to commend to your attention the general principle of non-violence, in other words, self-purification ... As I was driving through Prome I passed through a village which was pre dominantly a weaver’s village. All the looms are working with foreign yarn and therefore have no living contact.”³⁵ Gandhi asked the women to give up foreign silks and English umbrellas and take to homespun cloth and paper parasols.³⁶ In his speeches at Prome and Paudane he complemented the Burmese looms and found them to be cheaper, better and lighter than the Indian looms. He asked the people to make more bamboo spinning wheels and urged the weavers to display patriotism by reviving hand spinning and connecting with villagers who produce yarn.³⁷

The enduring message of *swadeshi* is evident in the traditional Burmese farmer’s hat which was worn by Gandhi in his tour of Burma. “There is one area where Gandhi appears to have lent a new meaning to a longstanding accoutrement: a Burmese traditional, broad rimmed, bamboo, farmer’s hat known as the *kamauk*. Pictorial records suggest that the *kamauk* on his Burmese tour to symbolise the practical utility of *swadeshi*... we can thus speculate that Gandhi acted as a conduit for the *kamauk* to become a symbol of resistance, resilience and freedom later adopted by Suu Kyi.”³⁸

The importance of Burma in the context of the Indian freedom struggle can be ascertained by the speech given by Gandhi on the eve of his departure Gandhi at Mandalay ”you have rightly reminded

me that it was here in Mandalay that the great son of India, Lokamanya Tilak, was hurried alive. It was he who gave India the mantra of Swaraj and in burying him alive, British Government had buried India alive. The Lion of Punjab (Lala Lajpat Rai) also was similarly incarcerated here and lest we should forget those things, Government recently buried alive Subhas Bose and numerous other sons of Bengal. Mandalay is thus a place of pilgrimage for us Indians, and it is remarkable coincidence that we are all sitting here today in the shadow of the walls of the fort and the prison sanctified by those sons of India. In India it is a common saying that the way to *Swaraj* is through Mandalay, - and let Mandalay be an eternal reminder both to you and to us of that great truth.”³⁹

The impact of Gandhi’s visit is evident in the adoption of boycott and civil disobedience as a means of protest by the YMBA or GCBA. Influenced by Gandhian ideology, U Chit Hlaing initiated the ‘Thakin’ or ‘masters’ movement in the early 1930’s, which believed in strength in unity and demanded complete independence or *swaraj*.⁴⁰ Non-cooperation boycott movement, which was started under Gandhi’s leadership in January 1921 came to an end on 11 February 1922 at Gandhi’s insistence, following the news of the burning of 22 policemen by angry peasants at Chauri-Chaura in Gorakhpur district of U.P. on 5 February 1922. While in Burma the boycott movement “continued unabated till 1928 in some of the most heavily populated districts or even till 1930 in some other areas of Burma.”⁴¹

3. Women Leaders

Indian women played a pivotal in creating a common political platform across Asia in the era of nationalist movements. All Indian Women’s Conference (AIWC) was started by Women’s Indian Association in 1927 and addressed women’s education and also recommended policies to the government. Later on, the primary objective of All India Women’s Conference was to promote education for both sexes at all levels and also to deal with problems related to the welfare of women and children. The ideology of ‘Greater India’ greatly influenced the

formation of the AAWC⁴² and “evidence of the ‘Greater India’ ideology among Indian women is seen in their relationship with one of their closest neighbours, Burma.” National Council of Women in India set up a branch in 1926 in Burma, namely the National Council of Women in Burma (NCWB). The members constituted “European, Burmese and Indian women living in Burma and its members of the NCWB were represented on the central executive of the Indian Council.”⁴³ The NCWB concerned itself with “improving the lives of women and child labourers in Burma in 1929 well before *thakin* and other politicians turned their attention to the plight of the working class.”⁴⁴ The report of its investigation on the labour condition of women and children in vicinity of Rangoon was submitted to the Royal Commission of Labour in India.⁴⁵

