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Author	Dr. Nwe Ni Hlaing
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# The concepts of Kingship in Bagan with Special Emphasis on the titles of Bagan Kings

Nwe Ni Hlaing<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The cosmological concepts of Hinduism and Buddhism are very similar to each other. Within this, the idea of the state as the kingdom and the institution of kingship was set. The kingdom should be seen as a replica, carrying the attributes of the macrouniverse. Kingship could be seen as an attempt to parallel the universe. The kingdom of South-east Asia and also in Myanmar are intimately intertwined with the three conceptions of kingship, all of which are Hindu in origin. The three Myanmar conceptions of kingship got from India are the *devarāja* or *devarājika*, the *dhammarāja* or *dhammarājika* and the *Kammarāja* or *Kammarājika* -- the divine, human and superhuman attributes of kingship. Bagan administrative structure especially lay on the Buddhist theory of kingship. In this Buddhist state, the king was the supreme defender of Buddhism who observed the Buddhist conception of kingship, i.e. the *Mahāsammata* and *Dhammarājika* models. But, in this paper, by the study of the regnal titles of Bagan kings we came to know that there existed all three conceptions of kingship in Bagan.

Key words: Kingship, *Devarāja*, *Dhammarāja*, *Kammarāja*, *Mahāsammata*.

## Aim

The aim of the research paper are to analyse three conceptions of kingship and to understand how the Bagan King observed these kinds of kingship.

## Materials and Methods

In writing this paper, lithic inscriptions, ink inscriptions and other contemporary records are used to collect the required data. It is extensively used the "Inscription of Burma" in five volumes, compiled by Professor Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce. The printed records of U Nyein Maung "She-haung Myanmar Kyauk-sar Mya" (ancient Myanmar Inscriptions) which are published in three volumes is very helpful to me. Furthermore, Mon inscriptions are also used.

Field surveys are done to get required data and visual witness of historical records and monuments. Then, comparative analysis is carried out in order to find out any mistakes and differences, that may exist between the historical records and ground survey knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Dr, Department of History, University of Mandalay

In preparing this paper, following method are used: for Myanmar words and spelling by the government spelling system, for lithic inscription by standard transliteration method and for regnal and person names by phonetic method.

### Introduction

The conceptions of state and kingship include the belief in the parallelism between macrocosmos and microcosmos, between the universe and the human world. According to the belief, the human world is under the constant influence of cosmic forces emanating from stars and planets, producing welfare and prosperity or hazards and havoc, which in accordance with whether or not individuals, social groups and even states, succeed in bringing their lives and activities in harmony with the universe. In that, harmony between the empire and the universe is achieved by organizing the former as an image of the latter as a universe on a smaller scale. This Cosmo-magic principle originated somewhere in the Near East and well established in Babylonia in the third millennium B.C. and found existed in Northwest India in the second half of the third millennium B.C. In India, the principle had adapted itself to Hinduism and Buddhism with resultant development of variants with different traits. In the process of Indianization, Southeast Asian countries and also in Myanmar received the Indian versions of the conception of State and Kingship based on Cosmomagic principle.

### Three Conceptions of Kingship in Bagan

The economic state, as existed in Southeast Asia and also in Myanmar is intimately intertwined with the three conceptions of kingship, all of which are Hindu in origin. The three Myanmar conceptions of Kingship got from Indian religions of Hinduism and Buddhism are *devarāja* or *devarājika*, , *the dhammarāja* or *dhammarājika* and *the kammarāja* or *kammarājika* - the divine, human and superhuman attributes of kingship. The king got a divine image by means of three ways: by aiding the public's desire for salvation and upward spiritual mobility as a *Bodhisatta*; by ruling earthy *devar āja* known as *Jambudipa*, paradise on earth as *Sakka*; and by guarding the supernatural dimensions of the society as a *Nat*. The king enjoyed the image of *dhammarāja* for administering the state efficiently and morally in the tradition of Asoka and *Mahāsammata*, both being exemplary humans. The king earned the image of supreme human, for successfully conquering the familiar world as a *cakkavatti*, universal monarch. Yet, he was, above all, a *Kammarāja* because he achieved all this by virtue of the merits derived from his past deeds.

