

# Myanmar Literature Project

မြန်မာစာပေစီမံကိန်း

Hans-Bernd Zöllner (ed.)

Working Paper No. 10:19

**Material on Three Novels:**  
*Ba Thoung, Pantha Ma Sa U and Oil*  
*Dagon Taya, May*

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## **I. Introduction** (Hans-Bernd Zöllner)

### **The Business of Bookselling**

Between September and December 1939 the British administration registered 300 books published in Burma, 167 of them in the Burmese language. Amongst these were Ba Thoung's two-volume novel *Pantha Ma Sa U*, published by the Nagani Book Club in September 1939, the first of the three books introduced below in this volume. Besides these two volumes, fourteen other works in this Catalogue of Books, not including one drama and two books of poetry, were registered as “fiction”. The other 148 books published in the language of the country's dominant ethnic group were listed under seventeen categories, which might be summarised as “non-fiction -- from architecture to 'travels’”. Thirty-three of these books were categorised as dealing with politics, fourteen being published either by Nagani or Tun Aye's Burma Publishing House. The two volumes of Ba Thoung's novel were the only books of these publishing houses regarded as fiction by the officials in charge of the list in that last quarter of 1939.

Twenty years earlier, in the last quarter of 1919, the total number of books written in Burmese was just eighteen of a total of thirty-three registered. Five were classified as “fiction” and there were only four further categories, with “miscellaneous” (seven entries) holding the greatest number of non-fictional publications in Burmese.

These statistics give some idea of the increase in book production in Burma between the end of World War I and the first quarter after the outbreak of another great war in Europe. One can further recognise a shift towards the production of non-fictional books, in terms of the percentage of both total output and differentiation of topics. The Catalogue of Books kept by the British administration reflected the growing integration of a section of Burmese society into the contemporary global world of letters. The process had started with the introduction of printing machines to Burma in course of the gradual British annexation of Burma. In the first years, Christian religious tractates and school textbooks dominated, but later Burmese dramas and religious texts on Buddhism appeared. The emergence of a nationalist movement in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by an increase in publishing houses and a diversification of book production for the sake of entertainment as well as of education. The demand for books on a variety of subjects increased.

Publishers such as the founders of Nagani aimed to use such demand to throw off the yoke of the British masters and to establish an independent state by applying contemporary

knowledge in all fields. They did not feel duty bound to follow any of the political models competing in the ideological market at that time.

Nagani was striving for a new society compatible both with contemporary modernity and with “Burmeseness”. To achieve this goal, however, the entrepreneurs of change had to deal with conditions as they were. They had to print and to sell books. Members for the Book Club had to be attracted and – even more difficult – to be kept as customers and as propagators of the books and the ideas behind their publication. Ideals and material reality soon collided, and Tun Aye left Nagani because his vision of publishing books “along a purely political line” was tainted by the plan of Nu and his associates to solve financial difficulties by setting up an “economic enterprise with a political façade” (Working Paper 1: 44).

Economic realities required compromises. The same applied to the profile of the publications, which had to meet public interest and popular reading habits if the aim of reaching out to “all of Myanmar”, as proclaimed in the leaflet heralding the new enterprise (ibid.: 72-73), was to be accomplished. One of the compromises was the inclusion of novels in Nagani's book program. Dagon Taya's *May* when first offered to Nagani might not have been accepted by Tun Aye because it was not “political” enough (ibid.: 55-56).<sup>1</sup> Tun Aye, however, not only published Ba Thoung's *Oil* but at least two other novels as well.<sup>2</sup> Both dealt with war-related issues and *Oil* could be regarded as a “political novel” because of the story's setting during the 1938 strike of oil workers in Burma.

Up-to-dateness was thus an obvious criterion of book selection both of Nagani and of Tun Aye's publishing house. The production of both houses stood out in the publication of books on political themes. Public interest could be taken for granted. To meet popular taste, however, literary means had to be applied.

### **Between Genres, between Times**

The classification of literature into the categories of “fiction” and “non-fiction” with their respective subgenres is not absolute, as shown in the genres of “creative non-fiction” – communicating facts in a way that reads like fiction – and of “non-fiction novels” – depicting real historical figures using storytelling techniques of fiction (as in Truman Capote's famous *In Cold Blood*). Further, post-colonial theory has challenged the usage of concepts developed

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<sup>1</sup>It is not quite clear when the book was written. According to Dagon Taya's autobiography written in 1951, it was written in 1941. In an interview with this editor, Dagon Taya dated the writing back to 1939, when he was just 19 years old.

<sup>2</sup>The books are Khin Myo Chit's *Sit Nyaung Nyo* and Mya Doung Nyo's *Sit Pyan*, the latter being an adaptation of Leonhard Frank's novel *Carl & Anna*, on the fate of prisoners of war returning home.

within a given culture for the analysis of the cultural objectivations of another culture. The term “non-fiction” is usually defined simply as “not fictional” or – more elaborately – as “narrative prose dealing with or offering opinions or conjectures upon facts and reality, including biography, history, and the essay (opposed to fiction and distinguished from poetry and drama)”.<sup>3</sup> However, the understanding of “facts” and “reality” heavily depends on the epistemology applied. Literary genres change over time and between cultures.

As a consequence, the terms used by the British administration to classify Burmese books has to be questioned. The following examples provide some details about different options for allocating genres and subject areas to specific books.

A first case in point are Thein Pe's two books on the students' strike of 1936 (see Working Paper 4 of this series). The Catalogue of Books classified them as “fiction” and – in line with the term used in the book – as “novels” (Burmese: *vutthu*). However, these books dealing with a contemporary event in Burmese history displayed some less conventional qualities, such as introducing one of the main protagonists of the strike, Nu, with his real name and thus clearly transgressing the sphere of fiction.

Another example is Dagon Khin Khin Lay's book *Rays of War*, written on the request of the British Propaganda Office to counter sympathies for Germany in Burma (Working Paper 15,1). The book was published two months after Ba Thoung's novel and listed in the Catalogue of Books as a “biography”. The author, however, refers to the book as a “novel” in her autobiography.<sup>4</sup> Dagon Khin Khin Lay's second book, published with Nagani's assistance, *Enemy of the World*, was a novel but at the same time a political pamphlet serving the interests of the British authorities.

Finally, Mya Sein's book *Women* (see Working Paper 17) is instructive. It was classified under the caption “Literature” and contains a number of lectures on the status of women in a variety of cultures, bound together by a thin narrative thread. It could be called a work of non-fiction disguised as fiction.

All these books thus typify genres “between” fiction and non-fiction. They served as means to inform the readers about political and societal matters in a way that made it easy for the readers to get the messages. They represented Burma's situation at that time between old and new, and in a way reflected the proclamation of the three Nagani founders that Nagani was

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<sup>3</sup><http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/nonfiction> [17.9.2011].

<sup>4</sup>Working Paper 15.1 of this series, pp. 70-71. – Dagon Khin Khin Lay was renowned for her popular novels at that time and therefore chosen by the British authorities.

neither one of the “kind of political groups mushrooming nowadays“ nor "an ordinary book club” (see WP 1: 72-73).

It might be appropriate, therefore, to look for ways to classify Burmese literature in the colonial period other than by applying the familiar terms of Western literary tradition. A starting point for such an attempt could be the *Khit-san Sarpay* (Time-Testing Literary) Movement initiated by the Burmese scholar Pe Maung Tin. He and May Oung (1880-1926), his brother-in-law<sup>5</sup> Gordon Luce (1889-1979) and J.S. Furnivall (1878-1960) were for many years the leading members of the Burma Research Society. Pe Maung Tin supported Furnivall's projects, started after his resignation from the Indian Civil Service in 1924, such as “World of Books” magazine (founded in 1924) and the Burma Education Extension Society (BEES). Its slogan, “The Bricks are Fallen down, but we will Build with Hewn Stones”, was a quotation from the book of the prophet Isaiah (9:10) and clearly indicated the radical changes lying ahead as well as the belief that not just Western ideas, but also a Western spirit would be needed as the fundament of the new building.<sup>6</sup>

From the beginning, “World of Books” organised a translation contest, won in 1927 and the following years by Ba Thoung, the author of *Pantha Ma Sa U* and one of the leading contributors to Nagani.<sup>7</sup> Ba Thoung presented another way of “testing the times” when in 1930 he put the prefix *thakin* (Master) before his name and founded the *Dobama Asiayone*, the Our-Burma Organisation. His vision of the foundations of the future of Burma and the role of the West was different from the ideas of the anglicised Burmans and their Western friends.

The phrase *Khit San* may therefore be used not just in the narrow sense as the designation of a particular group of authors trying to find new ways of writing Burmese prose,<sup>8</sup> but as a term under which various and sometimes conflicting attempts to combine Burmese and foreign literary traditions in a period of transition can be subsumed. In this broad sense most of the publications of Nagani “tested the times” in a different way than did “World of Books”. The latter concentrated on the literary means of Burmese writings. The former focussed on the

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<sup>5</sup>Gordon Luce married Pe Maung Tin's sister Tee Tee in 1915.

<sup>6</sup>Pe Maung Tin was an Anglican (Alan Saw U 2004 Professor U Pe Maung Tin: A Gentle Genius a Meek Master. *Journal of Burma Studies* 9: 35-41).

<sup>7</sup>Besides the five books published under his name by Nagani and the Burma Publishing House, he contributed some more works which were published under the names of other authors (see Working Paper 1.1: 66-68).

<sup>8</sup>See Anna Allot 1986 *Burmese Literature*. Leonhard S. Klein (ed.) *Far Eastern Literatures in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. A Guide. New York, Ungar: 2; For the role of Pe Maung Tin, the first Burmese professor of Burmese literature at Yangon University see Anna Allot 2004 Professor U Pe Maung Tin (1888.1973).: *The Life and and Work of an Outstanding Burmese Scholar*. *The Journal of Burmea Studies* 9: 19-21.



effect on society of the publications, regardless of literary style and the genres used, such as biographies, political treatises and pamphlets, historical chronicles, guidelines for economic success, essays on societal issues, pamphlets, revolutionary stories and finally, adaptations of fiction written abroad.

*Pantha Ma Tha U* as well as the other books introduced in this Working Paper were such adaptations of foreign models. They shared this feature with many other books published by Nagani.

### **The Arts of Adaptation**

The story of the genesis of the Burmese novel has been often told.<sup>9</sup> It started with the adaptation of an episode of Alexander Dumas' famous novel *The Count of Monte Christo* in 1904 by Hla Gyaw, a government translator. The author transferred the story to Burma in the time of King Tharawaddy (reigned 1837-1846). Shortly afterwards a novel was published which was not based on a foreign model but on motifs from traditional court literature. In contrast to the storyline of the adaptation of the French novel, which contains a romantic love story, the latter book told the frivolous adventures of the womanizing flower seller Maung Hmaing. In 1916, the name of the villain-hero of the story with the added prefix Mr. was adopted as a pen name by another author, who as Thakin Kodaw Hmaing (1876-1946) is still regarded as Myanmar's national poet. By choosing the pen name "Mr. Maung Hmaing" he mocked the attitude of the anglicised Burmese elite. The literary "testing of times" included a variety of nuances, many of which can hardly be comprehended by foreign "Burma experts". Thakin Kodaw Hmaing's many works developed the traditional genres of Burmese literature, but his works have not yet been translated into any foreign language. It is said that his special style prevented his works from being censored by the British authorities.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, those first novels published in 1904 faced criticism by some traditionalists. It was argued that the term *vatthu*, used as a Burmese equivalent for the English "novel", was not appropriate for the new genre because it had earlier denoted the Buddhist Jataka stories.<sup>11</sup>

The art of adaptation practiced by the Nagani authors can therefore be viewed from two aspects, that of adaptation of foreign material into the Burmese context and that of

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<sup>9</sup>Thein Han (Zawgyi) 1968 A Study of the the Rise of the Burmese Novel. *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 51, 1: 1-7; Win Pe (Maung Swan Yi) 2002 The Development of Modern Burmese Literature Under the Influence of Western Literature. IIFA, Leiden University, Amsterdam, December 5-9, 2002. Translation: Tha Noe <http://www.uiowa.edu/~iwp/WRIT/documents/MAUNGSwanYiformattedOctober13.pdf> [15.9.2011].

<sup>10</sup>Allott 1986: 6.

<sup>11</sup>Thein Han 1968: 6. - Pe Maung Tin, criticised both novels and many others as being inferior to Western works (Than Tun, U Pe Maung Tin and Myanma Novels: 149-157).

“modernising” traditional literary forms.<sup>12</sup> The example of Thakin Kodaw Hmain's work exemplifies how an investigation into the latter aspect faces some special problems and cannot be undertaken without Myanmar scholars playing a central role.

There is some information about the attitudes toward the task of adaptation of the two authors whose books are introduced here. Ba Thoung's essay on translations from 1930 has been reprinted in Working Paper 17 in full length. Here is the gist of the text:

We can depend only upon ourselves; who else is there to help us? We have no one to rely on, but ourselves. Do rely on yourselves; do the good job of translation; printing only slogans and declarations in dailies and monthlies will not do the job. We don't see any benefit in relying on foreign rulers. We must do what we should, by ourselves. (Working Paper 17: 7)

Translation was seen as a crucial means of gaining independence. Knowledge was needed and could be gained through the transfer from foreign sources into the Burmese context. Another text provides us with some insight into the way Ba Thoung practiced the principles he had proclaimed. A former student attending a translation class conducted by Ba Thoung in 1930 remembers him saying:<sup>13</sup>

When you translate something from somebody else's language into Myanmar language, you should mirror<sup>14</sup> his words and life in our words and life and only then begin to translate. So that his feelings become our feelings. For example, in Russia the people suffered as they were oppressed and exploited as serfs and servants. When they couldn't take it any more, they revolted. It was a truly justified revolution. They were not afraid. Dared to die. And when you translate a text about this revolution, you must do it while your mind mirrors the feelings of the Russian people. Only then will your work be able to generate *ya.tha*.<sup>15</sup> And only then will it be a good translation.

Translations had to create *ya.tha*, emotions similar to those evoked in the text to be translated. Ba Thoung as remembered by his student displayed such an attitude by introducing himself as Thakin (master) Ba Thoung and greeting his students with the slogan of the *Dobama* Song

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<sup>12</sup>Anna Allott 1982 *The Short Story in Burma: With Special Reference to its Social and Political Significance*. Jeremy H.C.S. Davidson and Helen Cordell (eds.) *The Short Story in Southeast Asia: Aspects of a Genre*. London School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London: 101-138 notes: “It is possible to detect two main tendencies prevalent among Burmese prose writers of the twentieth century: the tendency to view literature from a western standpoint, and the tendency to view it from a traditional Burmese point of view.” (ibid.: 105). This statement concentrates on the question of what yardstick should be applied to measure the value of Burmese literature and ignores the necessity of having both „western“ and „traditional“ orientated writers, to combine perspectives.

<sup>13</sup>For the whole text see chapter V, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Translator's note: *htin ha'* - reflect in a mirror, in one's mind, one's work

<sup>15</sup> Translator's note: *ya.tha.*, from Pali/ Skt. *rasa* literally means ‘flavour’. *Rasa* is an important concept in Myanmar/Indian literary and arts theory, referring to the ability of a work to evoke a range of emotions in the reader/spectator. Traditionally nine different *rasas* are identified: love, laughter, fury, compassion, disgust, horror, heroic mood, amazement and tranquility. Myanmar literature to this day is often judged by its ability to evoke such emotions.

„We are a master race, we, the Bamar!“<sup>16</sup> and asking them to repeat these slogans and the gesture of clenching his fist.<sup>17</sup>

What Ba Thoug tried to teach his students was that inspiration was needed to turn a technically correct into a „good“ translation. The difference between the translation's model and the translator's own work had to be reduced to the utmost. A book on the Russian revolution could only be translated adequately if the translator became a Burmese Thakin. The students were enthusiastic about Ba Thoug's approach and even visited him after he had been dismissed from University.

The element of inspiration can be noticed in the Dagon Taya narration of how *May* came into being, too, but the political connotations which caused Ba Thoug to lose his job are missing as a key element. In his autobiography written in 1951, the author recalls:

I read the novel [*Self* by Beverley Nichols] in 1939 and thought of writing it in Burmese. I had it all arranged in my mind how to make the adaptation when I translate it into Burmese. But a year passed and I still had not started the adaptation. I was unsuccessful despite having a strong desire to write it.

But there was something that impelled me to write it. That something was ...<sup>18</sup>

Dagon Taya then tells about an event happening one year later when he and some other students planned to produce a film. A teacher and singer named Dora Than Aye was chosen as the main actress. The students went to see her and met her at her school:

Dora.

At first I had only known her by name. I had heard her songs on the radio. Now I have seen the singer in person. Her voice was pleasant. When she sang and drew out her voice, the sound waves were like the ripples that moved continuously towards the bank as when a stone had been thrown onto the calm surface of the lake.

Rebecca West wrote that the American singer Paul Robson's voice was like black velvet. Paul Robson's voice was likened to black velvet because it was rich. The singer who sang with a beautiful voice also had beautiful looks that went well with her voice.

When I got back to the hall of residence from the Teachers Training College the beautiful voice remained echoing in my mind.

'I will row the little boat,

It's going to be harmless and peaceful,

Along the river bank,

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<sup>16</sup>For the whole text of the song see Working Paper 6: 85-87.

<sup>17</sup>This concept of translation comes close to the Brazilian Haraldo de Campos' idea of translation as „transcreation“ which understands translation in analogy to a blood transfusion. (Else Ribeiro Pires Viera 1999 *Liberating Calibans. Readings of Antropofagia and Haralso de Campos' poetics of transcreation*. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds.) *Post-colonial Translation*. London and New York, Routledge: 95-113.

<sup>18</sup> See below V.2 (p. 73).

The water clear and pale green,'

Dora's song was coming softly into my ears. The desire to write the novel came to life at that moment; I had been unable to write it for a whole year out of sluggishness and laziness.

When I sat down at the writing table, the scenery of the flowers entwining in front of the Teachers Training College appeared on the sheet of paper.

That was why I started the novel 'May' with the description of the Teachers Training College, adorned beautifully with flowers.

It was Dora standing in the compound of the Teachers College who inspired Dagon Taya to realise his plan to adopt Beverley Nichol's novel. The comparison of the first sentences of both novels illustrates the effect of the author's inspiration on the adaptation:

Beverly Nichols: "The outside of Misses Perrings' seminary for young ladies was not an inspiring spectacle, even on a brilliant morning in May, 1918."

Dagon Taya: "The wind, soft and cold, is still gently and playfully teasing ..."

As the reviews of the book show, the author's inspiration spread to the readers as Ba Hein's often quoted comment on the beginning of the Burmese novel shows.

Reading May is like drinking a cup of champagne because the feeling one has is not of the traditional same old plots, but of a special feeling of a sudden rush of sensation and emotion.<sup>19</sup>

Here again, *ya.tha*, feeling and emotion, is invoked. The author is creating a new work. The model disappears behind the new creation as the Russian revolution behind its Burmese adaptation. The model may be foreign, the end product is genuinely Burmese.

### **Literature and Nationalism**

Both Ba Thoung and Dagon Taya were nationalists, but of different colours. Dagon Taya took part in the students' nationalist movements but separated this engagement from his literary efforts. Ba Thoung, on the other hand, could in his early years be labelled a "literary nationalist", i.e. somebody who used literary means to develop a full-fledged national identity.<sup>20</sup> The *Do-bama* Song and his series of articles promoting the aims of the *Do-Bama* movement can be regarded as programmatic manifestos of this kind of cultural nationalism and the literary works of Ba Thoung and others as manifestations of this program. Similar developments were seen in neighbouring Thailand, highlighted by the activities of Vichit Wathakan, who after 1934 became Director General of the newly-created Fine Arts

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<sup>19</sup>See the reviews of the book under section V.

<sup>20</sup>The term „literary nationalism“ was coined to characterise the debate in the United States at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the apparent inability of American authors to produce quality literature. For details see Marcus Jens Müller 2006 *American Literary Nationalism in the Early Republic*. Hamburg, Kovač.

Department after the revolution of 1932 and who propagated Thai identity through a variety of literary means.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, Nagani can be seen as a collective attempt to establish a basis for the further development of a national Burmese literature. After independence, one can argue, this task was “nationalised” by the foundation of the Burma Translation Society of Nagani's co-founder Nu in order to promote literature in the language he regarded as the national tongue. One of the measures taken was awarding prizes for novels and other genres. Another was the production of an encyclopedia.<sup>22</sup> During the Ne Win period, this task was performed by the *Sarpay Beikman* (Literature Palace) as one of many initiatives to use literature as an effective means to promote the goals of “the great socialist revolution”.<sup>23</sup> Besides promoting literature for peasants and workers, the socialist state strengthened the control over the press and the publication of all kinds of literature. The Press Scrutiny Board established in August 1962 together with the promulgation of the Printers' and Publishers' Registration Act continued its work after 1988.<sup>24</sup>

In all the years after independence there were discussions and controversies focussing on two related issues: the political function of literature and the search for a “national aesthetic”. The magazine “Tayar” founded by the author of May after the war was one of many podiums for such discussions. At the end of the socialist period government-enforced uniformity gave way to a more pluralist literary scene, which continued under ongoing censorship after 1988.<sup>25</sup>

The process of establishing a national literature in Burma is therefore not finished yet. The task of including the languages of the many ethnicities has not even started. The Nagani Book Club and its sister enterprise are part of this unfinished story. The contribution of both enterprises can be characterised by their attempts to connect Burma to world literature not by way of copying foreign models but by way of adaptation. This applies both to fiction and non-fiction. Both Ba Thoung and Dagon Taya used foreign models to create something genuinely

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<sup>21</sup> Scot Barmé 1993 *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity*. Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Allott 1981 *Prose Writing and Publishing in Burma Today – Government Policy and Popular Practice*. Tham Seong Chee (ed.) *Essays on Literature and Society in Southeast Asia. Political and Sociological Perspectives*. Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1-35: 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Form November 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>th</sup>, 1962 a writers' conference was held in Yangon attended by 700 participants (Allott 1981: 2-6).

