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The Study of the Age of Appearance of Lokanīti Text and Its Organization

Mya Thu Zar Hlaing *

Abstract

There are so many assumptions to the age of appearance of Lokanīti texts and its organization. Therefore, this research paper presents the plausible opinion out of these assumptions. In doing this research, descriptive method and comparative method are used by collecting facts and data from the Replicated Lokanīti texts written by western and eastern scholars.

Introduction

In Myanmar society, social thoughts and traditions which are still accepted and practiced from the early days of history to the present time can be found in Nīti texts. Among these Nīti texts, Lokanīti text is the most distinguished. It is a text that penetrated even the neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Laos, Nepal, Cambodia, etc. It took a place as a text for social guidance in the curriculum of monastic education from the seventeenth century to the World War II, in the curriculum of high school education for several years after the World War II and in the curriculum of higher education till the present time.

The word “lokanīti” is a compound word comprising loka and nīti. Loka is of three kinds, namely, sattaloka (animate world), okāsaloka (inanimate world) and saṅkhāraloka (the conditioned world) of which the loka is the sattaloka (the animate world). The word nīti means nīti text, a text for culture and that which conveys the beings to Samsāra. Moreover nīti text conveys the meanings of direction, execution, conveying, guidance. Therefore lokanīti is a guide on secular rules of conduct and on progress in secular life. In other words, lokanīti text is a literature of homily.

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1. The Age of Appearance of Lokanīti Text

Regarding the age of appearance of the lokanīti text and the original compiler, it is found to be different in view among the Western and Oriental scholars. Out of these assumptions, the plausible opinions will be presented.

Firstly the arrival of Nīti literature in Myanmar will be presented. Nīti literature is not a kind of literature from Theravāda literature field. It is a kind of literature from Brahmanḍa doctrine. According to the upholders of the Brahmanḍa faith, the authoritative sayings of Nīti text, were compiled by Creator Brahmās. It is stated that practising in accordance with these authoritative sayings is a very important rule of conducts for Brahmanḍavādis.

The above Sanskrit Nīti literatures arrived in Myanmar from India together with Brahmanḍavāda. Regarding the time of arrival of Brahmanḍa Nīti literature, Dr. Than Tun stated that both Brahmanḍavāda and Buddhism arrived in Lower Myanmar through the Southern Indian merchants from the early Christian Era. Similarly the findings of statues, images, inscriptions, votive tablets relating to Brahmanḍa faith in Pyu areas such as Tha-ye-khet-taya, Bheik-tha-no and Mon Suvaṇṇabhumi were described in ancient Myanmar history.

Particularly in bringing learned scholars from Thaton during the reign of King Anawratha (1044-1077 A.D.), both Buddhavādis and Brahmanḍavādis seemed to be taken from Thaton. Myanmar in Bagan can be said to get the chance to learn not only Theravāda Pāḷi literature but also Sanskrit Buddhism and Nīti literature from the learned persons brought from Thaton.

Again during the reign of King Bodawpaya (1782-1819 A.D.), over a hundred texts such as astrological texts, medical texts, texts on diet and secular texts were brought from Ceylon and India and had them translated into Myanmar language. It is known that Nīti texts were also included among the texts which were translated into Myanmar language.

Sanskrit Nīti texts from Brahmanḍavāda that arrived in Myanmar in successive ages translated by Myanmar scholars into Pāḷi Nīti texts, and Pāḷi Nīti texts which were then translated into Myanmar nissaya texts. Myanmar renderings were transformed into the forms of pyo, laṅkā, homily, epistle and proverbs.

As mentioned above, many literatures similar to Lokanīti appeared in Myanmar. Those Nīti texts were texts which were translated from Sanskrit language
into Myanmar language and texts which were written in Myanmar by Myanmar Pāli scholars. Among these Nīti texts, there were three main affairs which were written. They were the affairs of secular world, the affairs of Dhamma and the royal affairs. Nīti Texts found in Myanmar are Cāṇakyanīti, Sīhaḷanīti, Dhammanīti, Lokanīti, Mahārahanīti, Rājanīti and Sutavaḍḍhananīti, Patyānīti, Gīhivinayasaṅgahanīti, Cintāmayanīti.

In general the compiler of Lokanīti text is described as Caturangabala Minister of Pinya age. But R.C. Temple who translated the Lokanīti Pāli into English completely in 1875 described in his introduction that there was no one who could tell the age of compilation and the compiler of the text definitely and that the compiler could be a monk who was learned in Pāli. In the introduction of a set of palm leaf manuscripts he found from Pathein District the foreword was found in both Myanmar and Pāli languages. It contains only about Sayadaw U Budh. U Budh is said to translate the Sanskrit or Pāli text into Myanmar language in 1826 A.D. The compiler of the original text was described to be a Brahmin called Cāṇaka. Thus the age of compilation of the text was assessed ordinarily as “it could not be much early”.

