

RURAL SOCIETY IN MEIKTILA (Nineteenth Century)

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Abstract

This research paper focused attention on Meiktila, as a representative area like the rest of Upper Myanmar. The social life of Meiktila is discussed on the revenues and royal affairs paid by *athi* and the basic of rights and responsibilities of the *ahmudans*. The outstanding characteristic the study area was, most villages were small, with few inhabitants and was therefore sparsely populated. In these rural villages, a mixture of *athi* and *ahmudans*, or the peasantry and the gentry, lived together peacefully before Konbaung Period.

Key Words: *ahmudans, athi, daing, thetkayit, thathameda* , tax

Introduction

In the history of Myanmar monarchy, the center of politics and administration was mostly located in the central region, which is popularly known as Upper Myanmar . Although Meiktila is not that of the monarchical center of Myanmar Kings, it is economically important in the successive periods. According to the geographical position, it lying between North latitudes 21 5' and 20 40' , and East longitudes 96 . Meiktila township is 30 miles long from east to west, 22 miles wide from north to south and 470 square miles.¹

Social pattern of Meiktila in Konbaung Period depended on the agro-based economy and feudal political situations. There are monks, nobility, *ahmudan*, *athi* and slaves. According to the inquests enumerated in the reign of King Badon (1782-1819), there were 2644 households in 1783. The inquest described the households of the kingdom in seven division as the Royal capital, North and Northwest region, the Central region, Pye, Taungoo, Mottama and Delta region. The most populous region was North and Northwest region, followed by the central region. Of the Central region, Meiktila ranked as the 9th town in term of households and population. Thus it could not be said that Meiktila was a prosperous town.

According to the census of 1789², Meiktila had 2644 households and 13220 persons. By the inquest of 1802, household number of Meiktila was 982 only in 11th position. Towns which

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¹ Burma Gazetteer Meiktila District vol:B ,1(Rangoon, Government printing, 1913)

² (a) Parabaik *M.S.*, Yangon Universities' Historical Research library, No.2989

enjoyed the increase of number of households and population were Pakhangyi, Bagan, Talok, Pin, Myingun and Kyaukpadaung, while Salin, Pindale, Magway, Meiktila, Nyaungyan, Pyinzi and Kyauksauk experienced the decrease. Only two towns, Taungdwingyi and Yindaw kept stable number of households. The number of households and population of towns and villages of the Central Region of the kingdom in the year 1802. The decrease were found in Salin (- 459), Pindale (-2739). Bagan (- 457) Talok (-746) Meiktila (-1662) Nyaungyan (-986) Pyinzi (- 2774) and Kyauksauk (-1294). The worst case were found in Pyinzi, Pindale, Meiktila and Kyauksauk .

In general, there was a decrease of household numbers and population within a time span of 20 years. It is noteworthy that though Meiktila and Pindale were adjoining with Yamethin and Yindaw, the change of population was not the same. Meiktila experienced a decrease of household by 92 households per year. Of the many reasons of the decrease of population, one was the runaway of the people for various reasons, one of which was exemplified by a *thetkayit*, dated 1 December 1801³, that described that one absconded when to serve the king's serve. For this runaway man, the ruling was that "it the man run, his *le* land shall serve the king". Thus fees for king's service was got by mortgaging the runaway's persons *le* land. By another *thetkayit* of 1826, we come to know that a group of people had absconded to other place for they had no money to follow in the "Thayawaddy column" and they could not do their livelihood as the cattles died. *Ywa-thugyi* and village head worked on the runaway people; left over *le* land for they had to get the money from the runaway people. The runaway people did not dare to say anything to *Ywa-thugyi* and village head and it was recorded that the *le* land was not mortgaged⁴. In rural agricultural society, it was the rule that people with their families, the whole clan or the whole village moved or migrated to other areas where tender grass and clear water was there, when their livelihood of agriculture did not succeed, or encountered natural hazards and famine.