All Asian Women’s Conference of 1931 was organised primarily by Indian women and it aimed to “cement regular meetings between Asian women and to forge a pan-Asian feminist organisation⁴⁶.... The AAWC was a vehicle for Indian women to voice their ideas and vision of an Indian-centred Asia.”⁴⁷ May Oung also known as Daw Mya Sein, was on the All Asian Women’s Conference committee from 1931 to 1933. She attended the AAWC at Lahore and also presided over one of the sessions. She also was a member of the executive of the National Council of Women in India and was appointed secretary of the Liaison Committee of the AAWC at the 1931 Conference.⁴⁸

A strong bond between the women’s organizations of India and the rest of Asia was thus created by the efforts of Indian women nationalist. “The support for the All-Asian Women’s Conference testified to the thriving women’s movement within India and across Asia as a whole.”⁴⁹

S. Muthulakshmi Reddy worked for the progress of Women’s education, because she felt that education was essential for women. “She was nominated by the Viceroy to serve on the Sir Philip Hartog Education Commission which was formed to review educational projects in India and Burma.”⁵⁰ As a member of this committee she travelled to different parts of India and studied the

advancement of education among the people in Burma and India. Dr. Reddy “was nominated by the Nationalist Women’s Organization of India to represent Indian women and give evidence at the Third Round Table Conference in London (1930) and the World Women’s Congress in Chicago (1932).”⁵¹ Muthulakshmi Reddy was the main figure behind the abolition of the *devadasi* and started the Avvai home in 1930, which was initially located in her residence. It provided shelter, protection and basic education to women and girls free from the Devadasi system. “The Avvai Home was a home to provide protection, food and accommodation without social or caste barriers. It was virtually an ‘open house’. Most of the women and girls who came had very little education and ‘mother’ (Dr. Reddy) educated them in local schools.”⁵² In 1940 during the Japanese invasion of Burma and she came to learn from the British camp authorities in Imphal that many Tamil children and women were stranded. These she readily accepted and provided shelter to them in the Avvai home. “The Avvai home became like a Universal Refugee camp”, which was not merely an asylum, but also a place where vocational training and basic education was provided to women.⁵³

4. Religious Leaders

The late 19th century and early 20th century witnessed travels by Burmese Buddhist monks to India, not only for purposes of pilgrimage, but also to pursue further education, learn about different religions and re-establish old meditation technique of Vipassana. These visits led to close religious and cultural interactions between India and Burma, and they also highlight the pivotal role of Burmese Buddhist monks in field of Buddhist and Pali learning, research and education.

Monk U Ukkattha stayed in India for 7 years during which he visited numerous parts of the country. With the aid of financial support from followers from around Burma, he boarded a ship from Yangon to India on 18 November 1922 and arrived in Calcutta on 21 November 1922, where he went to the Mahabodhi Society. At the Mahabodhi Society in Calcutta he met the forward thinking

Adiccabhivamsa and they under him he developed an interest secular learning and knowledge of other religions and art of debating.⁵⁴ After residing at Mahabodhi for a month and a half he moved to Benares where he pursued English and received a Ph. D degree. He also learnt Hindi and Sanskrit from the Hindu pundits who also acquainted him to Vedic hymns the Upanisads and the Bhagwad Gita.⁵⁵ He gained knowledge of Rg Yajur and Atharva Veda, and he studied the Chandoga, Svetasvatara, Bṛhadārnayāka, Māṇdukya, Aitreya, Muṇḍaka and Prasna Upaniṣads. In 1926 he moved to Lucknow where he studied the Bible and the Koran, and gave talks every Sunday between 6 pm to 8 pm at the Bengali Buddhist Monastery.⁵⁶ In 1927 he attended the Gaya Congress where he discussed the site of Bodhgaya with Dr. Rajendra Prasad and suggested that the site should be placed under national administration as the site had global historical and religious importance.⁵⁷ He moved to Amritsar in 1928 and continued his Sanskrit studies, read the Mahabharata and Ramayana and translated the Visudhimagga and Kathavattu in Hindi in 1928 and the Suttanipataka in 1929⁵⁸, thus making it accessible to the general public in India. He travelled widely in India and visited Buddhist sites of Jetavana, Kusinara, Lumbini, Nalanda, Rajagriha, Pataliputra, Sanchi and the historical sites of Harappan civilization, Gandhara, Bombay, Ajanta as well as some museums.⁵⁹ His keen interest in understanding the various systems of education in India led him to visit “St Xaviers College in Mumbai, St, John’s College Lucknow, the Punjab University, Varanasi Sanskrit University, Shanti Niketan and Calcutta University.”⁶⁰ Ukkattha mastered Sanskrit to such an extent that he won the first prize in a National Sanskrit poem competition held at Sanskrit University in Benares.⁶¹ He also attended conferences, seminars, wrote newspaper articles in Hindi and English and preached Dhamma in his talks. His talk reflected” the continued development of an international network of Buddhists centred on India especially under the auspices of the Mahabodhi Society.”⁶²