<sup>24</sup> Anna Allott 1993 *Inked Over, Ripped Out. Burmese Storytellers and the Censors*. New York, PEN American Center. 3-20.

<sup>25</sup> Georg Noack 2005 *Bilder männlicher und weiblicher Identität in Liebesromanen aus Myanmar (1962 - 2000)*. M.A. thesis (unpublished), Berlin, Humboldt University: 125-127.

Burmese. Both *Pantha Ma Sa U* and *May* became classics because of the literary skills of their authors.

These skills converted a foreign text into a Burmese one in the same way that Hla Gyaw adapted a motif from Dumas' famous *Count*. If a reader were not accidentally familiar with the French model he would take it as a purely Burmese work. And *May* did not need *Self* any more. The same applies to Nagani books from other genres. Thakin Soe's *Socialism* was a “burmanised” version of Western socialist-communist ideas, as his usage of Buddhist terms shows. This kind of adaptation can be described as a one-way street. Foreign texts and ideas were incorporated into the Burmese context, but not the other way around. It is hard to imagine that anyone would think to translate *Pantha Ma Sa U* into English, except perhaps to satisfy academic curiosity. This may point to a problem of Burmese nationalism. The unfinished state of Myanmar's national literature is related to the unfinished task of developing a national identity that not only distinguishes the country from other nations, but contributes to bridging the great differences of political, ethnic and religious diversity existing in Myanmar as well.

The art of adaptation à la Ba Thoung and Dagon Taya left no room for the British or Russian or non-Burman “other”. The same can be said about Nagani as a publishing house, which used literature as an instrument to completely decolonise the country. In this regard Nagani took a different path than the *Ganda-lawka*, “World of Books”, which was bilingual and tried to bridge the gap between the literary and political cultures of Burma and those of Britain and the Western world. The *Dobama-Asiayone* claimed to be the only organisation in Burma “which has enlisted the support of all racial groups in the country”.<sup>26</sup> Nagani did not publish any book in the Shan or Karen language.<sup>27</sup> The Catalogue of Books shows how many languages were used before the war to disseminate not just religious tractates but fiction and non-fiction as well. It seems that this process did not continue after independence. The Burma Translation Society, renamed *Sarpay Beikmam* (Palace of Literature) in 1953, concentrated on books in Burmese and English. However, here as in other fields much more research needs to be undertaken.

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<sup>26</sup>Dobama Manifesto 1940 (*The Guardian Magazine* 6.1, January 1959).

<sup>27</sup>However, two books on the Shan country were published („Our Shan Land“ and „Saw Mon Hla“ (the famous Shanprincess and wife of Kng Anawratha, the founder of the Bagan Dynasty) both written by Ohn Myint in Burmese.

## About this Volume

The three novels are introduced in chronological order. *Pantha Ma Sa U* was published in September 1939, *Oil* in January 1941 and *May* in August 1941.<sup>28</sup> The books are introduced from different perspectives: through book reviews, comparisons of the English and the Burmese versions and additional material, like Dagon Taya's remarks on the genesis of the book in his early autobiography and the recollection of Ba Thoung's short career as a university lecturer. Submission of more material that may help throw further light on the themes touched upon in this introduction and related issues will be welcomed.

Hamburg, August 2012

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<sup>28</sup>The publication date is given according to the date of Ba Hein's introduction, 8.8.41. However, according to Kyaw Hoe's bibliographical listing, the book is registered before the coming out of books in early 1940. The publication history of Nagani books in the last period of the club's existence has still to be clarified.

## II Material on Ba Thoung, *Pantha Ma Sa U*

### 1. Kyaw Hoe, Bibliographical Information<sup>29</sup>

Translation: Georg Noack

#### 30.) Ba Thoung, Thakhin: *Panthar Ma Sar Oo*, vol. 1.

Author: Thakhin Ba Thoung. Editor: Dagon Khin Khin Lay. Yangon: Nagani, 1939. 329 pages.

While on the page that features the book's title inside the book the title is spelled 'Panthar Ma Sar Oo' [Oo spelled *a-tachauṅ: ngin* GN] on the book cover it is spelled with the vowel 'u'.

The preface was written by Ko Maung Htin. It includes a sentence that gives an idea of the book's flavour: 'When Thakhin Ba Thoung had mocked the world with energy of his youth, he encountered much sadness and sorrow; now, at the time he writes the book, he can bear the sadness and sorrow that is the law of the world (*lokadhamma*) and is calmly writing in the clarity of the *dhamma* attained through meditation'.

This book features the chapters 1 to 25 and indicates that the reader should read the second part (vol. 2) as well. The book was first printed in 1939 in 5000 copies.

#### 31.) Ba Thoung, Thakhin: *Panthar Ma Sar Oo*, vol.2.

**Yangon: Nagani, 1939, 358 pages.**

The title on the cover reads *Panthar Ma Sar Oo* [spelled with the vowel 'u']. The back features an advertisement for Nagani books. Thakhin Ba Thoung first published this notable novel as a Nagani book. He wrote it while he was serving a prison sentence that he had been given for political reasons.

Thakhin Ba Thoung had originally named the novel 'Panthar Ma Sar Oo' ['sar' spelled with a high *jei:cha* and 'oo' spelled *a-tachauṅ: ngin*] but the printing press changed that in the publication process... [?] After the war, around the year 1950 the novel became a required reading for the university entrance examinations in Myanmar language.

The book was first published in 1939 in 5000 copies. The first edition was published in 1936 (Nagani) [probably an error, 1939 GN], the second edition in 1951 (*pyithu. alin:*), the third edition in July 1951 (*pyithu. alin:*), the fourth edition in October 1967 (Bagan).

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<sup>29</sup> From Kyaw Hoe's Nagani bibliography, pp. 51-52.





Thakin Ba Thoug, Drawing (2002)

## **2. Moe Hein Zaw, Review of Ba Thoung, *Panthar Ma Sar U***

Translation: Tun Aung Kyaw

### **The Author**

The author, Thakin Ba Thoung was born on Thursday, February 7, 1901. His native is Ponkone village in Natmauk township. The father U Myit served at Thibaw's court as the Royal Tea Master, and later on became the *Sitge* of Taungdwing Yi. The mother, Daw Lay Khin was a native of Pankone village in Natmauk township. The author is the second of the four siblings. At the age of 10 he attended the vernacular school at Myothit, and when he passed the Fourth Std. continued his studies at the Anglo-Vernacular middle school at Taungdwingyi, and did his high school studies at the Buddha Nugyaha high school in Mandalay. The 1920 students strike transformed the 10<sup>th</sup> grader into a strike leader. Then he quit the classes and served as a volunteer school teacher in the national high schools of Mandalay and Shwebo. He competed in translation competition held by Ganda Lawka and won the first prize five out of six times. In 1928-29, he won the Prince of Wales award for his translation into Burmese the volume "Outlines of General History". He was appointed a translation tutor at the Burmese Language Department of the Rangoon University in which post he served for a year. Thakin Ba Thoung resented having to live under the British colonial rule and was eager to fight for independence. Therefore, he took up politics since the 1920 students' strike. The name Thakin Ba Thoung was first used in 1928. He was one of the founders of the Dou Bama Asiayone [Association of Burmese Nationals] and authored the Dou Bama Asiayone Manifestation. In 1930 he became an executive in the Burma National Youth Organization. He was jailed in Shwebo for canvassing for votes for a seat in the Dyarchy Legislative Assembly in 1933. He went on a hunger strike in protest. He wrote short stories, novels and plays while he involved himself in politics. "A Doctor, Indeed" a Burmese play he adapted from the French writer Moliere's *Le Medecin Maigne Lui* was well known as one of the earliest in the history of modern Burmese plays. He also translated the "Arabian Nights" into Burmese. At the Sarpaybeikman (The Burma Translation Society) conference/symposium on translation held in 1969, Thakin Ba Thoung read his paper entitled, "The experience and opinion /assumption/point of view of a translator".

In 1962, Thakin Ba Thoung served at the Burma Broadcasting Service (Station) of the Information Department as a press censor. He also edited the "Burma and the World" a journal brought out by the Social Relations Unit of the Ministry of Defence. In 1965, he lectured on the translation component at the editing courses conducted at the Headquarter of

the Burma Socialist Programme Party. He received the Nain Ngant Gon Yi Citation (First Class) awarded by the State Council in 1980. Thakin Ba Thoung passed away on April 21, 1981. -

His other translation works included Part One of The Oil Story ('Oil' by Upton Sinclair), 'Father's Heritage', 'An Enemy of the State' (from, Ibsen's play), 'Little Mother', and 'The Revolution of the Four-foot Creatures' (Animal Farm, by George Orwell); Ahmed, the Thief (Thief of Bagdad), The Country of the Blind (The Country of the Blind by H. G. Wells); David Copperfield (David Copperfield, by Charles Dickens); Round the World in Eighty Days (Round the World in Eighty Days, by Jules Verne) (which won the UNESCO translation award, 1959-60), The Royal Carpet and the Astrologer; Super-imposition on one's horoscope; Braving the Sun; Myanmar's Rocket; This is Democracy and the Universal Sermon of the Buddha.

### **About the book**

The novel Pantha Ma Sa U comes in 43 chapters.

#### Chapter (1)

It begins with the village scene; the southern entrance to Pepinkon village where trees abloom and where the common mynas were chirping. Pan Aung, Sar U's father was addressed as Myosarmin, (Mayor) by Saya Chein on horseback. When U Pan Aung asked Saya Chein (Saya Chein the astrological; Saya Sein the archivist) why he did that, the latter explains that U Pan Aung's grandfather was the son of Sar Kyin Mingyi, a chief commissioner/Court elder of King Aloung Min Tayagyi (title was Naymyo Byetgarajah); that he was in charge of Pan Tha town, and all these could be found in the records on copper plates at the monastery presided by the Rev. Sayadaw U Ghandama. He went on to say that by the time of U Pan Aung's grandparents, and parents, they have lost all the fortunes wealth/riches and cultivation land as well and had to face poverty. Had their line of ancestry not degenerated they would have ruled/reigned levied/attained the mayorship of Pantha town, explained Saya Chein. Thus, U Pan Aung was left (at the village rest house / hall / common hall) musing over his future dreams by humming a tune where lyrics ran something like, "like a genuine ruby that will not fade in colour even when it is sunk in mud - here comes a brighter future, ". When a village lad came up, U Pan Aung recounted his life history to him, and then producing a one kyat coin from his safe keeping, asked a bullock cart man of the village to buy him a pot of

toddy from the toddy grove. After instructing his wife to cook a meal he was again left to his reverie/stream of dreams.

#### Chapter (2)

On that day, U Pan Aung's daughter, Ma Sar U, commonly known in the whole of Pepinkon village as 'U' came up / appeared in the company of village belles, all dressed up to join / lead the procession which was about to enter the Southern monastery U Pan Aung was seen passing by on an open bullock cart, and the girls teased U who nearly came to tears. At the monastery, the village beaux played some musical instruments while the belles took a rest. At that moment, what seems to be three brothers passed by the road south of the monastery and the youngest Maung Dewa parted from the rest to enter the monastery. The girls were much attracted by this young man and taking the harp requested him to play the classic song 'Wezayanda'. After playing the tune, Maung Dewa rose to go and as he did so came across 'U'. Their eyes met, and emotions evoked. Without greeting or taking leave of each other, Maung Dewa rushed out to catch up with his brothers. This image of the beau from another village / place (Maung Dewa) was still left behind in U's mind.

#### Chapter (3)

'U' returned home with the companions but Maung Dewa was still in her mind's eyes. She was apprehensive of her father's unusual acts. She found her mother unlike any other days enjoying her house chores while humming a tune. The mother then told her to expect some good news, and that was about the discovery of their ancestry lineage of noble birth since the days of King Aloungmintayar (Konboun Dynasty) and with that good tidings her father was hiring a bullock cart to take him around. 'U' asked what difference that would make and her mother replied in the affirmative that there could be a lot. Then the mother went out to fetch U Pan Aung who was at Chetkyi's hut having a good time drinking toddy. Before leaving she told 'U' to keep the astrology book on the household Buddha shrine. She did as instructed. When her parents hadn't shown up for quite a time 'U' sent younger brother Maung Sein Aung to fetch them. She became worried when they didn't turn up after a time and so she went out to Chetkyi's hut by herself.

#### Chapter (4)

Chetkyi's hut was the place where village men congregated for its fine toddy drinks. When Daw Buma (Mrs. Pan Aung) entered the hut, Chetkyi's wife, Gaut-tay was frightened because she thought it was the village headman coming in. At that moment U Pan Aung was quite

drunk and humming the tune, “A genuine ruby, even when buried / sunk in mud ---“ Daw Bu Ma told all about their family prospects to Gaut-tay and then discussed with U Pan Aung for sending their daughter ‘U’ to Pantha Khin Lay of Myaukon town to re-establish / claim kinship ties. They did not notice the arrival of Maung Seinn Aung. So, when Ma Sar U got there, they were much alarmed. The mother admonished the daughter for coming after them and after that went back home together. U Pan Aung was by now very drunk as he had been drinking at Kantha market since the afternoon. Therefore, he was unable to be up at 02:30 / 03:00 hrs the next morning to go to Ywahaung market to sell firewood. So ‘U’ and her brother had to do the job. On the way, the brother referring to what had been told him by the mother said that ‘U’ would earn a ladyship soon. The sister wasn’t pleased with it and told him to shut up. They soon fell asleep while driving the bullock cart, which capsized into the wayside gutter and one of animals lay bleeding as a roadside/ thorny stump had pierced into its body. The animal died soon after and a passerby on horseback helped them get another cow for their journey ahead. In the evening they took the carcass back to village. The corpse was buried because the Indian buyer offered so low a price for the hide. ‘U’ felt guilty for being the cause of all these.

#### Chapter (5)

While U Pan Aung was grieving over the loss of his cow, ‘U’ was considering how she could find ways and means to become the breadwinner for the family. The mother, Daw Buma suggested ‘U’ going to see Pantha Khinlay at Myaukon town to revive the kinship relations. At first ‘U’ refused, but on realizing that she was the cause of all these miseries, assented / agreed to go. Thus, the next day ‘U’ went to Pantha Khinlay hitching on / by bullock cart going to Myaukon. As the house seemed empty, she was worried, but then she met Pantha Maung Maung, the son of Pantha Khinlay. When Pantha Maung Maung enquired of the purpose of the visit, ‘U’ told him she came to establish kinship ties as instructed by her mother. By that time Pantha Maung Maung had developed insincere motives regarding his relations with ‘U’. When ‘U’ made known that she’d be going back in the evening, Pantha Maung Maung showed her round the house garden while enjoying / partaking some food. He wanted to force a kiss when the time came for her to take the bullock cart but refrained on second thought that she might get angry at the very initial stage

#### Chapter (6)

On her way back on the cart ‘U’ was much worked up and when she pulled out from her hair the roses given by Pantha Maung Maung a thorn cut her fingers. She spent the night at the

home of a relative at Nyaungkyin village and continued her journey home to Pepinkon village the next evening. The mother was overjoyed to learn that ‘U‘ had met Pantha Maung Maung, and said that she received that morning the note / intimation by Pantha Khinlay to assist her in preparing dawn alms food (breakfast) for the Sanghas. ‘U‘ didn‘t like it, but the mother urged her to go. As she didn‘t like to put up with Pantha Khinlay, ‘U‘ enquired for jobs / work in the village but to no avail. Pantha Maung Maung also came down to enquire whether ‘U‘ would come to them. At last, in order to please her mother, she wrote to Pantha Khinlay that she would be coming to work for her. The next day she was informed that a bullock would be sent to fetch her. The mother, Daw Buma was overjoyed at the prospects of Pantha Maung Maung and her daughter becoming intimate.

#### Chapter (7)

On the day she was to go to Pantha Khin Lay, ‘U‘ heard the gecko while preparing for the journey and took it as something of bad omen. The mother dressed her daughter up for the occasion. During that time ‘U‘‘s father was offering the title of the Mayor of Pantha to Pantha Maung Maung for good in return for some cash. The latter came to fetch ‘U‘ on a fancy bullock cart and had the wooden box and palm frond covered basket containing her belongings packed on to another ordinary bullock cart. When they left, the mother and children wept and the mother was left telling her husband that in accordance with astrological treatise their daughter was destined to be the wife of a high official.

#### Chapter (8)

On the way, Pantha Maung Maung was conspiring a situation where ‘U‘ could not help but cling to him as he drove the cart at high speed. His excuses were that the cows behaved badly and tended to swerve to whatever directions they fancy. The previous owner died when thrown into a ditch, he told ‘U‘, and he also preferred driving at high speeds. Thus, he drove recklessly up hills and down dales causing ‘U‘ to be frightened out of her wits. Finally, on a descending slope Pantha Maung Maung forced ‘U‘ into allowing a kiss if she wanted the cart to slow down. He was angry when the frightened ‘U‘ by nature of a young woman tried to avoid every move he made. Nevertheless, Pantha Maung Maung succeeded in kissing ‘U‘. Then when they came to a certain place ‘U‘ dropped her shawl unnoticed, and on the pretext of picking it up she had the cart stopped. She stepped down and refused to ride the cart. In the end, ‘U‘ walked behind the cart for the rest of the journey and reached Myankon only at dusk.

## Chapter (9)

At the house of Pantha Khin Lay, U's chores were limited to rising up at 4 am to prepare alms food, to pick flowers for the household shrine, and to do sundry tasks for the lady, Pantha Khin Lay. The landlady was about 60 years old, and blind. So 'U' performed her duties with care and sympathy. Throughout her stay there, 'U' had to use her discretion to evade Pantha Maung Maung's frequent attempts to woo her, or to enter her room with the intent of molesting her. One day, people from Myaukon went to the Weluwun Hills next to Weluwun village to make offertories at the Nat (Spirit) shrines located at a distance of about 4 miles from the village. 'U' had been there a couple of times with the womenfolk. On this Full Moon Day of Waso, 'U' made the trip alone later and was unable to locate her friends. Pantha Maung Maung appeared from nowhere and offered to secure a cart for her return journey which 'U' declined. When her friends were found the return trip was further delayed since those in the group paid up the band to play some *music/tunes* and joined the spiritual dance. All the time Pantha Maung Maung was lurking behind. 'U' fell out with the two young women she was with on their trip back to village. They were known to have involved with Pantha Maung Maung. 'U' was walking alone behind at a distance when he made his appearance and offered to take her on horseback. 'U' hadn't got over with her bad mood yet and she mounted the horse.

## Chapter (10)

'U' wasn't enjoying the ride with Pantha Maung Maung. The animal trotted under the cloudy skies which soon blacked out the moonlight and sleet, began to fall. 'U' was dozing in the saddle having a couple of naps along the journey. Whether it was Pantha Maung Maung's own doing or whether it was by his oversight, they passed the crossroad/junction lane that led to Mayukon and left it way behind. When 'U' woke up she found herself in the arms of Pantha Maung Maung who gave the lame excuse of preventing her from falling down. 'U' was annoyed and quarrelled with Pantha Maung Maung over the affair. When it dawned on them that they had lost their way the man got some twigs and leaves to keep the gin warm and left the horse with her before he went off to find the way. After failing in his search for the way out he returned to find 'U' fast asleep, and the deflowering process of 'U' was completed there and then.

## Chapter (11)

One month after the trip from Weluwun Nat (Spirits) Shrines, ‘U’ was seen at dawn heading back to Pepinkon from Myaukon carrying a heavy basket. What had been a down dale track when she came to Myaukon had now changed into an uphill one, thought ‘U as she trudged on. Similarly, the high expectations she brought along with her to Myaukon were also in disarray and her life had also changed. Pantha Maung Maung came along with a bullock cart to take her home, but ‘U’ didn’t even bother to respond to his offer and walked on till she came close to Pepinkon where Pantha Maung Maung gave up and turned back. On the way, ‘U’ met someone who was handing out stickers with the phrase, “It’s your own doing. / There’s no one to blame except you yourself. You can’t blame anyone but yourself / You’ve no one to blame but yourself.” She had a chat with him and continued her way back. Once at home, the mother blamed her when ‘U’ made known that she was coming back for good, not for making arrangements for the wedding.

## Chapter (12)

Though ‘U’ came back as a loser from Myaukon, her friends in Pepinkon assumed that she was doing quite well with Pantha Maung Maung. To ease off / lighten her heavy heart, ‘U’ went to the monastery on the Sabbath day, but that reminded her of Maung Dewa whom she had met at the alms donation procession. She came back after taking the precepts at the monastery. Since that time ‘U’ shut herself indoors to avoid being seen with a stroll or two in the garden at night. People of Pepinkon village thought she had gone back to Myaukon, but ‘U’ herself was in a miserable state.

## Chapter (13)

Time flew quickly after ‘U’ returned to Pepinkon. One morning at the start of the rainy season, she was seen burning up the trash in a cultivation plot north of the village. When it was about noon a 14-year old girl appeared holding a small baby which she handed over to ‘U’. That was the child fathered by Pantha Maung Maung. While she was breastfeeding it, two women clearing land on the next farm gossiped. After that ‘U’ revived up the courage to be seen with her child. Sometimes she suffered a lot at the thought of the affair with Pantha Maung Maung. The child also died of high fever despite the various medical treatments rendered.



#### Chapter (14)

By and by, 'U' overcame her bleak / haunting memories of being deflowered, and of giving birth to a fatherless son who succumbed to illness, and became quite matured. 'U' went about her routine as usual, and even her villagers were beginning to forget all that she had gone through. She was quite determined to rehabilitate her diminished status as a single woman, an eligible bride. When it was the month of Tazaungmon she went to a friend of her mother in Sharpinsu village to gather groundnut, and for once she felt light at heart with no part of her sad life haunting her.