In colonial period, population and household lists were collected by the administration divisions of division, district and township. Meiktila Division (Eastern Division) was comprised of districts of Kyaukse, Meiktila, Yamethin and Myingyan, covering an expanse of 10852

(b) Frank N. Trager and William J. Koenig, *Burmese Sit-Tans (1764-1826)* Arizona, The University of Arizona Press, 1979, 404(Henceforth: Trager and Koenig,1979)

³ "1801 December 8 , *Parabaik MS*, Thibigon U Pyu saung collection, No.1

⁴ 1826, *Parabaik MS*, Sinzale, No.9

square miles with a population of 992807⁵. Meiktila district composed of Meiktila, Mahlaing, Thazi, and Wandwin townships with population of 217280 in 1891 and 252305 persons in 1901⁶. Township area extent and population of the district were as: Thazi Township had 696 area s/m, 39256 persons, Windwin Township (595,69273), Meiktila Township (466,65612), Mahlaing Township (426,55868).⁷ By this comparison area extent and population, Thazi was the most expansive, but by population Meiktila was the most populous. In that year (1891), 6092 families emigrated from the district owing to famine, but in the good agricultural years of 1893 and 1894, a large number of these returned. In 1895 and 1896, successive famines led to another large emigration. In the latter year with an estimated population of 10454 persons, were transferred to the district from Yamethin. It is probable that the population is decreasing, though it is certainly not sufficient to cultivate the lands available⁸. The population increased in the early colonial period.

Table (I)
The population of townships in Meiktila District

| Township | 1891 | 1901⁹ | 1911¹⁰ |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Meiktila | 65612 | 76656 | 83257 |
| Mahlaing | 55868 | 62890 | 67805 |
| Thazi | 39256 | 49824 | 59487 |
| Wandwin | 56544 | 62935 | 69273 |

Source : Meiktila Division (1908) 269-270 and Meiktila District (1913) 28-42

By comparison of area extent, though Meiktila was not much extensive, it became the most populous township, as Meiktila became the seat of divisional headquarters. Out of a total of 1184 villages, in the district (Meiktila District), only 75 contained more than 100 houses at the census of 1891; ten years later the total was stationary while the household-tax assessment rolls of 1908-09 show no more than 98 villages with over 100 households assessed to that tax¹¹.

⁵ Meiktila Division, *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Burma*, Vol : II, 238 (The Minbu, Sagaing, Mandalay and Meiktila Division and Native states), Calcutta, Government Printing, 1908 (Henceforth: Meiktila Division, 1908)

⁶ Meiktila District, 1913, 1

⁷ Meiktila Division, 1908, 269-270

⁸ Scott and Hardimen, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and Shan States*, Vol II, Part ii, Rangoon, Government Printing, Burma, 1907.265 (Henceforth: Scott and Hardimen, 1907)

⁹ Meiktila Division, 1908, 269-270

¹⁰ Meiktila District, 1913, 28-42

¹¹ Keith, 1911, 9

During the Konbaung Period , there were two main divisions; the *ahmudan*, who were liable to regular service in some public capacity, and the *athi*, who paid taxes, but were not liable for regular service although they might be recruited on occasions of emergency for service in the army¹². In Konbaung period lists of households, populations, *athi* and *ahmudan* were recorded separately. The table shows Konbaung period *athi* and *ahmudan* in Meiktila.

Table (II)

Athi and Ahmudan in Meiktila (Konbaung period)

| Year | Number of <i>Athi</i> households | <i>Athi</i> population (estimated) | Number of <i>Ahmudan</i> households | <i>Ahmudan</i> population (estimated) |
|-------------|---|---|--|--|
| 1783 | 1957 | 9785 | 687 | 3435 |
| 1802 | 800 | 4000 | 182 | 910 |
| 1826 | 1169 | 5845 | 359 | 1795 |
| 1876 | 2811 | 14055 | 2069 | 10345 |

Source: Parabaik MS, YUHRL, No. 2984 and. Parabaik MS, UCL, No.7522, Trager, 1979, 241

Rural people were mostly *athi* and very few were *ahmudans*. *Athi* were the people who were not of *ahmudans*, and lived in a place permanently. They were responsible to supply provisions in time of war¹³. Most *athi* were poor people. As they were socio-economically low in standard, they were regarded as poor but recognized as higher in status than the slaves¹⁴.

In Thalun's reign (1639-48), there were about 40 cavalry regiments. These cavalry *ahmudans* were settled in Kyauksauk, Nyaungyan, Pynzi, and Meiktila¹⁵. In King Sane's reign (1690-1714), the king hired a host of Muslim soldiers and settled them in 12 localities¹⁶, in

¹² Furnivall. 1957, 31

¹³ Dr. Than Tun, "Ameintaw-hteka Thamaing" (History of the Royal Orders), *Atwe-Amyin (15)*, Yangon, Daung Sarpay, 1999, 12-13

¹⁴ Dr. Toe Hla, *Alaungmintayagyi-ie Konbaung-shwepyi* (Konbaung the golden of Alaungmintaya), Yangon, Sarpay lawka Book House, 2002, 187

¹⁵ Dr. Than Tun, *Some Observations on History and Culture of Early Myanmar*, Yangon, UHRC, 2003, 69

¹⁶ Sipottara, Sitha, Nyaungyan, Tapin, Taphetswe, Taunggu, Pindale, Bawdi, Meiktila, Myedu, Yindaw., Yamethin

which Meiktila was included¹⁷. Thus, Meiktila area was found to be a land of *ahmudans* well before the Konbaung period.