Burmese monks played a central role in the preservation and continuation of the Vipassana

technique of meditation. It is one of India’s most ancient techniques of meditation and was taught by was taught by Buddha as a universal remedy for universal ills. This non-sectarian technique is a way of self-transformation through self-observation.⁶³ This technique was brought to India by Mr. Goenka who was born and raised in Myanmar. He was trained in Vipassana by Sayagyi U Ba Khin for 14 years.⁶⁴ Sayagi U Ba Khin belonged to a long line of Vipassana teachers beginning with the venerable Ledi Sayadaw who actively revived it. Ledi Sayadaw visited the holy Buddhist sites of Bodhgaya, Rajagrha, Sarnath, Savatthi and Lumbini in 1895, he received the title of *Aggamatra Pandita* by the British Government in India in 1911 and during the years 1913-1917 he had a correspondence with Mrs. Rhys-Davids of the *Pali Text Society* in London and translations of several of his discussions on points of *Abhidhamma* were published in the “Journal of the *Pali Text Society*.” He assisted the Pali text Society in carrying out many translations as well. In 1915 he designated a lay disciple Saya Thetgyi to teach Vipassana and this not only allowed the common man access to Vipassana but also ultimately led to its re- establishment within India and across the world.⁶⁵ The other monk from this line of teachers who undertook pilgrimage to the sacred sites in India was venerable Webu Sayadaw (1896-1977) and he meditated under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya.⁶⁶ Acharya Anagarika Munindra (1915-2003), a Bengali Buddhist from the Chittagong region, was invited by the Prime Minister U Nu to visit Burma to receive instruction in Vipassana meditation from the famous Mahasi Sayadaw at Thathana Yeikta in Rangoon. He departed for Burma in early 1957 and spent nearly ten years at the Mahasi Sayadaw’s meditation centre in Rangoon. “According to Pryor his visit was facilitated through a government project organized by U Nu to sponsor foreigners who wanted to learn Vipassana meditation in Burma. It was not until 1966 that Munindra returned to India and Bodh Gaya, where he embarked on a lifetime of meditation instruction and teaching.”⁶⁷

The close association of Burmese monks with Buddhist studies and education in India continued well into the post-Independence period in India.