#### Chapter (15)

'U' had passed her teenage and reached young adulthood (29-30) at the moment. The environs of Sharpinsu village were dotted with strips of elevated land, stretches of ridges where people cultivated sesamum, groundnut and cotton. 'U' put up at --- U Tun Baw and --- Daw Aye Moe and did such chores as gathering groundnut, feeding cows, slicing maize stem / stalk, 'grinding groundnut for oil, and drawing water for the household with some other women labourers. There was one city-bred lad at the household. 'U' thought they had met somewhere and at last realized that he was no other than Maung Dewa whom she met at the alms donation procession of Pepinkon village. 'U' and the rest of the female labourers were all attracted to him. Maung Dewa, the youngest of the three sons of the religious meditation teacher U Phyo Din of Myo Hia took interest in farming and was on a study tour at Sharpinsu village.

#### Chapter (16)

Maung Dewa was not interested in becoming a township officer or subdivisional officer, but was bent on farming and cultivation. So he came to stay with U Tun Baw and Daw Aye Moe and joined the farmhands for getting a practical knowledge on the basics of agriculture. At the same time he studied books and treatises on agriculture brought in from abroad. Thus, 'U' and Maung Dewa met again in circumstances where the latter could not help being attracted by the former, physically afresh after giving birth to a child.

For 'U' who had fallen for him at first sight in Pepinkon village, it was a great effort to stop herself from falling again for Maung Dewa after what had happened to her misfortune / unfortunate affairs. The fact that Maung Dewa being there made it possible for him to be around 'U' to help her out with whatever there was / whenever the need arose.

#### Chapter(17)

While ‘U‘ and Maung Dewa were entertaining interest for each other, Ma Nan Sein, Ma Ngwe Khin, and Ma Shwe Hmone were also Maung Dewa. So, ‘U‘ thought she had better be a wiser girl than an emotional one concerning her relationship with Maung Dewa.

#### Chapter (18)

One day, the four young women (‘U‘ and other three) found themselves stuck at a run-down bridge on their way to the hermitage monastery. Maung Dewa appeared from nowhere and carried them across the stream one by one. Quite naturally, each young woman was entertaining her own wild dreams while being carried in the arms of Maung Dewa. ‘U‘ did not agree when her companions told her that Maung Dewa was interested in her only. That night ‘U‘ and the young women let their thoughts enjoy a free rein.

#### Chapter (19)

The month of Tabodwe (February) ushered in with its pleasant climate and the beautiful scenery of flowering plants. And it was at such a time while they were milking the cows, that Maung Dewa declared his love for ‘U‘ who despite the non-committal by word of mouth, became the former’s sweetheart.

#### Chapter (20)

From then on Maung Dewa was asking himself whether it was a true love that he had bestowed on ‘U‘. He went back home to sound out his parents’ opinion on that matter. At Myohla, he met Ma Khin Thu, the convent girl with whom his parents had given their consent to an arranged marriage, but he pretended not to see her. It so happened that his two elder brothers Maung Marga and Maung Thura were also in town. He kept a distance from them as there existed no warm relationship between them. When he mentioned his desire to get married, his father reminded him that he was to be wedded to Ma Khin Thu. Maung Dewa argued for his choice claiming that although she might not have much education, her high morality could well compensate for such a deficiency. At that time in Sharpinsu, ‘U‘ and her companions were secretly longing for him as during his absence. When he was to leave for Sharpinsu, his father U Phyodin told him of the heated argument he had had with one Pantha Maung Maung over the latter’s line of ancestry which he presumed to be a made up one. He felt sorry for his father over the affair.

#### Chapter(21)

Back in Sharpinsu, Maung Dewa found ‘U‘ alone in the house. They were enjoying each other’s company as lovers when they realized that they had to milk the cows and set out to work. ‘U‘ felt that she should not be falling in love with Maung Dewa because of her past, and therefore, declined his offer for marriage. That U Phyodin and Pantha Maung Maung had quarrelled at Mayukon, according to Maung Dewa reminded ‘U‘ of her tarnished / inglorious past events.

#### Chapter (22)

‘U‘ had in fact had fallen in love with Maung Dewa, but was very much worried / filled with anxiety over her own situation. She found various excuses for not accepting Maung Dewa’s proposal for marriage. However, she decided to open up to him eventually, and thus, made an appointment with him on the coming Full Moon day.

#### Chapter (23)

One day U Tunbaw was talking about a womanizer named Maung Thabyei who married one Ma Ei for her fortunes. However, since Ma Ei had been married at one time, the former parents-in-law reclaimed their farmland and properties (previously handed down as inheritance to their son, Ma Ei’s ex-husband, on his setting up a new household of his own with Ma Ei). That story made ‘U‘ more determined to withdraw from her affair with Maung Dewa.

#### Chapter (24)

One day, ‘U‘ had to accompany Maung Dewa to transport corn to other farms around, and on the way he reiterated his request for her hand in marriage. ‘U‘ in the course of retracing her biography, told him that she lived in Pepinkon village where she finished her primary education, and that she had a drunkard father who was addicted to toddy juice, the local intoxicant. But Maung Dewa cut in and made her stop telling about her. When they came to an old brick building where the mayors/counts/dukes of Pantha had resided, ‘U‘ mentioned that hers was a family descending from that nobility clan. Maung Dewa responded by saying that he valued the ancestral lineage of grand old families, and pressed on for her consent to marry him. ‘U‘ gave in on condition that she would write to her mother who lived in

Pepinkon, and she went **011** to recount their first meeting at the alms sharing/giving procession at that village.

#### Chapter (25)

In her reply letter, U's mother prohibited her from telling her past events to Maung Dewa, and 'U' thought of abiding by her wishes. Thus, the couple were having a good time and U Tun Baw was informed of their intention for wedlocks. The three companions of 'U' were glad for the couple, but at the same time each had her own share of suffering resulting from their undeclared love for Maung Dewa.

#### Chapter (26)

'U' was postponing the wedding date again and again and it so happened that there was not much work left to do at U Tun Baw's as the farming season came to a dose. So it was for 'U' to decide whether to return to Pepinkon or. find work in another village if she was not marrying Maung Dewa. Finally, she gave up the alternative and made known the wedding date. Maung Dewa bought wedding apparels for 'U' from town. When they went shopping the next day at Magyicho market someone spoke to 'U' about her affair with Pantha Maung Maung. That led to a quarrel between the speaker and Maung Dewa, and that night Maung Dewa talked about the afternoon event in his sleep. 'U' was worried for not telling Maung Dewa everything about her past which might cause trouble in the future since he proved to be very sentimental and obsessive. She wrote down everything and put the letter in Maung Dewa's room. However, Maung Dewa did not notice the letter and carried on living in a blissful mood. After about three days 'U' found her letter under a mat in Maung Dewa's room. Since the wedding was drawing very near 'U' tore up the letter once and for all. Then she tried to open up herself but Maung Dewa would not accept. Thus, they got married and left U Tunbaw's farm. On the way out they heard a crowing of the cock which was supposed to represent ill Omen.

#### Chapter (27)

'U' and Maung Dewa reached the Sitta Bungalow at about 4 o'clock in the evening. They did not want to put up along with some subdivisional officers who were already there and so they went to the old residence of the Pantha ancestors. They asked the cultivator family living nearby to cook for them and were chatting after the meal when the diamond jewelleryes from Maung Dewa's. parents arrived. A note attached said they were from Maung Dewa's adopted mother for her daughter-in-law. The cart carrying their belongings arrived late *because* of the

prevailing state of affairs when the couple left. It was learnt that Nan Sein jumped into the river/lake/water, Ngwe Khin drank toddy juice, and Shwe Hmon was in a melancholic mood brooding. ‘U’ felt sorry to hear all about her friends’ dilemma.

#### Chapter (28)

‘U’ and Maung Dewa agreed that they both confess their past mistakes / misdeeds. He said he had fornicated with a certain woman from / of the market when he was at a loose end after failing the school examination. However, when ‘U’ told him all about her past affair with Pantha Maung Maung, Maung Dewa got furious and was unable to forgive her. They then stayed apart after he told her how much he valued and ‘worshipped’ her as a lover, and as such, he could not reconcile with the fact / face the fact that she had been through such a blemished past. Morning came and he was still adamant on his stand concerning ‘U’, who said that she had flirted with the idea of committing suicide the previous night. Strange enough, Maung Dewa responded in the negative saying that it was an improper act to take one’s own life. At this revelation ‘U’ realized that what she needed was some manoeuvring on her part to make Maung Dewa revert to his former state of mind. However, she was such a plain and honest girl that she didn’t make use of that opportunity. Then, they talked of living separately.

#### Chapter (29)

The two packed up their belongings and went to bed at midnight. At about 2 am, Maung Dewa sleepwalked again. He entered U’s room and carried her outside. They came to a ruined bridge and ‘U’ was thinking it would be better for both of them to fall off the bridge and die. When they reached a cave in the compound of a dilapidated monastery Maung Dewa placed her in the cave and fell asleep. The cold outdoors was unbearable, so ‘U’ had to coax him to return home via another route. Next morning, Maung Dewa woke up oblivious of what had happened the previous “night“. When the bullock cart came for them they left the house on the way they had to call on U Tunbaw and Daw Aye Moe without revealing any hint of their true situation. According to Maung Dewa they were not to see each other, and he gave ‘U’ 50 bank notes of Kyat 10 denomination and took away the diamonds for safekeeping at a bank. He asked the cart driver to take ‘U’ to Pepinkon village, and taking an umbrella, resumed his journey to Myohia on foot. Back at Pepinkon her mother, Daw Buma blamed ‘U’ for disclosing all about her past life. The father was also feeling uneasy considering the fact that he had been boasting in the village about his daughter’s fortunes. ‘U’ made a gift of Kyats 250 in cash to her parents.

### Chapter (30)

At his home Maung Dewa explained that he had left his wife at her mother's and that he was going to Java to grow sugar cane. His mother led him into the bedroom and pressed for more details when tears betrayed him as he spoke of his wife. He said they were in mutual discord, and as he did so anger welled up in him with every thought about 'U'.

### Chapter (31)

Maung Dewa paid homage / respects to his parents prior to his departure for the island of Java, and went back to the old residence to where 'U' and he had put up at to collect some of his belongings left over there and to give some money to the old peasant. Then, he met Miss Shwe Hmon on the way and gave her a lift. He said he was going to Java leaving behind 'U' as he was not very pleased with her and if Miss Shwe Hmon was willing he would gladly invite her to accompany him. The girl came along, and on the way she confessed that her love for him was not less than that of 'U'. That reminded Maung Dewa of 'U' and memories of her made him reverse his decision to take Ma Shwe Hmon along with him to Java, and dropped her back at the village. Thus Maung Dewa left for Java via Rangoon.

### Chapter (32)

Eight or nine months went by without any written contact from Maung Dewa. Conditions did not improve much for 'U' even though she moved from village to village working to earn whatever she could. She had to comply with her parents' frequent requests for cash and so she had very little money left. One day 'U' received Kyats 300 from the bank endorsed by Maung Dewa. Soon after that came the request from her mother, Daw Buma for Ks. 250 to repair the house. After moving from village to village in search of (paid) work, 'U' settled for the offer by Miss Ngwe Khin, her one time working companion in picking to join up with her pulses at Sharpinsu village. Then, the house repairs charges seemed not adequate with what she had sent, for she received / there came a note from her mother asking for Kyats 50 more. She did since she had no choice. On her way to Kyutaw village 'U' came across the person with whom Maung Dewa had a quarrel at Myohla market. To avoid him she had to go off the road and run into the jungle where she spent a miserable night in low spirits.

### Chapter (33)

Late next morning on her way to Kyutaw village, 'U' had to disguise herself to ward off likely / possible trouble from the menfolk. She trimmed short her eyebrows and tied a white shawl from the chin covering the temples. She didn't tell Miss Ngwe Khin everything about Maung Dewa and herself but just mentioned that circumstances had them endure a temporary inconvenience to live apart. Then the two women discussed work.

#### Chapter (34)

The next day 'U' was found cutting paddy (corn) stalks together with Miss Ngwe Khin at a place about two miles from Kyutaw village. Miss Khin was found frequently taking her sips of toddy from what was supposed to be her water bottle. As they both missed Miss Nansein, they wrote to her and she came over one day. It so happened that the landlord they worked for was no other than the person who had quarrelled with Maung Dewa at Makyicho market and the one 'U' came across on her way to Kyutaw village. He was finding fault with her because of the quarrel with Maung Dewa, and she challenged him into cutting the corn / paddy stalks till the late hours. The three friends had a lot to chit-chat at work. Time and again the desire to go to Maung Dewa's parents occurred. However, 'U' resisted the idea while facing her miserable livelihood. One day she did go to see her parents-in-law but it didn't help as she only met with his two elder brothers.

#### Chapter (35)

While passing along not far from 'U', the two elder brothers were blaming their brother Maung Dewa for marrying a paddy transplanting woman worker. 'U' felt very bad about it and so instead of going to her parents-in-law, she returned to *Kyutaw Ywama* (village proper) (main or central part of a village) 'U' came across a group of people listening to a sermon delivered by one lay hermit at the *Zayat* (village common hall / rest house for travellers). When she passed the *Zayat* she found out that the preacher was no other than Pantha Maung Maung. When he saw 'U', he followed her and said that he would like to preach her/show her the right path to nirvana (heaven). She reproved him for what had happened in the past.

#### Chapter (36)

Pantha Maung Maung was in a state of agitation when he took out to read the letter by U Phyodin of Myohla. It was an invitation for him to discuss the Dhamma (Buddha's teachings). 'U' came back to Kyutaw village and carried on with her work. Then one day Pantha Maung Maung came to apologize and told 'U' he would take her as his legitimate wife. However, 'U' did not accept and informed him that she had been married to another man. She did not name who that person was, and could not explain why she had been toiling single-handed like that. It followed that Pantha Maung Maung had a lot of questions on those circumstances. So much so that he and 'U' argued till they had a quarrel. One day, 'U' wrote an apology to Maung Dewa. Pantha Maung Maung came one evening as 'U' was alone in the house. As she could not avoid him a conversation took place between the two. The topic turned to Dhamma in which

‘U’ repeated Maung Dewa’s discussions on Dhama to Pantha Maung Maung. He was quite embarrassed by what ‘U’ said and his eagerness to touch on that matter also disappeared into thin air.

#### Chapter (37)

Four or five days after that event Pantha Maung Maung showed up again at the worksite dressed in new apparels and said he couldn’t abandon ‘U’ but kept on loving her as he did in the past. Out of anger, ‘U’ threw a copper bowl at him which cut his lips. He retraced his steps but said he would return in the evening.

#### Chapter (38)

That evening the landlord, U Tauk Htein, came and told the workers to continue working with the moonlight as he wanted were work to be done. At about 4:30 pm Pantha Maung Maung turned up but ‘U’ and the farmhands kept on working. U Tauk Htein told ‘U’ to go and meet Pantha Maung Maung, who walked towards her and told her about her parents and brothers and sisters at home. ‘U’ felt very sorry for her family. Then they returned home and as ‘U’ entered the place, Pantha Maung Maung retraced his steps. That night ‘U’ wrote an apology to Maung Dewa. That letter was sent to Maung Dewa via U Phyodin who believed that ‘U’ was with her family. Meanwhile, Maung Dewa in Java was much disturbed and filled with worries by his thoughts about ‘U’. One day U’s brother and sister came and informed her that their mother was seriously ill, and so she returned home to Pepinkon.

#### Chapter (39)

Once at Pepinkon her mother’s illness improved a bit while her father, U Pan Aung, suffered from ill health apart from his business not doing well. Therefore, ‘U’ has burning old leaves, twigs and other rubbish as a means of preparing the land for cultivation when Pantha Maung Maung showed up and told ‘U’ that he would work with her on the farm. She was very reluctant to accept his offer. Then, all of a sudden, her father suffered a paralytic stroke and died leaving the family in debts. The family had to vacate the house since it had been an unredeemed mortgaged property that the creditor had graciously allowed U Pan Aung to put up during his lifetime. Pantha Maung Maung invited her family to come and stay with him at his house, but ‘U’ refused saying that she could rent a hut in Pantha town.



#### Chapter (40)

In such a time of troubles 'U' harboured some grudges on Maung Dewa and wrote him a letter to that effect. Next day early in the morning the family moved to Pantha town with their two cartloads of belongings. When they reached the town they found the hut they had reserved for rent had been taken up by some other people. So they had to pile up their belongings beside the walls of a pagoda and put out a make-shift residence there. Pantha Maung Maung came to, the pagoda and was lying on the tombstones in the pagoda compound when found by 'U' who suffered a shock and became unconscious at the sight of him. Later on, when she came to, she declared that she would have nothing to do with Pantha Maung Maung and so the latter left. U's comrades, Ma Ngwe Khin and Ma Shwe Hmon, could not bear to see their friend in such troubles and wrote to Maung Dewa. At that time Maung Dewa was back at home but his failing health was causing him to be so frail that hardly anyone could recognize him. U Phyo Din gave him the letter from 'U' which made him very sorry for her. The next day Maung Dewa wrote to his parents-in-law at Pepinkon village only to receive the reply that 'U' was no longer living in Pepinkon, and that they had no right to tell him where she was. Maung Dewa was heart broken when he reread U's letter from Kyutaw village. Then, as he was packing for the journey in search of 'U' he received the letter from Ma Ngwe Khin and Ma Shwe Hmon.

#### Chapter (41)

Maung Dewa went by cart to downtown Kyutaw and enquired. He learnt that she had worked there but had gone back to Pepinkon. So he set out for Pepinkon and when he came to the village monastery, memories of their first meeting came back to his mind. He was not very successful with the villagers on the question of the whereabouts of 'U' but eventually it was learnt that Daw Buma and the children had moved out to Pantha town and Maung Dewa traced their tracks to that town. Daw Buma did not seem very pleased to see Maung Dewa. Nevertheless, she informed him that 'U' lived in Thongyi and to that place Maung Dewa arrived at midnight. He went on searching in town and finally came to a mansion by the name of 'Sabeimyaing', where 'U' put up with a lady called Pantha Ma Ma. The landlady and 'U' were known to have been very much in resemblance. Maung Dewa got there and explained to her about his return and asked to forgive him for causing all these misfortunes she had faced. Unfortunately, he was told that what had been done could not be salvaged, and that she had come back to Pantha Maung Maung. These circumstances made both of them speechless for a while and when Maung Dewa came to, he set off aimlessly from that very spot.

## Chapter (42)

At the inn Maung Dewa got a telegram from his father informing him of the wedding of his elder brother Maung Marga and Ma Khinthu. He was waiting for the train at the station when his thoughts wavered back to past events. It made him want to leave Thoungyi for good. As he walked along the main road out of it he turned to have a look at Thoungyi town. And after a while he felt the urge to take a last look and turned for the second time and noticed someone running towards him. He stood there and waited for that person who turned out to be no other than 'U' herself. She explained that she had stabbed Pantha Maung Maung to death and had run to join him. Then, the two made their way into deep jungle taking up unbeaten paths. 'U' was hidden in the jungle while Maung Dewa secured snacks from village convenience stores.

Thus, they headed towards the foot of the Yoma hills and one evening reached a large house belonging to the owner of a rubber plantation. There they ate up the snacks they had brought and spent the night.

## Chapter (43)

Maung Dewa and 'U' spent five days at the house owned by the owner of the rubber plantation. On the Sabbath day (of the month) the housekeeper woman came but did not wake them up. They felt they had been found by someone and therefore left the house. At midday they approached Taungtharyar town and Maung Dewa bought some snacks. As they continued their journey they came to huge old stone edifice which was the former residence of An monks (members of a deviant sect of Buddhism) They, being exhausted, slept on the great stone slab. Next day at dawn they found two persons approaching, one from each side converging towards them. They turned out to be the ones coming to arrest 'U'. Dewa pleaded with the two not to wake up 'U' as she was fast asleep. When 'U' woke up she faced her uninvited guests and said she was ready to go with them. One morning at dawn Dewa and Ma Kyay Mmyin climbed up the Daw Bokesone Pagoda mound, when they heard the bazaar clock struck six quite faintly from a distance. That was the moment when 'U' was hanged at the central jail in the Southwest corner of Narathin City in accordance with the government court's sentence to hang her by hanging.

## Overview / Review

The novel 'Pantha Ma Sar U' was brought out by the Nagani (red dragon) Publishing House for the first time in 1939, before the Second World War. It was very popular among the public since that time. In April, 1951 it was published for the second time by the *Pyithu Alin*

(Peoples' Light) Publishing House. At that time the Ministry of Education prescribed the novel as a High School text. The third impression came in July, 1951, the fourth by the Bagan Publishing House in 1967, and the fifth by *Pho Yar Zar* Publishing House in 1977. Therefore, it can be considered as a successful and influential novel in the world of Myanmar literature. The novel, 'Pantha Ma Sar U', is Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', Burmanized and remodelled by Thakin Ba Thoung. The original English novel published in 1891 is recognized as a classic up to the present day. Maung Tun Thu who in 1984, translated "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" into Burmese with the title 'Tess' has the following to say in his preface.

Tess' and I met about 40 years ago. But, I didn't know it was Tess, then. I have a reason for not knowing her. I met her as a miserable Myanmar rural girl called 'Pantha Ma Sar U', not as an English country lass. In fact, "Pantha Ma Sar U" was the Myanmar version of the English country lass, 'Tess' adroitly created by veteran writer Thakin Ba Thoung. Because of that rural girl, the novel, 'Pantha Ma Sar U' by Thakin Ba Thoung had made a historic milestone in Myanmar literature. It is a novel most popular among the reading public even to this day.

