

## The Life of Peasants in Colonial Period told by U Ba Glay's Cartoons

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The art of cartoon occurred simultaneously with the journals and magazines in the world of journalism in Myanmar. The cartoons which produced in 1915 were drawn by Shwe Talay (a) Cartoonist Saya U Ba Glay. U Ba Glay recorded the Myanmar's social and political events with cartoons during 1915 and 1939 and also created the jolly type old man U Shwe Yoe in Myanmar's film and dramatic art.

U Ba Glay's cartoons were found in 1927 but they were not found in 1928, 1929 and 1930 in *Thuriya* Magazine and newspapers. However, U Ba Glay's cartoons were found again in 1931 and U Ba Glay had drawn the cartoons not only in the *Thuriya* Magazine and *Thuriya* newspaper but also in the *Myanma Alin* newspaper, it was found. U Ba Glay's cartoons were very active and lively together with the political situation of Myanmar because at that time, the situation of Myanmar was also unstable. During those years, the World Depression which attacked the capitalist world had also reached Myanmar and Myanmar had to face with unprecedented economic depression which led Myanmar to extreme poverty.

The peasants who were extremely poor economically were forced to collect the *Thathameda* Capitation tax of five kyats for one household and the peasants who could not afford to pay were tortured and arrested by the armed troops, police and bad *Thugyis*. Therefore, the peasants had lost their patience with the measures of the colonial government and rose against it with whatever arms they could possess and *Galon* Uprising occurred in December 1930. The peasants' Uprising was very important for Myanmar history. U Ba Glay also realized the conditions of the peasants clearly and he drew of cartoons concerning with the peasants throughout his life as a cartoonist. Therefore, the cartoons of U Ba Glay depicted the history of the peasants and they would be collected and printed until the outbreak of the peasants' revolution.

The earliest peasant cartoon among the discovered cartoons was the cartoon published in March 1918 *Thuriya* Magazine.



Figure 1

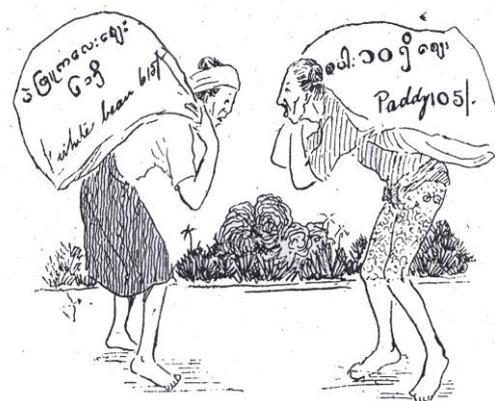


Figure 2

The cartoon shown in Figure 1 was depicted that the price of paddy was less as well as the production of paddy was less. But the expense of cultivation, tax and cost of consumption was big. Therefore, the peasant could not raise his head but the foreigner capitalist who would

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buy the paddy looked at the peasant satisfactorily by brushing his moustache. The price of paddy at that time was also depicted in U Ba Glay’s cartoon (Figure 2).

Although the price of paddy was one hundred and five kyats at that time, the peasants did not get the full price. It was the price given to their brokers in Yangon by the British capitalists who were exporting the paddy abroad. The peasant got only sixty-two kyats as the price of paddy at their villages. The price of paddy sixty-two kyats did not leave profit for the peasants and would even lose and if the peasants could not sell the entire paddy before monsoon season, the peasants would not have money to pay the tax as well as he must search the capital for the next season. U Ba Glay depicted the burden of tax of the peasants with the following cartoon (Figure 3).

The meaning of the cartoon was that although Myanmar and Indian were the same as the slave of the British colonialist, Myanmar peasant had to pay one tax more than the Indian peasant. That was the capitation tax in lower Myanmar and *Thathemeda* tax in Upper Myanmar. The capitation tax was five kyats per annum for one household of a peasant and two kyats eight peas for a grown up son and daughter. The capitation tax and *Thathemeda* tax collected in 1915-1916 at Myanmar was over 9.6 millions. As Myanmar was a province under the Indian Central Government, over three crores (or) thirty million kyats from the collected tax must be given per annum to the Indian Government. That was why U Ba Glay had drawn the cartoon to open the eyes of Myanmar that although Myanmar and Indian were the same as slaves under the British colonialists, Myanmar had to shoulder the yoke as a slave heavier than the Indian.

