

A Study of Water's Symbolic Roles in Daily Life and Buddhist Rituals in Myanmar and Other Countries

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Abstract

This paper presents the different meanings and values of water in Buddhist rituals in Myanmar and other countries. Water is an important part of the beliefs and rituals in society. The main aim of this research is to obtain a better understanding of water's significance in daily life. The different beliefs, rituals associated with water in some countries are discussed. Firstly, the study is to present how people accept these beliefs in practice and to find out how people perceive the value of water. Finally, the different kinds of rituals in Myanmar and other countries are highlighted.

Introduction

The water called *Udaka* (ဥဒက) as Pali language.² It is pure and cold symbolic. The property of water is that flows from higher place to lower place.³ When everyone drinks the water, also get cold and the benevolence creates cold sensation. Most of the people realize “the water is like benevolence” that is a metaphor in the Buddhism. Both the parents and teachers always stretch out the benevolence towards their children and pupils. So their benevolence is always compared with the water.⁴ When the hot thing touched upon the water, it changed its property.⁵ We have seen that everybody knew a little about the rest of water, but was often rather careless when we studied about the water. According to historical evidence, the battle had broken out because of water. In Myanmar, Buddhists offer drinking water to Lord Buddha everyday. The rituals are that although the water festival is a new year celebration, this festival is linked to religion.⁶ Next one is, watering Bodhi tree festival of Kasone is celebrated on the full moon day of Kasone in the second month of Myanmar calendar.⁷

The water is very meaningful. And when people go to pagoda, they pour water to the Buddha at their birthday corners.⁸ According to Myanmar custom and practice, when the bridegroom and bride get married in the wedding ceremony at which a person of the highest integrity pour water on their two right hands in a decorative silver bowl. According to historic evidence, we have known the vital role of water which contain to support good effect of society in daily life.

¹Tutor, Department of History, University of Yangon

² U Hoke Sein, The Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary, Yangon, Daily Gazette Press, 1981, p-685

(ဦးဘုတ်စိန် ၊ အများသုံး မြန်မာ-အင်္ဂလိပ်-ပါဠိအဘိဓာန်)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as **The Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary.**)

³ Dr. Saykeinda, Professor, International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University Yangon.

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as **Dr. Saykeinda, Professor**)

⁴ Dr. Saykeinda, Professor

⁵ Dr. Saykeinda, Professor

⁶ U Than Pe (Guide), Myanmar Culture ,Traditions And Scenery, Yangon, Sun Thazin Offset, 2009 , First Edition, p-၄၈ (ဦးသန်းဖေ (လမ်းညွှန်) မြန်မာ့ယဉ်ကျေးမှု မြန်မာ့ဓလေ့ နှင့် မြန်မာ့ရှုခင်း)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as, **Myanmar Culture ,Traditions And Scenery**)

⁷ Nay Aung Myint , (Yangon University), Seasonal Myanma Tradition, Yangon, Hlaing Yadanapone Press, 1981, First Edition, p-43 (နေအောင်မြင့်၊ ရာသီစဉ်လာမြန်မာရိုးရာ)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as, **Seasonal Myanma Tradition**)

Relating to the water for health delivered by Buddha

One day, after the king of Kausala had partaken, he was feeling luxurious. Because of feeling luxurious, the king of Kausala became a tough behavior in the presence of Buddha. When the Buddha knew, he preached to live healthy depending on the water. The Buddha preached to drink healthy water and to eat three mouthfuls of meal within the belly when the monks are eating foods.¹

To maintain clean water explained by Buddha.

If people has drunk dirty water, they can be indirectly infected with a variety of diseases from contagious diseases. Everybody has to boil the water for healthy drinking water and to prevent the diseases.² Buddha preached the monks to maintain the healthy environment and to protect from discarding dirty things as excrement, urine, spittle in the water³

Conflict over water delivered by Buddha.

When Buddha was alive, there was a dispute between the citizens of Kapilavatthu and those of Koliya, over the distribution of river waters from river Rohini situated between the two countries for agricultural purpose. Buddha went to that place and seated on the bank in the middle of the two armies, delivered a sermon of peace.⁴ “Valuable rulers! Why will you let your invaluable lives and blood lost for water which is of little value? Peace and tranquility should not be destroyed by means of quarrel”, and Buddha prevented the war of range.⁵

Ten benefits of water

When everybody visits the pagoda, the people pour water to the image of Buddha at their birthday corners. They believe that by doing these kinds of good deeds, they will gain good fortunate and their misfortunes will be decreased.⁶ Although the face of Buddha is never dirty, Ashin Ananda always offers water to the Buddha in every morning because he wants to get as the merit.⁷ The water functions as purification tool not only itself but also others.⁸