The novel was not a translation by Thakin Ba Thoung, but an adaptation which highlighted contemporary novel composition and characterization of human nature which was most successfully depicted. The plot, the characters, and the settings attracted the readers due to the creative skills of the author. A native of rural Upper Myanmar, Thakin Ba Thoung was able to make use of authentic Myanmar expressions which enhanced the novel's validity as regards the plot. The novel 'Pantha Ma Sar U' was prescribed as a High School Myanmar Text in the 1950s. Furthermore, Thakin Ba Thoung's 'Pantha Ma Sar U' has been a novel much referred to by the Myanmar literati for the study of creativity, composition, and characterization in the history of Myanmar literature up to the present time.

### 3. Myint Myint San, Ma Sar Oo of Pan Thar

The novel 'Ma Sar Oo of Pan Thar' could be viewed as an ordinary love story that you might like to read but the author had portrayed the traditions and the way of life of Myanmar people in it. It was a touching, true story of the descendants of the Pan Thar 'Myosar (governor)'. The very beautiful maiden Ma Sar Oo of Pay Pin Gon village was the eldest among three siblings who looked after her parents U Pan Aung and Daw Bu Ma. Although poor she was not overly fond of wealth and status but cherished true love. Maung Maung was not a descendant of the noble family but had called himself Maung Maung of Pan Thar, in imitation of the members of the nobility. He was a rich merchant from Myauk Kon town who was a scoundrel and a philanderer seducing beautiful women. Maung Deva was from Myo Hla town. He was from a respectable family, of good temperament, had attended an English school and had a degree, and was interested in farming. His father was a sage who taught people how to meditate.

It was the very hot season during the months of Tabodwe and Tabaung. Only at such times would parrot trees and red silk cotton trees blossom in full and give the appearance of the trees being covered with red carpets. When the sounds of birds were added to the landscape the small village of Pay Pin Gon became as beautiful as it could be. There was a procession of people going to the monastery to pay obeisance and the maidens and young men of the village were enjoying themselves to the accompaniment of music and dances. At that moment there was a man who failed to appreciate the beautiful surroundings and had no interest in the offering made by the villagers to the monks. He was U Pan Aung, the father of Ma Sar Oo, who had come back from the market after (selling firewood and) earning money for the family. Someone had addressed him as 'Myosarmin' (Hon. Governor). It was Saya Chein who studied historic, ancient manuscripts written on palm leaves and tablets who told U Pan Aung that he was no ordinary citizen but a descendant of the governor of Pan Thar town and that the facts were recorded on bronze tablets. He said that the great, great grandfather of his was the eldest son of a dependable minister of King Alaungphaya who founded the third Myanmar kingdom. The king was pleased with him and had given him the town of Pan Thar. If there were Myanmar kings at that time U Pan Aung would have been the governor of Pan Thar. Poor old U Pan Aung was pleasantly surprised to hear that and continued home in the elegant manner of a governor. Friends of Ma Sar Oo saw her father acting like a governor and teased her and Ma Sar Oo was greatly embarrassed. It was then that she met eye to eye with Maung Deva of Myo Hla town who was on a visit there. It was an

unforgettable encounter for the two young people. When Ma Sar Oo reached home after paying obeisance at the monastery, she heard extraordinary news from her mother. She found it hard to believe or disbelieve what she had heard and scenes she had witnessed earlier in the day came back to her. On the third day after the incident her mother sent her to seek help from the relatives in Pan Thar town. At first Ma Sar Oo was not interested in the fact that she was a descendant of the governor of Pan Thar town. But her father was overjoyed at the knowledge that he was a descendant of the governor of Pan Thar and had taken to the bottle ever since and could not go to the market. Ma Sar Oo and her younger brother had to drive the bullock cart to the market and she was worried about the welfare of her family and decided to look up her relatives in Pan Thar town. When she arrived at Pan Thar town she easily found the house of Khin Khin Gyi of Pan Thar. She found that Khin Khin Gyi was totally blind. She only saw her son, Maung Maung of Pan Thar. Ma Sar Oo told him that she was a descendant of the governor of Pan Thar and every other thing. Maung Maung of Pan Thar was not a descendant of the noble family and he usually did not let go of pretty women when he saw them. It was an opportune moment for him and he reassured Ma Sar Oo that he would give her employment after he had consulted his mother and sent her back home.

After about three days a letter arrived to fetch her; it said that there was employment for her. There were food and clothing for her parents and siblings. While Ma Sar Oo was attending to the needs of Khin Khin Gyi of Pan Thar, she had to endure various kinds of harassment from Maung Maung of Pan Thar. About a month later they inevitably came to have a relationship. After about six months, when Maung Maung of Pan Thar failed to make an honourable proposal, Ma Sar Oo came back to her village carrying her baby in her womb. She gave birth to a boy but the child died in infancy.

After the death of her child she went to Shar Pin Su village to forget the unpleasant things and find some work to earn a living.

It was then that she again met Maung Deva, the one she had loved since her youth. She worked as a labourer plucking groundnuts and reaping sesame; Maung Deva was educated and was studying the yield of groundnuts and sesame. (They lived in the same compound.) As time went on, they came to love one another and Maung Deva asked for his parents' blessing and married Ma Sar Oo. Although Ma Sar Oo tried time and again to tell Maung Deva about her past before the marriage she had not been successful and when she at last told him after the marriage Maung Deva was very upset and leaving Ma Sar Oo, he went to a distant place. Ma Sar Oo came back to her village and endured various hardships. Although she tried, she could not reach Maung Deva. Her father died and they were evicted from the village as the

lowly and had to move to another place. It was the time when she faced various difficulties and she married Maung Maung of Pan Thar. After about one and a half years Maung Deva was no longer angry at Ma Sar Oo and came back looking for her and found her. Ma Sar Oo did not love Maung Maung of Pan Thar; she had been deceived many times into believing that Maung Deva would not come back; she was ill-treated by him; and all these things led her to stab Maung Maung of Pan Thar to death. She was reunited with her love, Maung Deva, and had a blissful time together. In the end she was caught and sentenced to death by hanging. Before being captured she asked Maung Deva to look after and marry her young sister Ma Kyay Myin.

Ma Sar Oo was descended from the governor of Pan Thar but had to contend the slings and arrows of life and she worked for the welfare of her parents and siblings. She had married someone she did not love and stabbed him to death when he taunted her and insulted the man she loved. In the end she valiantly redressed the injustice with total disregard for her life. She calmly accepted the sentence handed down to her and it was heartrending. Maung Deva and Ma Kyay Myin gazed at the gallows from the platform of the pagoda built on a hill. Tears rolled down their cheeks when they saw the black flag reached half mast. It was the execution by hanging and the end of Ma Sar Oo of Pan Thar, a descendant of the governor of Pan Thar.

#### **4. Ye Htut, TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES OR PANTHAR MA SAR-U**

Periods in history and literature fade into one another as night into day. After glancing, as we have done, at some of the principals of our origins it is wise to remember, not periods, but a few peak names which stand for summits of ability. They are: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Ben Johnson, Spenser, Sir Francis Bacon, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Defoe, Addison, Samuel Johnson, Gibbon, Fielding, Blake, Burns, Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelly, Keats Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, Macaulay, Hazlitt, Lamb, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Swinburne.

And then those nearer today: Hardy, Meredith, G.B/Shaw, Conrad Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, Yeats, Chesterton, Kipling, D. H. Lawrence, Somerset Maugham, Masefield, and Aldous Huxley, whose work-or much of it-will continue to live for many a year.<sup>1</sup>

Among them or in the stream of early literature, Thomas Hardy is the one whose name along with whose works has maintained its authoritativeness and reputation throughout the course of literary history until now.

Thomas Hardy belongs to the age of Victorian Literature-the body of works written in England during the reign of Victoria (1837-1901),a long period of magnificent achievement. Its leading lights include, in the novel Charles Dickens, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, William Makepea Thackeray, and a host of only slightly lesser names.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was an English novelist and poet. Hardy brought to the English novel a sense of tragic pessimism expressed with stoical restraint. Nothing in the external circumstances of his life explains this point of view. He was brought up in Dorsetshire (the Wessex of his literary work and his closeness to simple rural life probably helped him to penetrate to the central motives of existence. After a local apprenticeship and a stint with a London architectural firm, Hardy returned to Dorsetshire, preferring to try his hand at writing even though he had won two architectural prize.<sup>3</sup>

In his novels, he set his story-line in a rural life in which the characters, naturally impoverished, are created to the harsh life as well as serial outcome of it. To prove that he enlivened his characters through the sense of tragic pessimism, the short portion entitled. 'The Tragic Spirit in Thomas Hardy' that is included under the topic of Victorian Prose by W.J. Bytom can be referred back.

Unlike his Victorian contemporaries, who survived the 1870-1880 epidemic of doubt and maintained an optimistic spirit whether they looked on the bright or the dark side of things, Hardy took a very somber view of man's life on earth. Having a philosophic cast of mind, he sought an explanation for the tragic patterns which so often, it seemed to him, formed the lives of individuals, and he found his explanation in the hypothesis of God as being not all powerful and beneficent but a blind Will existing in and through the universe, powerful to create, but unconscious of its own creations. In a poem he asks:

Has some Vast Imbecility  
Mighty to build and blend,  
But impotent to tend,  
Framed us in jest, and left us now to  
hazardry?

.....

This outlook is surely the extreme of pessimism.<sup>4</sup>

In his great novels, he writes of simple men and women, who, having some dominant aim such as .....desire for married happiness beyond her unfortunate past in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, are frustrated by adverse circumstance and ill-luck, and find a fate tragically different from their hopes.<sup>5</sup> So Tess is such a kind of tragic character in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. To clearly define it, Tess is more than 'tragic'.

Another interesting view of Hardy's novels can be sought in another book. It was written by Richard Church about British Authors- a twentieth Century Gallery with 53 Portraits.

Of the many "regional" writers in English literature, Thomas Hardy may be considered the greatest. The scene of his work is his native district of Wessex which comprises the several counties in the south-west of England, with London at one end and Land's end at the other, with Oxford at the top, and Southampton at the base. Within this area of such varied beauty, his rustic characters play their part during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Hardy's simple genius makes their actions and emotions universal

It is significant that in almost every one of Hardy's fourteen novels, and in a great many of his short stories, as well as in his vast epic-drama 'The Dynasts', the opening scene discloses a road, with human figures progressing along it. Further, a characteristic opening device is for Hardy to prelude this raising of the curtain by a certain cosmic commentary, with astronomic references in which the earth is seen as a speck of dust in the heavens.



.....this device is a direct consequence of his attitude towards life. One can hardly call it a philosophy, nor would he have done so himself. Indeed, his whole concern was to have no label attached to him. He refused to join the Rationalist Press Association, saying that” though I am interested in the Society I feel it to be one which would naturally compose itself rather of writers on philosophy, science, and history, than of writers of imaginative works, whose effects depend largely on detachment. By belonging to a philosophic association, imaginative writers place themselves in this difficulty, that they are misread as propagandist when they mean to be simply artistic and delineative.

...such, however, was the moral stiffness of English society in the Victorian nineties, that Hardy’s novels, in spite of their exquisite gentleness of spirit, their rich poetic fullness, and their profound moral outlook, roused a storm of protest which alarmed and disgusted him.<sup>6</sup>

The above-mentioned also vivifies the attitude and style of Hardy in literature. He did not naturally to be bias. He wants to be natural. So his works were based on grass root-people and the relating handful of men who sought pleasure in torturing the lives of the down-trodden flower-like people, especially those living in rural areas.

So being not attached to disguises and masks of true nature, he tried to portray his characters as they were in reality. By trying to create those living in villages, in lack of education, wider scope of knowledge and they became the subjects to those who played tricks on them. The critic may say something about his works as the symbols of tragic pessimism but the true life of rural people are of the same characters in Hardy’s works. He tried to paint the true colour of his picture that draws the attraction of the readers and sustains its reputation for nearly a century.

Richard Church gives the full remark to one of his novels. It is Tess of the D’Urbervilles.

‘The most popular, and the one which instantly brought him wide fame, is Tess of the D’Urbervilles.’<sup>7</sup>

Another comment on his literary attitude can be traced back in ‘English Literature, Volume V, 1830-1880.

‘The key to Hardy’s attitude as a literary artist may be found in an essay published by him in 1888:

“The conduct of the upper classes is screened by conventions, and thus the real character is not easily seen; if it is seen it must be portrayed subjectively; whereas in the lower walks,

conduct is a direct expression of the inner life; and thus character can be directly portrayed through the act. In one case the author's word has to be taken as to the nerves and muscles of his figures; in the other they can be seen."<sup>8</sup>

It seemed to him that the kind of universe in which we live was, by its very nature, not merely in different but actively hostile to man. It was a view that had some unfortunate results. In his eagerness to show his characters as victims of blind forces- ironically designated in 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles, as 'the President of the Immortals'- he of the turns them into puppets and forces them into impossibly theatrical situations. Thus Tess is hounded by so many misfortunes that at the end she tends to become a figure of melodrama against the luridly painted backcloth of Stonehenge'.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Tess of the D'Urbervilles, A pure woman, by Thomas Hardy or the tragic epic of Tess Durbeyfield is the story of a "well-meaning" man's misguided cruelty to the woman he believed he loved. Yet it is far more than that; for in the tale of adorable Tess the milkmaid, with her pure warm heart and her eager human impulses, we discern, with growing horror, the bitter thread of destiny weaving-weaving and tightening as time passes, until at last it closes round her young throat on the scaffold.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with the condensed account of the story, Parson Tringham told Jack Durbeyfield, the local haggler in the village of Marlott, that the latter was actually the lineal descendant of the noble and ancient family of D'Urbervilles, now deemed extinct and with their possessions scattered. Jack's eldest daughter Tess, beautiful and unselfish, was also urged by his father to see a rich lady named D'Urberville out at Tran ridge although she had seen a handsome Angle Clare, a vicar's son and wished she had danced with her during their many time revels.

At Tran ridge, Alee D'Urbervilles received her and arranged to her to be engaged as poultry-maid by the aforementioned rich but blind mother. Alee D'Urbervilles had, in truth, less claim to the ancient lineage than Tess herself. The son of a deceased merchant who had taken the name-D'Urbervilles. He was struck by her beauty and bent on seducing her. One day Alee rescued her from a slight brawl in which some local villagers had involved her. D'Urberville took her on his horse to a remote wood. Tess feel asleep, weary from a long day's work, with a tear on her cheek. There was darkness and silence everywhere around. Tess had to marry Alee and later they parted each other. A baby was born but it died. She became a milkmaid in Talbothays where she found Angle Clare, the young man she had seen once before. Angel was educated, reserved, subtle, and sad one. He was a dairy-farmer. Tess admired and

respected him In the hot, scented summer days her passion grew, and Clare's too. He wooed her for several times. She also loved him so passionately that she struggled to make her confession that she was not a Durbeyfield but a D'Urberville- a descendant of the family who owned the old house both of them were passing by. She dismissed the past-trod upon it and put it out, as one treads on a coal that is smoldering and dangerous.

They married. But Tess told Angel without flinching about her acquaintance with Alee D'Urberville. They lived through a despairing day or two, more widely apart than before they were lovers. Both of them lived apart and Angel sailed for Brazil a few weeks later. She hoped that her husband would return or write to her to join him in Brazil but no letter came. Driven to desperation by Angel's silence, she went to visit her parents one Sunday. As she approached the vicarage she overheard a slighting remark by one of Angel's brothers, as to his 'ill-considered marriage to a dairymaid'. She turned back, tears running down her face.

At the vicarage, Alee D'Urberville, who had been her seducer, was than a preacher. Both of them met each other. Shortly afterwards he came to Tess as she worked in the fields, with a proposal. He wished to make amends for the wrong done to her and threatened to make him her husband again. She wrote a pitiful letter to Angel to save her from what threatened her. In the mean time, her father died. Meanwhile Alee D'Urberville appeared and offered to take care of them all at Tran ridge. She refused his proposal stormily. Meanwhile two loyal friends of Tess wrote to Angel Clare to save his wife, if he did love her, from an enemy in disguise of a friend. But they didn't reach him. Angel Clare came home and read two letters given by his parents. But he was late when he found Tess in a different and fashionable villa. Tess said she had waited for him but in vain. So she had remarried Alee who took care of her and her mother and young children. But much to the astonishment, the passionate love to Angel that mutely stayed within her inner sub-conscious mind was so severely aroused to kill the cruel and hateful seducer. Both of them met again and joined in an endless kiss when the faint steps were heard. Finally Tess' life was ended by the justice.

Thomas Hardy himself said to the readers about his opinion on his work later editions in March 1912:

'This novel being one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after an event in her experience which has usually been as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least as the virtual ending of her enterprises and hopes, it was quite contrary to avowed conventions that the public should welcome the book, and agree with me in holding that there was something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded said of a well known catastrophe'<sup>11</sup>

It has been over one-hundred and twenty years since it was first published in 1891/ After forty-five years after first publication, Thakhin (Master) Ba Thoung took the whole story of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and completely turned the total English Landscape into pure Myanmar location. All the main characters freshly adorned with traditional garbs appeared in 1936. "He adopted work in Myanmar was first published by Nagani Publishing House (Red-dragon Book Club) in 1936. The second edition was come out in April in 1951 as published by Pyithu Ahlin Publishing House (The Light for the People). The Department of Education prescribed the adopted 'Panthar Ma Sa-U' for high school text in all over the country. The third also appeared in July in 1951. The fourth and fifth were made by Pagan Publishing House in 1967 and Hpho Raja Publishing House in 1977 respectively. Thus it can be guessed that the adopted work of Tess, Panthar Ma Sa-U had the great impact on the world of Myanmar Literature."<sup>12</sup>

The original novel of Thomas Hardy won the great fame in the whole globe. The Myanmar adopted Version by Thakin Ba Thoung still attracts a great deal of attention in Myanmar. Even Maung Tun Thu's directly translated work has also been published for two times in Myanmar. We have to query the readers internally and externally about why Tess still survives through ages. My response to this query is that Tess is a real human that is made up of natural human characters-love, hatred, admiration of truth, ignorance, stupidity, honesty, etc. Tess is always alive among the people, especially those who have been tortured, oppressed, ignored, and treated with inhumanly forces. Even though some of the critics may label Thomas Hardy as a tragic pessimist, Hardy is the true representative of the impoverished people of the world.

In Myanmar, the reason of why Myanmar readers admire it is that Tess is a real Myanmar damsel in a rural society. A village girl maybe beautiful with perfect health in physicality, she is actually deprived of human rights if compared with the ones born of rich family in urban areas.

The reason of why Thakhin Ba Thoung chose the story and themes of Tess to be adopted is that Tess is the real Myanmar as especially the one, replica of Tess under colonialism. So Tess became Ma Sa-U and D'Urberville was transformed as Panthar lineage. What is more significant in Panthar M Sa-U is that the transformed characters in Myanmar novel are embellished with Myanmar cultural identities. For example, the dancing party in Tess was changed into a paying-homage of the Presiding Monk of the village and Maung Deva ( the equivalent of Angel Clare in Tess) was so traditionally able to play a Myanmar harp that he

showed his artistic capacity among the village girls and sang a traditional and classical song entitled “the celestial Palace”. Thus Myanmar readers with no knowledge of English and the text to the Tess of the D’Urberville will have no sense of Panthar Ma Sa-U as being adopted from an English novel Thakin Ba Thoung took Tess as a representation of a poor Myanmar village girl, trying, at the same time, to portray the real typical Myanmar girl, honest, beautiful, but ignorant as she is in lack of education under the British colonialism.

Thakin Ba Thoung was born in Phonkone village, Gwecho village Track in Natmauk, the birthplace of General Aung San, the Father of Independence of Myanmar, on Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 1901. His father was a Sitke, the second-in-command of a military unit during the time of Myanmar King Thibaw in the last dynasty and became a governor of the town, Taungdwingyi. He stood first in the fifth-grade exam in the whole township, won the governor’s gold medal. He got the scholarship in the eighth grade. He led the first students’ strike against colonialism as one of the leaders of Mandalay, the city of the upper Myanmar. He boycotted the eleventh grade exam for ever and became a national politician and attended the Yangon Students’ meeting as a student representative of the strike. He had been a national school teacher, imprisoned, an English newspaper editor, assistant-librarian, an editor for the Ganthaloka Magazine, and a tutor for translation at the oriental studies of Yangon University in the years of 1920 to 1930.

He was the first founder of Dohbama Asiayone ( The Association of We, the Myanmar) in 1930. He wrote altogether 40 books and all of them were famous in the history of Myanmar literature. Among them, he was specially reputed for his two books, Panthar Ma SA-U, the adopted novel of Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Tahtauntanya Ponpyinmya, the translated stories of one-thousand and one Arabian nights.<sup>13</sup>

Panthar Ma Sa-U was first published by the Nagani (Red-dragon) Book Club.

In the 1930s, there sprang up in the precincts of Rangoon University a literary movement called Khitsan (Experiment for a new age) which has left a deep impression on all subsequent Burmese Writing.<sup>14</sup>

“In the circle of university intellectuals, students writers tried to renew the literary style while others were making great effort to research the political doctrines that can be intrinsically effective on the desire and the nature of Myanmar. Thus Nagani Book club was founded among the young politicians as well as writers.

The objective of the Nagani was clear and pre-determined. It tried to prophesy the forthcoming form of the free Myanmar. There were three objectives: to understand the true doctrine and to be a systematically organized in attacking the colonialism; and to deliberate the steps and forces of those attacking colonialism by other means.

The plays, novels and political and philosophical literature sprung up from the Nagani Book Club had the purpose of sending off the literature to reach the people. The Nagani circle played the successful role in propaganda literature on political theory and practice.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the significances of the year 1930s was the great political awakening after the development of the role of G.C/B/ A/ (General Council of Buddhists Association) based on the national movement. The spirit of Anti-colonialism within the heart of Myanmar people could be aroused and that made a good deal of forming forces in attempting to regain independence.

