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Department of Higher Education  
Yangon University of Distance Education**

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Research Journal**

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## The Role of Saya San in Myanmar Politics (1930-1931)

Hlaing Hlaing Nyunt\*

### Abstract

Myanmar is an agricultural country and 89 percent of the population were peasants. Traditionally, the peasants in Myanmar stayed aloof from politics and led a peaceful and contented life. After the British annexation, a new political and economic order was brought in and the life of the peasants changed.

Keywords: peasants, British rule, Saya San, Galon Forces.

### Introduction

Agriculture was the most important economic of the country, employing 70 percent of the working population. Under Myanmar Kings, domestic agriculture and subsistence farming predominated in Myanmar. The family land was cultivated by the members of the family to provide themselves with enough food. It was strictly domestic agriculture. During the British colonial period, Myanmar population was mostly peasants and dependent on paddy cultivation. When the British introduced commercialism, especially in the rice was exported presents were oppressed by the colonial government and capitalism. Therefore, peasant uprising occurred because of the pressure of capitalism.

### The Political Conditions (1930-1931)

Political conditions in Myanmar during the period of 1920-30, were a period of turmoil and an outbreak of intense anti-British nationalist movements occurred. With the formation of GCBA (General Council of Burmese Association) in 1920 Myanmar population was organized politically and anti-British and anti-foreign sentiment spread all over the country.<sup>1</sup> National awakening had spread to gross-root level, through the *Sanghas* who had also participated in the nationalist movements.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the British government opened Rangoon University according to the Rangoon University Act of 1920. The Rangoon University Students protested against the University Act of 1920. University Boycott of 1920 demonstrated the nationalist and anti-colonialist feelings of not only the students and their parents but also the whole population of Myanmar, GCBA and *Sangha* Associations. The British government had to concede to some of the demands. National Schools and National University were organized through the efforts of Myanmar patriots.<sup>3</sup> Non-cooperative movement was organized and practiced down to the small villages. Wunthanu associations and later Bu Athins (Associations) spread throughout the country.<sup>4</sup> In 1921, the splits occurred among GCBA and Sangha Samegyi Associations due to the Dyarchy system which was given to Myanmar by the British government.<sup>5</sup> Whatever was happening at the top level of the parties affected the peasants and they suffered most because of the political splits. Although there were protests against paying taxes, the British government did not relent and went on taxing the peasants culminating in the outbreak of Saya San uprising.

Worldwide economic depression in 1929-1930 had serious depression on the world economic system as well as Myanmar economic system. Before the economic depression, the capitalists who monopolized the rice trade in Myanmar manipulated the price of rice for their

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<sup>1</sup> Albert D Moscotti, *British Policy and Nationalist Movements in Burma 1917-1937*, Hawaii, Hawaii University Press, 1974, P. 34 (Hereafter cited as Moscotti, *Nationalist Movements in Burma*).

<sup>2</sup> ဦးမောင်မောင် သံဃာနှင့်ဒါယိကာ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအမျိုးသားရေးလှုပ်ရှားမှု ၁၉၂၀-၄၀ ပထမအကြိမ် New Delhi, India, 1980, PP. 14-15 (Hereafter cited asမောင်မောင် သံဃာနှင့်ဒါယိကာ)

<sup>3</sup> Moscotti, *Nationalist Movements in Burma*, PP. 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> ဒေါက်တာမောင်မောင်မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံရေးခရီးနှင့်ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ကြီးနေဝင်း၊ ပထမအကြိမ်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ပုဂံပုံနှိပ်တိုက် p-43 (Hereafter cited as)မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့်ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ကြီးနေဝင်း၊

own benefit.<sup>1</sup> Since rice had been procured at the price which was even lower than the price of 1860s, it caused great difficulties for the Myanmar cultivators, Myanmar tenant farmers and labourers. They had no saving of any sort. Therefore, they were unable to cope with this situation and came to the conclusion that the British government was responsible for it all.<sup>2</sup>

