

The Role of Myanmar Proverb in Myanmar Traditional Life

Khin Saw Myint¹

Abstract

The word “proverb” is derived from the Latin word “proverbium”, which means a brief popular saying. A proverb expresses a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of mankind. Every society has its own proverbs that can display thoughts of its people. Myanmar proverbs through the ages have exhibited the Myanmar way of thinking, Myanmar way of life and philosophical values that identifies the national characteristics of the Myanmar people. This paper tries to reveal the philosophical values in Myanmar Proverbs.

Keywords : proverb, philosophical value in Myanmar Traditional life

Introduction

Myanmar proverbs are influenced by the very rich cultural values, moral values and strong belief of Theravada Buddhism. There are various usages of moral term in Myanmar proverb. The moral term in Myanmar proverb presents Myanmar ethical norms and Myanmar cultural values. Myanmar proverb throws light on divers’ characteristics of human beings. Some Myanmar proverbs express the human characters and their conduct.

Myanmar Proverbs reflects the Myanmar social values .Myanmar proverbs in this senction give an insight into situations that may arise between friends, relations, lovers, husbands and wives, teacher and their pupils and so on.

In Myanmar proverbs, its can be found the idea of Harmony of social relationship. In Myanmar way of thinking, it can be found that the idea of Harmony plays a significant role in social relationship and in moral conducts .Myanmar people usually live together in harmony with nature as well as social environment.

1.1 The Nature of Myanmar Proverb

The word “proverb” is derived from the Latin word “Proverbium”: “Pro” means forth and “verbium” means word. A proverb is called a brief popular saying. Some define proverb as ‘a short wise saying’. A saying becomes a proverb when it is taken up and assimilated by the common people.

The word “proverbs” means in Myanmar “sagabaunj”. It means “similarly saying”. Myanmar proverbs are very unique from the others. This short listing features most of the famous proverbs in the Myanmar culture. Some Myanmar proverbs are influenced by the very rich cultural values and the strong belief of Buddhism. Myanmar still use these saying frequently, whether in formal speech or in daily conversation.

Flourishing proverbs have their own significant characters. The characters of proverbs are as follows:

¹ Lecturer, Dr, Department of Philosophy, Myingyan Degree College

1. A proverb is short and to the point.
2. It is packed full of meaning.
3. It is neat and concise in form.
4. It has gained quick and lasting entry into the public mind.

These characters make proverbs memorable. A proverb expresses a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of mankind. Proverbs have given us a graphic picture of the development and progress of human life and thought. The function of proverb is to provide the general advice about how to act and live in daily life.

There are various proverbs in Myanmar language. All Myanmar are fond of proverbs in their daily life. Myanmar proverbs express the views of man about their fellow men and about human life in its various aspects. A proverb may have more than one implication depending on the circumstance in which it is used. A Myanmar proverb throws light on divers characteristics of human beings. Myanmar proverbs express the human characters or human behavior. Moreover, they are employed for many other purposes as follows:

1. to convey practical knowledge
2. to enhance the way of life of people
3. to demonstrate universal truths

The foremost proverb scholar Wolfgang Mieder defines the term proverb as follows.

A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.¹

Many proverbs have their origins in oral traditions but some have their origin in literature. The synonyms of proverbs are “adage”, “saw” and “byword”. Proverbs reflect the cultural values including the way of thinking, and the physical environment from which they arise.

In studying the ways of thinking of a people, we have to find the clues in their language. The proverbs are part of language, it can reveal the way they generally think. We come to know their perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, by studying Myanmar proverbs through the ages, we can understand the Myanmar way of thinking.

In Myanmar way of thinking, it can be found that the idea of harmony plays a significant role in social relationship and in moral conducts. Myanmar people usually live together in harmony with nature as well as social environment. There are many Myanmar proverbs that express the idea of harmony and some are as follows.

- A branch on which bees can swarm and squirrels scamper.
ပျားလည်းစွဲသာ ရှဉ့်လည်းလျှောက်သာ
- Reeds depend on alluvial land and it on reeds.
ကိုင်းကျွန်းမှီ ကျွန်းကိုင်းမှီ
- If there is unity then the country will prosper.
ညီညာမှ ပြည်သာမည်

¹ Mieder, Wolfgang (1993), Proverbs Are Never Out of Season, p. 24.

