



THIDINGYUT FESTIVAL: MYANMAR BUDDHIST RELIGIO-CULTURAL SPIRIT

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Introduction

Buddhism and Myanmar people cannot be separated from each other for Buddhism is the life blood of Myanmar people in literature, cult, arts, ways of life and culture since Myanmar has been embracing Buddhism, Myanmar has been adopting all Buddhist ways of life into its society. By adopting Buddhist ways of life and thinking, Myanmar has been possessing highly and lovely culture and has been exercising into life even today though multi-culture has been mushrooming in modern times in our Myanmar society.

Thidingyut Festival Spirit

Thadingyut is the seventh month of Myanmar lunar Calendar corresponds to October and Religio-cultural spirit of Myanmar people. Thidingyut literally means rain retreat was over. Myanmar as a Theravada dominated Buddhist country, Buddhist monks have to spend rain retreat at their respective monasteries for three months during rainy season which correspond to Waso, Wakhaung and Tawthalin (July, August, and September respectively) without going anywhere as promulgated in *Vinaya* rules by the Buddha. According to Theravada Buddhist tradition, Buddhist monks can go and perform their mission everywhere wherever they wanted to go. This Thidingyut month reflects the religio-cultural spirit of Myanmar people. It associates with two events found in Buddhist literature: the Buddha and invitation of the Buddhist monks.

Among those lovely cultures, paying respect to highly virtuous persons (*gunavuddhi*) such as teachers, officers, hierarchy and spiritual leaders to whom we keep in mind that we owned a debt of gratitude. Seniority in a family member or responsible respected persons (*vayavuddhi*) in a community and in any institutions is common scene in every corner of the country in the month of Thadingyut, especially on the full moon day, in Myanmar calendar. Astrologically named Tula (libra) the zodiacal sign of this month is a man holding a balance.
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The five different species of aquatic flower lotus: red, blue, padoma, speciosum and pounnajei louts.

Louts flower is traditionally designated as the flower of this Thidingyunt month. White and Padoma lotus are very sacred for Buddhists. Lotus is the symbol of purity as it is perfect in beauty, fragrance and purity stemming out of the muddy water. Besides lotus symbolize peace, prosperity and progress. Its beauty brings physical and mental peace. Lotus multiply very quickly and very much covering the entire aquatic body. Four lotus flowers and one lotus bud represent four *Buddhas* already revealed and one bud represent the *Mettaya Buddha*.

On the full moon day of Thidingyut, the Buddha returned to human realm from *Tavatimsa* celestial world after delivering *Abhidhamma* teaching. Within 45 years of his mission, on the seventh rain retreat (*vassa* in *Pali*) the Buddha went to *Tavatimsa deva* world to preach *Abhidhamma* teaching to his former mother *Setaketu deva* by name who was reborn in *Tavatimsa deva* world to fulfill his filial duty to his former mother. The filial debt of gratitude to his mother is that the mother conceives child in her womb, that she gives birth to the child and that she feeds the child her breast milk grown up.

The Buddha observed his seventh rain retreat in *Tavatimsa* to preach *Abhidhamma* philosophy to *devas* led by his mother of previous existence now *Santussita deva* by name. Sitting on the brown emerald slab called *Pandukambala* under the shade of PinleKathit, tree or coral tree. The Buddha expounded the seven sections of *Abhidhamma* teaching to his mother. On the full moon day of Thidingyut, the *Abhidhamma* delivery came to end. It last for three months.

The Buddha told *Sakka*, king of *devas*, that he would return to human realm and *Sakka* created three stair ways: (1) gold stair way on the right side for the *devas*; (2) silver stair way on the left sided for all Brahmas and (3) ruby stair way in the middle for the Buddha. Many celestial beings accompanied the Buddha holding celestial regalia. *Pancasikhadeva*, on the right, played Beluva harp in praise of the Buddha; *Samaya deva* held a yaktail flywhisk; *Catussita deva* held a ruby studded gold fan and *Sakkha deva* blew conch shell to celebrate the auspicious occasion. All deities of the whole universe gathered to pay their homage to the Buddha as best they could. The stair ways were illuminated by the lights radiated from the deities.

At the gate way to the city of Sankassa on human world, the Buddha set foot on earth. The welcoming crowd paid a resounding welcome homage to the Buddha the entire city was lit by oil lamps. To commemorate this great event Myanmar people annually hold Tavatims festival (qDrD:jrifhrdkylaZmfyJG) or Thidingyut light festival.

In the time of Myanmar kings, Light Festival of Thidingyut was held and celebrated without fail. A special fund was issued from Royal Treasuring Special committees and sub-committees were formed by royal order: Minister, civil and military services men were tasked to the successful holding of this festival. Replicas of Mt.Meru were built on four sides of the royal palace city, on which the grand descent of Buddha from Tavatimsa was reenacted accompanied with devotional songs and music. Their Majesties and the court made entourage visiting Pandals of Replica Mt. Meru oil lamps line up the streets from Palace city to prominent Pagodas in four directions. Music, dance song entertainments were held. Their Majesties gave awards, cash and kind to outstanding performers.

Myanmar chronicles kept detail account of Thidingyut light festivals. Prominent Treaties was **LokabyuharInyonsardan** compiled by Minister Thiriujjana of Inwa period. It was a treatise of Court Ceremonies and monthly festivals. Thidingyut Light festival lasts three successive nights from the 14th waxing moon day, the 15th full moon day and 1st waning moon day.

On the full moon day and the 1st waning day, Buddhist community and family around the country pay respect to the five persons to whom they own infinite gratitude namely:

1. The Buddha,
2. The Dhamma,
3. The Sangha,
4. The Parents and
5. The Elders and senior persons in respective institutions.

The festive mood is always created by music, songs and dance. Performing arts always accompany happy and joyous events and occasions. Free lunch and free feast for all friends as well as strangers and passerby are served.

This paying respect to the senior, the elderly family members and relations or highly persons can be traced from Buddhist literature and it has been exercising since the time of the Buddha formulated by the Buddha himself. Following that tradition, our ancestors Myanmar

people created the culture of paying respect elderly persons and teachers' paying respecting ceremony in our society.

Actually, this tradition and custom have been derived from the community of the *Sangha*, Buddhist monks. Buddhist monks, especially in Theravada Buddhism, have to stay in their respective monastery compounds within rainy seasons amounted for three months and they have to perform their duties: learning (*ganthadhura*) and practicing the teachings of the Buddha (*vipassanadhura*). When rain retreat was over, the monks who are occupying the same monastery either junior or senior have to inform and request one another to point out the faults: physically, verbally or mentally if they have seen while staying together. This custom is well known as "*Pavarana day*" in Myanmar and it is performed by the community of the Buddhist monks in Myanmar. After requesting and paying respect to one another they can go freely wherever they wanted to because they don't have any sin to one another. Myanmar has been adopting this highly and valuable culture into its society.

Conclusion

Therefore, I believe those who introduced this unique culture based on religious festivals are none other than Myanmar Buddhist monks who have been influencing in the life of Myanmar people and who played the most important role in the education sector in the country in the past. We, Myanmar people, have been enjoying ancient, valuable and highly Thidingyutreligio-culture due to our respected spiritual leaders, Myanmar Buddhist monks.

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