The government could neither solve the debt problem of the peasants nor the problems of agricultural loans. Meanwhile, a great earthquake nearly destroyed the town Bago. Myanmar masses looked upon this earthquake as a sign and portent of a change of government. At that time, Sir Charles Innes, the Governor of Myanmar, temporarily went back to London. So, Sir J. A. Maung Gyi was officiated as a Governor of Myanmar in place of Governor Sir Charles Innes in 1930.<sup>3</sup>

Sir J. A. Maung Gyi, the Acting Governor of Myanmar, could not solve the crisis coined around the peasants. Without the knowledge of economic difficulties of the farmers the government forcefully imposed taxes including tithe and capitation taxes. *Bullinger Pool* which monopolized rice trade procured the rice at minimum rates. The chettyars, the Indian money lenders also forced the farmers to get repayments from indebted farmers. Both money lenders and government seized the agricultural tools and bullocks, and even paddy left by peasants for their food forcefully if they defaulted their due payment.<sup>4</sup>

Saya San, a native of Shwebo, an indigenous medicine practitioner, a former *Phongyi*, one of the members of the U Soe Thein GCBA faction, and an astrologer led the peasants' uprising of 1930.<sup>5</sup> Saya San was not a western educated person but he connected with U Soe Thein GCBA faction. Therefore, it was considered that he was an able political minded man. As he was an astrologer, he predicted that the Bago earthquake foretold the close of British rule in Myanmar.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Myanmar peasants were in deep despair due to the economic depression of 1929-30, fall of rice price, unrelenting demand for taxes and their debt-ridden status.<sup>7</sup>

As Saya San was a member of the executive committee of U Soe Thein GCBA faction, he had attended GCBA Conference held at Minbu in 1928. At the conference, he was given the assignment of investigating the complaints of the people concerning such matters as capitation tax, agrarian debt, and denial of access to forest reserves to cut bamboos and firewood.<sup>8</sup> Saya San made the investigation and submitted the report to the committee but the executive committee of U Soe Thein GCBA faction rejected the Saya San's Report. Therefore, Saya San divorced from U Soe Thein GCBA.<sup>9</sup>

After he had withdrawn from U Soe Thein GCBA faction, Saya San went on organizing the secret, separate political societies in preparation for armed uprising. He went to Shan States and Upper Myanmar to organize the people to raise armed revolution. Then he came down to Lower Myanmar to continue his organizational works. When Saya San went on tour to organize the peasants in Thayet, Thayarwady, Insein, and Phyapon districts, he found that the peasants were in poverty. Many had lost their lands to Indian money-lenders. And then

<sup>1</sup> ဒုတိယအစည်းအရုံးသမိုင်း၊ ပထမတွဲ(ဒို့ဗမာအစည်းအရုံးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်အတွဲ-၁) PP.116-121(Hereafter cited as (ဒို့ဗမာအစည်းအရုံးသမိုင်း အတွဲ-၁))

<sup>2</sup> Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1967, P.290 (Hereafter cited as Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*).

<sup>3</sup> သခင်ဘမောင် ဝံသာနုအရေးတော်ပုံသမိုင်း စာပေဗိမာန်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၁၉၇၅P. 311 (Hereafter cited asဘမောင်ဝံသာနုအရေးတော်ပုံ)

<sup>4</sup> ဘမောင် ဝံသာနုအရေးတော်ပုံ p. 312.

<sup>5</sup> *Report on the Rebellion in Burma up to 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1931 and Communique issued by the Government of Burma, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1931*, P. 12(Hereafter cited as RRB).

<sup>6</sup> Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, p. 290.

<sup>7</sup> John F., Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, First Published, New York, Cornell University Press, 1960, P. 311 (Hereafter cited as Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*).

<sup>8</sup> Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 310-311.

