

## Social Life of People in Meikhtila District During Konbaung Period

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### Abstract

This paper is made on the existence of different social organizations ranging from hereditary officials to the pagoda slaves of the region during Konbaung Period. The number of households of crown servicemen and Commoners, their privileges and obligations and even their titles are mentioned in this paper. The discussion is also made on the miscellaneous occupations, education and health care provided by the *sanghas* of the locality and indigenous medicine men (practitioner). In the source materials collected so far in the region, the different types of livelihood, social customs together with the infra and supra-relations of the local chiefs are mentioned. The role of local hereditary chiefs and heads of monastic orders in the region are highlighted. In the long course of monarchical rule, the people sometimes had to live under the chaotic situation created by warfare, mal-administration, heavy taxation, epidemic and serious drought. The paper is made on the instability of social life under such situation and how the people make attempts to overcome the social and economic difficulties in Konbaung Period.

**Keywords:** social life, organization, Meikhtila

### Introduction

All of the world's earliest civilizations and social organization had something in common that is, they were mostly situated in river valleys and big lakes that had pleasant locations for agriculture. The early people, however, could not use the water resources of the rivers and big lakes. When a great amount of rain fell, water levels got very high. Flooding destroyed crops, killed livestock, and washed away homes. In the summer when water levels are too low, crops dried up. Farmers therefore attempted to control the rivers' flow. By this way the earliest irrigation systems were developed. Irrigation increased the amount of food for farmers were able to grow and produce a surplus food. Because irrigation made farmers more productive, fewer people needed to farm. Some people became free to do other jobs. As a result, new occupations developed. They became craftsmen, religious leaders, and crown servicemen. By this way, a division of labour had emerged in early societies. (Burstein, 2006, p. 54-56) Although there were no rivers in Meikhtila Region, there are perennial streams which provided the lakes and tanks of the region. Over time, the people in the region, like those who lived nearby the rivers, were well acquainted with the irrigation technology to control the water from the lakes and tanks. The extensive irrigation networks provided to attain surplus food as well as to emerge the various social organizations.

### SOCIAL LIFE OF PEOPLE

Over time, human settlements grew in size and complexity. During the Konbaung Period, the social order of Meikhtila, Nyaung-yan and Yindaw took the form of a quasi-feudal society and mainly depended on the agricultural economy. The social order of the region accordingly divided into two categories: ruling class comprising hereditary officials like *Myo-wun*, *Sitke* and *Thugyis* and the subject people comprising *athi*-tax paying commoners and *ahmu-dans*. Since the lakes and tanks of the region had provided enough water resources for

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self-sufficient farming, wide range of crown service groups and commoners settled in the region. The following table shows the list of the households of crown service groups in the middle of Konbaung Period.

<TABLE 1> LIST OF HOUSEHOLDS IN MEIKHTILA, NYAUNG-YAN AND YINDAW

Township	1783		1802		1826	
	<i>Athi</i>	<i>Su-gya</i>	<i>Athi</i>	<i>Su-gya</i>	<i>Athi</i>	<i>Su-gya</i>
Meikhtila	1907	687	800	182	1169	359
Nyaung-yan	1156	542	592	120	731	211
Yin-daw	591	521	521	491	521	491

<sup>a</sup>. Koenig, 1979, p.404, 412-13

According to the table above mentioned, it is known that *athi* had primarily settled in Meikhtila and Nyaung-yan. In addition, the total number of *athi* and *Su-gya*--servicemen of foreigners group in the year 1826 is slightly lesser than that of the years 1783 and 1802. It is therefore suggested that some *athis* and *su-gyas* were probably recruited in the armed service to wage the war against the British in the First Anglo-Myanmar War. (Toe Hla, 2004, p.175) In the year 1876, there were 5751 households in Meikhtila District. Of these households, 2811 were *athis* whereas the remaining households were of crown servicemen.(*Parabaik MS, UCL, No.7522* ) There were altogether 125 villages in Meikhtila Region.(*Parabaik MS, TDMC, No.47*) The villages in which crown servicemen settled were as follows: ( *Parabaik MS, UCL, No.7522*)