According to the *thathameda* list¹⁸ presented by Meiktila *Myo-thugyi*, *Ywa-thugyi* and *daing-thugyi*, in Mindon's reign in the year 1876, we are to understand that Meiktila was formed by 35 *daings*. Population difference in the *daings* were due to difference of area extent, fertility of soil, availability of water, outbreak of epidemic and relocation of servicemen. There were Nyaunggon *daing* (21 households, 105 persons), Shande` *daing* (23,115), Wayone *daing* (25,125), Hlebwe *daing* (26,130), Myar *daing* (41,205), Natsigan *daing* (42,210), Ohndon *daing* (53,265), Myaungbauk *daing* (78,390), Myintha *daing* (80,400), Kanna *daing* (83,415), Nyaunggan *daing* (84,420), Kyaungywa *daing* (85,425), Thigon *daing* 88,440) Kywetalin *daing* (89,445), Kamni *daing* (91,445), Kaleinkyi *daing* (115,575), Palangyin *daing* (119,595), Kywelkan *daing* (126,630), Thaphan *daing* (134,670), Inndaing *daing* (149,745), Ywama *daing* (149,745), Kattugan *daing* (149,745), Okpo *daing* (153,765), Myingan *daing* (163,815), Myoma *daing* (168,840), Kokkogon *daing* (185,925), Dabyaw *daing* (212,1060), Thaminbyo *daing* (272,1360), Mondaing (279,1395), Thanaunggan *daing* (335,1675), Shanmange *daing* (340,1700), Kamni *daing* (434,2170), Ywathit *daing* (443,2215), Ingyingon *daing* (444,2220), Thayaban *daing* (453,2265) respectively.

King Mindon formed these Muslim men into a separate regiment, called the Kalapyo Kindat *Ahmudan*. These people still professed the Mohamedin religion, but dressed as Myanmar. There are some in Wetchauk village and in a few other places. Of the forces supplied by the Meiktila district there were two kinds: the *Athi Kindat ahumudam* and the *Kalapyo Kindat ahmudan*. The former were Myanmar and the latter the Indian Muslims, were raised from the Muslim settlers in Meiktila, Yindaw and Yamethin and numbering about one hundred men. In Meiktila, *athi* and *ahmudans* lived side by side, which could be best explained by the list of Thigon *daing*¹⁹.

¹⁷ Dr Than Tun, *Myanmar-thamaing Sha-taw-pon* (In Search of Myanmar History), Yangon, Daung Sanpay, 2003, 125

¹⁸ Households, 1876

¹⁹ "1240 ME, the list of Thigon *daing*", *Parabaik MS*, MTUL, No.221.

The households list of Thigon daing

| | | |
|----------------------|----|------------|
| <i>Athi</i> | 43 | households |
| <i>Myinsugyi</i> | 10 | households |
| <i>Phwa-bet-taw</i> | 6 | households |
| <i>Le-daw</i> | 1 | households |
| <i>Athi Kindat</i> | 5 | households |
| <i>Da-wai</i> | 1 | households |
| <i>Shwe-hlam</i> | 1 | households |
| <i>Kalapyo</i> | 1 | households |
| <i>Ngwe-khun-daw</i> | 6 | households |
| <i>Nga-ze-daw</i> | 4 | households |

By the above mentioned list, there were 78 households, with the estimated population of 390 peoples. The record showed that 2 households from *Shwe-hlam* and two *athi* households, migrated to Mondaing and two *athi* households to Myingan *daing*. Therefore *athi* and *ahmudans* lived peacefully in harmony. Of various *ahmudans* found in Meiktila, most were of cavalry men. They were men from Shwe-pyi-yan-aung East, under the command of Kandaung *Myin-gaung*, Kondaung *Myin-si*²⁰. Men from Shwe-pyi-yanaung cavalry lived in the southeast of Meiktila (the lower area of Meiktila lake), while those of *Myinsugyi ahmudans* lived in the west of Meiktila (the higher places of Meiktila lake).