<sup>9</sup> Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, p. 290.

he reached Thayarwady district and he observed that the people especially the peasants in the district were on the verge of rebellion.<sup>1</sup>

Saya San, in spite of his superstitious beliefs was a genuine patriot and poverty stricken himself, felt that the only way for people of Thayarwady district to end their misery was to raise a rebellion against the British.<sup>2</sup> Saya San deliberately planned an armed uprising enticing the peasant population with propaganda based on Myanmar's traditional political and religious patterns. A jungle capital was prepared in a remote foothill area of Bago Yoma, 12 miles from Thayarwady and a carde army was drilled and indoctrinated that they would be issued with amulets and charms and tattooed with magical figures so that firearms would not harm them.<sup>3</sup> The difficulties and hardship of the peasants drove them to follow Saya San.<sup>4</sup>

Saya San organized his trustworthy men as members of *Galon* force in two units of categories, namely *Galon-Ka* and *Galon-Kha*. Category one represent *Galon-Ka* which was assigned to assault government force by launching guerrilla warfare and to collect all the available arms and ammunitions as much as possible. Category two represent *Galon-Kha* which was assigned to launch civil disobedience movements by refusing to pay due taxes, to provide required supplies for *Galon-Ka* and to give information to *Galon-Ka*.<sup>5</sup> *Galon* was a mythical bird accredited with special power to destroy the Dragon Naga identified with the British.<sup>6</sup>

After organizing members of *Galon* forces secretly, Saya San had selected military leaders to command his forces. Next, he made his troops drink consecrated water ceremoniously drunk as symbol of loyalty and made them to a vow of not to loot the properties belonging to Myanmar nationals and fight for religion and the country.<sup>7</sup>

The politico-religious character of the movement was reflected in the oath required to be taken by all members of Galon units. It can be seen that the following mentions:

“We are banded together to drive out all unbelievers...  
till we are free of the rule of the English.....I will  
obey all supervisors of the Galon units.....so that  
our religion may be saved from their unbeliever...  
Protect and help our religion. U Ye greater and lesser  
Nats.....Grant to us liberty and to the Galon King  
dominion over all the land.”

On 28 November 1930, he renamed himself as *Thupannaka Garuna Yazar* with full Royal Regalia. In December, he crowned himself as a king and declared war on heretical foreigners.<sup>8</sup> Sir J.A. Maung Gyi, who was an acting Governor, toured a durbar held at Thayarwady district on 21 December 1930. While the acting Governor Sir J.A. Maung Gyi reached Thayarwady Durbar, the peasants living in the Thayarwady district appealed to him to stop unlawful suppression of government police corps and to relieve hardship among the peasants of the burden of taxation. Sir J.A. Maung Gyi responded that he had received the appeals presented by the peasants about the suppression of villages by the police force. Unless taxes were paid they would continue their suppression. He refused to reduce tithe, capitation

<sup>1</sup> Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, p.292

<sup>2</sup> ဦးတင်၊ ဒဂုံရွှေမြား ၊ ၁၉၃၀ ဆရာစံ အရေးတော်ပုံ ၊ ရန်ကုန်စာပေဗိမာန် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် 1959 P. 3 (Hereafter cited as ဒဂုံရွှေမြား၊ ဆရာစံအရေးတော်ပုံ။

<sup>3</sup> Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 311-312.

<sup>4</sup> မျိုးသန့်၊ ၁၂၅၂ တောင်သူလယ်သမားအရေးတော်ပုံ၊ ရန်ကုန်စာပေဗိမာန်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၆၅, P. 64 (Hereafter cited as မျိုးသန့်၊ တောင်သူလယ်သမားအရေးတော်ပုံ။

<sup>5</sup> မျိုးသန့်၊ တောင်သူလယ်သမားအရေးတော်ပုံ p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> ဒဂုံရွှေမြား၊ ဆရာစံအရေးတော်ပုံ p. 5

<sup>7</sup> ဒဂုံရွှေမြား၊ ဆရာစံအရေးတော်ပုံ, p.7

<sup>8</sup> Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, pp. 311-312.

tax, and land tax.<sup>1</sup>As a petition to reduce taxes requested by the peasants had been rejected by Sir J.A. Maung Gyi, the peasants decided to join the Saya San revolutionary forces known as *Galon* forces.<sup>2</sup>

Saya San and his Galon-Kha agitated the peasants not to pay the capitation tax, land tax and tenant fees and not to pay back the loaned money from Indian money lenders (Chettyars). *Galon-ka* of Saya San's units were eagerly waiting for a chance to launch guerrilla warfare against government forces in villages. Saya San selected his cantonment area or military operation camp at Alan Taung near on the east of Thayarwady Township to set up his headquarters.<sup>3</sup>