By terracotta votive tablets and epigraphical evidences, we come to know that there existed all three conceptions of kingship in Bagan, viz, *devarāja*, and *dharmarāja*. By the study of the regnal titles of Bagan kings are as follows:

### The title of Bagan Kings

Date	Names	Title names	Reference
1044-1077	Aniruddha	<i>Maharāja Sri Aniruddha deva</i>	Mya (1961), p-13
1077(?)1084	Sawlu	<i>Sri Bajrābharanatribhū pati</i>	Mya(1961), p-28
1084 - 1113	Thiluin Min (Kyanzitha)	<i>Sri Tribhuvanāditya dharmarāja rājadhira para misvara bala cakkrāvar</i>	Mon Chok, p-48
1113-1163	Cañ sū II	<i>Sri Tribhuvanā ditya pavaradhmmarāja</i>	PI.L18, PI, L42
1163-1165	Eim Taw Shin	<i>Sri Tribhuvanā ditya pavaradhmmarāja</i>	SMK.I. p -19
1165(?)1211	Cañ sū II	<i>Sri Tribhuvanā ditya pavaradhmmarāja</i>	PI.10a. L 1
1211-1231	Nātonmyā	<i>Sri Tribhuvanā ditya pavaradhmmarāja</i>	PI. 31 - L 2
1231-1235	Narasingha Uccanā	<i>Sri Tribhuvanā ditya pavaradhmmarāja dānapati</i>	PI.138 - L 1
1235-1249	Klacwā	<i>Sri Tribhuvanādityā pavara pandita dharmarāja</i>	PI.90 - L 15
1249 ? - 1256	Uccanā	<i>Sri Tribhuvana dityadhmmarāja jayasūra</i>	PII- 164 - L1
?1256	Min Yan		
1256 - 1287	Taruk pliy	<i>Sri Tribhuvana dityapava dharmarājā</i>	PIII. 234 - L 4

It is found that, of the eleven monarchs, almost all, a total of ten kings explicitly claims that they were *dharmarāja* (king of law). Aniruddha, the founder of Bagan Empire, ie, the Second Myanmar Empire, is an exception who himself claimed a *devārāja*. With regard to *Kammārāja*, as it is an analytical concept coined by Robert Heine-Geldern so said by Michael Aung-Thwin, we have to trace it in the expressions of the components of a superhuman king. Thus we can not find any king openly claiming the role of a *Kammārāja* in Bagan period.

The cult of *devarāja* is made up with three elements, namely, the *Bodhisatta*, the *Sakka* and the *nat*. Of the *devarajas*, the most prominent-claimant is that of - Anairuddha, who is the only king in Bagan period candidly claimed as *devarāja* which can be known by his regnal title of *Maharāja Sri Aniruddha deva*. Aniruddha usually gave his regnal title in pure Sanskrit form. Other kings notwithstanding do not openly claim as *devarāja*, some of them, themselves claimed as *Bodhisatta* or later they were described as *Bodhisatta* by which these kings were, we are obliged to be taken as *devarājas*.

Kyanzitha explicitly claimed in one of his inscription that he was the *Bodhisatta* "who shall verily become a Buddha that saves and redeems all beings". When other peoples held the perceptions of kings as the savior, they attributed king as *Bodhisatta*. It was the write of a high-ranking minister who called Alaungsithu as (*Paya-alaung-gyi-Sithumin*) the "*Bodhisatta*

*Sithu Min*" (King Sithu, the *Bpdjosatta*.) The name "Sithu" is the Myanmarised Jayasura-the Victorious Hero. In post-Bagan times, many described him as Alaungsithu, the incipient-Buddha, i.e., "*Bodhisatta* Sithu". The regnal title of Jayasura is *Sri Tribhuvana ditya pavara dhamma raja*, meaning Sun of the Three Worlds, Most Excellent King of law. Other kings mentioned as *Bodhisatta* are king Kyazwa (1235-1249) described as "*Payalaung Kyazwa Min*" *Bodhisatta* Kyazwa Min", (King Kyawza the *bodhisatta* and king Uccana denoted as *Paya alaung Min Uccana Mingyi* "*bodhisatta* Min Uccana the great king (the Great King Uccana the *Bodhisatta*). Kyazwa's regnal title is *Sri Tribhuvana ditya pavara pandita dhamma raja* and that of Uccana *Sri Tribhuvana ditya dhammarāja jayasura*. Why did Bagan Kings claims to be a *Bohsisatta*? It is thought that Buddhist-kings derived their authority, not from Buddha, who had renounced his worldly position, but from *Bodhisatta* who were still of this world and possessed extraordinary powers.