- Doing good for the many brings benefit to oneself as well.
အများအကျိုးဆောင် ကိုယ့်အကျိုးအောင်
- Only if one extends his arms (alms), will others do the same.
ကိုယ့်လက်သွားမှ သူ့လက်လာသည်
- The crow pays deference to the crow-pheasant and the crow-pheasant also pays deference to the crow.
ကျီးကို ဘုတ်ရိုသေ ဘုတ်ကို ကျီးရိုသေ
- It advocates avoidance of extremes. Myanmar people accept that it is best to follow the middle way that avoids extremes. Myanmar proverbs that advocate the idea of moderation are as follows:
 - Healthful when taken in moderation, harmful when taken in excess.
တန်ဆေး လွန်ဘေး
 - Tune the harp strings neither too taut nor too slack.
မလျော့မတင်း စောင်းကြိုးညှင်း
 - If the string is too tightly tied, it will break off; if the string is too loosely tied, it will wrinkle.
တင်းလွန်းလျှင်ပြတ် လျော့လွန်းလျှင်ပတ်
 - Adjust the burden to capability just as you match the arrow to the bow.
ဝန်နှင့် အား မြားနှင့်လေး
 - The idea of change can be found in many Myanmar proverbs. If one realizes that nothing is permanent then one can develop stability of thought. Some of these proverbs are:
 - A gilded pinnacle once; now relegated to the wood-pile.
မှန်ကင်းတလှည့် ထင်းတလှည့်
 - The bonlon fruit and the mudskipper are on top of each other by turn.
ပုံလုံတလှည့် ငါးပျံတလှည့်
 - Strain against the current sometimes and be under easy sail in calm waters at times.
ရေစီးတခါ ရေသာတလှည့်
 - The tree-stump and the grass come into prominence in turn.
သစ်တုတ်မြင့်တုံ မြက်မြင့်တုံ
 - Misery alternates with well-being.
ဆင်းရဲတခါ ချမ်းသာတလှည့်

1.2 The Classification of Myanmar Proverbs

The word “proverbs” means in Myanmar “sagabaunj”. It means “similar saying”. Myanmar proverbs are essentially similes or parables. Myanmar still use these sayings frequently, whether in formal speech or in daily conversation. Myanmar proverbs uninfluenced by the very rich philosophical values and the cultural values of Buddhist’s life.

Culture is concerned with the description and analysis of people's lives and traditions. Every society has its own cultural norms. These norms are cultural foundation of that society. Myanmar has its own philosophy which is based on *Theravada* Buddhism. Myanmar traditional thought finds expression through Myanmar proverbs. Myanmar proverbs are concerned with Myanmar ways of thinking.

Myanmar proverbs express the views of man about their fellow men and about human life in its various aspects. Myanmar proverbs express the various circumstances of Myanmar life.

Myanmar proverb throws light on divers' characteristics of human beings. Some Myanmar proverbs express the human characters and their conducts. They are as follow:

- *To shave off a spot on the already bald head.*
ကတုံးပေါ် ထိပ်ကွက်
- *One usually feels jealous upon the other who out scores.*
ကိုယ့်ထက်သာ မနာလို
- *One cannot see the exudation of his own eyes, but he can see that of others.*
ကိုယ့်မျက်ချေးကိုယ်မမြင်၊ သူ့မျက်ချေးကိုယ်မြင်
- *No care who dies.*
The important thing is the health of Nga Tay, one's own sun.
ဘယ်သူသေသေ ငတေမာပြီးရော

The above Myanmar proverbs explain the ethical concepts of "evil deeds" , "*lobha*" or "greed" and "*dosa*" or "anger". These proverbs refers to the bad action is immoral for social life.

The Proverb Concerning the Verbal Action

Verbal action is very important in Myanmar moral life. Some Myanmar proverbs refer to this ethical idea. They are as follows:

- *Say only seldom, but keep the words what you have said.*
စကားဆိုခဲစေ မြဲစေ
- *If one talks a lot, some words may disclose the true mentality of the speaker.*
စကားစကား ပြောဖန်များ စကားထဲက ဇာတိပြ
- *After the spoken out words, the legal action may follow.*
စကားနောက် တရားပါ
- *Talking too much may demonstrate more mistakes.*
စကားများ အမှားပါ
- *Eat up all the rice, but not speak out all to say.*
နှုတ်ကြောင့်သေ၊ လက်ကြောင့်ကြေ
- *A sweet mouth prevails success.*
နှုတ်ချို သျှိုတစ်ပါး

The above proverbs can be explaining the vital part of verbal action in Myanmar way of life.