⁸ Member of Buddha Sasana, Theragahtapali (Udakanikaye), Yangon, Department of Religion, 1962, p-82
(ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာအဖွဲ့၊ ထေရဂါထာပါဠိ (ဥဒ္ဓကနိကာယေ))

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as Theragahtapali (Udakanikaye))

⁹ Kyaw Tint Swe, Principles and Practice of Natural Water, Yangon, Seik Ku Cho Cho Sarpay, 2001, First Edition, p-3 (ကျော်တင့်ဆွေ၊ သဘာဝရေကုထုံး)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as Principles and Practice of Natural Water)

³ Member of Buddha Sasana, Paseiktayapali, Yangon, Department of Religion, 1997, p-270 (ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာအဖွဲ့၊ ပါဠိစိတ္တိယပါဠိ) **(Hereafter this site will be referred to as Paseiktayapali)**

⁴ Min Yu Wai, Life of Buddha (Mingalar Yaung Chi), Yangon, Ngwe Pyi Taw Press, 2008, Second Edition, p-60

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as Life of Buddha (Mingalar Yaung Chi))

⁵ Min Yu Wai, Life of Buddha (Mingalar Yaung Chi)

⁶ U Dhamma Thar Mi, Lecturer, Presiding Monk Training School Patheingyi, Age (60) Years, Vassa (41) Years, (21.10.2018)

⁷ Dr Say Keinda, Professor

⁸ Dr Say Keinda, Professor



Figure (1)



Figure (2)

In Buddhism, because of well donation, this donors never arrive towards the plane of four netherworlds.¹ When everybody donated the water, the donor get ten benefits of water in both the present world and the future existence, which is a belief of every Buddhist.

Ten benefits of the water in Buddhism are described in the following ²

(1) Being beautiful, (2) Being popular with wisdom, (3) Being strong in character, (4) Having long Life, (5) Being powerful, (6) Being clean, (7) Being famous, (8) Being light and quick, (9) having plentiful of followers, (10) Being completely free from hunger.



Figure (3)



Figure (4)

Having the benefits of water.

Before ninety-one world, Wipathi Buddha had attained Buddhahood. In the kingdom of Bandumati, the wealthy persons, ministers, crown prince and king donated in competition. At that time, when one poor person had felt to emulate these persons, he donated drinking water and fetched the water for the monastery from the river. The following are because of water donation, he got good benefits: ³

(1) Becoming the Sakka in abode of celestial beings, (2) Having to stay in beautiful edifice, (3) Having a thousand angels as attendants (4) Being the king of ‘devas’ for fifty times in the abode of ‘devas’, (5) having the universal monarch (Cakkyavate) for twenty

¹ U Dhamma Thar Mi, Lecturer

² Tekatho Shin Thiri, Dhamma Sariya(B.A), A Variety of Donation and Uncountable Benefits, Yangon, Kyaw Win Swe Press, 1992, p-99-101 (တက္ကသိုလ် သျှင်သီရိ လှူဖွယ်အမျိုးမျိုး အကျိုးအနန္တ)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as A Variety of Donation and Uncountable Benefits)

³ A Variety of Donation and Uncountable Benefits, P-99-100

times (6) Never been in hell, (7) Getting water even at the top of mountains, tree, sky and ground if he wishes, (8) Completely free from cares, (9) Be unblemished like Leprosy disease (10) If he wants to use the rain water, it will rain at any time, (11) Completely free from worries within eight months, (12) Be unblemished grime on his body, (13) Be pure heart, (14) escaped from the hell in the whole life cycle, (15) Became an arahat named Udaka in the reign of Buddha

Water over the ceremony of anointment

If we search graceful and suitable wedding in the middle of audience, according to Myanma traditional custom, the bridegroom and bride's right hands are put in the silver bowl which is officiating a wedding. After both bridegroom and bride's right hands were put into the water in the silver bowl," they will become well-being as the cold water and fresh as the flower" and it is a good omen in the future.¹

After the bridegroom's right hand is joined with the bride's right hand, the integrated person pour with auspicious pure water on their right hands.

Water over making donation.