Thakin Ba Thoung actively participated in reviving the birth of Myanmar tradition through his significant literary prose, reminding Myanmar of loving our native land and respecting our literature. His collection of literature include translated works on science and philosophy. Whatever he wrote had impact on the youths in that period as he was capable of creating those ideas from other countries in the styles of Myanmar culture.<sup>16</sup>

Panthar Ma Sa-U (Tess) became a very poor Myanmar women much of Myanmar writing styles in prose were taken from English.<sup>17</sup>

“If it is said about modern classical literature, the good adopted father of other people’s off springs- Panthar Ma Sa-U by Thakhin Ba Thoung cannot be omitted. First, I did not know it is an adopted one. I think it is his own daughter. But later I came to realize it isn’t. But because of his skilled upbringing, Panthar Ma Sa-U became one of the Myanmar modern classical literature as it has been printed again and again and prescribed as a school text.”<sup>18</sup>

In accord with the aforesaid findings, a question arose whether it is Tess of the D’Urbervilles or Panthar ma Sa-U. Both of them are inseparable in its phenomenon and essence. Thomas Hardy was globally acclaimed as one of the greatest writers in the Victorian period. Thakin Ba Thoung was also praised for his art of adoption of a famous English novel, attiring it into his own landscape, garbs, and cultures. He perfectly made it a real Myanmar. Both of them are sure to shine the lights of literature on the earth, saying something that the power of literature can create and change the mindset of humanity. That is why numerous writers keep

on holding their power of literature as it is mightier than the arms that cannot totally change the concept and minds of people and that just hurt the physicality superficially.

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### III. Material on Ba Thoung, *Oil*

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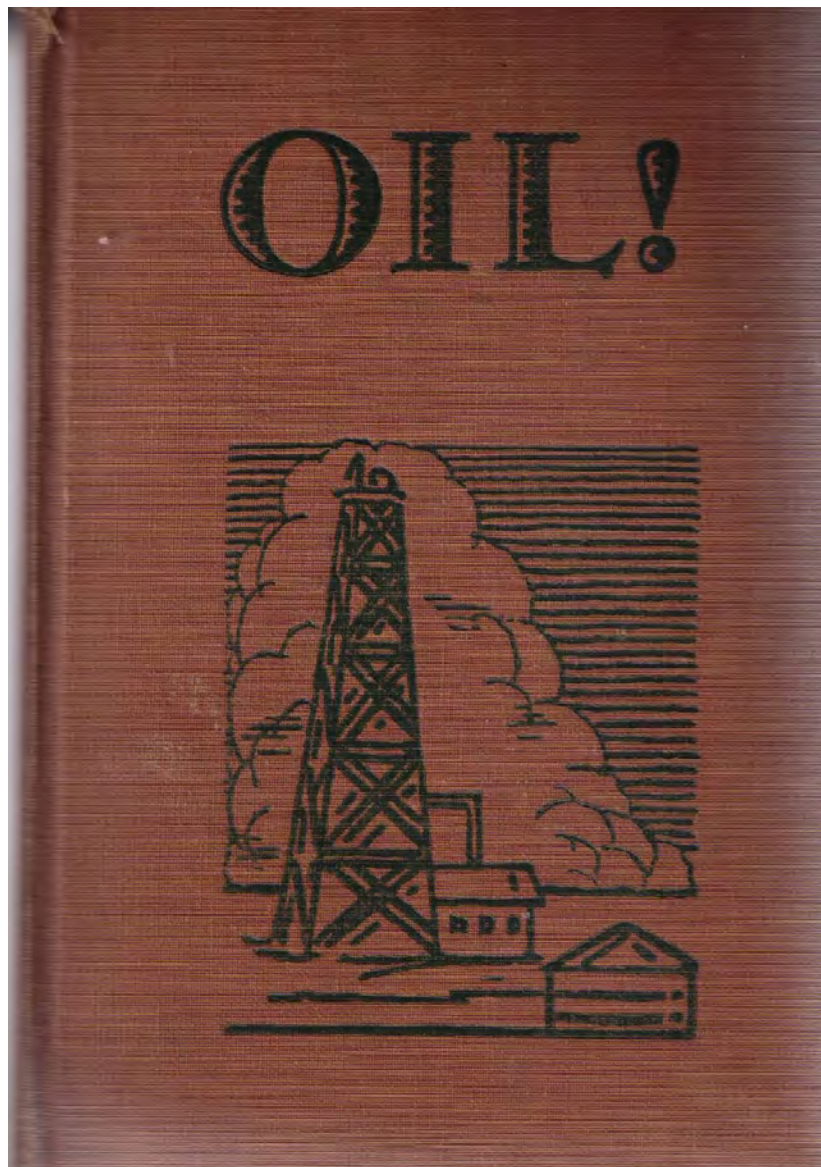
**Yangon: Myanmar Book Distributors (*mjama pyi sa ou' phjan. chi jei:*), 1941. 191 pages.**

Published on the 2 January 1941 in 2000 copies selling for 8 annas each. It tells the reader to look forward to the publication of the second volume. It is based on Upton Sinclair's 'Oil' but was rewritten to match the situation in Myanmar. As the author wrote the book following choice of the publisher, U Htun Aye, *he honours U Htun Aye and includes 75 pictures to honour U Htun Aye* [??? not clear /GN]. The book includes a short biography of the author. The author and the publisher announce their vow that when the Myanmar people read this book, an era will come to its end. And it actually did cause considerable repercussions. The book received positive reviews from U ... Kyaw Aung, Dagon U Chin Sein, U Khin Aung (editor of ... *sanei thatin:*), Daw Ma Ma Khin (member of the Hluttaw), the editor of the chou'kjei... newspaper, Buddhism monk U Wimala, Minthuwun, U ... Mya Myo Lwin, Dagon Natshin, U Myo Nyunt (*tou:te'jei:*). This demonstrates that this book was well received among the Myanmar readership. One of the reviews states: Make sure that you read the book 'Oil'. Try to find and buy it. If you can't buy it, rent it. If you don't have the money to rent it, steal it and read it!

[Translator's remark: Some parts of the original text were cut off or not readable. I have tried to fill in wherever the lacking words were obvious, have had to guess in in a few instances and left blank in others. GN]



Title Page



Title Page of Sinclair, *Oil!*

## **2. Aung Min Htut, Review on “ Oil ” by Upton Sinclair and Its Adaptation into Myanmar by Thakin Ba Thoung**

Upton Sinclair published his book in 1927 and Thakin Ba Thoung adapted it into Burmese in 1940 just before the Japanese invaded Burma. In his preface, the translator wrote of convenience in printing in two parts in Burmese and because he was pressed for time, he apologized for condensing much of the book and if the readers found it a good read, to heap 75% of praises on his publisher Tun Aye, but if found wanting, to blame cent per cent on him, the translator. For reasons unknown, Part B of the Burmese translation was never published. Maybe because the situation was worsening as the Japanese had already invaded the Far East and some countries of South East Asia. Maybe he was pressed for time as he had admitted, or maybe the first part was not a good seller as expected or because of the imminent Japanese invasion.

Sinclair did not write a foreword or preface for his book but just a half-page note of disclaiming similarities of his characters with actual living persons except the three surviving American presidents. U Ba Thoung, on the other end, had a four page note on his profile and his photograph, followed by a definite foreword and also an author's note.

His profile was a definite good read. It said he was just an ordinary person and not a devil, with no horns on his head but luck seemed always to favor him. While boys of his age went around with their longyis looped around their shoulders and killing off lizards with their catapults for no apparent reason, he stood first in the whole district in Burmese literature in his fourth standard. He said he won the prize not because he was good but his opponents were dumb. He also won a scholarship in Anglo-Burmese 7<sup>th</sup> standard, but in his 10<sup>th</sup> Std, when the National Day and the general strike transpired, it was the end of his official schooling. His luck was still with him when he won the first prize in five of six translation competitions arranged by Mr. Furnivall and U Pe Maung Tin. This resulted in a new ruling that no one would be entitled to win a prize in six consecutive competitions. In 1930, he won kyats 1000 of Prince of Wales prize from the university. Before he joined Gandha Lawka as an editor, he wrote a play and then worked a stint as a tutor in translation in college. Later, he joined Doh Bama Asiayone and talked of 'Thakin' policies. He had a definite destiny with goals. He wrote 'The flower Seller Ma Sar Oo' while in imprisonment. Although his livelihood depended on his writings, his real interest was in politics and he relished it more than the traditional Burmese pickled tea, *the laphet*. His father was minister of the tea ceremony in the

service of the last Burmese king Thibaw as well as *Sitkhe* (commander of a military unit) at Taungdwingyi. Before Upper Burma fell into the hands of the *Kala* that is, the Indian, that is, the British, he served the Burmese King as the official tax collector on cattle. His father took up arms against the Indian (read 'British') when Upper Burma was invaded. When King Thibaw was deposed and carried off to India, his father surrendered and took service with the Indian King (read 'British') as a *Sitkhe* as well as a township commissioner post. His father the *Sitkhe* was well versed in the arts and literature and also skilled in painting and sculpturing. He took many wives also. Thakin Ba Thoung, however, couldn't keep pace with his father's steps. He was not successful in arts and sculptures nor could he take multiple wives.

In his foreword, U Ba Thoung acknowledged that his publisher Tun Aye selected the book for his translation rather than he himself, so the plaudits should go to the publisher 75%, but if the book were a flop, he the translator should be blamed 100%. Regarding the book, there was an advertisement in *Sinn Fein magazine* – “*The Burmese now read this book!*” The author and the publisher claim a new era will be ushered in! ” U Ba Thoung didn't claim the dawning of a new era as he did not have such self-confidence in himself. U Ba Thoung writes:- ‘The success of a book is decided not by the publisher or the author. It will be decided by the readers. If it becomes a good read for the reader, then the author is happy that his efforts have been well spent. If there are notable facts in the book for the reader, the author takes pride in it. Even if the book is not good, criticizing impels the writer to be more careful in his further ventures. Thus criticising is a good practice so we should accept it. The book was adapted from Sinclair's book with Burmese name places and environs. There was no intention of libelling or slandering actual persons. All the characters were created in the author's mind with no allusion to anyone’.

In the author's note :- The Burmese word for 'oil' is *yenan*, a smelly water. There is no water in oil. It is a combustible liquid and its qualities are a far cry from ordinary water. Although it is simply called 'oil', it is different from other oils as sesame oil, coconut oil, groundnut oil, mustard oil, etc. You can't extract expensive materials from these ordinary oils, but from petroleum oil, you can extract good quality petrol, low quality petrol, kerosene oil, candle wax, tar, etc. There is a considerable output of oil in Burma but before Burma deteriorated, it was not deemed valuable. What the Burmese kings esteemed were gold and silver mines, sapphire and copper mines, and not the oilfields. The petroleum sellers were looked down upon and can be surmised from such derogatory proverbs as ‘ The castor oil

plant reigns in a forest where there are no rich or valuable plants’, ‘The petroleum seller is waving his head band’ (i.e. he is showing off his lowly status when he has no reason at all to do so). In bygone eras, petroleum was used only in lighting torches, and in coating surfaces such as boats, carts and houses to prevent from decay by termites. When Burma disintegrated, there were also many changes in the world. You can call those times as the oil era. You can even call the First World War as the Oil War. Nowadays in the developed and cultured world, no one is immune from the usage of oil. You light candles at your altar at night, you ride on cars and crafts that are moved by oil, those dreadful aero planes that are dropping bombs are driven by oil. Oh Oil! You have been beneficial in our daily lives but you have also been a cause in our destruction. If you blame oil for our inconveniences, how do you think the oil will answer back? “Friends! I am just a lifeless material. Because I like to be alone and do not want to have relations with you humans, I stay hidden under layers and strata of earth and rocks. Only when you humankind comes with your big machineries to extract me from under and use me in your nefarious acts, then these difficulties arise. Why blame me from all the consequences?” If the oil wraps a pickled *laphet* tea and hires a lawyer (an old Burmese custom on hiring a lawyer), how shall we answer him back in the court of law? Oh Oil! You are meant to be good. Humans have tarnished and destroyed your reputation. Oh! How pitiable!\_

The translator was pressed for time as he had admitted in his foreword. He had dropped huge swathes of passages to condense his book and meet the deadline. Thus, the translation into Burmese was not a faithful rendition of Sinclair’s book but much abridged and liberally adapted to Burmese settings in the late 1930s. The translation followed the broad outlines of Sinclair’s book with Burmese characters and actual names of towns and places in the Dry Zone e.g. Yenangyaung and Chauk, the oil towns. As part B of the book never appeared, we cannot comment on the ending or how the author would have liked to conclude. The one definite point we can infer is that the happenings in Sinclair’s book very hauntingly mirrored what actually had happened in those oil towns in the Dry Zone in Burma in the 1930s. The plight, the poverty and the deprivations of the workers, the strikes, how they were broken up by police and thugs, are almost eerily identical. The only difference is that the oilmen in Sinclair’s book were rich individuals and oil conglomerates, with their machinations and unfair practices, exploiting the poor uneducated simple rural folks, whereas in the 30’s Burma in the oil towns, it was the same kind of rural folks but Burmese and Buddhist against the (what they perceived as) blood-suckling colonialists the (Christian)

British and their sepoys and servants the (Hindu and Moslem) Indian police and staff and Burmese renegades. The strikes were by Burmese oil workers against the British Oil Company known simply by the acronym BOC. The strikes, the revolts and their harsh breakup so paralysed and stunned the nation that it became part of indelible and proud Burmese history and written in all school textbooks. Thirty years after the events, the military and socialist government honored the strikes and their leaders with issuing of stamps and currency notes depicting oil derricks and pictures of a strike leader.

There are many instances in Upton Sinclair's book where his dry humor and satire are richly depicted. An instance where Mr. Ross greased the palms of a bribe taker who was now seeing 5000 dollars as a five and three zeroes in the smoke belching from his pipe. The translator U Ba Thoug was faithful in this translation and he was as good, if not better than Sinclair, in this rendering of the humor. Not in Sinclair's book but inserted by U Ba Thoug in his translation, there is an episode where the oil prospector and his son visited a land lease agent named Sir San Pa, who was so illiterate that he couldn't sign his signature properly but, nevertheless, knighted grandly by the British.

When the British annexed Burma, they found, to their liking, that the desperately poor and the simple Burmese addressed the high officials of the Burmese king as 'Thakins' (lords) and themselves as 'Kyundawmyos' (your servants). They ordered the Burmese to address them exactly as they had done before. Thus the Burmese addressed the British Officials as 'Thakins'. Consequent to the First World War where the British were severely nettled and unsettled by the Germans, with many nations clamoring for independence and active struggles against colonialist forces, many educated Burmese youths joined the protest movements, and to nettle the British further, called themselves 'Thakins' as the British did. The translator, U Ba Thoug, belonged to those kind of youths because he called himself 'Thakin Ba Thoug'. From this, we can deduce the extent of his nationalist feelings and anti British sentiments.

Upton Sinclair's writings reflect a condescending tone towards religion in general. In the book, regarding the character Eli's preaching, he writes in amusing undertones about speaking in tongues, the shoutings and rollings on the ground, faith healings, etc. U Ba Thoug translates the activities faithfully but there were no any amusing undertones or condescension on religion.

Sinclair frequently uses the word 'negro' regarding African Americans but this was an accepted usage then with no or slight racist undertone. Of course, the word is now no longer politically correct. On the other hand, both the editors and U Ba Thoug were quite frank in

using racist tones in their choice of words. The Burmese culture encompasses, accepts and practices many shades of racism against foreigners and especially towards people from the Indian Subcontinent, despite the god of their religion being an Indian Hindu. This is practiced by both the people in governance and the common people since the days of Burmese kings, parliamentary government and various military regimes up to the present. In the very first pages of the book, the editor(s), in profiling U Ba Thoug's life, repeatedly referred to the British not as 'the British' but 'the Indian'. Indians are severely despised and discriminated in the country since the days of yore. The Burmese race and culture is an amalgam of Chinese and Indian Civilizations but the role of the latter is never recognized, acknowledged or simply ignored not only by people in power but also by educated and devout people right down to the common ordinary man. This was seen in government newspapers of recent years referring to the female opposition leader married to a British national as 'the wife of the Indian', 'the Indian woman' or 'the Indian prostitute'.

Bribery, graft, corruption and extortion have always been part of unavoidable necessities of life in Asia since olden days despite protestations from all governments to the contrary. Asian cultures are pock-marked with these evils from 5000 year old Chinese and Indian civilizations to Arabic tribes, South East Asian countries to the Far East. Burma is no exception to this way of life. Accounts of travels by European merchants and diplomats to the country since the 17<sup>th</sup> century are rife with shameful accounts of bribery, graft and extortions. This is still the norm in poor and underdeveloped countries, and Myanmar stands prominent in the region. The government officials, the main beneficiaries of the system, do little to stamp out the practice unless a particular incidence results in great loss of face for the government or when their own relatives or friends are being extorted excessively. Both Upton Sinclair and U Ba Thoug portrayed oil prospectors, land lease agents and authorities as unscrupulous people, money hungry and lawless, with evil schemes, swindling's and blackmailings of the ordinary rural people who are aptly portrayed as simple, honest, hardworking, god-fearing and unpretentious, a prey to the machinations of oil entrepreneurs, British BOC officials, agents and go-betweens. Sinclair was portraying the loopholes of democracy and extolling socialist ideology; U Ba Thoug was sneering at failings of democratic institutions as well as swiping at the British colonialists.

The great oil strike in Burma against the BOC is known as the Yenamyay Strike. The strikers, like in many other strikes over the world, were demanding higher wages, reduction of working hours from 12 to eight hours a day, granting of allowances to meet the stiff rise of



food and commodity prices, decent quarters for their families, and restitution and medical care for injuries and accidental deaths while on duty. The only difference here was that they knew the price of oil had risen sharply because of the war, and that only the BOC people were benefitting enormously from it and only a pittance for them and the Burmese. They were all demonstrating against , to use their much-used words, ‘ the white faced British and their lackeys’.

In conclusion, Thakin Ba Thoung’s adaptation of Upton Sinclair’s book was indeed a good book to read with his mastery of the Burmese language and his absorbing style of Burmese writing though rather quaint. There is an inkling that he was adapting Sinclair’s oil strike to what had happened in the great Yenamyay Oil Strike of recent years, but, as the book was never completed, we can never know but wonder only how he intended to portray later happenings in Sinclair’s book.

### 3. Maung Yoe, *Oil* by Thakin Ba Thoung

Translation: Maung Aye

In the 2006 March issue of Forbes Magazine, Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore wrote an article on Oil and Islamism. He stated in the article how Arab nations used oil as a weapon. He pointed out that if the United Nations took action against Iran, the country would suspend its daily sale of 2.5 million barrels of crude oil to the world and this would result in a steep rise in the price of oil.

This reminded me of the novel 'Oil' by Thakin Ba Thoung. So, I read it. He wrote it in 1940 (1302 ME) but he managed to finish Volume I only. Volume II failed to appear. In the foreword he admitted that it was an adaptation of the original story 'Oil' of Upton Sinclair into Myanmar setting. In that book, there was a brief auto-biography of Thakin Ba Thoung. He stood out as a bright child right from his youth. He stood first in the fourth standard in the entire district. He won the prize of U Tok Gyi. He was then awarded scholarship in the seventh standard. Out of the six translation competitions organized by Ganda Lawka Magazine he won first prizes on five occasions. While studying in the university, he again won the prize money of 1,000 awarded by the Prince of Wales. He then worked as editor with Ganda Lawka Magazine and translation tutor at the university. He founded Doh Bama Asiayone. He was sent to prison time and again for his defiance against the British colonial government. His work, Pantha Ma Sa Oo, a classical milestone in Myanmar literature was written while he was in prison.

Thakin Ba Thoung said in the foreword that the story of his book was an adaptation of 'Oil' of Upton Sinclair. It is true the plot was based on the original 'Oil' but the story and the struggle of workers were portrayed through clear political outlook. He stood by the suppressed class. The writer also included a very simple love story to attract the attention of young readers. He dealt with the story most vividly. It was about oil well owner U Shwe Yauk, the rich man, and his son Maung San Hmi plus Maung Ye Baw, leader of the workers. The story highlighted the qualities of Maung Ye Baw and his outstanding abilities of forgiveness, readiness to take risks and his courage.

Although the leading character was Maung San Hmi, words reflecting the political outlook and other ideas of the writer were expressed by Maung Ye Baw. In the story, Maung Ye Baw was thus made to look like a philosopher. U Shwe Yauk or 'Ba' (as called by his children) was owner of a large number of oil wells. On one occasion, he took his son Maung

San Hmi to a hill called Amway-way Taung. All his wealth would be inherited by his son Maung San Hmi and his daughter Khin Shwe Kyi (senior to Maung San Hmi). When the father and son arrived Chauk town to buy oil wells, Maung San Hmi got acquainted with a young man, who approached him and asked for food. Very fond of the pride and frankness of the young man he made friends with the latter, Maung Ye Baw. Maung Ye Baw was raised in a poor family and out of the five children he was the eldest. He lacked proper school education but he read a lot. Maung San Hmi liked and highly regarded him. When he met Ma Shwe Oo, younger sister of Maung Ye Baw, he liked her as his own sister.