**Alantaung Headquarter**

Saya San's Galon-Ka or fighting units made surprise attack on police station camped at Ye-haik village and seized arms and ammunitions. They also confiscated the guns from village headmen. The Galon forces could enjoy victory out of over Phar Shwe Kyaw and Alan Taung villages. At the battle of Alan Taung, District Superintendent U Maung Lay was killed in action.<sup>4</sup>

Within Pyarpon district, on the south of Dedaye' township, U Aung Hla, President of Htantaw Circle unit of U Soe Thein GCBA faction started to revolt against the British government. At Insein district, U Myat Aung led a rebellion group and revolted against the British government. At Thayet district, the insurgents were led by Saya Nyan. In Pyay district, the peasants initiated to revolt against the government in Wethtekan area. Since the insurgency was widely spread the strength of the rebellion was increasing day by day. The British government had to deploy their police force widely to suppress the rebellions. Besides, some suspected leaders of the villages, GCBA branches were seized and imprisoned. There were about 12,000 GCBA leaders who kept in custody.<sup>5</sup>

The British government troops burnt down the villages which had supported the Saya San's *Galon* forces and killed some of the suspected persons. Many of them were captured and imprisoned. The peasant companies called as rebels by the British government were killed in action and beheaded and the heads hung in public place. The British government troops showed off their strength in the villages in order to demoralize the people. They had approached the monasteries and requested the *Sanghas* to give sermon to bring peace. Although general amnesty was granted to the peasant revolutionary men who came to the legal fold. It was announced to give kyats 5000 as reward to those who could capture Saya San. In April 1931, the reward to be offered had been increased to kyats 10,000.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ဒဂုံရွှေမြား၊ ဆရာစံအရေးတော်ပ P. 6.

<sup>2</sup> ရှိုးသန်၊ တောင်သူလယ်သမားအရေးတော်ပုံ P. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.68

<sup>4</sup> တင်ထွန်းအောင် မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့်သခင်ဘသောင်း ရန်ကုန်၊ စပယ်ဦးပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၈၀p.165 (Hereafter cited as တင်ထွန်းအောင် နှင့်သခင်ဘသောင်း)

<sup>5</sup> သူရိယနေ့စဉ်သတင်းစာအထူးထုတ်, 4 July 1936.

<sup>6</sup> မောင်မြဟန်M.A.,ကိုလိုနီခေတ် မြန်မာ့သမိုင်းအဘိဓာန် ၊ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၉၉PP. 70-71 (Hereafter cited asမောင်မြဟန်M.A.,ကိုလိုနီခေတ် မြန်မာ့သမိုင်း။)



In the hearts of the peasants, the longing for the monarchy remained firm and although they were only armed with crude handmade guns, they went on fighting till 1932. The Saya San peasant uprising was defeated due to the lack of modern arms, proper military training of the British army and police. Sympathetic peasant uprising broke out in Yamethin, Pyarpon, Dedaye, Pathein, Hinthada, and later it spread up Ayeyarwady valley into Pyay and Thayetmyo.<sup>1</sup>

The British government also sent troops to strategic points in Upper Myanmar, Meikhtila, Yenanchaung, and Shwebo to stop further uprisings. Tattooing was forbidden and police arrested suspected persons. To counter political unrest a special Commissioner, Mr. Booth Cavalry was appointed to suppress the uprising. Sixteen administrative units were set up with strong police force and special tribunals covering the five districts most seriously affected by the uprising. The strong measures taken to end the uprising resulted in the complete defeat of the peasant in April 1932. The British had inflicted 3,000 casualties (dead and wounded) and arrested over 8,000 villagers.<sup>2</sup>

The peasant uprising did not involve GCBA and other political parties. However, the majority of the nationalists sympathized on peasants and they had high regard for Saya San's heroic endeavor. Local *Wunthanu* Associations were also on the side of the peasants. Crude fireman's made from pipes and bicycle tubing's were not matched for modern weapons and Saya San's followers were dispersed. So, Sayan San himself had to flee to the Shan Hills.<sup>3</sup>