In the social environment of Meiktila, various status and rank of cavalry officials were found such as ----- *Myin-tat-bo-* Cavalry captain Maha Minhla Yaza²¹, *Myin-se-ye-* Adjutant of Horse Minzeyya Kyaw Htin²², Kondaung *Myin-si* Mg Ye²³, *Myin-si* Mg Ap²⁴, *Myin-si* Mg Mg²⁵, Zidaw *Myin-si* Mg Pe Hlaw²⁶, Innmagyi *Myin-si* Nga Shwe Thin²⁷, Kyatywa *Myin-si* Nga Phyaw, Shwe-pyi-yanaung Cavalry Minister Maha Thiri Thihathu²⁸ Kondaung *Myin-si*,

²⁰ *Parabaik MS*, Zigon, San San Aung collection, No .12

²¹ *Parabaik MS*, Khin Lu, No.12

²² 1 November 1848, *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.11

²³ "1802 hired armedman " *Parabaik MS* ,DMC, No.25

²⁴ 1 Nov 1848, *Parabaik MS*, Sinsalwe,No.11

²⁵ Thigon U Soe Thein collection

²⁶ "13 Feb 1865, *le morgage deed*," *Parabaik MS*, MTUL, No.226,

²⁷ "29 Dec1855 ,Cow theft ", *Parabarik MS*, DMC, No.8

(Innmagyi *Myin-si* was Under the charge of Sameikshe *Myin-gaung*)

²⁸ "18 Nov 1842 ,Dacoity". *Parabaik M.S*, DMC, No.10

Kandaung *Myin-ok* Khinlu *Myin-si*²⁹, Htamongan *Myin-si* Tuyinteza Yegaung³⁰, *Myin-si* Tuyin Yehla Kyawthu Aleywa³¹, Minhla *Myin-si*³², Minhla *Myin-gaung*³³, Sameikshe *Myin-gaung*³⁴.

Irrigation officials and servicemen were also found in Meiktila, since it has been one of the irrigated agricultural regions. Among the officials, there included such officials of *Se-wun* (Administrator of the Weirs and tanks), *Se-saye* (Clerk to the *Se-wun*), *Se-gyi* (Head of a bund-keepers) and *Se-sount* (bund Keepers). All of the irrigation workers wherever they resided were under the charge of the *Se-wun*. It was a *Se-gyi* under whose charge were the villages of Shande and Aingzauk³⁵. The royal order issued on 5 June 1796, concerning with the upkeep of Meiktila lake, dictated that *Kandaing* (controller of the Reservoir) and four *ye-htein Ye-kyis* (water watcher and controllers) shall keep four water poles for their work³⁶. Other social ranks found in Meiktila area were *Le-daw-gaung* (Head royal land), *Le-daw-lok-tha* (Royal cultivator)³⁷, *Myo-saye* (Town clerk)³⁸, *Kindaing*, *Kinmingyi*³⁹, *Koyandaw*⁴⁰ (Royal escort), *Shwe-hlangaung*⁴¹ (Head of golden spearmen), *Hti-gaung*⁴² (Head of royal parasol *Wun-Saye*⁴³ (Clerk to the

(Kyatywa *Myin-si* was under the command of Kondaung *Myin-gaung*)

²⁹ "21 Feb 1850, Robbery", *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No. 11

³⁰ "3 Oct 1826, Apportionment of cost for campaign", *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.25

³¹ "3 Oct 1826, Le Mortgage Deed", *Parabaik MS*, Kyosu No.13

³² "24 January 1884, Finding Horse Trail", *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.3

³³ "6 April 1859, List of Paddy in Granary", *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.6

(Minhla *Myin-si* and *Myin-gaung* were under the command of Sameikshe captain of Horse).

³⁴ "Commerce case", 29 Aug 1853, *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.8

(Sameikshe *Myin-gaung* was one of four *Myin-gaung* in the Shwepyi Yanaung Cavalry East. Now Sameikshe is in the Magyigan village tract, Thazi township).