The Proverb Concerning the Social Relation

- The existence of a small midriver island depends on the net work of roots of the reeds and the everlasting growth of the reeds depends on the firm existence of the island mass.
ကျွန်းကိုင်းမှို ကိုင်းကျွန်းမှို
- *If the crow shows respect to the crow-pheasant, then the latter will do the same to the crow.*
ကျီးကို ဘုတ်ရိုသေမှ၊ ဘုတ်ကို ကျီးရိုသေမည်
- *The person who really endears you is your relatives. The dish which savours well is a best dish.*
ခင်ရာဆွေမျိုး၊ မြိန်ရာဟင်းကောင်း
- *If the male is endeared, it eggs will be adored.*
မကိုခင်မှ ဥကိုခင်
- *Good people are happy among themselves.*
သူတော်ချင်းချင်းသတင်းလွေ့လွေ့ပေါင်းဖက်တွေ့
- *In time of lest, family is best*
အရေးကြီးက သွေးနီး

The Proverb Concerning the Khanti Practice

- If one entertains fury or begins with fury, he will make mistakes.
ဒေါသရှေ့ထား မှားတတ်
- *Say little and keep your word*
ဆိုခဲစေမြဲစေ
- *If one accepts the law of Karma, one can easily dispell one's fury.*
တရားဖက်တော့ အမျက်ပြေ
- *Tolerance leads to Nirvana.*
သည်းညည်းခံ နိဗ္ဗာန်ရောက်
- *The rudeness should be conquered by genteelness.*
အကြမ်းမှု အနုနှင့်သာ အောင်စေရာ
- *The fury of a wiseman does not peep out.*
ပညာရှိအမျက် အပြင်မထွက်
- *One may be killed if he creeps underneath and old tree, but, one may never be killed if he succumbs to a person.*
သစ်ပင်အောက်ကျိုးသေနိုင်၊ လူ့အောက်ကျိုးမသေနိုင်

The Proverb Concerning the Law of Karma

- *The result or Karmic effects of one's own deeds.*
Do the injustice, comes the unhappy end.
မကောင်းတာလုပ် မကောင်းတာဖြစ်
- *Behave modestly and keep higher ambitions.*

The Proverb Concerning the Role of Gratitude

- If one wishes to beat the watch-dog, he should take into consideration of its master's favour.

ခွေးကိုရိုက်ချင် ခွေးရှင်မျက်နှာထောက်

- Even for a mouthful of food eaten, one owes gratitude to the host.

တစ်လုပ်စားဖူး၊ သူ့ကျေးဇူး

The critical analysis of the above selected Myanmar proverbs, we seen their usages are reflected in Myanmar personality, Myanmar national spirit, Myanmar culture and Myanmar ethical criteria. So Myanmar proverb as moral foundation for Myanmar traditional thought.

1.3 The Impact of Buddhism in Myanmar Ways of Life

Every nation has its own proverb which is the cultural foundation of that society. Myanmar has own distinctive culture and civilization has flourished through its long history. Myanmar culture is based on Theravāda Buddhism that was introduced into the country, during the era of King Anawrahta of Bagan. Therevada Buddhism flourished in Myanmar not only as a religion, but also as a way of life. Buddhist morals and ethics has influenced our social relationships, art, culture and so on. Myanmar cultural values find expression through proverbs in Myanmar daily life. These proverbs are concerned with Myanmar culture and Myanmar way of life.

In studying the ways of thinking of a people, we have to find the clues in their language. The existence of a common language serves as criterion for the identification of a people. Since the proverbs are part of language, it can reveal the way they generally think - we came to know their perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, by studying Myanmar proverbs through the ages, we can understand the Myanmar way of thinking. Most Myanmar proverbs reflect the Myanmar way of living as well as the Myanmar way of thinking. They are as follows:

- A deed, both subsistant and meritorious.
ကုသိုလ်လည်းရ ဝမ်းလည်းဝ
- Being devoid of the favour of luck, the more wiser attempts may brings more adversity.
ကံမရှိ ဥာဏ်ရှိတိုင်းမဲ့
- If luck favours, there will be edifice and abode readily made.
ကုသိုလ်ဖန်၊ ဗိမာန်အသင့် ဘုံအသင့်
- The restles endeavour can eventually leads to attain the Buddha-hood.
ကြိုးစားက ဘုရားပင်ဖြစ်နိုင်
- Luck is the mother, luck is the father.
ကံသာအမိ၊ ကံသာအဖ
- While the novice wanders for alm-rice he is infested with malaria.
ဆွမ်းခံရင်း ငှက်သင့်
- Spoiled for a long time; repaired at once.
ပျက်အစဉ် ပြင်ခဏ