Again, Pāli Professor James Gray of Yangon University translated and published the Lokanīti text completely. According to James Gray, Manipuri Brahmins had Sanskrit Lokanīti, Dhammanīti and Rājanīti in Bengali scripts. The texts in Bengali scripts were later substituted with Myanmar scripts. The Sanskrit Lokanīti text comprises a total of 109 gāthās. When Pāli version was compiled in Myanmar scripts, the total number of gāthās increases to 167. The text was said to be compiled in the period between the 12th and the 14th B.C. Dr Heinz Bechert and Dr Heinz Braun expressed their opinions in the Pāli Nīti Texts of Burma as follows:

“Therefore the Lokanīti in Sanskrit which was brought from India to Burma in 1814 has as little to do with the Pāli Lokanīti as the Lokanīti in Sanskrit which was studied by the Manipurian Punnas (Brahmins) of Burma and referred to by Gray. Under these circumstances, we cannot give a more accurate answer to the question about the date of Lokanīti than to say that it was compiled in its present form probably between the second half of the 5th and the middle of the 18th century.”

Now the opinions of Myanmar scholars will be presented in continuation. During the reign of King Thibaw in the Late Konbaung Period, U Shin Galay, the
Secretary to the Minister, compiled *Lokanīti Pyo* with 167 gāthās and 40 stanzas based on *Pāḷi Lokanīti*. The conclusion of *Lokanīti Pyo*, it is written as follows:

“

It is also described in the Myanma Sweson Kyan as follows:

“The Minister Caturaṅgabala, who was well versed in the *Tipiṭaka*, was also learned in *Māgadha*, *Ganthantara* texts and religious texts in Sanskrit. Accordingly he compiled gāthās on the eighty detailed characteristic marks on the person of the Buddha, gāthās on the one hundred and eight characteristic marks on the soles of the Buddha, *Hitopadesa Vatthu* (over 20 aṅgas) and *Māgadha Abhidan* and ʲิกā text. Moreover he also compiled *Pāḷi Lokanīti* text which was very significant in the traditionally accepted ways and ideas. *Pāḷi Lokanīti* text was then translated into Myanmar *Nissaya* by Sayadaw U Budh.”

Sayagyi Maung Lwin Yi (Arts and Science) made records by studying the opinions of the Western and Oriental scholars and the literature collection under the name of *Nīti* literature as follows:

Caturaṅgabala Minister, who was traditionally accepted as the compiler of *Lokanīti*, was (1) a person who appeared in round about 1350 A.D., (2) a Myanmar Buddhist, (3) a person who was well-versed in both Sanskrit and *Pāḷi* languages, and (4) being a translator of *Nīti* literature collection such as *Hitopadesa Vatthu*, Caturaṅgabala Minister compiled *Lokanīti* text by drawing much upon *Berahmaṇa* literature, Buddhist literature, etc. It is evident that Caturaṅgabala Minister was not a person who merely translated Sanskrit *Lokanīti* text into *Pāḷi Lokanīti* text as said by Professor James Gray.

To estimate the age of the appearance of *Lokanīti* compiler based on the above authoritative sayings, it was Caturaṅgabala Minister, entitled Sīrimahā Caturaṅgabala, who was well-versed in Sanskrit and *Pāḷi* literatures during the reign of Laysishin Kyaw Swa called King Thihathu (712-721 M.E.); (1350-1359 A.D.). It was Caturaṅgabala Minister who compiled *Lokanīti* text in *Pāḷi* which was most appropriate to Myanmar ideas by basing on the various authoritative sayings from *Piṭaka*, *Dhammanīti*, *Mahārahanīti*, *Rājanīti*, *Cāṇakyanīti*, *Sīhaḷanīti* texts.
Caturaṅgabala Minister: Caturaṅgabala Minister was a distinguished poet in the world of Myanmar literature in the Innwa Period. The native place of the minister was Pyay. The parentage and the original name of the minister are not known. When he came of age, he went to Pinya town called Vijayāpura and learned Pariyatti literature as a novice under Venerable Sudhammamahāsāmi who was skilled in Piṭaka literature. After learning all the scriptures, he quitted monkhood and entered the royal service with the rank of Atwinwun (a secretary to a minister) during the reign of Laysishin Kyawsaw called King Thihathu who ascended the throne in 712 M.E. While he was serving as an atwinwun, he was conferred the title of “Sīrimahā Caturaṅgabala. Caturaṅgabala means “one who is replete with the four strengths.” The four strengths are (1) mastery of grammar text, (2) mastery of prosody, (3) mastery of Dhammasat text, and (4) mastery of military science as shown by Illustrated Abhidhan Sayadaw Venerable Obhāsābhivamsaka.

