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

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Abstract

There are so many assumption 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 *sankhāraloka* (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 *Samāsāra*. 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 *Brahmaṇa* doctrine. According to the upholders of the *Brahmaṇa* 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 *Brahmaṇavādīs*.

The above Sanskrit *Nīti* literatures arrived in Myanmar from India together with *Brahmaṇavāda*. Regarding the time of arrival of *Brahmaṇa Nīti* literature, Dr.Than Tun stated that both *Brahmaṇavāda* 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 *Brahmaṇa* 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 (1044-1077A.D.), both *Buddhavādīs* and *Brahmaṇavādīs* seemed to be taken from Thaton. Myanmar in Bagan can be said to get the chance to learn not only *Therāvāda Pāli* 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 *Brahmaṇavāda* that arrived in Myanmar in successive ages translated by Myanmar scholars into *Pāli Nīti* texts, and *Pāli 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*, *Gīhivinayasāṅgahanīti*, *Cintāmayanīti*.

In general the compiler of *Lokanīti* text is described as Caturāṅgabala 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 Patheingyi District the foreword was found in both Myanmar and *Pāli* languages. It contains only about Sayadaw U Buddh. U Buddh 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 *Cāṇakya*. 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 *Pāli Lokanīt*. The conclusion of *Lokanīti* Pyo, it is written as follows:

“ဝိယောပုရပြည်ပင်းယဉ်၊ စတုရင်္ဂဗလ၊ တတ်လှကျမ်းဂန်၊ အမတ်မွန်လျှင်၊ မှတ်ရန်
ပြည့်မွမ်း၊ ထိုထိုကျမ်းမှ၊ ဖော်ထုတ်ပြသား၊ လောကနီတိ၊ အမည်ရှိသည်၊ ပါဠိဂါထာ၊
ဤသည်စာကို -----”

It is also described in the Myanmar 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 āṅgas) and *Māgadha* Abhidan and *ṭikā* text. Moreover he also compiled *Pāli Lokanīti* text which was very significant in the traditionally accepted ways and ideas. *Pāli 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 *Pāli* 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 *Pāli 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 *Pāli* 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 *Pāli* 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 Sudhammahāsāmi 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 Kyawswa 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 *Pāli* Abhidhan which was compiled by Venerable Mahāmoggalla of Ceylon. The *Pāli* 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 *Pāli* language. To the students of *Pāli*, 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 *Pāli* language. The minister was not only skilled in the Sanskrit and *Pāli* 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 *Pāli 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:-

Introduction	1 <i>gāthā</i>
1. <i>paṇḍitakaṇḍa</i> (On the Sage)	39 <i>gāthās</i>
2. <i>sujanakaṇḍa</i> (On the Good Man)	27 <i>gāthās</i>
3. <i>bāladujjanakaṇḍa</i> (On the Base and Foolish Man)	11 <i>gāthās</i>
4. <i>mittakaṇḍa</i> (On the Friend)	15 <i>gāthās</i>
5. <i>itthikaṇḍa</i> (On the Woman)	18 <i>gāthās</i>
6. <i>rājakaṇḍa</i> (On the King)	26 <i>gāthās</i>
7. <i>pakiṇṇakaṇḍa</i> (On the Sundry Matters)	30 <i>gāthās</i>
Total	167 <i>gāthās</i> .

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, *Pāli* Professor Dr James Gray (1886) and Psychology Professor Dr Sein Tu (1962) translated 167 *gāthās* including the introduction *gāthā* as in the *Pāli* version. But in the English rendering of R.C. Temple (1878), there are only 164 *gāthās*. The Myanmarīti 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 *Pāli Nīti* version because some *Pāli gāthās* included in the original *Pāli* 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 *Pāli* 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 *Pāli Lokanīti gāthās*, the *Pāli Lokanīti* text is found to comprise 19.6% of the authoritative sayings from *Piṭaka Pāli*, 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 *Pāli gāthās* of the *Lokanīti* text, the compiler is considered to extract suitable *Pāli gāthās* from the earlier *Pāli Piṭaka*, Sanskrit Scriptures, *Dhammanīti*, and *Sīhaḷanīti*, etc. and used in compiling his *nīti* text. There are 19 *Pāli 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 *Pāli* 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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