Maung San Hmi in spite of his being the son of a very rich man was a person of kind heart. He had sympathy for the poor and was ready to help them. He was not conceited. His father 'Ba' or U Shwe Yauk, too, was not proud despite his great wealth, which was not inherited. He was a self-made man. One time he had to pole a boat and then became a vendor of mohinga (traditional Myanmar snack). For some time he sold edible oil. So, he had sympathy for the poor to an extent. However, being a man of wealth, he was in no position to contradict the wish of fellow rich men. Low-paid oil workers who had been exploited by the oil well owners staged a strike. In describing the struggle between the workers and employers Thakin Ba Thoung said:

“Why are the workers so poor and destitute? It is because of the greed of the employers. All the demands made by the workers are fair and just. Yet, why don't the employers comply with the demands? It is because of their insatiable greed. They threaten the striking workers showing different types of weapons. They have created situations under which workers find it difficult to work. Their stand is that the workers would become more and more destitute if the days of the strike drag on, and they would have no choice but to give in and finally work under previous conditions”.

He wrote how the employers tried to break up the strike, how they had called in the special police, and how they substituted other workers in place of the strikers by offering higher wages. Maung Ye Baw, leader of the workers, explained the sufferings of the workers to 'Ba' .

“The fact is that since the start of the war in Europe the price of all items has been on the rise, but the workers are drawing the same wages they earned before the war. The employers, on their part, can pay more if they wish to because the price of oil has increased since the start of the war. It is unfair that the employers are paying the workers the old wages, that by antagonizing the workers' association the employers are making the latter to become

Bolsheviks. When he heard the word Bolsheviks ‘Ba’ was alarmed. It was because he had learned that Bolsheviks forcibly seized the oil wells from the owners and they would like to produce oil to serve the interest of the workers themselves. It was also rumoured that when the Bolsheviks felt the owners ill-treated them they would destroy the oil wells and in some cases they could even set fire to the oil wells.”

It was also written that in the world there was no place where Bolsheviks were non-existent and as such, the best way would be to treat the workers justly and fairly.

In fact, the story entitled ‘Oil’ was a creation of Thakin Ba Thoung to feature communism he believed in. When he began writing the novel the Second World War had already started in Europe and socialism was becoming popular on the continent. In Russia, the Czarist monarchy was toppled and Bolsheviks were in control of the nation after the October Revolution in 1917. In 1940, Stalin was the Prime Minister of Russia and he was preparing to wage war against fascist Germany. Marxism spread and it even reached the colonies through the educated people. In Myanmar too, the spirit of anti-imperialism and anti-fascism was high among the younger population and they were eager to fight for independence. On 15 August 1939, the Burma Communist Party was founded and it was led by Thakin Aung San acting as General Secretary. Communism calling for equality for all was in vogue among the university students, educated youths and politicians. Thakin Ba Thoung wrote the book ‘Oil’ while anti-imperialist feelings were growing high among the Myanmar public. At that time unity of Thakin Soe, Thakin Than Tun, Thakin Thein Pe and Thakin Aung San was solid.

Maung San Hmi had a girl friend named Mya Mya Kyi, a daughter of a wealthy man. She was beautiful and modern. In fact she might be described too modern because she was trendy or untraditional. She practiced the sexual relationship of living together that was common in the West. Even in the presence of a parent (her mother) and she invited her lover to come to her house and sleep there. She lived together with him in her room.

“Kyi, my dear, I am sorry. In case we...”

“Oh, it’s better because I’d like to have a baby.”

“But, I don’t want to be a father yet.”

“For you, it’s nothing to worry. It’s my concern, not yours.”

“I say it sincerely. I’m worried about you as well.”

“Don’t you worry about such things. I understand them all. Here, look ...”

So saying, she took out from the pocket of her bodice a small bottle of pills manufactured in Germany, which she always kept with her. Well, it was the time of Mya Mya Kyi, that of such pills and that of the women who wanted to live freely.

Maung San Hmi happened to enjoy the sensual pleasures with the help of his instructor Mya Mya Kyi.

On one rainy day, she took him to her house and instructed him, “Hmi, my dear, it is raining. It isn’t right to go out. So, you must sleep here.”

“It’d be improper, Kyi. In case, your mother finds out ...”

“It’s no problem with Mother. I can convince her very well.”

“I don’t think so, Kyi. Please think it over. And there are house maids at home. What would happen if they know?”

“Who cares the servants? We’ve hired them to work for us. We don’t have to behave to please them. I don’t care even if they know.”

“I feel sorry for your mother.”

“Don’t you worry about her. There is complete understanding between my mother and myself. She, too, has her own lovers. Father also has his. That’s why he hardly comes home. Mother knows that I am aware of her affair. So, she dares not say anything about me.”

Her reply left Maung San Hmi at a loss for words. He thought about their way of life.

“Then, Maung San Hmi was taken to the room of Mya Mya Kyi. At that night he enjoyed sensual pleasures offered by Mya Mya Kyi.”

This way Thakin Ba Thoung ridiculed the way of life of wealthy class and erroneous sexual relationships of theirs.

After reading the novel ‘Oil’ featuring the workers’ strike and the love story of Maung San Hmi and Mya Mya Kyi, the book ‘Ashay-ga Ne-wun Htwet-thi Pamar’ (Like the sun rises in the east) by Thein Pe Myint surfaced in my mind. It was written fifteen years later. I then wondered if there was any impact of the ‘Oil’ to some extent on the novel of Thein Pe Myint. The love affair of Maung San Hmi and Mya Mya Kyi in ‘Oil’ and the affair of Maung Tin Tun and Ma Mya Hmi on a train journey in ‘Ashay-ga Ne-wun Htwet-thi Pamar’ were the writing skills exhibited by the authors to attract the readers and the young generation.

Thakin Ba Thoung managed to portray the despicable and mean nature of oil well owners and the wealthy people and proud and overbearing behaviour of their families who thought lowly of the workers and only the wealthy people were human beings and the workers were low class creatures. To illustrate this he wrote:

“Occasionally, Khin Shwe Kyi visited the site of the oil wells and viewed them. There she saw workers, a kind of creatures, who had to get there to work as decided and assigned by their fate. She felt uneasy when she found out that those creatures, too, were sensible and intelligent almost like human beings. On one occasion, Ma Shwe Oo and Maung Ye Baw came and saw her. The sister and the brother had to keep their distance from Khin Shwe Kyi since the latter seemed hesitant to get acquainted with them.”

The ‘Oil’ highlighted exploiting and high-handed nature of the wealthy class and vividly described unyielding spirit of the working class and how they staged a strike with discipline and order. The importance of oil more than 60 years ago does not wane today. In fact, it has become more important than before and the commodity is the most sought after now.

The Arab nations in the Middle East whose possession was the deserts only have now become very rich nations because of oil. The emirs or the kings of those nations, according to their traditions, are regarded as sovereign rulers. So, oil becomes the property of the rulers and their families. The king and his family of Saudi Arabia thus spontaneously become billionaires. The oil companies from the West get richer and richer. The United States and the Europe being industrialized centres have to stockpile oil for fuel. Meanwhile in the People’s Republic of China, economy of which is growing leaps and bounds, the nation is no longer hostile to the world. Instead, it is wearing smiles and shows this to the world. At the same time, it is trying to please every oil producing nation by establishing Paukphaw relationship. China is purchasing as much oil as possible from all sources including Russia, nations from South America, Asia, and the Arab world. As oil is the best fuel to date, those in possession of oil can wield their influence.

Thakin Ba Thoung intended to write volume II of the ‘Oil’ but he could not do so. As such, the desire of readers was unfulfilled. However, in the volume I alone, the author had been able to sufficiently convey the messages or his ideas and concepts to the readers. He particularly described the strike of the workers and the methods, ways and means to stage one. He said:

“The strikers are to exercise their rights according to law; they need to take special care not to violate the law; even if there is a minor violation of the law the enemy would take advantage of that excuse and they would suppress the strikers; for instance, if the strikers lose control of themselves and throw stones the enemy would order to shoot them and would say they have to do so unavoidably because the former got rowdy and riotous; then they would persecute the strikers; so the strikers need to control themselves so that the enemy would not find any excuse.”

The author went further concerning the matter of equal rights between men and women. In his work of satire on the issue he wrote:

“Mya Mya Kyi advocated that if men have the right to take many wives if they can look after the latter, women too should have the right to take many husbands if they can look after the latter. A man is permitted to take second wife but a woman is not to take second husband. It is because the laws are made by men. Men are very jealous. They will hack their wives if they catch their wives having love affair with other men.”

The novel was written during the colonial days. Be that as it may, there was considerable freedom of expression then. The issues of communism and strikes were featured. The story reflected political, economic and cultural situation of the period. It showed certain improvement in the writing style of Myanmar language. The plot is not much to talk about but characterization is spectacular. The most prominent characters are Maung Ye Baw and Mya Mya Kyi.

## Upton Sinclair, *Oil!*

(From Wikipedia)

### Characters

- **James Arnold Ross** (aka **Dad**): is a self-made oil millionaire.
- **James Arnold "Bunny" Ross, Jr.:** the protagonist, is the son of a self-made oil millionaire. Self-aware but ignorant in the ways of the world.
- **Paul Watkins:** a farmer's son who runs away from home, is tutored by a [free thinker](#), and becomes an advocate for the rights of laborers. After spending time in Siberia after World War I, he sympathizes with [Bolshevism](#) and becomes a Communist.
- **Vernon Roscoe:** Dad's business partner, and arguably the novel's antagonist. He is a greedy business man who helps bribe the government to acquire the land in Teapot Dome to drill oil. He also works to crush The Unions that oppose him by bribing the authorities to throw its members into jail.

### Plot

The book is divided into twenty-one chapters with titles, which are further subdivided into numbered sections.

- I. "The Ride" – Bunny and Dad are introduced to the reader as they drive by car through the southern California desert to a meeting with the owners of some oil property.
- II. "The Lease" – Dad meets with the owners of the residential lots to discuss an oil lease; the owners are hopelessly deadlocked about how the properties and proceeds should be divided; the character of Paul Watkins is introduced.
- III. "The Drilling" – Details of the oil drilling business and of the Ross family.
- IV. "The Ranch" – Dad and Bunny go quail hunting on the Paradise goat ranch, property of the Watkins family, and find oil.
- V. "The Revelation" – At Bunny's urging, Dad tries to prevent Old Man Watkins from beating his oldest daughter Ruth; Dad tries to convince them that he has received the "third revelation", which prohibits parents from beating their children (among other things), but the plan backfires when Eli Watkins, Paul's younger brother, interjects himself into the discussion and claims that HE has received the revelation.
- VI. "The Wild-Cat" – Drilling begins at the Paradise oil field; Bunny begins to realize his father's business methods are not entirely ethical; an oil worker is killed in an accident, and the oil well explodes and burns.
- VII. "The Strike" – The oil workers go on strike, and Bunny is torn between loyalty to Dad and his friendship to Paul and Ruth Watkins.
- VIII. "The War" – Bunny begins a high-school love affair with Eunice Hoyt, daughter of a wealthy family; WWI breaks out, Paul is drafted, and the Ross and Watkins families are divided.
- IX. "The Victory" – WWI is over, but Paul remains in Siberia with the Allied intervention forces opposing the Soviets; Bunny decides to go to college after high school.
- X. "The University" – Bunny enrolls in Southern Pacific University, where his ideas of social justice evolve further as he meets free-thinking professors such as Dan Irving.
- XI. "The Rebel" – Bunny becomes increasingly involved with various socialist and radical students, including Rachel Menzies, against the background of the Red Scare. Also Paul comes home and tells of his travels.



- XII. “The Siren” – An aging socialite attempts to seduce Bunny aboard her yacht.
- XIII. “The Monastery” – Bunny accompanies Dad to the Monastery, the seaside mansion of his business associate Vernon Roscoe.
- XIV. “The Star” – Bunny begins an affair with Viola (“Vee”) Tracy, a silent film star; she loves him deeply, but does not share his political views.
- XV. “The Vacation” – Bunny goes back east with Vee and Dad, ostensibly to take care of some business matters, but in reality so that Roscoe can have a free hand to crush the oil workers’ movement.
- XVI. “The Killing” – Dad makes a killing by joining with the big oil companies, but loses his independence; Bertie, Bunny’s spoiled socialite sister, has an abortion.
- XVII. “The Exposure” – The bribery involved in the naval oil reserve transactions during the Harding administration becomes exposed by radical journalists, including Dan Irving; Bunny broaches his idea of going away and earning his own way in the world to Dad, who is confused and hurt, but not unsupportive.
- XVIII. “The Flight” – Roscoe and Dad are forced to flee to Canada and then to Europe (accompanied by Bunny), to avoid being subpoenaed by Congress in connection with the naval oil reserve scandal.
- XIX. “The Penalty” – Dad meets and marries Mrs. Olivier, a widower and Spiritualist, but he soon passes away from pneumonia.
- XX. “The Dedication” – Bunny decides to dedicate his life and his inheritance to social justice; Roscoe moves to get control of the bulk of Dad’s estate.
- XXI. “The Honeymoon” – Bunny and Bertie are swindled out of most of their inheritance by Roscoe and Dad’s widow; Bunny marries Rachel Menzies and they dedicate themselves to establishing a socialist institution of learning; Eli Watkins, by now a successful (and completely hypocritical) evangelist, adds insult to injury by falsely claiming that his communist brother Paul underwent a deathbed conversion to Christianity; the final, sad end of Paul and Ruth Watkins.

## **Basis**

The book is loosely based on the life of [Edward L. Doheny](#) (and the company he co-founded, Pan American Petroleum & Transport Company, the California assets of which became Pan American Western Petroleum Company), and also the strategic alliance Union-Independent Producers Agency, a consortium created in 1910 to bring oil via pipeline from Kern County to the Pacific Coast facilities of [Union Oil Company](#) at Port Harford (now called Port San Luis just west of [Avila Beach](#)).

## V Material on Ba Thoung

### 1. Mya Kaytu, The World of the University and Thakhin Ba Thoung<sup>30</sup>

*On Occasion of Thakhin Ba Thoung's 100th Anniversary*

Translation: Georg Noack

It was in 1930. Like a movie, the past is passing again before my eyes. The past of *Sayagyi* Thakhin Ba Thoung, who passed away, at the age of 81, is only a memory.

When he passed away, I read short biographies of him in the newspapers and magazines. These biographies also mentioned, that he had taught translation at Yangon University. Several writers had asked: Was it really true, that he had been a lecturer of translation at the university? “No, that must be an error”, some opined who had come to attend university around 1935. They expressed their doubts as they had never heard that Thakhin Ba Thoung had been a university lecturer.

So I have to say: how could they have heard? Thakhin Ba Thoung only was a lecturer of translation in 1930, years earlier. And the time he was, lasted only very short; only about seven months. On 15 June 1930 the headmaster, Mr. Sloss [?], hired him to teach translation at the Institute of Myanmar studies (*mjama. sa htana.*) when the new term would begin.

I was one of his first students. We had passed the tenth standard exams and had arrived at the university to study there. As far as I remember among his students were U Thet Tin from Bago who later became a lecturer himself, U Ohn (U Aye Myint) who later served at the SAMB (State Agricultural Marketing Board), U Doe, who later worked at Sabei Bei'man, U Than Tin (Moe Net) who adopted the writer's pseudonym of Shwe Pyi Soe and U Thein Pe Myint alias Thein Ne Nwe who was also called Tet Phoneyi Thein Pe. We all arrived at the university in the same year and chose the subjects Myanmar studies, logics, and Asian history. Back then, the names of the subjects were different from today.

What people now call *sei' kjai' myama sa* (optional Myanmar studies) was then called *apou myama sa*<sup>31</sup>. What is now called basic Myanmar studies, was then called compulsory Myanmar studies. Even the name *Te'kathou kjaun*: [University] was fairly recent: 1924 Saya Pe Maung Tin had come back from the Western countries and invented Myanmar terms for the names of institutions and subjects related of universities. Yangon *Te'kathou* [University] was prior to 1924 referred to as Yangon *kolei'* [college]. The terms *wei'za batha* [for arts/humanities] and *thei'pan batha* [for

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<sup>30</sup>Source: Yananthit Magazine 81, September 2001 ([http://mywebdigest.50g.com/people/01sep/page\\_07.htm](http://mywebdigest.50g.com/people/01sep/page_07.htm) [18.9.2011])

<sup>31</sup>Translator's note: *apou* means additional, but can imply a notion of redundancy or being superfluous.

sciences] had only come into use from around 1928. Before they were called IA and ISc, Inter-Arts and Inter-Science. When it was decided that the BA in arts would be called *wei'za* many objections to this appeared in the newspapers. When IA was renamed *u.pa.sa*, there were also people who did not like that. Back then, the word 'more' [?] was used colloquially for drunken persons. 'So, will we then call a person who received a *wei'za* degree a *wei'za* more?', one newspaper commented. When the university buildings were given Myanmar names, there were also people who didn't like this. *Hsaun*<sup>32</sup> was normally used for less respectable places such as *mi:pou hsaun* (kitchen), *nau'phei:hsaun* (the backroom of a Myanmar house, used for domestic work, washing, toilet) - wouldn't it be inappropriate to put university buildings in the same category? the newspapers complained. But even though the newspapers kept complaining, Saya Pe Maung Tin and his colleagues were did not bother. Saya Pe Maung Tin did not invent these terms alone, however, but in collaboration with Saya Yeik Kyi, Saya Mun Kyi, Hmawbi Saya Thein, Saya Kyi U Lin, U Poe Sein, and U Pwa.

At that time, the only university buildings were Thaton hall, Bago hall, Pinya hall, and Sagaing hall.

The Inwa hall was only being built. Many buildings now found on the university campus, including the ceremonial hall and many institutes did not yet exist. Judson College was also still in the process of being built. During that term, in 1930, classes were only held in the Pinya hall and the Sagaing hall. So that is where we had our classes. The students who stayed as boarders at the university were accommodated in the Thaton hall and the Bago hall. These are [now ?] the Pyi hall and the Bagan hall. The science students stayed in wooden buildings. The university hired buses for them because they had to attend class downtown, in Commissioner St. The *wei'za* students had their classes at the Pinya hall and Sagaing hall.

Back then, people didn't even dare to walk to the lakesides of Inya Lake in the late afternoon. They were densely covered with trees, bushes and climbing plants and some people said that there were even tigers around. From others I heard that the lake itself would eat people or that there were water ghosts. Students were not allowed to walk into Kamaryut, which was a 'prohibited quarter'. There were almost no buses to the city centre and students who wanted to go to the city centre had to walk over to Hanthawaddy Station and take the train. Such was Yangon College between 1924 and 1930.

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<sup>32</sup> Translator's note: The Myanmar term denoted university buildings, in English referred to as "hall".

On 15 June 1930 the University reopened and we, the new students arrived. We attended a class in Myanmar Extension at the Pinya hall. I think, only about 30 students had chosen this subject. The whole university had only about 700 students. At the institute of Myanmar studies the teachers were not yet that many. It was called the institute of Oriental Studies. The Persian language also taught within this institute, Saya Carson taught it. Only two or three students attended his classes. Myanmar studies were taught by the Sayas U Lu Pe Win, U Aye Maung, U Nyunt, Sayagyi U Pwa, and U Lin; Saya Pe Maung Tin had only just arrived back from England. He was still young but he used to wear a shirt with a Chinese collar and a *kaun:baun*.<sup>33</sup> Like this he really looked solemn.

U Aye Maung, U Nyunt and the others were just around 25 years old. And with their white skin and winding a *kaun:baun*: in what they called BA ou' style around their head, they looked very handsome, almost like princes. Pali was also taught at the institute of oriental studies and sometimes the teachers' room a looked as if a group of stage actors ['princes'<sup>34</sup>] was preparing themselves for their appearance on the drama stage. I admired their appearance and behaviour so much that it made me want to become a university teacher myself. I decided that I would strive to become one of them. Pali teacher Saya U Ba Kalay was also a very smart and handsome person and his style was very princely.

We had only attended university for two or three days when Professor Pe Maung Tin brought a new teacher to the room in the Pinya hall, where our Myanmar studies classes took place. He also looked very handsome, slightly Indian and princely in his gestures. I think, the princely persons all gathered at this place... He had his *kaun:baun*: wound around his head with a lobe standing out on the side in a special way that looked very good.

“Hey, this is you new teacher for translation methods, Saya Ba Thoung. From today you will attend his classes. Do your best to learn from him as much as you can. He has recently received the Prince of Wales award in translation, 1000 [kyat]. He got it for his translation of the drama ‘A doctor’. Yes, try hard so that you may also get such awards.”

Saya Pe Maung Tin turned the class over and left the room. Saya Ba Thoung smiled and looked very elegant. His sparkling eyes looked vividly at us. From this very day we saw us as his disciples. His smile and his way of talking captivated all of us.

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<sup>33</sup> Translator's note: Myanmar traditional men's headdress.

<sup>34</sup>Translator's note: *min:tha*:, the Myanmar word used here can refer both to a prince and a (lead) actor, who, in precolonial drama, usually performed the role of the prince. Later the term came to be used for movie actors as well. Whatever is meant here – it refers to the demeanor of a noble, refined, elegant perhaps aristocratic Myanmar male.

“My name is Thakhin Ba Thoung”, he introduced himself. “I put ‘Thakhin’<sup>35</sup> in front of my name, of course, because we are nobody’s serfs. Already since about 2000 years we have been a master race. We are a master race, we, the Bamar!”

These were the first words that he spoke to us when he had just come into our class. We liked them very much. On that day Thakhin Ba Thoung explained to us which attitude one should have towards translation. “When you translate something from somebody else’s language into Myanmar language, you should mirror<sup>36</sup> his words and life in our words and life and only then begin to translate. So that his feelings become our feelings. For example, in Russia the people suffered as they were oppressed and exploited as serfs and servants. When they couldn’t take it any more, they revolted. It was a truly justified revolution. They were not afraid. Dared to die. And when you translate a text about this revolution, you must do it while your mind mirrors the feelings of the Russian people. Only then will your work be able to generate *ya.tha*.<sup>37</sup> And only then will it be a good translation.“

We loved his words. He had courage! That’s what we expected a teacher to be like. “Are you afraid?” he asked bluntly. “No, we are not”, we replied. “Good, only then can you be my disciples!” Then he raised his arm and clenched a fist. “Master Race!” he exclaimed. We didn’t know what to say. So he taught us: “Shout ‘We, the Bamar!’, and raise your fists!” Our voices were still very low. At this day I enjoyed it very much to be at the university. I’d like to say that it was him who instilled the first patriotic feelings in the university students of the colonial era. True. In 1930 the anti-colonial revolutionary spirit was not yet very present among university students. It was only in this year that the student’s assembly was founded. And it was Thakhin Ba Thoung who first taught us to love our people and our country.