Village	Number of the Household of Crown Servicemen
Ingyingon	11
Inma	1
Kanni	3
Kattukan	56
Mondaing	11
Mya	2
Pyintha	5
Thahpan	1
Thayapan	2
Thigon	7
Ywathit	19

The above mentioned list excluded the households which resided in Shwepyi Yan Aung Cavalry District where the majority of crown service households settled. All of the villages in the list are located on the upper part of the Meikhtila Lake. It is interesting to note that miscellaneous servicemen had resided in Meikhtila Region. There were members of *Myinsugyi* (the cavalry comprising Myanmar, Shan, Yun(Chiangmai), Kathe(Manipuris) and Akkapat(Cacher) horsemen), *hpwabetkyawsu*(the group of the messengers of the *byedaik*(privy council) who also had to take care of the lock-up for minor offences), *Ledawsu*(Crown

cultivators) and *ngaze dawsu* (the Royal Fifty, Chief Queen's trusted relatives) who lived in the villages located on the upper part of the Meikhtila Lake whereas the servicemen of the Shwepyi Yan Aung Cavalry had to live in the villages located below the Meikhtila Lake. The other crown service groups like *a myauk-su* (artillery) and *thei-nat su* had settled in Tawma and Khinlu villages. (*Parabaik MS, TDMC, No.25*) In the Shwepyi Yan Aung (East) Tract, comprising Meikhtila, Nyaung-yan and Yindaw, there were four *Myin-gaung nei myei* (The area which fell under the jurisdiction of *Myin-gaung*-cavalry chief who has the same rank and power of *Myo-thugyi*). Of these regions of *Myin-gaung* jurisdiction, *Kondaung gaungwin* (the Cavalry area ruled by the cavalry chief of Kondaung) was comprised of Khinlu, Pyintha, Nyaungkaya, Kahpyu, Oakshitkon, Aungtha, etc. Under the *Kondaung Myin-gaung* (Cavalry chief who served as the headman of a cavalry tract and who was of the same rank as a *Myo-thugyi*) was *Kondaung-zi (Myin-zi)* (a cavalry leader) next in rank below a *Myin-gaung*, the leader of a strong cavalry unit) or *Kondaung* cavalry leader. The area under *Kondaung-zi* included the villages in Htamongan *taing* (an administrative unit comprising village, cultivated land and forest in the vicinity, an athi service and land tax unit) and *Kandaung taing*. ("Supplication of the Meikhtila Town Officer, Maha Minhla Mingaung Kyawhtin", *Parabaik MS, MUL, No.250*) In Yindaw, another important town of Shwepyi Yan Aung Cavalry Tract, the number of the population of *athi* and that of crown servicemen were about the same. (Koenig, 1979, p.404, 412-13) The miscellaneous servicemen had settled in Yindaw Region, comprising the member of *Kalabyo* (an armed unit formed with Muslim servicemen) *Kun-yei-daw* (betel servers), *Ngwe-gun-asu* (the service group of silver miners who had to pay annual household tax in silver) and the *Myinsugyi*. *Ngwe-gun-asu* also settled in Hta-yan-ka Township, (*Parabaik MS, SMC, No.4*) whereas the members of the *Myinsugyi* lived in Tamagon village. (*Parabaik MS, SMC, No.4*) *Kalabyo* servicemen had settled in Zibinpauk Village and Pin-ta Villages. (*Parabaik MS, SMC, No.3*) The evidences of *Kalabyo* in *thetkayits* and other sources could be found. The earliest evidence so far traceable came out in the reign of Sa-nei Min (1690-1714) who allotted thirty-seven land tracts to his servicemen. Of these land tracts, twelve were allotted to the Muslim crown servicemen. These tracts were Si Pottaya, Si-tha, Nyaung-yan, Dabayin, Dabet-Swe, Taungoo, Pindale, Bo-dhi, Meikhtila, Myeidu, Yindaw and Yamethin. (Than Tun, 1997, p. 25) In the year of 1710, 250 men (Kulas) from Rakhine moved into Myanmar. Each group of these new immigrants, comprising fifty men, were granted *nei-myei* (Land for residence), *sa-myei* (Land for subsistence) by King Sa-nei at Ka-pe, Yamethin, Yindaw, Meikhtila and *Ko-khayaing*. (Than Tun, 1983, p.315) It is interesting to note that this tradition of allotting lands to the crown servicemen had begun since the beginning of the establishment of second Myanmar Empire. During the reign of King Tabinshwehti (1531-1550), two hundred and eighty Indians from Rakhine were recruited into the army of the king. They were allotted lands in Yamethin, Yindaw, Nyaung-yan, Pindale and Taungoo in the south and Myei-du, Sitha, Sipottara and Dabayin in the north. They hereditarily served the Myanmar Kings till the time of King Badon. (Maung Tint, 1978, p.71-72) The kings reciprocally granted the lands to his servicemen in the fertile area where the irrigation is also favourable for cultivation.

