

The Study of Auspicious Housewarming Ceremony of Myanmar

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Abstract

Out of the many auspicious ceremonies related to Buddhist culture, the auspicious housewarming ceremony is included as one of the ceremonies. In this paper, the ceremony of housewarming in Buddha's time and the housewarming ceremony of Myanmar people in the present time are presented. In the introduction, the nature of Buddhist culture and the meanings of housewarming are extensively presented. (1) The auspicious housewarming ceremony of Myanmar people, (2) the auspicious housewarming ceremony of the Sakyan Princes and (3) the auspicious housewarming ceremony of the Ministers of Magadha Citizens are presented in the body of the text. With references to Pāli Aṭṭhakathā, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Mahāvagga Pāli, Dīgha Nikāya, Pāli Aṭṭhakathā, Sela Sutta, Majjhimaṇṇa Pāli, Majjhima Nikāya, and Pāṭaligāmiya Sutta Pāli Aṭṭhakathā, Sutta Nipāta Pāli, Khuddaka Nikāya, the ceremony of auspicious housewarming in Buddha's time and the housewarming ceremonies participated by the Buddha himself are presented explicitly and irrefutably. The ceremony of auspicious housewarming of Myanmar people in the present age is also presented. In the conclusion, it is described that the housewarming ceremony should be held according to the way the Buddha had instructed. Therefore this paper is presented with a view to knowing that the ceremony of housewarming has to be held from the time of the Buddha to the present day as the Buddha had instructed.

Key words: housewarming, auspicious housewarming ceremony of Myanmar, Sakyan and Magadha

Introduction

The Buddhist culture is worldly or supramundane ceremony according to the instruction of the Buddha. As the housewarming ceremony

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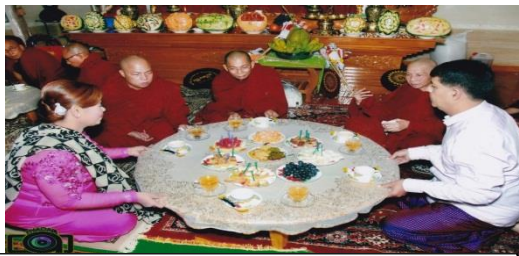
which is to be presented now is a ceremony held with the allowance of the Buddha, it is a Buddhist cultural event. Housewarming ceremony is a cultural event that takes place when a new house or a new building is taken for residence.

The usage "housewarming" means occupation of a new house by the owner. The ceremony is celebrated when a new monastery is donated to the monks for residing by pouring libation water or a new school, a new Dhammayon, or a new Zayat is opened for use.

Housewarming Ceremony for Myanmar Buddhists

When Myanmar people have built buildings such as a house, they invite monks to their houses and offer alms food, dessert and offertories. Then they take refuge in the Three Ratanas and undertake the five precepts for observance together with their inviting guests. Then they listen to the recitation of Paritta dhammas. Then all living beings are given the same share of merit.

At these auspicious ceremonies the monks usually recite Maṅgala Sutta, Metta Sutta, Pubbaṅha Sutta, etc. for the householders to be able to live in peace and without any danger. But as some of the families are poor, they cannot offer alms food and offertories but they are replete with faith. They respect to the tradition. Therefore they invite the Saṅghā in the evening and listen to the recitation of Paritta dhammas to ward off harms. Regarding the housewarming ceremony, it is celebrated not only when they begin to live in a new house but also they begin to live in an old house. So also, Myanmar Buddhists usually perform consecration of Buddha Images together with housewarming ceremony.



Offering alms food and dessert to Monks



Perform consecration of Buddha Images



Preaching the Dhamma (or) Listening the Dhamma



Offering the money to Monks



Auspicious Housewarming Ceremony of Magadha

The Buddha went from Nālanda to Pāṭaliputta village and resided at this small village. The two ministers, Sunidha Brahmin and Vassakāra Brahmin of King of Magadha were building a new city by town planning. The deities occupied the house plots by forming groups of a thousand deities. The powerful deities intended and ministers. The fairly powerful deities intended their house plots for the fairly powerful officers.

The deities who took refuge in the Three Ratanas came to the house plots of the persons who took refuge in the Three Ratanas. The ministers had these thoughts in their mind as follows:-

“Idha manussā nivesanam māpetva paṭhamam bhikkhusamgham nisīdāpetvā maṅgalam vaḍḍhāpessanti, athamayam sīlavatānamdassanam, dhammatham paññāvissajjanam anumodanañca so tum labhissāma, manussā dānam datvā amhākam pattim dassantī.”

“Our King is a close patron of Gotama Buddha. The King will blame us if we do not go and invite the Buddha. Particularly the places where the Buddha has been are said to be cleared of cruel beings. In order to make a new auspicious town, we will invite the Buddha.”

Then the two ministers went to the Buddha. They respectfully invited the Buddha to partake of alms food at their houses. The Buddha accepted the invitation by remaining silent. When it was near the time for alms food, the Buddha went to the new houses of the two ministers together with Saṃgha.