Myanmar kings were manifestaton of *Sakka*, (*Sakra-Sanskrit*) which is the Mynamar-Buddhist equivalent of Vedic Indra. They tried to live in *Sakka* or *Indra's* way by mimicing as much possible as every aspects and attributes of Indra. Aniruddha wielded what was called *Sakka's* weapon, the *Areindama Lance*. Kyanzittha called his palace as a pavilion that looked like that of *Wejayanta*, the *Indra's* palace. Myanmar kings attired like *Sakka* when they performed and the royal ploughing ceremony, a ritual to ensure the on set of the monsoons. The most explicit emulation of Indra is that of royal coronation, which when appropriately called, is the *Indra-abhiseka*. As far as we know, the first-Bagan King who held coronation on his accession to the throne was Aniruddha who solemnly promised on the day of his coronation in 1044, not to find fault with, destroy or oppress his subjects as he was their father. If he failed to keep his promise he would fall under the curse of eight sins, ten kinds of punishment and four hells. Fundamentally, the origin of the theory of Burmese kinship was a Hindu idea. The context of coronation oaths reveals both Hindu and Buddhists sentiments. The coronation oath in fact is a contract made between the king and his subjects in order to make the king benevolent, benign and lenient, which in political term was to made him not a despot and tyrant with absolute power, but a competent and legitimate king with a kind heart to rule the kingdom righteously and justly. The Buddhist sconcept of the genealogy of Gotama Buddha that he belonged to the *Khattiya* group which was one of the major divisions in the Hindu *varna* caste system tended to link together the two oriental religions. The reflex of Hindu Buddhist amalgam can be seen the Myanmar belief of the idea that the kings were direct descendants of *Khattiya* and that they were also *Bodhisatta*. The earliest record of coronation found in Bagan inscription is that of King Kyanzittha. Aside from Kyanzittha, Bagan kings

who held *abhiseka* coronation were Kyazwa nd Narathihapate who also known as *Panput pahto Dayaka* about whom a Bagan inscription of 1255-AD described as

"*Pan: Pwat Sañ Rhwe Toa` Tat Rhyay Bi Sit Khai So A Khâ*"

when *Pan: Pwat Sañ* held *abhiseka* coronation as he ascended the throne.

Kyanzittha *abhiseka* palace is called *pancaprasada* five point pavilions- one at the center over the principal throne and four at the cardinal directions. The cinquipavilion arrangement might represent at least three different ideas: the Mahayanist with the cosmic Buddha principle Vairocana occupying at the center of the four Dhyâni Buddhas; the Theravadin with its four Buddhas of this *Kappa*, who await Maiteya, the fifth and the center; and the Brahmanic, with *Sakka* in the center of the Four *Lokapâlas*.

*Nats* are supernatural beings ranging from Myanmar versions of Vedic sky deities to terrestrial guardians of territory, institutions and people. In the supernatural world of Myanmar, there are various kinds of *nats* different in status, function and occupying or controlling place. The spirits of nature in animism are different from those of house hold guardian *nats*, who in turn are different from deities who guard a specific place or forest. The guardian *nat* of the royal family also differs from the one who is in control of a particular province in the empire. And yet they are all regarded as *Nat*. Of these, the well known group of the Thirty seven *Nats* enjoys a special status. Mostly these *nats* are terrestrial. But in essence, they are directly or implicitly the guardians of the royal family, the guarantors of dynastic continuity and, above all, the guardians of the state. We can find *devarâja* element in the role of the Kings in their makeup and function of the Thirty Seven *Nats*. Out of a total of thirty seven *Nats*, only four commoners were found who were the lord of the Great Mountain, Three Times Beautiful, the Little Lady and Master Po Tu. The remaining were nine Kings, four queens, eight princes and eleven royal servicemen including four women. The make up of Thirty seven *Nats* vividly shows the continuation of the royalty even after life and their rendering of guardianship to the royal family, and the kingdom, not to mention to their devotees. Aniruddha made the Shwezigon pagoda the official abode of the Thirty-Seven *Nats*. It is in effect allowing Buddhist shrine to become the ancestral stele of all Myanmar royalty.