Customarily, the armed servicemen lived under the jurisdiction of their respective captains. For example, the cavalry men had to live under the charge of *Myin-gaungs* and *Myin-zis* whereas the musketeers had to live under the rule of *thwei-thauks*. Although they were exempted from paying *thathameida* tax, the main tax performed by *athis*, they sometime paid rent or revenue for their allotted lands to their respective captains. For example, 119 households of *su-gyas* in Meikhtila District paid taxes to their captain. (*Parabaik MS, UCL, No.7522*) The captain also received certain fees in connection with the administration of justice and other presents. They were not allowed to pass from one group to another without any specific

permission of the captains. (Furnivall, 1957, p.32) On the contrary, *athi* tax paying commoners had to live under the rule of *Myo-thugyis*, *Ywa-thugyis* and other hereditary officials.

All of the military servicemen were termed *su-gyis*-superior group of servicemen. In Meikhtila District, the number of the cavalrymen who belonged to *su-gyi* was higher than that of any other servicemen. They lived under the jurisdiction of *Myin-tat-bo*. In 1863, *Myin-tat-bo* (chief cavalry officer) of East Shwepyi Yan Aung Cavalry Tract was Maha Minhla Yaza. (*Parabaik MS*, KPMC, No.1) According to the documents so far come across, there were ten households of *Myinsugyi* in Thigon *taing* and other *Myinsugyi* households were supposed to live in Kadukan *taing*. (*Parabaik MS*, UCL, No.7522) Other minority group who settled in Meikhtila District was *hpwabetkyaw* group which comprised only six households in Thigon *taing*, located above the Meikhtila Lake. They were ruled by an official known as *hpwabetgaung*. In a document, dated 1850, we come across the name *hpwabetgaung* Nga Myat Aung. (*Parabaik MS*, TDMC, No.10) Another group of military servicemen which comprised as minority group was *Shwehlan* (golden Lancer/ golden spearman). A record of 1861 mentions the appointment of Maung Shweke as *Shwehlangaung*-leader of spearman in Mondaing. (*Parabaik MS*, TDMC, No.6) However it is interesting to note that there was only a single *Shwehlan* household in the district even in 1878. (*Parabaik MS*, MUL, No.221) Similarly, there was only one *Kalabyo* household in 1878 (*Parabaik MS*, MUL, No.221) under the jurisdiction of *Kalabyo Thei-natbo* Minhla Minhtin Yaza. (*Parabaik MS*, TDMC, No.74)

Apart from armed servicemen, there were other officials and servicemen who were responsible for civilian affairs. Of these officers, the irrigation officers and servicemen seemed to be important. Since Meikhtila has been the principal irrigated region, the kings appointed officials and servicemen to take charge of the distribution of water and collection of water tax in the region. They included *Se-wun* officer in charge of weirs and tanks, *Se-sayei*-clerk, *se-gyi*-headmen who took charge the bunds and channels, and *Se-saunk*-followers of *Se-gyi*. (*Parabaik MS*, TDMC, No.15) King Badon issued an order, dated 20 June 1796, to maintain the Meikhtila Lake. His order mentions the posts of irrigated officials and servicemen; *Kandaing*-controller of the reservoir and lake, and *yei-htein* and *yei-kyi*- overseers of the distributary's channels. (*Parabaik MS*, MUL, No.24) As the irrigated lands in Meikhtila were favoured for wet-rice cultivation, there were some *ayadaw-myei*-crown lands in the region. *Ledaw gaung*-overseer of the crown land and *Ledaw Loktha*-crown cultivators (*Parabaik MS*, MUL, No. 46) had to work on the crown land.