After the Buddha and the Saṃgha had partaken of nice alms food and desserts offered by the two ministers, the Buddha preached dhamma on appreciation of the alms food as follows:-

“Yasmiṃ padese kappeti, saṃpaṇḍhitajātiyo.
 Sīlavantettha bhojetva, saññate brahmacārayo.
 Yātattha devatā āsum, tāsam dakkhiṇa mādise.
 Tāpūjitā pūjayanti, mānitā mānayanti naṃ.
 Tatonāmanukamanti, mātā puttamva orasam.
 Devatānukampito poso, sadābhadrani passati.”

“Brahmins, a wise man builds and lives in a house in a place. The virtuous persons who restrain bodily, verbal and mental actions should be invited and offered alms food. Then all the deities in the environs should be shared merit of offering alms food.”

Then as the deities receive the share of merit from the human beings, they look after the sharers of the merit in return. They have good deposition towards the human beings thus: “These human beings share us merit although they are not related. Some deities who are given respect by offering offertories have got good attitudes towards human beings thus:” “Although these human beings are not related, they make oblation to us once in four months or once in six months”. Thus they look after these persons by warding off dangers.

For example, just as the benefactor mother always looks after her son, the deities also look after the persons who share merit with them. Those who are under the protection of the deities always enjoy wellbeing and various auspicious nesses.

The Auspicious House of Parliament (Hluttaw) ceremony of Sakyan

The housewarming ceremony that Myanmar Buddhists celebrate traditionally thrived in the lifetime of the Buddha. It was the time when the Buddha was residing at Nigrodārāma Monastery in Kapilavattu. At that time the Sakyans held a meeting for building a Hluttaw Building. When the construction was completed they went to this building to observe. They consulted among themselves as follows:-

“Idaṃ santāgāraṃ devavimāna sadisaṃ ativiya manoramam.

Sassirikaṃ tena paṭhamam paṛibhuttam hitāya sukhāyaassa.”

“This building is as graceful as a celestial mansion. It is replete with glory and auspiciousness. It is a brand-new building. It is not yet resided by any monk or any Brahmin. Whom should we let to reside it for arising of the prosperity for the Sakyans for a long time?” When they discuss among themselves, the Buddha appeared in their vision.

“Amhākaṃ ñātisetthassa paṭhamam, diyyamānēpi sathhunova anuvicchavikaṃ, tasmā paṭhamam sathhāraṃ paṛibhuñcāpesāma, bhikkhusaṃge āgate tepiṭakaṃ buddhavacanaṃ āgatameva bhavissati, sathhāraṃ bhīyāmaratiṃ amhākaṃ dhammakathaṃ kathāpessāma, iti tīhi ratanehi paṛibhuttam mayam pacchā paṛbhuñjassāma, evam no dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāya bhavissati.”

“The Buddha is the most exalted among the Sakyan relatives. He is an extraordinary person who is worthy of veneration. It will be excellent if the Buddha takes the first residence at this building. When the Buddha comes, the Saṃgha will also accompany the Buddha. Then only the Dhamma called Tipiṭaka will follow suit. Then we will listen to the Dhamma for the whole three watches of the night. Only after letting the Three Ratanas make use of the Hluttaw Building, we will be blessed with various glories and auspiciousness together with increasing prosperity.” Thus the Sakyans unanimously decided. Then they went to the Buddha to supplicate the invitation.

“Iva bhante kāpilavatthuvānaṃ sakyānaṃ navamaṃ santhāgāraṃ acikāritaṃ anajjhāvuhaṃ samaṇena vā brahmaṇavā kenacivā manussabhūtena, taṃ bhante bhagavā paṭhamaṃ paribhuñjissanti, tadassa kapilavattavānaṃ sakyānaṃ dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāya.”

“Exalted Buddha, the Sakyans living in Kapilavatthu have built a Hluttaw Building. It is not yet resided by any one, a monk or a Brahmin. Exalted Buddha, take the foremost residence of the Hluttaw Building. Only after the residence of the Buddha, this building will be used by the Sakyan Princes in Kapilavatthu. Celebration of housewarming in this way is for the prosperity of the Sakyans for a long time.” This is what the Sakyans Princes supplicated to the Buddha as described in the Pāli Canon.

The Buddha accepted the invitation of the Sakyans by remaining silent. As soon as the Buddha accepted the invitation, the Sakyans went to the Hluttaw Building and spread the strangely beautiful carpets in the main hall so that no vacant was left. Then they arranged the throne against the central pillar of the Hluttaw Building for the Buddha to sit. The strangely decorated canopy was installed above the throne.

Against the rear wall of the main hall the seats were arranged for the Saṃgha to sit. Along the front wall of the hall, seats were spread for the audience of lay persons. Big pots were separately filled with water for washing faces, hands and feet. Both the exterior and interior of the halls were brilliantly illuminated with oil lamps.