Notwithstanding all the connections with the divine and supernatural elements, Myanmar kings were compelled to assume a human posture. Of many human models, the frequently used superhuman role models, were the *dhammarâja*, the *Cakkavatti* and the *Kammarâja*. Among the three, the *dhammarâja* overwhelmed over all others which can be known by the study of the regnal titles of Bagan dynasty. Out of a total of eleven kings of Bagan dynasty, only

the first two kings, i.e., Aniruddha and Saw Lu, did not assume the title of *dhammarāja*. All the remaining kings from Kyanzitha to Narathihapate, took the title "*dhammarāja*". It seems that this consecutive use of the "*dhammarāja*", sets the standard for the later Kings Myanmar to come to assume it. In fact, the cult - *dhammarāja* is very useful in various ways, in politico-socio-economic context of a Kingdom or an empire or a state. *Dhammarāja* concept was used to justify the commencement of a new dynasty especially in the times of disorders. When needed to control a powerful *Sangha* Kings usually used it to execute their responsibility as the defender of the religion. Kings, as custodian of law, also use it to preserve the social and political hierarchy. When it was required to claim the resources, of the kingdom, to provide material welfare to his subjects, Kings normally used in this *dhammarāja* concept.

When the Bagan kings demonstrated their roles as *dhammarāja*, they patronized the religious affairs. Since the time of king Aniruddha Theravada Buddhism flourished in Bagan. Many Bagan kings built pagodas, temples and monasteries. King Kyanzitha sent a mission to India to repair the Maha-bodhi temple at Bodhgay. King Alaungsithu was also known for his travel throughout the kingdom and built and endowed religious buildings with lands and labours to support the *Sasana*. Professor Yoneo jshii described as this style of Buddhist state that "the king are supreme defender of Buddhism, supported the *Sangha*, the *Sangha* through correct observance of the precepts, transmitted the *Dhamma* and then the *Dhamma* legitimated the king."

Myanmar Kings always tried to observe and execute the *dhammarāja* idea in the tradition of *Mahasammata*, the first King of the world according to Hindu legend and Asoka, the first Buddhist king of India. As a *dhammarāja* a king is responsible to preserve the political and social order of the Kingdom. Kings, in their effort to establish or restore law and order, usually traced their genealogies to the solar dynasty in that the founder was *Mahasammata*. Two Bagan Kings, Kyanzitha and Narapatisithu traced back their genealogies to the solar race after the unification of the Kingdom. Of Bagan kings, Kyanzitha only had two regnal titles both assuming the title *dhammarāja*. Kyanzitha's regnal titles were Sri Tribhuvana ditya dhammaraja; The Victorious Buddhist King, Sun of the Three World; and the other *Sri Tribhuana ditya dhammarāja rājadhiraja paramisvara bala cakkravar*; The Fortunate Buddhist King, Sun to the Three Worlds of Men, Devas and Brahmans, King of Law, Excellent King of Kings, Lord Supreme, Mighty Universal Monarch. As a king of law, the king must also secure moral order, as well as custom and civil law like the Indian Buddhist king of Asoka. In this regard, we can study the only surviving royal order of Bagan dynasty, that of king Kyazwa's edict (1234-1249), whose regnal title was *Sri Triphavana tittyapa pavana pandita dhamma rāja*. As a *dhammarāja*, the king is the promoter and protector of the

religion. Due to this idea inherent in the *dhammarāja* cult, it became more important and perhaps more lasting than other concepts, for the notion that the king was a *cakkavati* or a *bodhisatta* or a descendant of Mahasamada, could not be acceptable for most Buddhists, if the king did not follow this Buddhist tradition.

The concept "*Cakkavatti*" can be found as early as in the *Maitri Upanisad*, meaning a "universal monarch" who wielded the weapon of jewelled disc called *cakkaratama*. According to Aye Kyaw, *Cakkavati* and *Bodhisatta* are one and the same, but in the eyes of Aung-Thwin, *Cakkavati* is related to the *dhammarāja*. *Cakkabatti* is world conqueror of *Jambudipa* and is one of the only four beings who can be honoured at the demise by a stupa. The word "*cakra*" means "wheel". In its further connotations, it represents the wheel turning (dhamma) sovereign of the world, denotes the sun and designates the symbol of Visnu. The *cakkavati* concept has left much imprint in the conception of Myanmar kingship, according Myanmar history. King Aniruddha was mentioned as *cakkavatti Aniruddha*" by an inscription dated AD 1207. King Kyanzittha made such claim which can be known by his second time assumed regnal title that read Sri *Tribhuvanāditya dhammarāja paramisvara bala cakkāvar*, meaning T Fortune Buddhist king, Sun of the Three Worlds of Men, Devas and Brahmans, King of Law, Excellent King of Kings, Lord Supreme, Mighty Universal Monarch.