Sayadaw Bhaddanta Dr. Jagaravibhamsa was ordained in 1944 and obtained a Doctorate from Nalanda University. He lectured at the University on Pali, Athakatha, Tika and treatises for over 20 years in Hindi and English, and translated select Buddhist literature into Myanmar from Indian literature.⁶⁸ In 1955 Sayadaw Bhaddanta Kovida travelled to Assam and at the Nampake Monastery in Dibaguga district he transmitted the Dhamma. . Sayadaw Bhaddanta Nandita was ordained in 1955 and he received MA degree in Pali from Nalanda University. He also concentrated on his efforts in Assam at Pan Sun village in Assam where he taught Myanmar literature, basic Theravada Buddhism and Abhidhamma and dedicated 13 years to missionary work. Sayadaw Bhaddanta Pannavamsa was ordained in April 1948, he carried out missionary work in Andaman Islands and in 1961 he took charge of the Buddhist Mission for Tamil Buddhists in southern India. Sayadaw Bhaddanta Pupapharama ordained as monk in 1939 and often toured in India spreading Buddha Sasana. Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma was sent to India by the Government of the Union of Myanmar to study Hindi and Sanskrit at Benares Hindu University and obtained MASanskrit degree in 1964 and PhD degree in 1967. At the Sanskrit University of Calcutta he mastered Mahayana Buddhism and pre Buddhist thought at. His mastery over Buddhism led to his appointment as the Chief Editor of Encyclopaedia of Chief Buddhist Technical Terms, and during his stay he translated, wrote and edited several Buddhist texts which were published by the Sanskrit University. He received the Kalidasa Prize from the U.P. Government for his translation of the Abhidhammathasangha. Sayadaw Bhaddanta Sobhana in 1949 resided in the Ariya Vihara Monastery where he learnt Sanskrit. Sayadaw Bhadanta Vajrabuddhi ordained as monk in 1938 obtained his MA Degree from Hindu University Benares and while in India he wrote books on Buddhism in Sanskrit and English and lecture on Buddhism in Hindi in Nagpur and Mumbai.⁶⁹

5. Bodh Gaya – The Continual Link between India and Burma

The history of Bodh Gaya is closely linked with

Buddhism in Burma, as records show a long tradition of upkeep and restoration of the site by the Burmese royalty for over millennia at varied intervals. This Burmese association with Gaya was integral in the continued sanctity of the site, even after Buddhism lost much of its foothold in India. While its architecture also played a crucial role if forging linkages between India and Burma, here only the various missions sent by dynasties of Burma, for varied purposes shall be discussed. “The upkeep of the Mahabodhi temple became a tradition with the kings of Myanmar who continued to send missions to Bodh Gaya repair the temple and also to donate temple slaves and land to the holiest shrine of Buddhism.”⁷⁰ An interest in repairing and maintaining the temple premises in Bodh Gaya can be traced to the reign of King Kyanzittha (1084-1113 CE). Two Burmese inscriptions dated 1035 and 1086, record repairs at the site by Burmese kings.⁷¹ The earlier one records on a copper umbrella the visit of Dharmaraja. The latter, on a stone slab, gives an important history of the temple itself. Burmese records confirm this activity. An inscription at the Shwesandaw Pagoda at Prome, Burma, records two missions to rebuild the temple, one sent by King Kyanzittha (1048-1112)⁷² and Leityaminnan (came to throne of Arakan in 1118 CE) under the guidance of Panthagu sent an envoy with men and money to repair the sacred shrine at Vajrasana, Bodh Gaya, which was carried out with great care and is recorded at the site.⁷³ Kyanzittha’s mission is mentioned in a Mon inscription from Prome, which says that because the temple of Sri Vajrasana (the Mahabodhi temple) had been “destroyed by other kings,” Kyanzittha “gathered together jewels of diverse kinds and sent them on a ship to on) a ship to build up the holy temple at Bodh Gaya and to offer lights which should burn forever there . “. ⁷⁴ The inscription continues that the funds are to be used for supporting the upkeep and functioning of the temple as well, for digging a reservoir, cultivating rice-fields, supplying musical instruments, singing, dancing, and so on. The delegation that visited Bodh Gaya in 1833 came across an inscription recording the major repairs carried out at the temple between 1295 and 1298. It states that when the temple fell into disrepair,

Dhammaraja sent his teacher Siri Dharmmarajaguru, who took along with him his pupil Siri Kassapa. Repairs commenced at the site on Friday the 10th day of the waxing moon of Plasuiw, in the year 657 (December 1295- January 1296) and on Sunday 8th day of the waxing of Tanchonmhum in the year 660 (October-November 1298) the dedication was held.⁷⁵

King Dhammazedī sent a contingent of craftsmen under the leadership of a Sri Lankan merchant “in 1472 to Bodh Gaya to repair the temple and make plans and drawings of it”.⁷⁶ In 1795 a Buddhist Burmese delegation had visited Bodhgaya with the purpose of collecting water from the tank for the Burmese king to bathe in.⁷⁷ Another Burmese mission visited the site in 1802. Francis Buchanan on his visit to the site in 1811 was told that the Burmese Buddhists were inquiring about the condition of the site.⁷⁸