Myanmar and other countries have different custom types of dropping water in Southeast Asian countries. The definition of water dropping is donation to make witness. The volume of water is wider than area of land. The water body holds seventy-five percent of the world. When people found the water, the donors never forgot about "I had donated something" because of water dropping.²

We usually see it in Myanmar Buddhist donation ceremonies. Buddhists believe that nothing can be carried to the next life except their good deeds. Donation (dana) is one of the main things which can raise them up to higher existence.³ After the donation ceremonies is made, they do a sharing of one's merit towards relatives died off in Srilanka, but without praying custom.⁴

In Thailand, although the donors made the donation, the customs of praying and sharing aren't put to practice in their donation ceremonies. In Myanmar, the donors put to practice the customs of donation, praying and sharing in every donation ceremonies. In Srilanka, the donor is pouring water into a small bowl 3, within a large bowl 8" in front of the monk.⁵

Benefits of Banyan Tree water pouring Festival

We believe in religious beliefs that is related to the water. That is pouring water to Banyan Tree festival which gives four benefits as described in the following:⁶

- (1) Repeatedly, feeling the bliss of heaven in the six heaven storeys.
- (2) Being the universal monarch within thirty-three worlds.
- (3) Although being human, will never know the pain of four netherworlds.

¹ Tharawady Thakhin Aung Chain, The Ceremony of Anointment Book, Yangon, Thihayadanar Press

P- 93-4(သာယာဝတီ သခင်အောင်ချိန် ၊ဆရာဖြစ်သင် ဘိသိက် မင်္ဂလာကျမ်း)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as **The Ceremony of Anointment Book**)

² U Thu Ma Na, Assistant Registrar

³ Culture & Beyond MYANMAR, p-25

⁴ Dr Sandawarabiwuntha, Pro-rector, International Therawada Buddhist Missionary University (Yangon)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as **Dr Sandawarabiwuntha, Pro-rector**)

⁵ Dr Sandawarabiwuntha, Pro-rector

⁶ Doe Khit Sarpay Family, A Variety of Donation and Benefit, Yangon, Gyophyu Press, 1988, First Edition, p-45
(ဒို့.ခေတ်စာပေ မိသားစု ၊အလှူအမျိုးမျိုးနှင့် အကျိုးအမြတ်ဖြာ)

(4) Having four analytical knowledge, six super knowledge, eight higher attainment and arahat.

The definition of Kasone is that “Ku” is called water and “son” is called pouring. So the meaning of Kason is called pouring water. ¹ The tree under which the Bodhisat sit to meditate and attain Sabbannuta nana is known as Bodhi tree (or) the tree of enlightenment. ² The water pouring to Banyan Tree Festival emerged since the reign of Buddha. ³ Pouring water to Banyan tree festival is an exalted ceremony of Buddhists.

Since the reign of King Narapatisithu, startlingly planted Banyan tree in 536 Myanmar Era. In 684 Myanmar Era, the reign of King Uzana held pouring water to Banyan tree festival, which has continued to hold until the present day. And then, pouring water to Banyan tree festival is both religious and traditional ceremonies. ⁴ In Buddhism, pouring water to Banyan tree is believed as bathing the Buddha for buddhist. ⁵

When we study events of relating to water, on the full moon day of Kason month, the people donated as a water donation to wash their hands and feet for the monks in Lao. That is their traditional belief. ⁶

Pouring water during water festival

Tagu(Apir) month is first month of Myanmar month. Because of hot season in April, this water festival shows benevolence of people to cool down anybody not only in Myanmar, but also all over the world. Again, after changing to new year, some young people make merit by pouring water on Buddha images, washing the hair of older people and bathing. ⁷

Shan wash the hair of older people and they offered water to wash the monks in a bath .

Conclusion

This paper examines that the wide benefits of water to the society. Sometimes the water can bring very bad things for the human. When we study the events of water upon the people, some people are superstitious. Firstly, nowadays, the belief upon the ceremony of anointment is quietly becoming loose situation, which is that the overseas culture is influencing over Myanmar traditional marriage. Secondly, because of very expensive and weak belief, some weddings didn't insert the ceremony of anointment. These causes are a bad symbolism. The authors need to write the causes relating to the ceremony of anointment for the next generation. And then, the master of ceremonies need to reduce wages for the ceremony of anointment.