The conditions faced by Myanmar peasants at that time could be seen in the following cartoon. (Figure 4)



Figure 3



Figure 4

*Bandoola Journal* wrote the following words under the cartoon drawn by U Ba Glay.

လယ်သမားများသည် ဆင်းရဲဒုက္ခညံ့တွင်းက တက်နိုင်သည်မရှိ၊ နှစ်စဉ်ထာဝရ  
 လယ်မှထွက်သောစပါးများနှင့် လယ်စောင့်နတ်မင်းကြီးများအား ပသနိုင်ရန် နေပူမှာကျောခင်း၍  
 ရွံ့ဘွတ်တွင်းမှာ နွားနှင့်ဖက်ရုန်းနေကြရရှာ၏

When the paddy had been harvested after the Myanmar peasants worked together with the cattle, the British capitalists created the Bullinger Pool for the decline in the price of paddy. During the fall of the price of paddy, the Chettyars, landowners and creditors took away the paddy by measuring with big baskets leaving nothing for the poor peasants. The time when U Ba Galay returned to cartoon profession was the time of the Peasants’ Revolution. The news of

the *Galons* (Garuda) were published in the newspapers daily describing that how the *Galons* seized the police station, which police officer was killed and how the police were escaped from the hands of *Galon* fighters, U Ba Glay realized that the police who showed powers at the villages were not powerful when they had met with the *Galons*. He had drawn a cartoon in *Deedok Journal*. That cartoon was based on the true event. (Figure 5)



Figure 5



Figure 6

The time of the uprising of the *Galon* peasants was the time not only the peasants had to face with economic depression but also the whole country of Myanmar. Therefore, both the rural and urban areas had to face with extreme poverty accordingly. The people had no idea how to earn their living. As U Ba Glay was from urban area, he drew the following cartoon (Figure 6) to depict the economic depression with the view of a cartoonist that represented the urban class.

The Government had suppression with the peasants who were facing with extreme poverty and they had to sacrifice their lives by challenging the cannons with swords. It was the cartoon that depicted as the Government had announced that the reward would be given if the rebels were arrested, the extremely poor and starved peasant through to give up himself as *Sayar San* and take the reward.

The imperialist colonial government beheaded the peasant rebels and threatened the peasants not to dare to rise against them. They also gave incentive by announcing that the reward would be given if a rebel had been arrested. But nobody directed at the *Galon* rebels and took the reward from the Government. Thus in order to mock that event, U Ba Glay drew the following cartoon with the title “ဂဠုန်ပေါက်ဈေးနှင့်ရွှေတလေးစိတ်ကူး”. (Figure 7) The posters announcing the reward 10,000 kyats for the capture of *Saya San* were sent to every *Thugyis* and crowded places such as railway stations.

The Governor stated for about forty-five minutes regarding with the affairs of the *Galon* rebels, the issuing of the irrevocable order, economy, starvation, peasants’ affairs, plenary conference, separation and non-separation, extension of the legislative council and the holding of the election at the meeting of the Legislative Council started to convene on 30 August 1931. The Government revealed in his speech that the Government had managed and strived for poverty, relief and reduction of farmland tax, 11,000 people had been employed at Myingyan, Magwe and Meikhtila, fifty lakhs of farmland tax had been written off and the agricultural loans had been marked for fifty-six lakhs and forty-five lakhs had already been loaned. Forty-five lakhs of agricultural loans were of no significance for the millions of Myanmar peasants. Furthermore it could not be loaned easily. It was arranged only for the rich peasants to get loans who could give much firmed guarantees. Actually the poor peasants did

not get anything although it was given. U Ba Glay depicted that event with the following cartoon (Figure 8).