Apart from the above mentioned armed servicemen groups, there was another group namely *Kin*-servicemen of guard stations. Unlike the other servicemen, the officers of *Kin* groups were appointed by *Myo-wun*. Their duty was to take care of the security of outposts, toll and guard stations along the river and overland routes. (Tin, 1976, p.141) During the reign of King Mindon in 1853, there were some guard stations in Meikhtila Region. Each *Kin* was composed of one officer, five followers, three muskets and six swords. They were also provided forty-five *kyats* of monthly salary. There were nine guard stations in Meikhtila District. These stations were located in Phaya-phyu village, Wundwin village, Hanza village, Magyizin village, Bogon village, Nyaung-yan village, Myoma, Shan-ywa and Pyawbwe village. (Tun Yi, 1983) The officers of these guard stations were responsible to *Myo-wun* who had to make continuous inspection to the officers of guard stations.

As the head-quarters of various crown service groups were located at the royal capital, some servicemen from the provinces were summoned to serve at the capital. In their absence, he and his family was provided with money called *nauk-htaukeyi*-aid money by the villagers. However, the family members of those servicemen had to return to their respective village after servicing duties at the capital.

During the long course of monarchical rule, although every one belonged, either by birth or marriage, to a definite social organization, all of the people had to rely on agriculture. They cultivated land mainly for subsistence, to provide themselves and their family with food and other necessities. They cannot leave or live far from their land and founded small villages nearby the lands they cultivated. They intermarry, they knew one another, and they helped one another in the cultivation. Overtime, a tradition of co-operation developed and the village came to resemble a large family. (Furnivall, 1957, p.29-30) One can see this tradition in Meikhtila, Yindaw and Nyaung-yan where both *athis* and crown servicemen lived together in the same village and worked together in the same fields. In addition, they contributed money or kinds in any ceremony. (*Parabaik MS, KMC, No.12*)

As discussed earlier, the lakes and irrigation system in Meikhtila increased the amount of food farmers were able to grow. In other word, they were more productive. Some people therefore became free to do other jobs. As important occupation other than cultivation was the indigenous medicine man. In a customary society, the king took no responsibility for the health care of the people. They were left at the mercy of their fate or destiny. In this situation the people were frequently faced with epidemics which sometime wipe out the whole village. Accordingly, the indigenous medicine men were regarded as the most respected persons and the people referred to them as *saya*-master. An indigenous (practitioner) could manage to take care of the people of at least one big village or two or three more villages. According to some land mortgage deeds collected in Meikhtila District, it is known that there were some medicine men in some villages. From 1842 to 1889 there were twelve medicine men in eleven villages. (Thida Myint, 2000, p.53-54)

Although we have some information about indigenous medicine men, we do not know about the health conditions of the people. However, it is assumed that the people of customary society would suffer epidemics such as small-pox, cholera and plague. In fact, it was usual practice when a village was visited by cholera or small-pox or some virulent fever for the people to abandon it and built elsewhere because the indigenous medicine man of the village could not manage to cure the patients infected by such epidemic. In addition, it is surmise that the infant mortality rate might be high in the rural area. Even the infant mortality rate of the royal family was high to some extent. (Toe Hla, 2004, p.76-77) For example the eldest son of King Thibaw could not survive infancy due to the infection of small-pox. (Maung Maung Tin, 2004, p.354) His two younger sisters had passed away due to the infection of same epidemic. (Maung Maung Tin, 2004, p.417-18) It is suggested that the rate of infectious epidemic and infant mortality rate among the common people might be higher than at least forty to fifty percent that of royalty. Any -how, the people in the rural areas had to rely on the treatment of indigenous medicine men.