- The merit attained in attending funeral is the same as that in ten visits to the monastery.
မသာတစ်ခေါက် ကျောင်းဆယ်ခေါက်
- The earliest teachers in life are one's parents.
လက်ဦးဆရာ မည်ထိုက်စွာ ပုဗ္ဗာစရိယ မိန့်ငဲ့ဖ
- Only if one's stomach is full, one can observe religious precepts.
အူမတောင့်မှ သီလစောင့်နိုင်သည်
- The possessions are impermanent like illusion. The wisdom is only the coveted pot of gold.
ဥစ္စာဟူသည် မျက်လှည့်မျိုး၊ ပညာဟူသည် မြတ်ရွှေအိုး
- One really suffers because of phobia instinct.
ဥပါဒါန်ကြောင့် ဥပဒ်ရောက်
- Destiny rules the prosperity of wealth.
Wisdom moulds the longevity of life.
ဥစ္စာကံစောင့်၊ အသက်ဥာဏ်စောင့်

The above Myanmar proverbs are reflected in Myanmar personality, Myanmar national spirit, Myanmar culture, Myanmar moral from, Myanmar Ethics and Myanmar way of thinking. So, Myanmar proverbs are moral foundation for Myanmar ways of life.

Conclusion

In Theravada Buddhist tradition, Buddha delivered his message of non-violence and peace, love and compassion, tolerance and understanding, truth and wisdom, respect and regard, etc. are also guiding principle for Myanmar moral life. We may find the Myanmar thought: the morality is the people virtue in Myanmar way of life.

In Myanmar, Buddhist culture is the main foundation of Myanmar culture because most Myanmar people are Theravada Buddhist. The Myanmar way of thinking has been greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy. Belief in the law of kama and the practice of the middle way are derived from Buddhism, which from the philosophical value of Myanmar way of thinking. In Myanmar it can be said that the Myanmar way of thinking is human-centered as illustrated by Myanmar proverbs and literature through the ages.

It is clearly seen that the Myanmar way of thinking has its own significant characteristics and philosophical values. By studying the above characteristics of Myanmar proverbs, it can be concluded that the philosophical values are very important in Myanmar proverbs. It can be said that Myanmar proverbs can continue to function in the age of knowledge, and by studying Myanmar proverbs we know that the philosophical values are very important play in Myanmar way of thinking.

Myanmar proverbs give the following benefits for Myanmar moral foundation.

1. Myanmar proverb can be supported Myanmar way of thinking.
2. Myanmar proverb explains about the Myanmar values of respecting elder, fairness, to know the value of one's gratitude, sincerity, respecting one's dignity.
3. Myanmar proverb represent the Buddhist Law of Karma, The thirty-eight blessing, Lokapala Dhamma, The four Brahma Viharas and Parami Kusala are vital parts for

Myanmar moral structure. And also Buddhist percepts are basic moral code for Myanmar moral foundation.

4. The Myanmar proverb is based on high moral attributes such as grate wisdom, truthfulness and patience.
5. Myanmar proverb makes vividly clear that Myanmar people appreciate and value of Dhamma on the basic of wisdom.
6. These selected Myanmar proverbs give three ethical principles for Myanmar moral foundation.
 - (a) *To do well* - all actions of physical affairs done by one self must be good deeds without mischief making for one self and the others.
 - (b) *To speak well* - all words of monthly affairs spoken by one self must be good speech without mischief for one self and the others.
 - (c) *To intend good* - all thoughts of mental affairs intended by one self must be good intention without mischief making for one self and the others.

So Myanmar proverbs are clearly ethical wisdom to guiding principles for Myanmar people. Myanmar proverbs can modify and support to become a good life from the philosophical values in Myanmar Proverbs.

Acknowledgements

I wish like to express my heartfelt thanks to Rector, Dr Tun Hlaing, Myingyan Degree College, for his permission and providing the necessary facilities. I would like to express my deep gratitude and sincere thanks to my supervisor Daw Khin Than Aye, Professor (Rtd.), Department of Philosophy, Yadanabon University for her guidance and invaluable advice throughout this research work.