In 1823, a deputation of Buddha priests was sent from Amarapura, by the Burman emperor, to perform rites for his predecessor, at the shrine of Buddha Gaya.⁷⁹ The Burmese mission sent by King Bagyidaw in 1833 and their report about the site seem to have prompted King Mindon Min’s mission in 1874 to Bodhgaya for extensive repairs to be carried out at the temple.⁸⁰

In 1875 the Burmese sent a mission to clear “debris” from the temple complex. The king of Burma, Mindon Min (1853-1878) requesting to send a mission to Bodh Gaya because: “it is His Majesty’s wish to repair the enclosures of the Great Bodhi tree, which from a long site of existence must have fallen into decay.”⁸¹ In August of 1875, Mindon’s Foreign Minister specified that the King wished (1) to repair the Bodhi-tree enclosure itself, its walls and terraces, as well as all the structures within, (2) to repair the caitya of Asoka over the site of the Aparajita (throne), (3) to prop up with masonry the weakened right limb of the tree, (4) to build near the Maha Bodhi Tree a monastery that might house up to twenty monks, (5) to enclose this monastery within a masonry wall, (6) to erect a structure (pari-bhoga) for the deposition of royal gifts. The Burmese list of improvements and additions was then passed on again, in October of 1875 to Government of Bengal.⁸² Alan Trevithick

study reveals that the Burmese royal scribe who came to Bodh Gaya in January 1876 was able to draw up plans that suited both Mindon and the Mahant. In the succeeding year the king of Burma sent three officers to supervise the repairs at the site. “The work, under solely Burmese direction with the approval of the Mahant, continued for about six months until it came to the attention of the Government of Bengal that, from a newly sensitive archaeological point of view, Burmese workmen were making a mess of the old temple at Buddha Gaya.”⁸³ In 1880 J D Beglar was appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal proper repairs in co ordination with the second Burmese mission.⁸⁴ A Burmese Rest House was also built by the Burmese king Mindon Min in 1880⁸⁵, and a second Burmese vihara was established in 1936 by Venerable Nandamala.⁸⁶ The Burmese interest and activities related to restoration of the temple site ultimately led to the emergence of Bodhgaya as an important historical and archaeological site from the viewpoint of the Archaeological Survey of India. The site of Bodh Gaya would change the colonial archaeological involvement with Buddhist remains from mere documentation, surface excavations and collections to a more physical engagement with the monument focussing on conservation and restoration.

6. Shared Literary Culture

The Arakanese kingdom, Manipuri Meities, the Konbuang kings and Buddhist monks contributed to a shared literary tradition between India and Burma. One of the regions included to highlight the cultural interactions is Chittagong which even though is currently in Bangladesh, had earlier been a part of the Mughal empire and later Bengal sultanate, which incorporated the present west Bengal as well.

The earliest evidence for influence of an Indian language in a Burma is traceable to period of the Arakanese kingdom. Bengali language was patronised in the 17th century by both the royalty as well as the elite and “Bengali literature was mainly written in two places in the kingdom: Chittagong and Mrauk-U”.⁸⁷ “The Arakanese kings had come under the influence of Bengal Sultans and their

courtiers were primarily Bengali speaking people from Bengal and neighbouring Chittagong region.”⁸⁸ Coins of the 16th and 17th century are inscribed in Bengali bearing Sanskrit titles,⁸⁹ “That the king was perhaps capable of conversing with foreigners in Hindustani, and that the “poet laureate” would translate an Awadhi epic into Bengali in order to give it a local audience, suggests both a substantial Bengali presence in Mrauk-U, and a cultural orientation directed decidedly towards the Bay”.⁹⁰ Bengali literature developed in the region primarily under the aegis of the royalty.