When new year's day arrive on Myanmar calendar, the young people wash hair of the older people that is Myanma custom and belief. But I saw that some people share the packet of shampoo in some places. The older people will share this clearly over to the next generation about the knowledge of custom and belief relating to water in Myanmar. When we study

¹ Seasonal Myanmar Tradition,p- 43

² U Sein Win, The Ceremony of Banyan Pouring Water, Yangon,(Non-Press),1953,p-16

(ဦးစိန်ဝင်း၊ ညောင်ရေသဘင်)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as The Ceremony of Banyan Pouring Water)

³ Myanmar Culture, Traditions and Scenery,p-61

⁴ Seasonal Myanmar Tradition,p- 48-9

⁵ U Dhamma Thar Mi, Lecturer

⁶ A Shin Thukhamaindha(Tant Yen), Beliefs and Customs of Shan, Yangon, Star Empire Press,2008,p- 49

(အချင်သုခမိန္ဒ(တန့်ယန်း) ရှမ်းတိုင်းရင်းသားတို့၏ကိုးကွယ်ယုံကြည်မှုနှင့်လေ့ထုံးတမ်းစဉ်လာများ)

(Hereafter this site will be referred to as Beliefs and Customs of Shan)

⁷ Seasonal Myanmar Tradition,p- 31-2

pouring water over Banyan tree festival, we found that it is widely celebrated in many places of Myanmar before 1988. But the young people just celebrate this festival to maintain as the custom. If people's beliefs disappear, they cannot see Dhama in their heart more than now. Not only the government, but also Buddhist organization need to maintain belief, ritual connecting with water.

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Figure (5)



Figure (6)

Reference

In Myanmar Publications.

နေအောင်မြင့်(ရန်ကုန်တက္ကသိုလ်) ရာသီစဉ်လာမြန်မာ ကျော်တင့်ဆွေ၊ သဘာဝရေကုထုံး၊ ရန်ကုန်၊စိတ်ကူးချိုချိုစာပေ၊ ၂၀၁၁ (ပထမအကြိမ်)

စက္ကိန္ဒ၊အရှင်၊ (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်)၊ ရခိုင်ယဉ်ကျေးမှု(၂)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ သိဒ္ဓမြိုင်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၉၃(ပထမအကြိမ်)

စိန်ဝင်း၊ဦး၊ညောင်ရေသဘင်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊(ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်မပါ)၊ ၁၉၅၃ တက္ကသိုလ်ရှင်သီရိ၊(ဓမ္မစရိယ၊ဘီအေ)၊ လှူဖွယ်အမျိုးမျိုးအကျိုးအနန္တ၊ရန်ကုန်၊ကျော်ဝင်းဆွေပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊၁၉၉၂။

တင့်နိုင်တိုး၊ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ တစ်ဝှမ်း ရှိရိုးရာပွဲတော်များ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြတ်ထက်ဟိန်း ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၂၀၁၄။

ဒို.ခေတ်စာပေ မိသားစု ၊အလှူအမျိုးမျိုးနှင့် အကျိုးအဖြစ်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ဂျိုးဖြူ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၉၈ (ပထမအကြိမ်)

ရိုးရာ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊လှိုင်ရတနာ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၈၁ (ပထမအကြိမ်)

ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာအဖွဲ့၊ထေရဂါထာပါဠိ(ဥဒ္ဒကနိကာယေ)၊ရန်ကုန်၊ သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာန၊၁၉၆၂။

ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာအဖွဲ့၊ပါစိတ္တိယပါဠိ(ဥဒ္ဒကနိကာယေ)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာန၊ ၁၉၉၇။

မင်းသုဝဏ်၊ ရေချမ်းစဉ်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စိတ်ကူးချိုချိုပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၂၀၁၅။

ရာဇိန္ဒ၊ဦး၊ဆုပေးရေစက်ချ အမျိုးမျိုးနှင့် အထွေထွေ သိမှတ်ဖွယ်ရာ၊ စိုးမိုးမိတ်ဆက်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၉၃။

သန်းဖေဦး(လမ်းညွှန်)၊မြန်မာယဉ်ကျေးမှု မြန်မာလေ့ နှင့်မြန်မာရှုခင်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ဆန်းသဇင် အော့ဖ်ဆက်၊ ၂၀၀၉ (ပထမအကြိမ်)

သုခမိန္ဒ၊ အသျှင်(တန့်ယန်း)ရှမ်းတိုင်းရင်းသားတို့၏ ကိုးကွယ်ယုံကြည်မှုနှင့် ဓလေ့ထုံးတမ်းစဉ်လာ များ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စတားအင်ပါယာ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၂၀၀၈။

ဟုတ်စိန်၊ ဦး၊ အများသုံးမြန်မာ-အင်္ဂလိပ် - ပါဠိ အဘိဓာန်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ဒေလီ၊ ဂေဇက်စာ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၈၁။
အောင်ချိန်၊ သခင်(သာယာဝတီ)၊ ဆရာဖြစ်သင် ဘိသိက် မင်္ဂလာကျမ်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ သီဟရတနာ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ၁၉၇၈ (ပထမအကြိမ်)

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