Saya San retreated to near Naungkan village located within the jurisdiction of Naungcho. While Saya San was recruiting Shan nationalist peasants to revolt against the British imperialists and their stooges he was captured by the British authorities on 2 August 1931. Then, he was sent from Thibaw to Thayarwady Jail. He and some of the leaders of his were put to trial for committing revolution against the British government. The Special Court which heard the case sentenced 128 leaders including Saya San to be hanged to death. Some of the rebels who had been captured were sentenced to serve life imprisonment.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the peasant uprising was an anti-capitalist, anti-Indian and anti-British government movement. It was a peasant revolution against the government with available ineffective small arms. The revolutionary forces did not enjoy massive support of the people. Although educated class and urban society sympathized with the uprising they did not cooperate with the revolutionary forces. It was because the people living in urban areas, the educated including the press dared not to express their opinions openly. But, the press wrote articles in their respective newspapers about the declaration of British government and their reports in relation to peasant revolutions as ridiculous.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the capture of the leader of the revolution force by the British government during 1931-32. During the course of revolution about 9,000 of the *Galon* soldiers had been captured alive while thousands of government troops were killed in action.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Kyaw Thet, in his work, 'History of Union of Burma,' wrote that the political leaders in those days did not comprehend the peasant revolution as the one which reminded that Myanmar was no longer able to tolerate the exploitation of foreigners. Thus, a few

<sup>1</sup> Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, p. 314-315.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, P. 316.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, P. 317.

<sup>4</sup> ဦးဘခိုင် (Fabian), မြန်မာပြည်နိုင်ငံရေးရာဇဝင် ရန်ကုန်၊ နံ့သာပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၆၄-139 (Hereafter cited as ဦးဘခိုင် (Fabian), မြန်မာပြည်နိုင်ငံရေးရာဇဝင်)

<sup>5</sup> ဒေါက်တာမောင်မောင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအတွင်းရှိတိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးများ၊ Djambatan Ltd., International Educational Publishing House, Amsterdam, 1950, p. 85 (Hereafter cited as မောင်မောင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအတွင်းရှိ တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးများ)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p-87

politicians who had such conceptions and had led civil obedience in conformity with the desire of people of Myanmar became premiers in later period, such as Dr. Ba Maw and U Saw.<sup>1</sup>

Many educated leaders took advantages of Saya San's case and volunteered to act as his legal advisers and pleaders. Dr. Ba Han, Dr. Ba maw, Ko Kyaw Din, Ko Htun Aung Kyaw, Ko Kyaw Myint, Ko Ba Si, Ko Thein Maung, Ko Ze Ya, Ko Po Aye, Ko Chan Tun Aung and Ko Tun Aung appealed to the High Court.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Maurice Collis, who spent many years with the Indian Civil Service (ICS) in Myanmar, looked deeper for the cause of Saya San Uprising. He expressed his views:

...the peasants rose because that was their way of expressing the national dislike of foreign government. Every man and woman in Myanmar wanted to get rid of the English government not because it was oppressive or lacking in good qualities, but because its policy was pro-English instead of being pro-Myanmar. The educated classes, realizing that they were living in the twentieth century, adopt the tactics which the times offer to unarmed and subject people; they presented their claim for a free government to parliament. The peasantry, whose education was confined to reading, writing and arithmetic, had no notion what to live in the twentieth century might mean, and having no way, except the traditional way of insurrection, of showing their dissatisfaction, they broke out as best they could, Their best was the best of an age that was gone....<sup>3</sup>

In brief, although Saya San uprising ended in failure it brought about the interest of British government on the lives of Myanmar peasantry. The British government reduced taxes on peasants. The revolution provoked national spirit of the Myanmar people to overthrow the rule of the British. It reinforced the spirit of the nation to resist the British with better arms, after obtaining assistance of a foreign country. The peasant uprising also encouraged the youthful citizens of Myanmar to be ultra nationalist who later took active role in Myanmar politics.