“The case of Bengali literature in Arakan is a fascinating example of complex cultural exchanges on the margins of South Asia. Above all, it shows the necessity of thinking in terms of regional cultural history in connection with supra-regional processes.”⁹¹ “Arakan participated as part of a broader literary and cultural continuum stretching along the Bay of Bengal.”⁹²

Daulat Kazi was the first Bengali poet in the Arakan court under the patronage of Ashraf Khan who had Sufi leanings. He was born into a Qazi family in the village of Sultanpur in Raozan Upazila, Chittagong, but not getting any recognition at home, he left for Arakan. Ashraf asked Daulat to write the story of Lor Chandrani and Sati Mayana in Bengali verse. Daulat Kazi turned to the old Rajasthani poem by Sadhan, a manuscript of which has been recently found.⁹³

Ālāol belonged to Fathepur in eastern Bengal where his father was a high ranking cavalry officer. After his father's death in a battle against the Portuguese, he was captured and sold to the king of Arakan. He was initially made to work in the stables and later he was apatronised by Ashraf Khan to write poetry⁹⁴ and eventually his patron who was also the Prime Minister, Magana Thakur, ensured him a place in the Arakanese court. Even though he was a Bengali Muslim, he “showed respect to figures of eloquence and wisdom associated with both Persian and Sanskrit cultures,”⁹⁵ and “had a deep knowledge of Hindavi, Sanskrit, and Persian literary cultures, his poems follow the rules of traditional Bengali literature, and all of his translations are panchalis.”⁹⁶

. Ālāol was also patronised important officials such as Syed Musa (Royal Minister), Solaiman (Chief Minister), Mohammad Khan (Minister of Army), and Majlis Nabaraj (Minister of Taxation).⁹⁷ His first work Padmavati “is an adaptation rather than a translation of the famous work, Padmavati of Malik Muhammad Jayasi. Alaol’s Padmavati was composed in the court of Arakan during the reign of Thado Mintar (1645-1652), at the request of his chief minister, Magana Thakur.”⁹⁸ Ālāol also wrote Ragtālnama, Padmavati (1648), Satimayana-Lor-Chandrani (1659), Saptapaykar (1665), Saifulmuluk Badiuzzamal (1669), and Sikandarnama (1673).⁹⁹ He often used Sanskrit words instead of Persian, to express the idea of refinement.¹⁰⁰ Ālāol also composed treatises on music, which now partially survive in later works called *Rāgamālās* and *Tālanāmās*. “The fragments of “Ālāol’s *Rāgatālanāmā* partly deal with the myth of the creation of *ragas*, *talas*, and musical instruments. The work appears to be framed around the story found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* about the origin of Drama, combined with elements of Puranic stories such as the birth of the Ganga (the river Ganges). Ālāol also provides lists of the *kalas*, *ragas*, *raginis*, *talas*, and *talinis*, the way they may be combined as well as the directions, colours, and, for the four *kalas*, the elements — fire, earth, wind, and water — they are associated with.”¹⁰¹ The kings also promoted the writing of puttis or folklore in Bengali as well : Shuja Qazi’s Roshanger Panchali (History 15 of Roshang), Kazi Daulat’s Sati Mayna-O-Lora Candrani, Shamer Ali’s Razawan Shah, Mardan’s Nasir Nama or Nasir Maloum, Shah Alaol’s Padmabati, Tufa, Sati Mayna Lor Chandrani, Saiful Mulk Badiujjamal, Sikander Nama, Hatf-Paikar, Abdul Karim’s Dulla Mailis, Hajar Masil, Tamam Anjari, Qazi Abdul Karim’s Rahatul Qulub, Abdullar Hazar Sawal, Nurnama, Madhumalati, Darige Majlis, Abul Hussain’s Adamer Larai, Ismail Saquib’s Bilqisnama, Qazi Muhammad Hussain’s Amir Hamza, Dewalmati, Haidar Jung, and etc.¹⁰²

Acquisition of Buddhist Pali and Sanskrit texts from India was actively prompted by the Konbaung kings who regularly sending missions to India. The translation and interpretation of these texts in the kingdom of Ava would not have been

possible without the involvement of Brahmins from north India and Manipur, who also were essential components in the promotion of secular education undertaken by rulers of the Konbuang dynasty. The transfer of knowledge via texts, which include not only on religious themes but also secular as well, helps retrace movement of communities and cultural links between India and Burma. “Many of the texts circulating in the frontier region moved across communities into each other’s libraries. Manipuri Brahmins sought to access particular old Manipuri books.”¹⁰³ The region of Manipur and its inhabitants were the key elements in the multilateral interactions between India and Burma.