“Khīrapāyake dārake khīraṃ pāyetha, dahare kumāre lahuṃ bhojetva sayāpetha uccāsaddamā karitthaṃ satthā anto gāme vasissati, buddhā nāma appasaddakāmā honti.”

Then they went around the city beating drum and proclaiming as follows:-

“Suckle the babies so that they do not cry. Feed the children to their satisfaction and put them asleep early. Do not make noises. The Buddha

will reside at the new Hluttaw Building for one night. The Buddhas prefer seclusion.”

When everything had been prepared, they went to the Buddha and invited the Buddha, “Exalted Buddha! It is time to come to the Hluttaw Building.”

Then the Buddha went to the Hluttaw Building together with the Saṃgha. The Buddha sat on a prepared seat facing to the east. The Saṃgha were seated facing east against the rear wall of the hall. The royal assembly sat against the east wall of the hall and facing the Buddha and the Saṃgha. While holding their joined hands, the Sakyans made obeisance to the Buddha and the Saṃgha during the first watch of the night.

The Buddha preached the benefits of donation of building to the royal assembly as follows:-

“Donation of this building is very beneficial. Princes, just as I reside at this new building, the community of Saṃgha also resides at this new building. The residence of the Buddha and the Saṃgha means the residence of the Dhamma as well. Thus the residence is inclusive of the Three Ratanas. This new building amounts to offering all offertories. The benefit of donation of a monastery built of branches and leaves or the donation of a pavilion built of branches and leaves is too numerous to be enumerated.”

After preaching the delightful benefits of offering new building for one night, the Buddha gave the responsibility of preaching the discourse of practice of Sekkha persons to Venerable Ānanda so that the Sakyans were acquainted with the auspiciousness.

The Sakyans desire auspiciousness at this new Hluttaw Building. In Buddha Sāsanā, the course of practice for Sekkha is considered to be “Maṅgalāpaṭipadā” or the course of practice for prosperity. The listeners of the Dhamma, the royal assembly, were mostly Sekkhas. The preacher of the Dhamma, Venerable Ānanda was also a Sekkhapatisambhidāpatta.

Thus if the course of practice for Sekkha is preached, the Hluttaw building becomes an auspiciousness. The prosperity of the Sakyans is also auspiciousness. As the Buddha caused to preach the course practice for Sekkhas, it would not be tiring to the preacher and the dhamma listeners. The housewarming ceremony of the Sakyans is the Dhamma preached by the Buddha himself in the Sekkha Sutta in Majjhimapaṇṇāsa Pāḷi.

The account of housewarming ceremony or the inauguration ceremony of the new Hluttaw Building does not contain offering of alms food or offertories. It only contains an act of reverence to the Saṃgha headed by the Buddha in the first watch of the night. But in the founding of Pāṭaliputta City which was preached by the Buddha in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pāḷi, housewarming ceremony was held by offering alms food and dessert to the Saṃgha headed by the Buddha.

Benefit Acquired from Housewarming Ceremony

When housewarming ceremony is held, monks are invited and alms food, robes and offertories are donated to the monks. Merit is gained from this act of charity. On account of inviting friends and neighbours to participate in the act of charity, feast and listening to the sermon, it promotes friendliness. As the charity of sermon is the noblest among different kinds of charity, it will enable the donor to gain merit from this act of charity. On account of sharing merit with seen and unseen living beings, celestial beings and human beings one will gain the protection these being. Therefore when housewarming is celebrated one will gain much merit in addition to the increase of glory and auspiciousness to the house.

Conclusion

The housewarming ceremony that Myanmar Buddhists traditionally celebrate did not appear only in Myanmar time. It was a celebration that was in existence in Buddha's time. The Buddha himself participated in these ceremonies. These were the celebrations that the Buddha allowed to celebrate.

In the present day housewarming ceremony is usually celebrated about one week or two to three months after the occupation of the family. This way of celebration is not in accord with ancient tradition. Therefore housewarming ceremony should be celebrated according to the following procedure:-

The Buddha Image on behalf of the Buddha is taken to the new house together with the shrine. Then flowers, water and light are offered to the Buddha Image.

As the new house is not occupied by the family, the house is offered to the Saṃgha for a night. Then the chanting of Paritta dhamma by the Saṃgha is listened.

When morning comes, alms food and dessert are offered to the Saṃgha as the Buddha instructed Magadha Ministers.

Taking refuge in the three Saraṇagamanas, undertaking the five precepts to observe, listening to the chanting of Paritta dhamma, water libation, sharing of the merit and rejoicing in other's merit are performed.

After housewarming ceremony, the auspicious house called "Sirigeḥa" must be occupied the whole family.

In this world, there are beings called Nats or Deities who are invisible to human beings. These Nats occupy the house plots when they are marked for building houses. These Nats like to be shared merits when meritorious deeds are done. They also desire to receive oblation occasionally. Therefore they are in the habit of guarding the persons who share merits on occasions of charity.

Therefore as Myanmar Buddhists gain merit and auspiciousness when they celebrate housewarming ceremony, they should celebrate housewarming according to the above-mentioned procedure.

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