Caturaṅgabala Minister compiled Abhidhan ṭīkā, a commentary on Abhidhānappadīpikā called Pāḷi Abhidhan which was compiled by Venerable Mahāmoggalla of Ceylon. The Pāḷi words and vocabularies in this dictionary are divided into different genders, different categories, explanation in detail and inferences of the hidden meanings from the context in Pāḷi language. To the students of Pāḷi, it is still a text that cannot be relinquished. Minister wrote in the conclusion of the text for the knowledge of his intellectual calibre by the posterity as follows:

“May you be able to resort in a forest of Tipiṭaka together with Sanskrit texts without unentangled wit.”

Moreover Caturaṅgabala Minister also compiled the eighty characteristic signs on the persons of the Buddha, 108 characteristic marks on the soles of the Buddha and over twenty characteristic features of Hitopadesa in Pāḷi language. The minister was not only skilled in the Sanskrit and Pāḷi literatures but also in Myanmar verses such as pyo, ratu, etc. Regarding the Abhidhamma, he supplicated questions to Venerable Nāgita who was also known as Su-twin-pyit Sayadaw in Ratu verse on points which were not clearly understood with the expression beginning with “Under the golden feet”. The Sayadaw answered the questions with the Ratu beginning with “General questions will be answered.” The question and answer in Ratu is quite well known in the world of Myanmar literature.
2. The Organization of Lokanīti Text

In conformity with the name “Lokanīti” the text is directed to the welfare of the people of the world. The text is organized with 167 Pāḷī gāthās which are divided into chapters. Out of these gāthās, Gāthā, No. 1 is for the pledge of the text compiler and Gāthās from No. 2 to 167 are for the body of the text. The chapter-wise subject matter and the number of gāthās in each chapter are as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Number of Gāthās</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>paṇḍitakaṇḍa (On the Sage)</td>
<td>39 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>sujanakaṇḍa (On the Good Man)</td>
<td>27 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>bāladujjanakaṇḍa (On the Base and Foolish Man)</td>
<td>11 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>mittakaṇḍa (On the Friend)</td>
<td>15 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>itthikaṇḍa (On the Woman)</td>
<td>18 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>rājakāṇḍa (On the King)</td>
<td>26 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>pakiṇṇakaṇḍa (On the Sundry Matters)</td>
<td>30 gāthās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>167 gāthās</strong></td>
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Regarding the number of gāthās contained in each chapter there are some differences among the scholars.

Some separate Gāthā No.1 for the Introduction and the number of gāthās in Paṇḍitakaṇḍa is shown as 39. Some separate Gāthā No. 1 in the introduction gāthās and Gāthā No. 2 which shows the qualities of the text and put them in the Introduction. Then the number of gāthās shown in Paṇḍitakaṇḍa is 38. Some separate the gāthā that describes the division of chapters in the conclusion is shown as Gāthā No.168 and the gāthā that describes the completion of the text is shown as Gāthā No.169.

As to English translations, Pāḷī Professor Dr James Gray (1886) and Psychology Professor Dr Sein Tu (1962) translated 167 gāthās including the introduction gāthā as in the Pāḷī version. But in the English rendering of R.C. Temple (1878), there are only 164 gāthās. The Myanmnīti text translated by E. Fowle (1858) contains a total of 211 gāthās. These translation versions are found to be the same in subject matter and essences as in the present Pāḷī Nīti version because some Pāḷī gāthās included in the original Pāḷī version are combined and some gāthās are separated. That is why there is variation in the number of gāthās. Similarly there can be differences in the spelling of the words in the gāthās and Pāḷī text. Due to these
differences there can be differences in the translating the meanings and in interpretation of the texts from one scholar to another.

Regarding the subject matters included in the Pāḷi Lokanīti gāthās, the Pāḷi Lokanīti text is found to comprise 19.6% of the authoritative sayings from Piṭaka Pāḷi, 70.4% of authoritative sayings from Dhammanīti, 33.7% of authoritative says from Mahārahanīti, 2.4 % of authoritative sayings from Rājanīti, 2.4 % of authoritative sayings from Cāṇakyanīti and 3 % of Sīhaḷanīti respectively. Basing on this finding, in tracing the sources of the Pāḷi gāthās of the Lokanīti text, the compiler is considered to extract suitable Pāḷi gāthas from the earlier Pāḷi Piṭaka, Sanskrit Scriptures, Dhammanīti, and Sīhaḷanīti, etc. and used in compiling his nīti text. There are 19 Pāḷi gāthās (11.3%) for which the identical gāthās could not be found in the original texts. These gāthās are considered to be composed by the compiler of the text in compiling his text.

**Conclusion**

Although most of the Lokanīti gāthās were derived from Sanskrit nīti gāthās, the subject matters are not only acceptable by the Pāḷi Buddhists but also by any race and religion. They are much contributory to be endowed with good moral conducts in human society and for the character development of young generation. The scholars in successive ages made translations of the lokanīti gāthās into nissaya in Myanmar language, in English language, in pyo and in laṅkā. These performances testify the fame and significance of Lokanīti.

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