The Manipuri kingdom provided human resources to Burmese kingdom as in the case of the Manipur cavalry division and the Brahmins. “In the Manipur cavalry division, nine corps was organized in total and many cavalry divisions of Manipur origin were placed around the castle. War captives from Manipur were given important posts as leading figures in the textile industrial arts and as member of the cavalry division in Mandalay. ¹⁰⁴ A”¹⁰⁵ Kathe horsemen were incorporated into King Alaungmintaya’s cavalry after he occupied Manipur¹⁰⁶ and their importance can be attested by the fact that, “They were offered gold, silver, clothing and other provisions and lands for residence and subsistence.”¹⁰⁷ The Kathe people, were responsible for the defeat of the British in the first- Anglo Myanmar war of 1824, when they attacked on their horses on the Rakhine front. They also fought as part of the cavalry in the the second Anglo Myanmar war of 1852 at and in the third- Anglo Myanmar war, the Kathe cavalry faced the British in Sagaing. ¹⁰⁸

Another area that speaks of cultural exchange between the two regions is textile technology. During King Bodawphayay’s expedition to Manipur in early 19th century there was transfer of technology in terms of traditional textile production from Manipur and can be seen at the largest silk production centre at Amarapura. ¹⁰⁹

The punna or Brahmins in the Konbuang court came in late 18th and first half of the 19th century

from Benares as well as Manipur and belonged to Vaisnavite as well as the Saivite sects.¹¹⁰ “A parallel historiography of Manipur (currently India) for the same period establishes that these ‘Brahmins’ constituted a particular ordination lineage of Vaishnava Goswamis drawn from Benares (Kashi) and Nadia (Bengal) in India.”¹¹¹ As stated in the Manipuri chronicles Vaisnavite Brahmins belonging from various parts of such as Bihar, or Khardah for the Adhikari mayum, Gujarat for the Sija Gurumayum, Nandagram in Hindustan for the Furalatfam, were to be found as early as 15th century onwards¹¹²

“Of the Kathe who settled in Myanmar as non-war captives, Kathe Brahmins (Punnas) were the most outstanding class and they served the king as the court astrologers, advisers and royal purohita supervisor who arranged the royal coronations.¹¹³... During king Mindon’s reign Punna scholars were offered insignia of rank including golden shoulder sash of twelve strings jewelled ear-plug, head dress, etc. and like the Myanmar court officials they were conferred the titles.”¹¹⁴

Bodawphaya saw “India... as land of pilgrimage and as a land where highly learned Brahmins were the safe keepers of a written tradition that had authoritatively defined kingship.”¹¹⁵ Jacques P Leider’s in depth study highlights the importance of the community and amongst the various functions entrusted to the punna were- the construction of a new city, the consecration of a new palace, the royal ploughing ceremony the naming ceremony, the first rice feeding ceremony, the anointing of the head at certain occasions, and the king’s participation at the New Year (thin-gyan) celebrations. Their importance in the royal ceremonies and court is attested by the fact that they performed the “incantation of mantras and the inscribing of mantras and magic squares on cloth on drums on city gates, and city walls were performed by the punna”¹¹⁶ On New Year. As also Their importance can be judged by the fact that King Bodawphaya reformed the annual ceremonial procession on advise of Brahmin Govinda Maharajinda aggamahadhammarajaguru who hailed from Benares.¹¹⁷