In greater part of rural areas in Myanmar, each household produced its own requirement; much of the cloth was spun at home and husked the paddy at home. For their other household wants, they drew their supplies from convenient centers. The annual pagoda festivals were the means of the exchange of goods from different regions. In addition, some people followed the profession of craftsmen who supplied the requirements of vicinity. In one village a few blacksmiths would supply the whole neighborhood with swords, spades and other agricultural implements, in another village there would be a group of potter, in another village carpenters, in another workers in plaster, in another village some would make mats, in another carts and in another cart-wheels. (Furnivall, 1957, p. 37-38) In Meikhtila District we come across only a few names of craftsmen like *pithuka*(architect) U Pu Chein, (*Parabaik MS, KMC, No.9*) *Pan-tein-saya*(goldsmith) *saya* Pwint, (*Parabaik MS, TKC, No.1*) goldsmith U Tun Aye. (*Parabaik MS, SMC, No.4*)

As the rural society of Meikhtila had relied on the agriculture, the most occupations of the local people were related with agriculture. In the rural society, peasant proprietors were supposed to be well-to-do class because they had their own farms and fields. If they were favored by good weather, they could accumulate some amount of money after the harvest. However, in the occasion of warfare, bad weather, heavy taxation of the government, they were forced to sell or mortgage their cultivation lands and become tenants. On the contrary, some peasant proprietors who could survive under such distress became benefactors of the community. The numerous pagodas, monasteries, lakes and rest houses were donated by them. Indeed, the one can assume that the number and situation of religious buildings of a certain region reveals the socio-economic conditions of that region. (Toe Hla, 2004, p.23) Traditionally, when the people were able to accumulate surplus wealth, they used some of their surplus wealth to make meritorious deeds. Some of them assumed the title of *da-ga*(or) *da-ya-ka*-donor which created them to become influential person of the community.

Apart from the well-to-do peasant proprietors, some people engaged in the occupations other than rice growing. In the western sector of township cotton cultivation was much prevalent. There might have been looms in every house to weave for clothing. In the dry sector of the township where the water for wet-cultivation was not available, peoples were engaged in the toddy-palm climbing and jiggery boiling business. However, according to the evidences collected so far, we come across a single mention of word "toddy palm climber." (*Parabaik* MS, KMC, No.12) Even though documented evidence is rare, toddy palm groves can still be found everywhere in the Meikhtila Region and toddy palm climbing, since the Bagan Period, seemed to be thriving next to agriculture in the dry zone of central Myanmar. Since the time of Bagan Period king, nobilities and the people donated lands and slaves to religious establishment for the prosperity and propagation of *Sasana*. Almost in every inscription one can see among the items dedicated to the *Sasana*, that mentioned of toddy palm groves as one of them. Until the present day, toddy palm climbing or jiggery boiling business is an important business next to agriculture in the township.

As mentioned earlier, the health care of the various strata of rural society was taken care by indigenous medicine men. The education of the society was took responsibility by the *Sangha* institution of the region. Every village monastery was a learning center of the children of locality. (Maung Kaung, 1963, p.1-112) Buddhism became not only the pervasive element in the evolution of Myanmar culture since the Bagan Period, but also the main stem of education through the efforts of learned *theras* and successive *Sangha* institution. *Sanghas* took the responsibility of education of the people as a self-imposed duty, and not by the encouragement of the kings. (Toe Hla, 2005, p.59) Overtime, the *Sanghas* became the custodians of learning in the society and the net result of their effort was quite remarkable. After the British annexation of Lower Myanmar in 1852, Sir Arthur Phayre, the first Chief Commissioner as well as the founder of the Department of Education in the middle of 1860s, admitted the values and important norms of monastic education and suggested to establish western education which was based on the monastic education. (Ma Kyan , 1973, p.108) By the year 1875 there were 114 monasteries in thirty *taings* of Meikhtila Region. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.119-120) According to the political and socio-economic conditions, the number of monasteries in the region would be varied under native rule. However, it is believed that almost all of these monasteries took the responsibility of education of local people.