*Kammatic* king or *kammarāja* concept replaced the idea of divine incarnation as justification of kingship by that of rebirth and of religious merit. It is his good *kamma* or good deed, his religious merit acquired in previous lives, which makes a man be born a king or makes him acquire kingship during his life time, be it even by murder and rebellion, The Glass Palace Chronicle of the kings of Burma told the typical example of such *Kammatic* king of Nyaung U Sawrahan explaining why the farmer became king like this "Although in verity king Sawrahan should have utterly perished, having killed like this "Although in verity king Sawrahan should have utterly perished, having killed a king while he was yet a farmer, he attained even to kingship simply by strong *karma* of his good acts done in the past." The chronicles comment is significant and catches the idea of *Kamma* as it was believed in Buddhist society. Even for the king, his action, either good or bad, had to meet its reaction during his life time or in his future lives. His actions, whatever they might be, left no option but to answer what had been done according to the law of *Kamma*.

By the study of regnal titles of Bagna kings, we know that these titles are made up with Pali and Sanskrit words which show the extent of the influence of these Indian languages. We can take and study the regnal title of Kyanzittha as his title is the most prominent and the longest who candidly claims to be a *cakkavati* that reads Sri *Tribhuvanā ditya dhammarāja*

*rājādhirāja paramisvara bala cakkarāvar*. The title consists of separate words of which 3 words are Sanskrit. These Sanskrit words are *Sri*, *ditya* and *paramisvara*. *Sri* means grace, beauty, prosperity, glory, wealth and the Hindu goddess Lakchami, consort of Vinsu. All Bagan kings assume this world or title "*Sri*". The word "*dotya*" is derived from "*aditya*" which means Sun god, by which monarchs themselves described they are member of solar race effectively taking the image of Sun god. "*Sri*" and "*ditya*" in combination would mean "the glorious Sun god" which extols and exalts the king to a higher place to which the subject people have to bow their heads. In this way, the peoples and potential enemies are subjugated by the extension of the regnal title. *Paramisvara* represents the Hindu high god Visnu. But according to Devaprasad Guha, it is one of appellations of *Siva*. Whatever it may be, one thing sure is it denotes one of Hindu Gods of the Trinity. By assuming the name of the god Visnu, the king dazzles the eyes of his people commanding regard and respect of his subjects, not to mention the capitulation of Indians and Indian community.

We find that Aniruddha used pure Sanskrit to express his regnal title. All Bagan kings took the Sanskrit word *Sri* and except the first two kings, all later kings assumed the title "*ditya*". Regnal titles are found composed with Sanskrit and Pali words. According to Luce, Sanskrit is used, perhaps, for dignity and Pali for ease. We also notice that Hindu and Buddhist Sanskrit culture provide the ritual sovereignty for the kings which stressed the consolidation of the society under the royal ideology of legitimacy. This legitimacy was provided by Hindu conceptions of state and kingship which were inherent in Hindu cosmology. Kings encouraged the adoption of Sanskrit culture owing to its potential as a source of political and social cohesion. It was adopted because of the advantages of it offered to an emerging indigenous agrarian-based elite, who emulated the Hindu model of kingship and order in that in theory the monarch relied on virtue rather than force to extend sovereignty.

In all, we find that the concept of kingship in Myanmar and Southeast Asia was strongly based on Indian cosmology. The need for the parallelism of the microcosmos with the macrocosmos had led to the evolution of minutely calculated ritual formalism by which a king could attempt to duplicate the cosmos in his territorial kingdom.

### **Conclusion**

Bagan kings introduced and practiced the three conceptions of kingship in their newly Bagan empire. The kingship they practiced helped to make them the righteous and legitimate rulers. It also supported them to organize the country and the people in an orderly manner with systematic rule. Furthermore, the kingship was instrumental in institutionalization of the country

with its rulers and the people, transforming once a Chaotic various Chiefdoms into a trust worthy kingdom, creating a polity with civilized peoples.

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