References

1. Ashin Janakabhivamsa 1999 *"Abhidhamma in daily life"*
Yangon: New Burma Press.
2. Ashin Thittila 1992 *"Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures"*
Yangon: Religious affairs Press.
3. Dr. K. Sri Dhammada 1999 *"Buddhist Ethics and Duties"*
Yangon: Yadanamin.
4. Hla Pe 1962 *"Burmese Proverbs"*
London: U.K. Press.
5. Hla Tha Mein 2000 *"Myanmar Proverbs"*
Yangon: Time Lin Press.
6. Khin Myo Chit 1995 *"Colourful Myanmar"*
Yangon: Kalhya Press.
7. Lu Zore (San Lwin) 1996 *"Myanmar Proverbs"*
<http://myanmarsar.zaung.net>

မြန်မာဘာသာကျမ်းကိုးစာအုပ်များ

- ၁။ ပညာရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန၊ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့ဦးစီးဌာန ၂၀၁၀ မြန်မာစကားပုံ နေပြည်တော် မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့၊ ဦးစီးညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူးချုပ်ရုံး။
- ၂။ လှကျော်နေ ၂၀၀၉ စကားပုံတစ်ရာ ပုံတစ်ရာ အတွဲ (၂)၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ ကံကော်မြိုင်စာပေ။
- ၃။ ဝေပုလ္လ (အရှင်) ၂၀၀၁ ဓမ္မပဒကျမ်းလာ မြန်မာစကားပုံများ (လူမှုရေး စကားပုံ) ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ သာသနာရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန။
- ၄။ ဝေပုလ္လ (အရှင်) ၂၀၀၂ ဓမ္မပဒကျမ်းလာ မြန်မာစကားပုံများ (အထွေ ထွေ စကားပုံ) ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ သာသနာရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန။
- ၅။ တင့်ဝင်းနိုင် (ဦး) ၂၀၀၃ နိုင်ငံတကာစကားပုံ အဘိဓာန် ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ ကြည်သာစာပေ။
- ၆။ ဝင်းလှိုင် (ဦး) ၁၉၈၉ စကားပုံတစ်ရာ ပုံတစ်ရာ ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ သုတေသီစာပေ။
- ၇။ စိတ္တဒီပ (အရှင်) ၂၀၁၁ စကားပုံများကို ဓမ္မဖြင့် တွေးမြင်ခြင်း ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ ရွှေပြည်သာစာပေ။
- ၈။ ဝမ်ထိန် (ဦး) ၂၀၁၂ စကားပုံများက ဖော်ညွှန်းနေသော မြန်မာ့စိတ် ဓာတ်နှင့် မြန်မာမှုဆိုင်ရာ ဓလေ့ထုံးတမ်းများ ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ ပတ္တမြားငမောက်စာပေ။

The Role of Myanmar Proverb in Myanmar Traditional Life

Khin Saw Myint¹

Abstract

The word “proverb” is derived from the Latin word “proverbium”, which means a brief popular saying. A proverb expresses a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of mankind. Every society has its own proverbs that can display thoughts of its people. Myanmar proverbs through the ages have exhibited the Myanmar way of thinking, Myanmar way of life and philosophical values that identifies the national characteristics of the Myanmar people. This paper tries to reveal the philosophical values in Myanmar Proverbs.

Keywords : proverb, philosophical value in Myanmar Traditional life

¹ Lecturer, Dr, Department of Philosophy, Myingyan Degree College

The Role of Myanmar Proverb in Myanmar Traditional Life

Khin Saw Myint¹

စာတမ်းအကျဉ်း

Proverb ဟူသော စကားလုံးသည် လက်တင်ဘာသာစကား proverbium ဟူသော စကားလုံးမှ ဆင်းသက်လာသည်။ အဓိပ္ပာယ်မှာ အတိုချုံးပြောခြင်းဟု အဓိပ္ပာယ်ရပါသည်။ စကားပုံတစ်ခုသည် လူသားတို့၏ လက်တွေ့ဘဝအတွေ့အကြုံကို အခြေခံ၍ ပြောသော အမှန်တရားဖြစ်သည်။ လူ့အဖွဲ့ အစည်းတိုင်းတွင် ကိုယ်ပိုင်စကားပုံများရှိပြီး စကားပုံများသည် ၎င်းလူ့အဖွဲ့အစည်း၏ အတွေးအခေါ် များဖြစ်သည်။ ခေတ်တလျှောက်လုံးတွင် မြန်မာ့စကားပုံများသည် မြန်မာ့အတွေးအခေါ်နှင့် မြန်မာ့ လူမှုဘဝတွင် ရှိနေကြသည်။ ဒဿနဆိုင်ရာတန်ဖိုးများသည် မြန်မာလူမျိုးတို့၏ အမျိုးသားရေး လက္ခဏာရပ်များဖြစ်သည်။ ဤစာတမ်းသည် မြန်မာ့စကားပုံများမှရသော ဒဿနဆိုင်ရာ တန်ဖိုးများကို ဖော်ပြရန် ရည်ရွယ်ပါသည်။

¹ Lecturer, Dr, Department of Philosophy, Myingyan Degree College