Apart from education the *Sangha* helped to provide stability in the society. According to the *vinaya*-code of conduct, *Sanghas* have to eschew all interest in mundane activities and so devote themselves absolutely to religion. The most important task of the *Sangha* institution is the maintenance of discipline within the order. The role of the monks had become so pre-eminent in the society that they became involved in some of the administrative affairs. In a

country like Myanmar where the political authority of the king was in effectual outside the walls of the royal capital, the *Sanghas*, together with the local headmen, cared for the stability of the rural community and admonished the people to obey the laws and to pay their taxes. (Smith, 1965, p. 15-20) In time of poor harvest, bad weather, *Sangha* appeal for the king not to collect taxes from the people.

As the kings assumed themselves as the defender and promoter of *Sasana*; they provided the *Sangha* order with four necessities; viz, monastery, robe, food and medicines. In addition, they had to exempt all taxation on religious establishment. The king even could not impose any taxation on parents and siblings, monastery and pagoda slaves and relatives of the monks. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.114) Instead the king held the rights to the sources for collecting *thathameida-tithe*, irrigation tax, crown land rents, bazaars (or brokerage) tax, ferry tax and court fees as revenue. (Scott, 1907, p. 272) Tithe or one tenth of the produce customarily paid to the ruler by his people was a form of taxation practiced in Myanmar throughout the monarchical rule. During the reign of King Mindon a little modification was made to collect a new system of *thathameida* tax that abolished the former system of paying taxes in kind. One major problem in collecting the new tax faced by the king's men was to get accurate information on the households in a particular locality and on local economic conditions to the extent that a fair assessment should be made. (Thant Myint-U, 2001, p.122) The king therefore pleaded to get the assistance of Salin *Sayadaw*, Madayd *Sayadaw*, Maungdaung *Sayadaw*, Thingaza *sayadaw* to supervise the collection of taxes. Collection of taxes in Meikhtila Region was supervised by Maungdaung *Sayadaw*. (Myo Myint, 1987, p.194) The *Gaing-ok* and *Gaing-dauk Sayadaw* that is the local monk leaders had to take the responsibility of the local headmen in collecting taxes regularly and carrying out their duties without corruption. Supervision of the monks in tax collection was also found in Meikhtila Region. In 1873, *Thudhamma Sayadaw* in Mandalay instructed the local monk leaders to admonish the people of Meikhtila Region that paying of tax is the means for the development of the *Sasana* and pacification of the kingdom. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.129) According to the instruction of *Thudhamma Sayadaw*, it is known that the *Sanghas* needed not only to admonish the people to say taxes but also to take charge of the officials to collect the taxes fairly. If the local monk leaders found the imposing of extra charges by any official, they had to report with firm evidence to *Thudhamma Sayadaw* exact punishment upon the collector.

Sometimes, particularly in times of serious drought, there would be poor harvest. In such situation, the people were unable to pay taxes. In such a situation the local *Gaing-ok* and *Gaing-dauk Sayadaw* would write the *myittaza*- an epistle to inform the distress of the people, to the king and admonish him not to collect any tax for that year. (Maung Htin Aung, 1965, p.9-10) Similar case happened in Meikhtila District in 1874 when cultivators from a crown land could not afford to pay the land rent taxes. In this case the Dhammayon *Gaing-dauk Sayadaw* summoned the tax-collectors and let them make a promise not to collect the taxes untimely. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.132) Similarly during the reign of King Thibaw in 1884, the people from Nyaung-yan, Hlaingdet, Thagara were imposed taxation which were more than the previous amount. Therefore local monk leaders *Gaing-ok* and *Gaing-dauk Sayadaws* stood by the people in appealing for the imposition of regular taxes. (*Parabaik MS*, TSM, No.2) The local monk leaders also took charge of the local officials- *Myo-wuns*, *Myo-thugyis*, *Ywa-thugyis* and instructed them not to collect taxes on the people who paid *naukhtaukkyei* to the members of the artillery groups and musketeers. They even drafted the list relating to taxation. (*Parabaik MS*, TDMC, No.47) If the local officials suppressed the people, the local monks made prohibitions upon these officials.