The *Galon* army and peasant uprising influenced youths and aroused national spirit of people at that time. After the uprising failed, the national spirit grew up rapidly in the people's minds. Especially politicians and political parties, their aims and objectives became more and more strengthened to ask for freedom under the colonial country. The Saya San Peasants' Uprising was the second armed revolution, after the first armed revolution of 1885-1897 had failed. After 40 years, this event emerged by national consciousness and economic crisis. Deteriorating protests against economic and political condition of the country and the emergence of armed movement led to the intensification of the movement for freedom under the British rule. While freedom from the British rule movement spread day by day, patriotic Myanmar youths organized as Thakhins.

### Conclusion

The peasants had been the most oppressed through under the British colonial rule. Myanmar peasants who could not bear the oppression of the imperial British began to take up arms at uprising. This uprising was ruthlessly put down by the British. But this uprising political agitation against the colonial government spread to the whole country. Though the uprising did not succeed, it sews the seeds of spirit to resist the colonialism and to fight fill get independence.

<sup>1</sup> ဒေါက်တာ၊ ကျော်သက်၊ ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံသမိုင်း၊ ရန်ကုန်စာပေဗိမာန်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ နှစ်မရှိ p. 503-504 (Hereafter cited as ကျော်သက် ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံသမိုင်း)

<sup>2</sup> David I Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of S.E.A.*, Colorada, Westview Press, 1982, p. 128 (Hereafter cited as Steinberg, Burma).

<sup>3</sup> မောင်မောင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတွင်းရှိတိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးများ P. 85.

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7. တင်၊ ဦး၊ ဒဂုံရွှေမြား၊ ၁၉၃၀ ဆရာစံအရေးတော်ပုံ၊ရန်ကုန်စာပေဗိမာန်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၅၉
8. တင်ထွန်းအောင် မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့်သခင်ဘသောင်း ရန်ကုန် စပယ်ဦးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၈၀
9. ဒို့ဗမာအစည်းအရုံးသမိုင်း၊ ပထမတွဲ (ဒို့ဗမာအစည်းအရုံးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်အတွဲ-၁)
10. ဘခို၊ ဦး (Fabian)၊မြန်မာပြည်နိုင်ငံရေးရာဇဝင် ရန်ကုန်နံ့သာပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၆၄
11. ဘမောင်၊ သခင် ဝံသာနုအရေးတော်ပုံသမိုင်း၊ စာပေဗိမာန်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၇၅
12. မြဟန်၊ မောင် M.A., ကိုလန်ခေတ် မြန်မာ့သမိုင်းအဘိဓာန်၊ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၉၉
13. မျိုးသန့်၊ ၁၂၉၂ တောင်သူလယ်သမားအရေးတော်ပုံ ရန်ကုန်စာပေဗိမာန် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၆၅
14. မောင်မောင်၊ ဒေါက်တာ၊ မြန်မာ့နိုင်ငံရေးခရီးနှင့်ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ကြီးနေဝင်း၊ပထမအကြိမ်၊ရန်ကုန်၊ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ၁၉၆၇
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**A Study of the Floral Arabesque Patterns in Myanmar Traditional Paintings**

Hla Hla Nwe\*

**Abstract**

The floral arabesque patterns have come through different ages in the history of Myanmar traditional designs and art paintings from Pyu Period to date. The mural paintings became remarkably popularized in the Bagan Period, and different painting styles were known in later periods – painting on palm leaf in the Inwa Period, and collage painting and mosaic art in Konbaung Period and so on. Relying on these documents, this research paper presents the knowledge of the floral arabesque patterns of Myanmar traditional paintings in a fresh way from the perspective of a historian.

**Key words:** Kanote, Myanmar traditional paintings

**Introduction**

This research paper focuses significant characteristics of the floral arabesque patterns from Myanmar traditional paintings. In the mural paintings of the Bagan temples, the floral arabesque patterns played an essential role from the ceilings to the floors of the buildings with the Buddha’s life-stories or Jatakas as the main subject of painting. ‘Kanote’ or floral arabesque are artificial elements commonly found in Myanmar handicraft and designs ranging from paintings and sculptures through masonry to smith. As its derivation suggests, ‘Kanote motifs’ resemble the different floral patterns of lotus purported to be decorations to the artistic works. These floral arabesque patterns are the basic of Myanmar traditional paintings; in murals, in parabaik, in sap paintings, in mosaic paintings and so on.

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