During the rule of the Konbuang dynasty numerous missions were sent to India to collect books of both religious and secular nature, which were then translated and studied. The Indian punna or Brahmins played a central role in the process of translation and thus transmission of Indian texts to Burma. The kings pursued a scheme of “return to the canonical sources”¹¹⁸, which invariably led to closer interactions between India and Burma. King Bodawphaya through letters to the English officers requested them to send not only Sanskrit texts but Brahmins as well. In one instance he asked for a Brahmin astronomer in a letter to Governor General Shore¹¹⁹ and in 1795 King Bodawphaya he requested Michael Symes, journey to “send to Amarapura certain Sanskrit texts and a Brahmin with his wife.”¹²⁰ From the early years of his reign he sent punna to Benares to collect books on “religious and secular subjects” and then these books were translated into Burmese either by the monks or the Punna at the capital Amarapura.¹²¹

Shwetaung Thagathu and Shwetaung Thirisithu departed from Burma on 12 February 1807 to visit the sixteen states in the Middle Region to get scriptural and secular texts, , , and they returned on 21 February 1808 alongwith back eight medical treatises and a Brahman Govinda for the court of Ava.¹²² In 1810 a group of officers (Shwetaung Thagathu, Zeyakyawthu, Zeyakyawhtin and Zeyakyawswa), were sent brought along with them eight treatises on varied topics such as medicine, “on the distinctive marks on elephants, on augury and astrology. During a mission sent by Bodawphaya which left from Burma on 2 December 1812 and returned on 12 February 1815, Nemyo-jeya Kyaw Htinthe governor (myo wun) of Pegu, “copied texts, discussed philosophy and religion with the Brahmins of Benares, and brought a wife for his king”.¹²³ The last mission sent with officers left on 1 May 1815 and returned on 4 September 1819, and.¹²⁴ “King Bodawphaya sent Shwetaung Thayata and officials to get more than 100 works from India which included works on medicine, didactics and astrology and had them translated. He sent missions to central India to collect secular and religious works. The official travelled as far as Punjab and also brought back with

them two Bodhi trees.”¹²⁵ It is estimated that a total of 253 texts were brought back from India between 1786 and 1818, but as of now only 236 texts have been found.¹²⁶ Of these 58 were on astrology, 56 on grammar, 23 on Logic, 8 on Law and the rest covered miscellaneous topics.¹²⁷

The monastic education under the rule of King Bodawphaya included not only religious education but came to incorporate a number of subjects of Indian origin such as astronomy, boxing, astrology, military arts and music.¹²⁸ These subjects were taught to the elite students by court Brahmins who were primarily of Manipuri descent.¹²⁹ These Manipuri Brahmins were moving between the Burmese and Manipuri courts, and thus Manipur became “a significant route for the introduction of Sanskrit works into Burma.”¹³⁰ The Chindwin monks relied on assistance of Manipuri and Hindu Brahmins in context of Sanskrit languages and texts.

Another aspect to this has been the role of the punnas and monks in collecting information about the British rule in India and informing it to the king. “As the Punna were familiar with Indian affairs and the increasing power of the English in India, much information of political nature could arrive at the court.”¹³¹ The delegations sent to visit holy sites of Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Varanasi seem to have established contacts with the local ruling dynasties of India. Evidence of “multilateral links between the Ava court and the heirs of Tipu Sultan, the Marathas, Nepal and possibly Punjab”, is to be found in Burmese intelligence documents.¹³² A. Phayre notes that “a Burmese was arrested while on his way to Delhi, ostensibly in search of religious books. The British Government now gained information, apparently for the first time, that Bodoaphra was actively engaged in intrigues with some of the native princes of India”¹³³ and “Manipuri and north Indian Brahmins in the Burmese court spread propaganda hostile to the invaders from hatred to the British rule.”¹³⁴

Literary, inscriptional and archival evidence indicates the intertwined and interlinked historical, social, religious and political developments in India and Burma. Personalities as well as communities

were instrumental in forging and maintaining linkages between these two countries over a long period of time. In the arena of Buddhism and Buddhist studies, the Bengali language, the fight against colonial, women's rights and traditional knowledge systems, the modern political national boundaries neither hindered nor impeded the interactions and movements of people and ideas between India and Burma.

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