Apart from taxation, the monks also had quasi-judicial power in the judicial administration. No monk, of course, was directly subject to the secular trials, but dealt by the

ecclesiastical authorities. (Scott, 1907, p.5) According to the evidences found in Meikhtila Region, the monks and local headmen tried the civil and criminal cases. Sometimes monks became the witness in commercial transaction. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.133) Sometimes, the monks were summoned to be present as the witness in certain criminal cases. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.134) Indeed, the inter-relations among the king, *Sangha* institution and the people harmoniously developed in the rural society. However the rural socio-economic life was not convenient for always.

Heavy taxation, mal-administration of government, warfare, bad weather, and epidemic threatened the stability of the socio-economic life. Sometimes, court rebellion even spread into the rural area. When the Myingun-Myinkhondaing rebellion broke out on 2 August 1866, the rebel princes, after plundering the royal capital and killing their royal uncle, fled and took refuge to the region granted them as appendage where they regrouped their army and captured several towns and villages in the area. In such an anarchic situation, the people deserted their villages and moved to another region. Otherwise they were forced to join the rebel army. (Toe Hla, 2004, p. 159-160) It is believed that the Myingun rebellion even spread into the cavalry areas of Meikhtila Region. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.113)

Indeed, the people in the rural areas were forced to live under the rule of the local officials. They were not given rights to present their grievances to the *Hluttaw* if they were put under the misrule of the local headmen. (Toe Hla, 2004, p.174) If the persecution of the local headmen was so great that it imposed heavy burden on them, they deserted their village and took refuge into the jurisdiction of other headmen. Similar problems broke out in the Meikhtila Region. The outstanding event was the case of people in Shwepyi Yan Aung Cavalry district. The people from Okshitkon, Nyaungkaya and Aungtha villages of Kabyu village tract under the jurisdiction of Kondaung *Myin-gaung*, comprising of 100 households, did not like to continue living under the jurisdiction of Kondaung *Myin-gaung* and moved into Ywathit *taing* in Meikhtila Region. In this case, Kondaung *Myin-gaung* took action against the immigrants by using force to take the household properties. The case became local disturbance when Nga Kywet, Nga Lu Hmon, Nga Sheigalay and Nga Khwei, on behalf of the people moved to Ywathit *taing*, presented their grievance to Meikhtila *Myo-wun* Maha Minhla Mingaung Kyaw. The *Myo-wun* ordered Kondaung *Myin-gaung* not to suppress the people who were not happy to live under their original jurisdiction. (*Parabaik* MS, MUL, No.250)

Similar problems broke out in a village called Htanaunggan village. The people from Htanaunggan village had long suffered the misrule and persecution of Samyeikshei *Myin-gaung* and Kondaung *Myin-gaung*. They finally presented their sufferings to U Sobhana, *Gaing-ok* Of Meikhtila *Myo* and Dhammayon *Gaing-dauk Sayadaw*. These *Sayadaws* instructed Samyeikshei *Gaing-dauk* and *Gaing-ok Sayadaws* to halt the persecutions of Samyeikshei *Myin-gaung* and Kondaung *Myin-gaung*. (Mi Mi Hlaing, 2008, p.127)

In time of socio-economic deterioration, or heavy taxation, the people were forced to mortgage their lands, household properties, and those who did not possess properties had to mortgage themselves. According to the land mortgage deeds, collected so far in Meikhtila area, it is known that most of the mortgage deeds were conducted in King Thibaw's reign. The people also mortgaged themselves by the following reasons;

1. in need of money (*Parabaik* MS, SMC, No.3)
2. to pay taxation (*Parabaik* MS, HWMC, No.7)
3. could not settle the debt in time (*Parabaik* MS, SMC, No.3)