He was our teacher and taught us how to translate. And how he taught us! We had classes with him only three days per week. I never missed even a single lesson with him – learning from him was so much fun! He also invited us to visit him at his house and whenever we visited him he gave us something to eat. So we just had to become fond of him. When we went out for a walk in the

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<sup>35</sup> Translator’s note: *thakhin*: master, Lord. Then a term used to address the English ‘masters’; today used a) for the owner/master of a dog and for the Christian God (‘Lord’ – *phaja: thakhin*:), thus implying a certain type of hierarchical relationship.

<sup>36</sup> Translator’s note: *htin ha*’ reflect in a mirror, in one’s mind, one’s work

<sup>37</sup> Translator’s note: *ya.tha*., from Pali/ Skt. *rasa* literally means ‘flavour’. *Rasa* is an important concept in Myanmar/Indian literary and arts theory, referring to the ability of a work to evoke a range of emotions in the reader/spectator. Traditionally nine different *rasas* are identified: love, laughter, fury, compassion, disgust, horror, heroic mood, amazement and tranquility. Myanmar literature to this day is often judged by her ability to evoke such emotions.

evening to relax, we often headed over to Yaytarshay St in Bahan where his house was. In front of his house we could see the signboard: Thakhin Ba Thoung, Do-Bamar Asi-Ayone. He had only recently founded the Do-Bamar Asi-Ayone. It's members were still few, only numbering thirty or forty. The British rulers didn't care about the small organisation yet – they must have thought that Thakhin Ba Thoung was just an odd lunatic.

He taught us translation for maybe six or seven months. We were translating texts written in English about how the Russian people revolted against the Czar and we had translation classes three times a week, tutorial once a week. “Copy these translations carefully page by page as a clean copy. Read them again slowly and thoroughly. If the best translations are good enough, we will print them as a book”, he said. The translations covered the whole of the Russian revolution from the beginning to the end. However, we had not yet finished translating all of it. During the tutorials Thakhin Ba Thoung talked to us passionately about the Russian revolution, again and again. Every now and then he raised his fist shouting “We, the Bamar!”

It was during the seventh month of our lessons. We had begun translating another text about how the Russian people dispossessed the Czar. One morning Mr Sloss and Saya Pe Maung Tin came into our translation class. Saya U Lu Pe Win followed them as well. “Please take out the copybooks you use in your translation tutorial and put them on your tables, said Saya Pe Maung Tin. They looked through our books. Mr Sloss also looked through them. Would he have understood anything? I don't think so. The students believed that the best translator might get a price and were excited. Saya U Lu Pe Win collected all the books and carried them off to his office. The next day, Saya Ba Thoung didn't show up for our translation class. We waited for him, but he didn't come. After a short while, Saya U Nyunt arrived.

“Hey, today your teacher won't come, neither today, nor thereafter. That's how it is. In the future I will teach you. For today, I'll give you an hour off.”

It began to dawn on us: Saya Ba Thoung must have been dismissed. He taught us about the Russian revolution and taught us that we must have a revolutionary spirit. We were sad that we wouldn't have classes with him any more. However, we frequently visited him at his house. And very often he invited us.

One day, he invited all of us students to his house. He would serve us Mohinga, I had heard. We optional Myanmar studies students spoke about it and decided to go together. However, the time that he invited us to come was very strange: We were to come at 10 o'clock in the evening. I learned that after we would all have eaten Mohinga, he would teach us ‘a song’. I had no idea what

kind of song. But we were only to sing it after midnight. And we were to sing it at a low voice, one fellow student told me. So, secretly, we arrived at his house, 27, Yaytarshay St. Until now I still see his smile when all his students were, as instructed, at his house at 10 pm. When we arrived, he had gone out, but exactly at 10 o'clock he appeared in front of his house. Instantly he raised his fist to his forehead and shouted: "Master race!" We were prepared, raised our fists and shouted: "We, the Bamar!" At this evening, after we had enjoyed the Mohinga, Saya Ba Thoung explained: He was going to teach us a song. But we shouldn't sing it loud. The house was very close to the guard-house of Bahan and the song should still be kept secret, he said. So, around midnight he intoned for us the Do-Bamar Thakhin ['We, the Bamar song'] beginning with the line "*tagaun: a.bi.jaza*". The song was very intense and beautiful. It evoked strong patriotic feelings in us. When he arrived at the line "*dou. khi' kou jau' hma. njan.kja. do.hma la*" [ We won't be weak when our time comes"] we could no longer remain silent. We raised our fists. When he sang "We are Bamars, aren't we?", we felt sad and ashamed of our situation. Then we stomped our feet on the ground and exclaimed "We, the Bamar, we, the Bamar!" When he arrived at "*kaba ma kjei / bama tatwei/ da dou. pyei da dou. mjei da dou. pjei*" [Until the end of the world, Bamars – this is our country, our soil, our land!], we joined in shouting at the top of our voices so that Saya Ba Thoung made a gesture signaling us to lower our voices. We sang the song together over 30 times until everybody knew it by heart. Saya told us that we had to teach this song to others as well in order to spread it. Our hearts were in high spirits. Before we returned home Saya Ba Thoung told us: Get ready! Not long and we will beat the English. Take the Russian revolution that I have taught you about as an example and prepare yourself well". We clenched our fists and answered: "We, the Bamars! Master race! We, the Bamars!"

Today, Thakhin Ba Thoung has parted from his students that he loved so much. Several of his students may well have been on the forefront of those who made the revolution against the English imperialists. Due to his truly noble intentions, his patriotic spirit and his great efforts that finally led to national independence, he received the honour of the nation medal first class. I, his student in the subject of translation, want to commemorate how he taught his students to love their country and their race, instilling in them a patriotic spirit for the first time.

## V. Material on Dagon Taya, *May*

### 1. Kyaw Hoe, Bibliographical Information<sup>38</sup>

Translation: Georg Noack

#### 61.) Dagon Tarya: *May*. Yangon: Nagani, 1940, 224 pages.

This is an adaptation of the novel 'Self' by the British author Beverley Nichols. Though the novel is an adaptation, it portrays the life, and in the end, the fall, of a beautiful young woman who attempts to participate in the world of the upper class of the time.

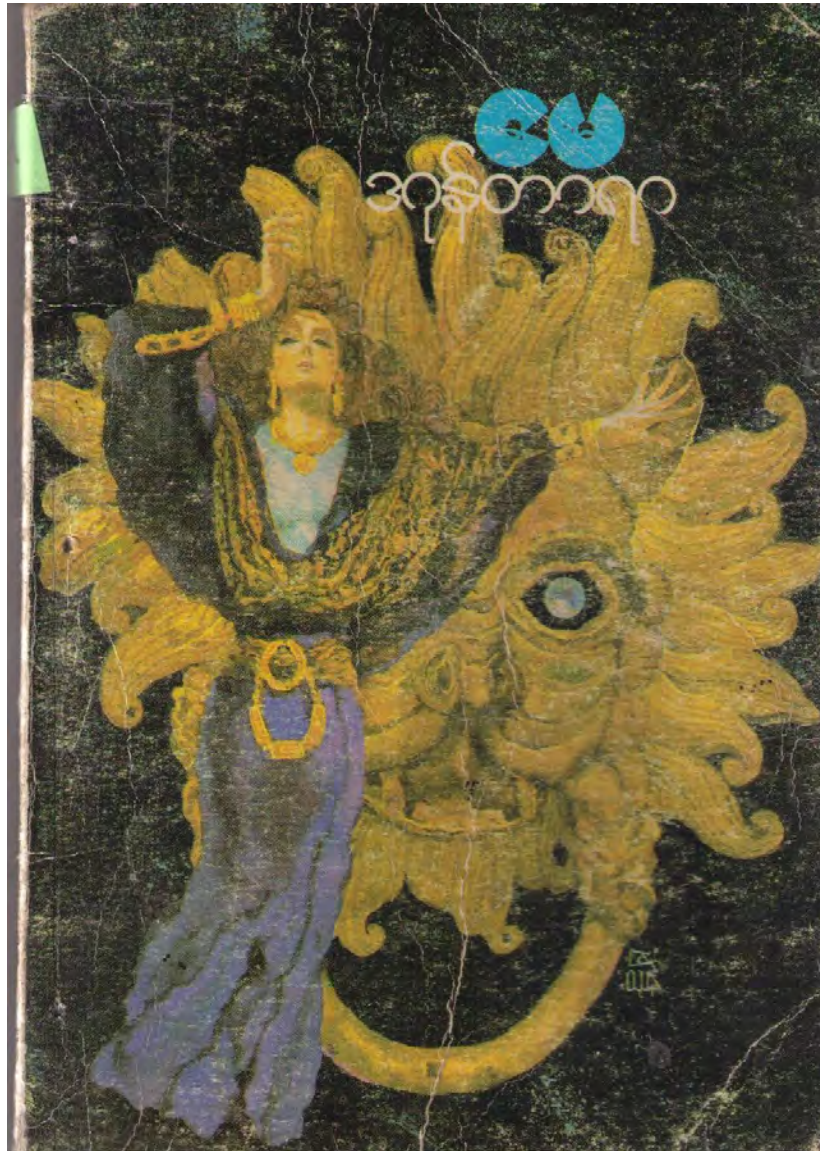
Primarily, it seems to be mocking upper class love. However, it is composed in a special style.

This novel marks an important step in Myanmar literature. Many people came to like the author because of his extraordinarily refined style of writing, but others mocked him. Phrases like '*lei nu. ei. thi ta nwe. nwe. no. nei hse:*' (the gentle, cool breeze blew playfully...) are characteristic of the style it is written in. Thakhin Ba Hein compared the reading of this novel to drinking champagne. It was reprinted many times. The book includes a preface by Thakhin Ba Hein that is dated 8-8-40. Nagani did not only publish propagandistic literature, but also fiction, like this book, thereby showing their commitment to promoting Myanmar literature in general. While the topic of this novel is class society, it was at the same time the introduction of Dagon Taryar's special style of writing with many new words and usages to the Myanmar readership. Thakhin Ba Hein writes in his preface 'He is a word sculptor, forming new, unusual expressions characterizes his special style. His writing is rhythmic, fluid and smooth.' *May* had strong, lasting repercussions in the world of Myanmar literature.

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Title Page, 1998 Edition



Dagon Taya in October 2010 in his summer « Shan residence » in Aung Pan<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For a picture of Dagon Taya taken in 2001 see volume 1 of this series, p.

## 2. Excerpt from Dagon Tayar, *Dagon Tayar by Dagon Tayar* (1951)

Translation: Aung Min Htut

The novel 'May'

The novel 'May' was an adaptation of the novel 'Self' by Beverly Nichole. When Nichole wrote that novel he had not received his bachelor of arts degree yet. He was still a student at Oxford University. He had been a president of the union at Oxford.

I read the novel in 1939 and thought of writing it in Burmese. I had it all arranged in my mind how to make the adaptation when I translate it into Burmese. But a year passed and I still had not started the adaptation. I was unsuccessful despite having a strong desire to write it.

But there was something that impelled me to write it. That something was ...

The early part of 1941 was a time for all the political parties to unite and marshal the forces for the fight for the independence of Burma.

The students union was involved in all this.

The examinations were drawing closer and those students who had no hope of passing wanted to boycott the examinations. Because if there was a boycott, at the very least the examinations would be postponed.

The union at that time was planning fervently to revolt against the expansionist system. At the same time it was looking for ways to increase its funds. There was a lot of work to do and a lot of expenses were incurred. The All Burma Students Union was not well-funded and the University Students Union which had more money had to provide it with some of theirs. To get more funds they had to approach film makers to donate movies; but there were never enough funds.

At last they had an idea. That idea was for the union to supervise the making of a film of their own. It would make quite a lot of money. While they were organizing for a revolution it would be a good opportunity to broadcast one's way of thinking to the country by means of a motion picture.

The British Burma company and the A1 Film Company were enthusiastic and promised to give a helping hand when we met them. Tet Phone Gyi Thein Pe (the author well known for his novel 'Tet Phone Gyi / Monk of the Times') was working as a director at the British Burma company and he

said he would direct the film for us and urged me to write the script for that. The director of A1 Film company, Ko Tin Maung, also promised to direct the movie for us.

The union only needed to make the necessary arrangements. The executives of the union were very keen to make the movie and entrusted the task to the chairman of the All Burma Students Union, Ko Hla Maung and I.

The University history lecturer U Ba Nyunt and Teacher Dora Than Aye of Teachers Training College were chosen to be the actor and actress for the film. We had not made the request to the actor and actress yet. The chairman Ko Hla Maung, other executives, Ko Tun Win, Saw Aung Pa (now a Karen Member of Parliament) and I first went to meet Dora Than Aye at the Teachers Training College where she lived.

We were told that she did not live there and a teacher said she lived at the Cushing School. We went there to find that she happened to be out. The next day, we went to the Teachers Training College during school hours to see her.

The compound of the Teachers Training College was more pleasant than that of the University. The front was suffused with the colours of the various white, red, yellow, blue and other flowers. It was against this backdrop that Teacher Dora Than Aye appeared. She had interrupted her class and came down to the corridor where we were waiting.

When we explained to her in detail about the motion picture we were going to make to raise funds for the union, she half smiled and said, 'Hey, you are not going to topple another cabinet, are you?' She was referring to the students uprising in 1938 which had brought down Prime Minister Dr Ba Maw's cabinet.

We smiled back at her.

Dora continued, 'I am ready to be of assistance. I am enthusiastic about making the film but you must ask for the approval of the dean of the college. I can be the actress only if the dean gives his permission. I was able to make the gramophone record because the dean had permitted me to do so.'

Only when the union has the approval of the dean would it be able to make definite plans. We bade her farewell and left the Teachers Training College.

Dora.

At first I had only known her by name. I had heard her songs on the radio. Now I have seen the singer in person. Her voice was pleasant. When she sang and drew out her voice, the sound waves were like the ripples that moved continuously towards the bank as when a stone had been thrown onto the calm surface of the lake.

Rebecca West wrote that the American singer Paul Robson's voice was like black velvet. Paul Robson's voice was likened to black velvet because it was rich. The singer who sang with a beautiful voice also had beautiful looks that went well with her voice.

When I got back to the hall of residence from the Teachers Training College the beautiful voice remained echoing in my mind.

'I will row the little boat,

It's going to be harmless and peaceful,

Along the river bank,

The water clear and pale green,'

Dora's song was coming softly into my ears. The desire to write the novel came to life at that moment; I had been unable to write it for a whole year out of sluggishness and laziness.

When I sat down at the writing table, the scenery of the flowers entwining in front of the Teachers Training College appeared on the sheet of paper.

That was why I started the novel 'May' with the description of the Teachers Training College, adorned beautifully with flowers.

The union's plan to film the movie during the summer holidays failed. It was due to the secret departure to Japan of the union's chairman Ko Hla Maung and its secretary Ko Htun Shein during the summer holidays. Even though the movie had not been filmed, I finished writing the novel 'May' during the holidays.

As the Nagani printing house had told me to write books, I submitted the novel 'May' to Nagani. At the time, I was in Rangoon to attend school. I had to wait because the school was not open yet. In the normal course of events it would take 4-5 months for my novel 'May' to come out. There were other chosen books besides mine.

After reading the hand written script, Ko Ba Swe also said, 'Your novel's good. It'll be a success.' He was staying at Ko Htun Shwe's house in 49<sup>th</sup> street to be the chairman of the union of the university that year.

After some pondering Ko Htun Shwe said, 'I want your novel to come out quickly. The problem is there are others selected before yours.'

After a while he said abruptly, 'Let's see. Have you any money?'

I didn't catch on and so listened without answering.

'It's like this. If you have the money for the cost of the paper, you publish it yourself. We, Nagani, will be responsible for the distribution. That way your novel will come out quicker. You will get the profit. You also get the copyright.'

I had the money for the school fees readily available and so bought the paper for printing the novel.

The managing director at the time was U Saw Maung (now the manager at Sar Pay Beikman, a government printing house) who had the novel printed without taking an advance payment from me.

The schools have opened. I had reckoned that I would pay the school fees when I recover the investment after the novel 'May' came out, and had stayed in the city, going daily to the Nagani press in Lewis Street to read the proofs.

Mother wrote to me asking which hall of residence I was staying at. I didn't write back. I knew I would get the money when the novel came out. The printing of the novel 'May' took longer than expected. The press was printing the Nagani journal and other periodicals that came out monthly in addition to my novel.

While the novel was still in the process of printing, I went in search of Ko Ba Hein to write a foreword for the novel.

At that time the thirty comrades were on Formosa Island and the students union and the Doh Bamar Asiayone were organizing throughout the whole country for an armed rebellion.

The circumstances were not the same from day to day. Ko Ba Hein was carrying out clandestine tasks while working as an assistant editor at the Myanmar Alin daily.

The government's detectives were on the trail and they had to work in secrecy. There were always quite a lot of people at Ko Ba Hein's house in Myaynigone. Thakin Than Htun, Thakin Soe, Mr Ghosh etc. used to come there. Even then there was the incipient cell of the communist party.

Ko Ba Hein had urged me to help with the translation for the periodical, the 'Ayay Daw Bon (the Uprising).' They were fervently working to form the 'Amyo Thar Asiayone (a national organization) but in the end, had to settle with an organization composed of various groups and parties known as the (Bama) Htwet Yat Gaing.

At present, one has to be careful even about going from one place to another because of the political situation.

I had to go to a house in Yegyaw ward to meet Ko Ba Hein and have him write the foreword for the novel 'May'. Thakin Tin Htun took me to the house where Ko Ba Hein had been in hiding. From Yegyaw they moved to monasteries in Shwegondine to be their secret camps. Ko Ba Hein was arrested on his way back to Myaynu street from Shwegondine.

The novel 'May' came out in August.

The cover was by Nyi Nyi and was printed in colour at Dagon Khin Khin Lay's Taing Pyu Pyi Pyu press in 47<sup>th</sup> street.

I wrote to my mother telling her that I would give her the profits from the book. Because she was asking frequently, I had replied that I had used the school fees to bring out the novel 'May'. I had expected to make a profit when the novel came out and it was with some amount of boasting that I wrote back to my mother.

But mother merely sent word by a chance messenger to buy half a viss of Seikkyi roasted beans for her with the money I got from my novel.

And actually I did not even get to buy her the Seikkyi roasted beans. Far from making a profit, the novel 'May' failed to even recover the investment.

It was known that agents from the districts ordered the novel by VPP (value payable on delivery by post). U Saw Maung left the post of managing director and his place was taken by Ko Maung Maung of Myanma Yoke Shin. In the meantime, the editor Ko Htun Shwe of Nagani was arrested.

I had to return to Kyaiklatt because my mother was ill. I wrote to Nagani asking for the money that I should be getting for the novel 'May'. I dropped in whenever I was in Rangoon and asked for the money.

But war broke out and left the country in ruins; I didn't get any money from Nagani.

I had used my school fees to buy packs of paper for the novel 'May'. I didn't attend school that year. I didn't get the money from Nagani. The novel 'May' instead of making a profit led to a loss.



### 3. Kyaw Min, Book Review of Dagon Taya's 'May'

Translation : Aung Min Htut

#### **Brief Biography of Dagon Tayar**

His original name was U Htay Myaing. He was born in 1919 at a small village in Kyaiklatt township. From young, he was interested in arts and literature. While performing duties as a leader in the Rangoon University Students' Union, he was also an editor at *Oway* magazine.

Dagon Taryar was well-known as a poet, a novelist as well as a critic of literature. He was also interested in music and painting. He was renowned as a good piano player and was praised for his peculiar style of oil paintings.

He was instrumental in the publication of Taryar magazine after the world war. He was the one who proclaimed and led the "New Literature". He wrote for aesthetic enjoyment of literature in poems, fiction, travel genre and biographical notes in *Yokepon Hwyyar*. During this time, he was involved in writing articles on critical analyses of published literature. While writing these, he was vigorous in his pursuit of activities in literary circles, writers' associations and in literary movements. He had served as president of the Myanmar Writers' Association, as chairman of Myanmar Poets Union, and as vice-president of World Peace Congress (Myanmar). He also led the movement in the setting up of the Union Of Burma Writers' Union (formerly Writers' Literary Club).

Dagon Taryar frequently portrayed in his writings his own experiences in the literary circles and

about the World Peace Congress. Some of his notable works are:- 'May' (1941), 'Myaing' (1948),

Dagon Taryar's Dagon Taryar (1950), 'Gandarlayit' (China) (1951), 'Kyarpan Yesin' (The pure lotus flower) (1953), 'Yokepon HWyyar' (Portrait Gallery) (1955), 'Sabai Oo' (The Early Jasmine)(1961), 'Ahlingar' (Prosody)(1962), 'One Moonlit Night'(1964), The Principles of Literature, Literary Criticism, Literary Movements (1967), 'It is certain that we shall reach our destined world' (1973), 'Thunar Paranta' (Abode of Western Islanders)(1987), 'Sein Mya Ayeyar' (The Cool Green Ayeyarwady)(1987), The Piano Player (1994), 'Ahla Bayda' (The Science of Beauty)(1999), etc.