³⁵ *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.74

³⁶ "5 Jun 1796, Royal Order", *Parabaik MS*, MTUL, No.24

³⁷ 12 Jan 1875, *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.15

³⁸ *Parabaik MS*, MTUL, No.46

³⁹ *Parabaik MS*, Ton-Aing U Sein Nyo collection, No.3

⁴⁰ *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.18

⁴¹ *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.8

⁴² *Parabaik MS*, DMC, No.13

⁴³ *Parabaik MS*, MTUL, No. 229

Wun), Adjutant to *Kindat* musketers⁴⁴, and *Thwethaukkyi* Nemyo Thamanta Sithu⁴⁵. Sometimes, land dispute cases were occurred among the *ahmudans*. One of such cases was the one occurred between Phwabettaw-gaung Thamein Yaza Shwetaung and Thwethaukkyi Nemyo Thamanta Sithu (Ingyingon) which was judged by Mingyi Maha Minhla Thingyan⁴⁶. Very often, *ahmudans* were found to be mortgagee. Aleywa Judge ruled that Phwabettaw-gaung shall succeed the land. Ingyingon *Ywa-thugyi-cum-Thwethaukkyi* did not accept the ruling and thus not eat the pickled tea.

The rural people worked in their own farms and fields. If there occurred on social instability and won the favour of good weather dirt-farmers could accumulate some amount of surplus money after the harvest of cash crops. In fact many of such peasant proprietors were hit by economic distress by frequent wars and bad weather. These circumstances forced them to mortgage their cultivation lands, by then they become tenants.

In the days of Myanmar Kings, the sources of revenue were *thathameda*, irrigation tax, crown land rents, bazaars and court fees⁴⁷. Tithe or one-tenth of the produce customarily paid to the ruler by his subjects or people was a form of taxation practiced in Myanmar throughout the ages up to the fall of the Konbaung dynasty, with little modification till in the reign of King Mindon. By studying such tax rolls, we can to some extent, guess the socio- economic conditions of the people, as well as the administrative system of a certain period. King Mindon on 14 May 1857, replaced the tithe with the *thathameda* in taxation⁴⁸. *Thathameda* was fixed at the rate of one rupee per house. In 1858, the rate was raised to three rupees, in following year to five, then to eight and ten, even to fourteen rupees eight *annas*. Finally, upon the representation of the monks and elders, it was settled at ten rupees per house⁴⁹. People had the right to pay the taxes either in kind or in cash. Generally speaking, people want to pay taxes in kinds. Therefore peasant farmer paid in crop, a potter in pot, etc.

In 19th century rural Meiktila, most of the inhabitants were Burmese Buddhists. Mohamedins were found in the area since 17th century, as they were being settled there by

⁴⁴ *Parabaik MS*, Kyosu, No.18

⁴⁵ *Parabaik MS*, Thibingon U Phyu Saung collection, No.1

⁴⁶ "21 March 1849, *Le land case*", *Parabaik M.S*, Thibingon U Phyu Saung collection, No.1

⁴⁷ Scott and Hardiman, 1907, 272

⁴⁸ Dr. Than Tun, *Ne Hle` Yazawin* (Field work of Myanmar, History), Vol II, Nanttha Publishing House, 1969, P-11

⁴⁹ Scott and Hardiman, 1907, 272-3

granting them cultivation land, resident land and land to share. In colonial period, Meiktila had a total people of 7076 persons, of which 5323 were Buddhists, amounting to 75 percent. There were 39 Animists, 905 Hindus, 1179 *Mohamedins* and 548 Christians. The highest number of *Mohamedins* was found in Magyigon village, numbering 149 peoples, denoting 35% of the total Mohammedans, and of the rest, 21 were in Kyigon, 14 in Nyaungzauk and 18 in Kyaukphyugon. There were 16 Christian peoples in Htamongan village, representing 2 per cent⁵⁰.

Conclusion

The important role of Meiktila in Konbaung period, could be seen in being the region of Shwe-pyi-yan-aung Cavalry, which was one of the backbone of Myanmar Cavalry: the Northern Nine cavalry in Shwebo and Shwe-pyi-yan-aung Cavalry in Meiktila. In colonial era, it seems Meiktila became more important for it became the town of divisional headquarter. Administrative development *albeit*, Meiktila was less progressive in terms of socio-economic development. Thinly populated in monarchical days *albeit*, Meiktila region experienced a population increase in colonial period, thanks to the relative political stability and agricultural development, not to mention the natural population growth.

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Parabaik MS, Kyosu, No.18, *Parabaik MS*, Thibingon U Phyu Saung collection, No.1

Parabaik MS, Ton-Aing U Sein Nyo collection, No.3, *Parabaik MS*, Zigon, San San Aung collection, No .12

Parabaik MS, Khin Lu, No.12 , *Parabaik MS*, Sinsalwe, No.11 , Thigon U Soe Thein collection

⁵⁰ *Meiktila District, 1913*, 20-31

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