

A Study of Women Burma in Pagan Period

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ABSTRACT

Pagan must have possessed some women of letters. In L362, Uiu can san is the writer of the inscriptions. The women of Pagan were modest about mentioning their own names. Slaves, of course, must mention their own names obviously for purpose of identification. This shows that the position of women was good during Pagan period. Inscriptions also throw some light on the character and habits of women in Pagan. Daughters of rich parents apparently lived in luxury. The lot of the slaves living with their families and companions cannot have been so miserable as is implied by the degradation attaching to their social status, especially as their main occupation consists in such religious duties as sweeping the shrine yard, lighting the pagoda candles and preparing foods for the monks. In L409, women slaves are mentioned as dealers in curries, in rice, in most, in betal-nut and in status. The organisations of lay people and of slaves were in the charge of elders called Sankri and Sanlyan, some of whom were women

Keywords: *Inscriptions, Luxury, Slaves, Liberation, Sweeping, pagodas*

The social life of Burmese during Pagan period was confined to the Kharuin and Tuik areas, which roughly form the dry zone of central Burma. Family was very important in society of that period. I am than is the Burmese word for it. Some of the terms for blood relation are Achuyamluiw or Achuyawa or just chuymuiw or pokpo. Inscriptions of Pagan throw some light on the position of women during that period. We get much more information regarding women slaves than anything else. They were present in almost all fields such as music, education, etc. and even in the royal courts.

A woman headman (Sukki) and a woman-in-charge of greeneries (Ki san) are mentioned in an inscription L176 as making monetary contributions towards the cost of offering made apparently to an Aran monk on the occasion of initiation of a friend's son. In L384, a woman Uisa phuk is mentioned as field worker. There is

mention of Yaptaw San which probably means a person in charge of the royal fans. L196 records Khyat ma miy sen as a woman holding such a post. There are many instances of women practising piety e.g. Santansan ui mhan san (L384), Santansan uim niw mi (L311).

We also find women in the religious field. In L359 princes Acaw patansa make dedications of lands and slaves and says: "I have offered so much wealth not because I do not love it, but because I love Buddhahood more than wealth". In L378, we meet with another pious lady, wife of Cansankha and grand daughter of Cuiw man mahasmin, who out of faith in religion, converted her house into a monastery at Mlat kri temalin. In an unlisted inscription at Lemyethna pagoda, Inpu village east of Myingum, a pious lady, Ui'lya kuiw, with her son is dedicated to all members of the clergy.

Pagan must have possessed some women of letters. In L362, Uiw can san is the writer of the inscriptions. A royal scribe of secretary (Ca taw khi), a women by name Ui khi rha san is a witness in a legal dispute. Another witness in the same affair is Skhan cakhi puil, 'LKord chief secretary. It would, thus, appear that this lady was chief of all the court secretaries. The women of Pagan were modest about mentioning their own names. Slaves, of course, must mention their own names obviously for purpose of identification. But a married women of the upper class generally omits her personal name and addresses herself as the wife of her husband, whose name is mentioned e.g. Kram suin's wife, Sinkhapati's wife or she may be proud of her own parentage and address herself as the daughter of her father and wife of her husband.

She may go a stop further and sany whose grand daughter she is. We have instances of unmarried daughters suppressing their own names in favour of their fathers. An unmarried daughter, however, may mention her own name as well as her father's single ladies generally mention their own names.

On the other hand, there are instances where only the wife's name is mentioned e.g. Uiw planwasan; other instances are also there were both the names of husbands wives are mentioned e.g. Uim'kon san, Na mruik san, husband and wife. The name of the wife comes first. This shows that the position of women was good during Pagan period. Inscriptions also throw some light on the character and habits of women in Pagan. Daughters of rich parents apparently lived in luzury. Thus in L197, we read of two young ladies requiring 20 sales for their personal use.

Women Slavery in Pagan Period

Women played an important role in the life of the people both as donors and slaves alike. As many women as men were dedicated as slaves. Thousands of the names are recorded in the inscriptions. The names of the women are dedicated generally by the prefix 'i' or 'ui' (or their variants 'i', 'in', 'im', 'ui', 'uiw'), and those of men by the prefix na. In many cases slaves were dedicated in family groups.

Types of Slaves

1. Religious Establishments Salves
2. Hereditary Slaves
3. Slave by Purchases
4. Slave after being bankrupt
5. War Captive as Slaves
6. Domestic Slaves
7. Liberation of Slaves

Thus "the Lum kwot pagoda slaves are Na kwon mran, wife 'i' Tun, son Na wam phaln, elder brother Na tuin, yunger brother Na ku awa, younger brother Na pha in, wife 'i' Lhok, daughter L'sin. The groups are not confined to families but comprise friends and companions also. Sometimes a family would consist of some members or members described as Ca tat, which probably means that they are literate. Thus "Na sum son Na lha khap, younger brother Na on, step father Na thwen, son Na com paca tat."

Sometimes the family circles are brightened by the presence of suckling babe (Nui cui) and weaned babies (Pu cu). Even twin babies of the same sexes are not wanting. "Twin sons Na kri, Na nay": married man Bola, wife Hila, twins" suckling babe Na kri, younger sister suckling baba Ui' nay.

The lot of the slaves living with their families and companions cannot have been so miserable as is implied by the degradation attaching to their social status, especially as their main occupation consists in such religious duties as sweeping the shrine yard,

lighting the pagoda candles and preparing foods for the monks. In L409, women slaves are mentioned as dealers in curries, in rice, in most, in betal-nut and in status.

Different kinds of musical instruments were also performed by women slaves. Out of the five kinds of musical instruments, Pantya seems to have been the favourite instrument for women. But in L391, a woman is mentioned as a Ku Pantya, which suggests that Pantya may have some other meaning. Women were accomplished artists, musicians and singers.

Nursing seems to have been a most lucrative means of livelihood. In L314, we read: "to the wet nurse Ui pon san, prince yan gave an umbrella, a golden planquin with a painted awning and bells attached to the rear of the awning. These she obtained. Lands 1000, slaves 1000, cows 1000, were given. Then he died. Prince Cansu ascended the golden throne and said: "I, too, was suckled at the breast of mother Ui pon san. I give to her as the price of the milk I drank the 1000 lands, 1000 slaves, 1000 cows which my elder brother gave her. Varily they are the lands, slaves and cows which the noble king Cansu offered with the pouring of sacred water."

There is still another world connected with San and that is Misan. The full form of Misan is Amisan. This suggests that it is a Burmese word with a prefix as in Amipurha, Asikhan and so on. The right deviation of the word is Amisan, a multitude (San) of mother (Ami), a most picturesque term for maids of honour. Sometimes the suffix Taw is added to the word to ensure that they are palace ladies. In L266, another such lady Ami santaw ma ut a san i.e. Ma ut a san of the royal company of maids of honour, carries the royal order, and the witnesses are all the royal companies of maids of honour who are the royal

presence. We meet a lay San mi ui pon san who is evidently a matron of the maids of honour.

Conclusion:

Thus it can be said that in the days of Pagan, there were social organisations called San (modern Thin). The organisations of lay people and of slaves were in the charge of elders called Sankri and Sanlyan, some of whom were women. There were also Sankri's of monasteries and of pagodas, and Sanlyan's of villages. Then there were San's or groups of maids of honour in the charge of ladies of importance, assisted by matrons. There were palace ladies, selected for inner service.

References:

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