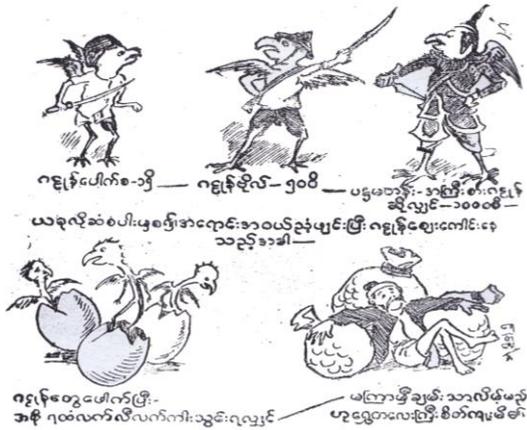


Figure 7

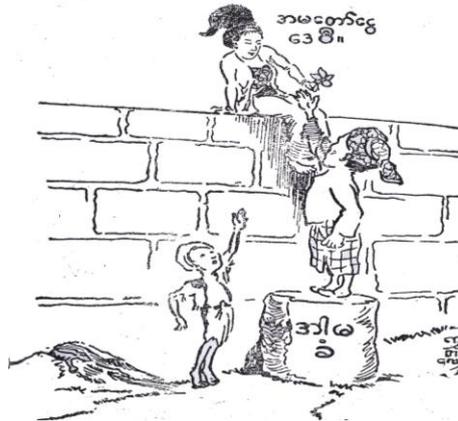


Figure 8

Actually the relief works of the colonial government were not sufficient. It was like feeding sesames into the elephant's mouth. Myanmar peasants' lives would not be improved by lending a small amount of money. The lives of the peasants would not develop from poverty so long as the foreign capitalist paid the price of the paddy as their wishes. Therefore, U Ba Glay drew a cartoon depicting that Myanmar politicians should extinguish the fire surrounding the peasants instead of fighting each other on the separation and non-separation issue.



Figure 9

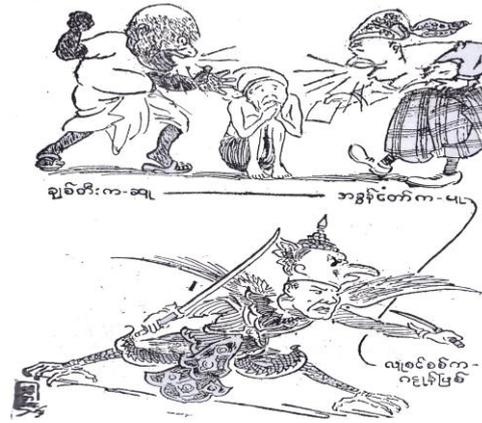


Figure 10

The Government continued to levy taxes as the rate marked when the price of paddy was one hundred and fifty kyats. Therefore, when the price of paddy had been declined, the peasants had to suffer from every aspect and could not cover the farmland expenses and left to be drowned in debts after working strenuously for the whole year. U Ba Glay depicted with that cartoon that Myanmar politicians were disunited and conflicted largely on the separation issue due to the creation of the imperialists.

The member of the Legislative Council stated to mark the price of paddy to be one hundred and fifty kyats and the farmland tax to be collected after the sale of paddy in July instead of the beginning of the production of paddy in January. If the price of paddy was sixty five kyats in January, it was increased to ninety kyats in December. In July, the price of paddy

was risen to a certain extent and made the peasants to sell their paddy at the time of the good price for paddy and paid the taxes. Otherwise, the Government should permit the paying of paddy instead of cash as tax. In the peasant situation, the peasants had to sell their paddy with the least price and paid their debts to be paid to the Chettyars. The capitalists who bought the paddy gave the least price to the peasants who were drowned in debts. The Chettyars, the Government and the Capitalists were the same. The Chettyars were loaned by the banks of the British capitalists. It was said that the Government should always remember the 1930 Peasants' Revolution. The *Thathemeda* and the capitation taxes were demanded to be abolished. With this intention, U Ba Glay drew the following cartoon (Fig. 10). In this cartoon, it contained the two main causes of the outbreak of Galon Uprising. Only the suppression by the Government was left.

In conclusion, the difficulties of U Ba Glay to pave the new way of cartoon art were very large. At the beginning of the occurrence of cartoon, Myanmar viewers did not know how to appreciate the cartoon. But the power of cartoon was very large. It could express more vividly than the expression of words and writings and it had entered into Myanmar literary world. U Ba Glay depicted the lives of the peasants in the colonial period vividly with the art of cartoon.

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