It can be said that the people who mortgaged themselves had to enter slave-bondage because they became the slaves of the mortgagee. It is interesting to note that the most of the

slave bondage deeds were collected from Yindaw Area. The people from that area had to mortgage themselves as slaves pledging that they would do whatever they were ordered to do because they were in need of money. The biggest mortgagee who had acquired numerous slaves through slave bondage contracts was the *thon Myo-ok* (*Thon Myo-ok* town officer of three *Myos*; Yindaw, Yanaung, Htayanka) Nemyo Thihakyaw Thamanda Kyawhtin. According to *thetkayits*, *thon Myo-ok min*, from 1874 to 1880, possessed 26 slaves through the slave-bondage contracts. Although slave bondage contracts could be found in Meikhtila and Nyaung-yan Areas, the practice of mortgaging human as slave was most common in Yindaw Area. It is known that the price value of a slave in Yindaw village in 1877 was 120 *kyats*, (*Parabaik* MS, SMC, No.3, 4) while in 1878 it was only twenty-five *kyats*. (*Parabaik* MS, SMC, No.3, 4) In comparison, the slave of former contract was a grown-up man who was able to do any work and the latter slave was a girl who had not come of age. Apart from the slaves who mortgaged themselves and became menial labour to a certain mortgagee, there were also religious slaves in the community. Since the Bagan Period, the king, nobility and the people were used to the custom of dedicating slaves to a certain religious establishment. These slaves became religious slave and were known as *Kyunthidaw* and the connotation of the then "*Kyun*" had a very different meaning with modern "slave". Even the members of royalty and nobilities dedicated themselves as religious slaves. (Than Tun, 2002, pp. 205-206) This practice still prevailed in Meikhtila during the Konbaung period. During the reign of Sagaing Min(1819-1837), Nga Kaung Pyei, who had received the title Shwedaung Thura Kyawswa, was donated as a slave to the Shweyinhmyaw Pagoda in Nyaung-yan. Indeed, the great grandmother, grandmother and mother of Nga Kaung Pyei was wrongfully recognized as religious slaves and lived as the slaves at the same pagoda. Nga Kaung Pyei finally took assistance from Montaung Kyawhtin, head of religious slave of said pagoda, to investigate his case by trial by ordeal. Finally Nga Kaung Pyei was released from the religious slave and became crown servicemen. He also allotted some compensation for his grievances. (*Parabaik* MS, MUL, No.0467)

## CONCLUSION

The society in Meikhtila Region under pre-colonial rule was a customary society. The people lived under the rule of hereditary headmen. As for the crown service group, they had to live under the rule of the respective captains or officers. According to the primary source material collected so far in the regions, the society in Meikhtila Region was organized into professional communities. Apart from the crown servicemen, private workers were categorized by occupation into specialist group. Besides to cultivators, there were indigenous medicine men, craftsmen, toddy-palm climbers, potters, judges etc. In a kingdom like Myanmar where the political authority of the government was still ineffectual outside the walls of the royal capital, the *Sangha* institution played an important role in providing the stability in the rural areas. According to the *Vinaya*, the *Sanghas* have to eschew all mundane activities. But, the *Sanghas* together with the local headmen have looked after the welfare of the village community and admonished the people and local officials to obey the laws. In addition the monks took responsibility for the education of the people.

In times of warfare, heavy taxation, poor harvest and epidemic, the stability of the rural life seemed to be in ruin. In such situation poverty-stricken people were forced to mortgage their lands, properties, and themselves to ease their problems. Some people, who could not withstand the pressure of the problem, deserted their villages. Numerous evidences have shed light on the instability of social life in Meikhtila Region. For example, the population of Meikhtila, Yindaw and Nyaung-yan *Myos*, according to the 1788 *Sittan* were 2,594; 1,698 and 1,112 respectively. Twenty years later, in 1802 the population of the said three *Myos* decreased

to 982; 712 and 1012 respectively. The reason for the population decrease could be taken being related to the problems mentioned above. With the exception in times of heavy taxation, misrule of the local officials and poor harvest, the socio-economic life in Meikhtila seemed to be a harmonious one. The lakes and tanks in the region had enough resources of water for hydro-agriculture to support the population of the region. The numerous religious establishments in successive reigns reveal that the people of Meikhtila Region under native rule have developed self-sufficient economy.

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