### **The Plot of ‘May’**

‘May’ was an orphan, a loner. Her mother was a dancer who died while she was quite young. Father was a piano teacher who instructed children of well-to-do people to earn his livelihood. With that income, May was brought up. In that era, it was considered that to be able to play the piano was prestigious and dignified. Income was considerable. He was able to keep May as a boarding student at the Diocesan Girls’ School. Her father did not want her to become an artiste like him. He wished her to become someone comely and proper but May had her father’s genes and she could play the piano expertly.

May was beautiful, with bright sparkling eyes and vaguely resembled a Westerner. Being Diocesan educated, she could speak English fluently and it was pleasurable to hear her talking. She was successful in her studies and could play the piano skillfully. She could expertly play and sing classical Myanmar songs. In music, she was dexterous beyond her age.

But May was fashionable; she liked to be independent and free from constraints. In other words, you could say she was flirty, beautiful, fashionable and of easy virtues. When she passed her tenth standard, her father enrolled her in the Teachers’ College. His aim was for her to work as a teacher and live a proper and worthy life with the certificate from that college. But, her father died. She was left alone, like an orphaned rat, in this world. The money left by her father was sufficient for her education to the completion of the second trimester only. So she left school and started looking for work. She was fortunate in obtaining a job to teach English and the piano to the two daughters of the landowner and Honorable Mayor of Pegu, U Pe Maung and his wife, Daw Nyein Khin.

May wished farewell to her friend, classmate and hostel mate, Ma Khin Si, and gave her the address of her job. Ma Khin SI was very friendly with her and the two of them confided in each other for good or for bad. Ma Khin Si belonged to wealthy circles and lived on the Kandawgyi Ring road. But she had come to stay with May at the hostel in college. She was very obliging towards May, and always bore the blunt end of the relationship.

May left for Pegu. She taught school subjects and music to the two daughters, Win and Hnin, of landowner and Honorable Mayor U Pe Maung . As soon as he set his eyes on May, U Pe Maung was pleased. He especially appreciated the beautiful face and the superb proportionate body

structure of May. Daw Nyein Khin too was obliging in her manners as May was the teacher of her two daughters.

Although she was in Pegu, she had frequent communications with her friend Ma Khin Si. She let her know her situation at her job. Ma Khin Si had an older brother named Ko Kyaw Myint and she talked about her always to him, how she was beautiful, how people liked her much and so on. Ko Kyaw Myint, without even seeing her once, took an interest in May. The two siblings conferred and bought clothes as gifts and sent them to May. They agreed to pay her a visit at Pegu.

May had become quite well-known in Pegu. Women from the influential class came to like her and praised her. They were envious of Daw Nyein Khin that she was able to keep a girl like her in her house. The Honorable Mayor U Pe Maung openly extolled her. When she was teaching the girls Hnin and Win, he would come and stand near her and talked to her. After morning meals, he would ask if the food was okay and whether she could eat. As days went by, she had become like a member of the family. In the evenings, May would take a walk with the girls and U Pe Maung would accompany them and talk to her. May couldn't stay aloof from him and she must be in the good books of Daw Nyein Khin. She worried that Daw Nyein Khin would entertain suspicions against her with her husband and that she might lose the job. She, therefore, had to be really careful in her movements.

May became quite well-known among the wealthy class in Pegu. The family members loved her also. Since her arrival at their house, they had become quite celebrated among the families.

Soon, a new commissioner and a new civil surgeon were transferred to their town. In those times, whenever new officers were appointed to their town, it was the custom among the town affluent folks to rush to make introductions as quickly as possible. Thus Daw Nyein Khin arranged a garden party at her house and planned to invite the two new officers.

For that night, May made herself as beautiful as she could. She chose clothes that matched her skin color. That night, May was the most prominent and the most beautiful woman in the crowd. A woman named Daw Aye Shin introduced her to the new commissioner ICS U Sein Tin who was amazed at May's English as it was so good. The rest of the people also heaped praises on her for her excellent English.

Then, Daw Nyein Khin requested May for a recital on the piano. She played and sang 3-4 classical and modern songs. Because she was so adept at the piano as well as singing the songs, she

received the interest, attentiveness and affection from all the guests. Although the hosts of the party were U Pe Maung and Daw Nyein Khin, none of the guests requested their daughters Win and Hnin to play the piano and sing some songs. Because the guests' attention was focused on May, none noticed the girls and forgot about them. Daw Nyein Khin was piqued at May's popularity which buried her two daughters. Slowly, resentment and envy started to grow inside her.

That night, May gave a reason that, because of her entertaining of guests, she felt nauseous and uncomfortable and went and sat in the side garden to feel the breeze. U Pe Maung then arrived near her and praised her on her singing and piano playing. He tried to kiss her. May escaped by running away upstairs. This altercation was seen by Daw Nyein Khin from start to end. She realized that she must then plan to drive out May from the house as soon as possible.

May was no longer the same May as before. Daw Nyein Khin's outlook upon her had changed. She no longer thought of her as a very brilliant young teacher. She thought of her as one "who is trying to catch a husband". Since the garden party, the women from the wealthy class in Pegu did not look upon her as an angel dropped from heaven any more. They considered her as a "flirt". Girls of her own age considered her the same. This was because they couldn't play the piano and speak English as well as May. This made them envious of her and speak ill of her. Within a short time, Ma Khin Si and her brother paid a visit to her. Because Ko Kyaw Myint was a simple man, as soon as he set his eyes on May, he became enamoured of her. May too saw immediately what kind of man Ko Kyaw Myint was, and she had already designs to organize and ensnare him. May told Ma Khin Si that she was not very happy at Pegu. Ma Khin Si invited her to come stay with her. May did not reply.

Ko Kyaw in Yangon longed for May in his heart. His mind was restless due to his love for May. He decided to buy May an sapphire brooch and sent it through the post. May loved that brooch.

May schemed to implicate the lecherous honorable town mayor, patron of the Lord Buddha, U Pe Maung and decided to teach him a lesson. She bribed the housemaid Aye Tin with money and organized her. Then she executed her plan. First she asked Aye Tin to hide herself near the window inside U Pe Maung's study. Then she entered the room on the pretext of borrowing a book. She asked U Pe Maung to search for the book. On being alone with her with whom he had been infatuated, he couldn't control himself and when, giving her the book, hugged and kissed her many

times. Aye Tin then appeared and accused U Pe Maung of being a vile and abominable person. May let Aye Tin go and settled accounts with him.

U Pe Maung gave May Kyats 300 as reparation. She returned to Rangoon. Her aim was to go live with Ma Khin Si and to ensnare Ko Kyaw Myint as her husband. He received Kyats 1800 a year from his grandmother from the sale of paddy from their rice fields. She wrote to Ma Khin Si of her intent to come to Rangoon, rented a room at the YWCA Hostel, and roamed about town as freely as she cared. That night, at an *Aneyint* show, she met and got acquainted with a man named Ba Thein. He was strongly built but not handsome. May became infatuated with at first sight. She followed Ba Thein to his room and spent the night there. She was just mollifying her lust.

The next morning, she went to Ma Khin Si's house where the brother and sister were very happy to receive her. Ma Khin Si's father was planning to entertain the senators with a tea party. At that party, she regaled the guests with the piano and they became interested in her. She became acquainted with U Ba Nyunt, a lower house parliamentarian. He took an instant liking towards May. He invited May to tea. That very night, May and Ko Kyaw Myint became lovers.

One Sunday, returning from the Shwedagon, she visited U Ba Nyunt at his house. U Ba Nyunt received her courteously. Then he showed her his jewellery. May became fascinated by the jewels and was desirous of them.. U Ba Nyunt invited her to come again whenever she so desired.

That night at Kandawgyi, there was celebration of bidding farewell to the Governor and there were stalls jostled heavily by people. Wishing to go there, May asked permission from Ko Kyaw Myint and Ma Khin Si. Being indulgent on her, they readily accompanied her to the celebrations. May purposely schemed to get herself drift loose from them. That night, she again met Ba Thein the rascal, and she again appeased her lust. Then she parted way with Ba Thein and wandered alone in the crowds. She snatched a diamond necklace from a woman and made her escape. Then she did whatever wiles appeared inside her. She phoned up U Ba Nyunt but he was not there , so she returned to Ma Khin Si's house.

May married Ko Kyaw Myint and rented a house at Thompson's Avenue and they lived separately. Ko Kyaw Myint was jobless and was living on the money accrued from his grandmother's paddy sale. He was looking for a job. One day, he went to Taunggyi on business. This was at the instigation of May. The same day Ko Kyaw Myint left, May phoned U Ba Nyunt at his house and accepted his invitation to visit him. He drugged alcohol into May's orange juice and

took advantage and had sexual intercourse with her. Then he wrote May a Kyat 1000 cheque. May did whatever inclination that formed in her mind and then she would regret for all that had happened. When she came back home, she discovered that she was pregnant with child.

When he knew May was pregnant, Ko Kyaw Myint became more careful and attentive. When she badgered him to let her visit Pegu, he himself went with her. There, U Pe Maung visited him at the house they were staying and told him of how May extorted him of kyats 300 and of her affair with Ba Thein. Ko Kyaw Myint began to nurse suspicions.

Later, a son was born to them. After becoming a parent, May tried to mend her ways and correct her immoral habits. She tried to escape from the dissolute shadows of her past. She particularly wanted to disconnect her relationship with U Ba Nyunt. She waited for that opportunity.

One night, Ko Kyaw Myint told her that he was going on a trip to Mandalay on business. May had come to know that his behavior had changed towards her, and his relationship with her was no longer as before. While he was in Mandalay, she went to U Ba Nyunt's, told him that that they were to stay clear from each other and that she no longer had any desire for further association with him. But U Ba Nyunt did not want to break off the relationship. He drove her back to her home, whilst, unbeknown to her, he put a ring onto one of her fingers. Unexpectedly, Ko Kyaw Myint was back at home, and on seeing her, lost his temper. Taking into accounts of what happened then, what U Pe Maung told him in Pegu, the jewellery and Ba Thein's photographs he had discovered in her trunks, he decided to separate from her, disdaining to cast her out as his wife. He took custody of the child. Knowing that whatever and however she gave her reasons, she wouldn't be believed, she returned to life on the streets living a life of profligacy and destitution.

### **Review of the book**

The Nagani book club issued the book 'May' in August, 1941. Dagon Taryar wrote the book while he was in college. It was published in 5 editions, the second in 1947, the third in 1960, the fourth in the 1970's and the fifth in August 1998.

"MAY" made Dagon Taryar well-known. You can say with firmness that Dagon Taryar created May as a beautiful, decadent young woman with easy virtues, while at the same time, May has nurtured Dagon Taryar as an innovative author. The reasons are that, in writing 'May', Dagon Taryar had created a westernized young woman rarely seen in Burmese women's circles; he had

used and formed words in an innovative way; he had portrayed events by using expressive words and had depicted man's aberrant nature with no holds barred.

'May' is actually an adaptation from the English writer Waverly Nichols' 'The Ego', wherein was described the life of 'Nancy', a beautiful and orphaned schoolteacher, a lonely person. The English woman 'Nancy' became the Burmese young woman 'May' in the reworking into Burmese environment and culture.

In the world's literature, Leo Tolstoy had created Anna Karenina, a lascivious young woman. Similarly in Burmese literature, Dagon Taryar had created 'May', a young woman with hard headed views and licentious habits. Leo Tolstoy portrayed his character Anna Karenina from her side, condoning her. However, Dagon Taryar, at first, in the beginning of the book, seemed to pity and condone May; later in the book, he abandoned her and let her face the worldly *Dharma* and decide her own fate. Here, Dagon Taryar had excelled Leo Tolstoy. He portrayed May as the prey of human society and its dealings in those times.

In that era, authors usually write their novels and love stories in the traditional genre of (boy and girl) meeting for the first time, falling in love, being separated for a while and then finally marrying. Dagon Taryar created May straying from that conventional portraiture. This stimulated a peculiar and different taste in readers that roused their interest. That was why Thakin Ba Hein writes in his preface of 'May':-

“ Reading May is like drinking a cup of champagne because the feeling one has is not of the traditional same old plots, but of a special feeling of a sudden rush of sensation and emotion.”

“ When you put it on your tongue, you feel a never- before- experience of a new feeling. You recognize that it is different from the customary feeling that you usually have. It doesn't enter into your stomach smoothly. At first, you swallow it pungent and sharp. While reading it, you daren't dream of new sensations. Nevertheless, you shall bear the pain of meeting it. To appreciate its ministrations, you need to understand it thoroughly. Once you come to understand it, there is more and more enjoyment in reading it.”

On studying the design of the plot of May, you will observe that emphasis is not on the plot but prioritization is given on the character's morals and habits. You read the book not with the aim of wanting to know what will happen next, but you continue to read because you are curious to

know what kind of a woman she is. This is a book with much stress on the character of personnel rather than on the plot of the story.

The story resembles as if the main character is not following the twists of the plot but that the plot itself ensues in the wake of the character's wanton intentions and actions. This let you to believe that the character is a real live person. The book is so written so that it incites the interest of the reader on the activities of the character.

Fiction is rewriting of accounts of man and his environments. It is literature written after observing and studying man vertically and horizontally (i.e. from all angles). Furthermore, you must also study ,in depth, man's nature and his habits. After studying these, they must be incorporated clearly or obscurely into your character's speeches and thoughts. In long novels, the habits of man are invariably woven in portraying the subject, as the Burmese saying goes:- "Where the buffalo splashes and swims, there must be water at the site".

The usual habits, custom and interests of man are logically and credibly presented in long novels and are composed and portrayed as human nature.

When a man is confronted with a situation, depending on the goodness or badness of that situation, there arise feelings of sadness, happiness, hatred, reciprocity with anger, cruelty and envy. This is the normal reaction of human beings. This reaction encompasses the characteristics of all men in this world.

Fiction is literature of accounts of man and his world, and thus it always includes human nature and portraiture of human nature is seen as a characteristic part of novels.

If you omit human nature from novels, the fiction becomes like residue of grinded sugar cane with no substance of import. It will become of little use. It will denigrate into an ordinary tale. That is why portraiture of human nature plays an important role in long novels.

If you can satisfactorily present this essential portrait of human nature, your novel becomes a good story. The critics unanimously proclaim the high standard of such kind of book. On the quality of a good fiction, Saya Zaw Gyi has remarked:-

“ A good fiction is not one that has a good plot, nor does it mean a book with good objectives and lessons. A book that expertly portrays the lives of men is a good book ” ...

Therefore, it is obvious that the glory of a book depends on the portraiture of human nature.



In writing the May fiction, Dagon Taryar was able to present, in the minds of the readers, the main character May as a real person in the real world. You can say May was a an able presentation of a human being. She wanted to be rich. She was desirous of beauty. She was impetuous. She preferred independence and hated restrictions. These are the normal characteristics of humans, more or less.

In their efforts to portray human nature, writers utilize different methods of depiction. Sometimes, the author portrays the nature of his character through the words of another character. Sometimes, he reveals the nature of his character by his actions and words.

Sometimes, he discloses his character's nature by definitive statements of fact. This is an easy method but it is a lifeless portraiture and is not effective.

Therefore, writers use (3) methods in presenting human nature, viz. –

The author lets his character confront a situation and then insinuates about his nature

Portraiture through the help of other characters

The writer clearly states the nature of his character

Dagon Taryar utilizes all 3 methods in portraying the nature of his main character May. Method 1 and 2 are known as demonstrative methods and method 3 is known as statement of fact. Thus, in 'May', you see both demonstratives and statements.

To cite some examples -- While May was staying at Ma Khin Si's house, one night there were celebrations for the Governor's farewell on the Kandawgyi Ring road. These could be seen from their house. May desired to visit the stalls. Dagon Taryar portrayed it as :-

“ May, as is usual with her character, desires suddenly to go and push through the crowd of men and mix with them “ ( - 125).

Then, while they were walking thru the stalls with the brother and sister, she wanted to be free of them and go by herself. In describing how to achieve it, he portrayed May's intention as :-

“ She wants to enjoy the fun by herself. This is her usual custom “.( - 126).

These are instances of the author's statements of facts. ( ) This is the use of the method of direct statement of fact regarding the character's nature.

Dagon Taryar also uses the method of portraying a character's nature by the aid of other characters. An example:-

To teach U Pe Maung a lesson, May told of her plan to the housemaid Aye Tin who replied:-

“ That is not good, Ma Ma. They say he is a member of the Pagoda's trust committee and also the Honorable Mayor. Doing such low down acts is despicable. This is an instance of while intoning God from his mouth, his hands are performing filthy acts. “

He was portraying the great lust of U Pe Maung. This trait was conveyed through another character from her (Aye Tin's) speech. This is a method of portraiture thru use of other characters.

In presenting the mind of his main character May, he let her confront different scenarios throughout the plot, and let her solve her problems by her own wit. He let her made decisions and actions. In meeting these challenges , through gestures of May's three karmas of body, mouth and heart, he let the readers come to know May's character. This method is portraying character through description of showing how s/he confronts and resolves situations. This is the method of demonstration of activities.

In fiction, instead of the writer telling readers know the character of a person directly, it is more appreciated and valued if the writer let the character confront situations and study how s/he reacts to them. This is because the reader imagines himself in the place of the character in the novel and try to resolve the crisis himself. The feeling of the reader is that he himself is meeting the crisis, and normal beliefs and reactions appear in his mind. Dagon Taryar understands this feeling and he has mostly used this method of letting the character meet situations and letting him resolve them in his own way.

The readers, together with May, feel her convictions, decisions and resolutions with sympathy, trepidation and surprise. They come to understand May's outlook and beliefs in life by making decisions in their own way. Thus May becomes like someone real in the outside world and the circle she has been moving about comes to resemble the environment of the actual world. This appears so because of the skill of Dagon Taryar in presenting man's natural inclinations.

That is why, in reviewing Dagon Taryar's May , Thakin Ba Hein speaks of – “The author writes of May's life as an artist draws her true to a life portrait. In drawing so, he doesn't use ostentatious words, nor does he paint with flamboyant colors. He draws her on the paper as he sees her. But there is one thing. He blends the colors beautifully and exquisitely. His artistry is pleasing

to observe. When he finishes the painting, he just props it up. He doesn't mention where the darker areas are or from where light is refracting upon the picture. The viewer himself must differentiate between light and darkness. This use of the reader's intellectual powers to differentiate is in itself a feeling of some kind."

Although May was born of Burmese parents, she is completely devoid of Burmese way of thinking and beliefs. You can say that because she is affected by the coloring of the environment and the system, she has come to represent a Westernized girl. But, no matter how much westernized you are, eventually Burmese thoughts and traditions resurface. As the Burmese saying goes 'You remember your mother when you trip upon an impediment', on meeting difficulties and suffering, you start having regrets and approaching god. These kinds of traits seem to be lacking entirely in May. You can call her un-Burmese.

You can say that the national trait or the Burmese characteristic has vanished inside her. The custom and practices of the wealthy class are superbly presented, thus he has brilliantly drawn the nature of the class.

Dagon Taryar's style of presentation is unconventional and new. He is more versed in poetry and thus he shows signs of poetical thoughts and uses words more seen in verse, beautiful, melodic and sweet. At the beginning of the book, he has used the words '*lay nu aye*' (cool and gentle breeze). This word has never been used before. It is a new word coined by himself. His construction of sentences is more in line like a poem. His use of the preposition '*ko*' instead of '*ei*' '*mi*' for verb suffixes can be construed as ungrammatical, but its use in the introduction of the book has increased the attractiveness of the book. This attraction is enhanced by the use of '*nawt*' as verb, and '*ta nwet nwet*' as adverb in the sentence. The reader, on reading the book, at the very beginning, feels a strange sensation at his unconventional usage. Following that unconventional word usage, the reader comes to meet the beautiful and unconventional woman. This causes a strange appeal of the character as Thakin Ba Hein mentioned in his preface like 'a special feeling of a sudden rise of sensation and emotion'. Composing the prose in unconventional sentence construction on the subject of an unconventional woman goes admirably with the subject.

Because Dagon Taryar is proficient in poetry and the arts, you can see his frequent use of sentence construction using his choice of words and timing as of musical beats. That is why you can call him an author with new visions, new ideas and innovations.

Good classical literature is replete with such features as disregard for readers' age or prevalent times. There are 3 sensations felt in the disregard of readers' age, viz., a different sensation when read in youth, another sensation when read at middle age, and another sensation felt when read in old age. Dagon Taryar's *May* can be read at different ages feeling the different sensations. You can say it has the feature of disregarding the age of readers. The quality of disregarding prevalent times means that whatever and however time changes, whenever readers read the book, the longer time flies, the reader has more satisfaction in perusing ; also, the older it becomes, it seems more and more like a new book. Although Dagon Taryar's book was written in 1940, readers of modern times still appreciate it and read it avidly. Thus, the *May* book belongs to the genre of that quality of disregard of prevalent times.

Fiction achieves classicism when it becomes infused with qualities of indifference to readers' age and prevalent times. The driving force behind this is none other than compositions on man's nature.

Efficient and credible groups in mankind's nature mold and create long stories to become effective. That is why scholars say that the lifeblood of fiction is human nature. They measure the quality of a book with compositions on man's nature. If the composition of the book in regards to human nature is proficient, then they call it a good book.

Dagon Taryar's *May* depicts clearly the fluctuating and fickle nature of the human mind. In accord with the Buddha's admonishment of '*Parpatmi Ranmathi Manaw* ', our mind takes pleasure in things that are bad. We tend to be engrossed in Lust, one of the five senses of attention on objects. To portray that sense of attention to the subject, he has written the life of the woman 'May'. Because he has written about one quality of man that is of regular occurrence, 'May' can be termed a fiction of a high standard.

#### 4. Ye Htut, Review of the Novels ,Self’ by Beverley Nichols and ’May’ by Dagon Taya

The Burmese are adepts in the art of story telling.<sup>40</sup> The Burmese are good at adapting themselves to their environment and are already making progress under the new influence. The novel is one of the results and it is interesting to know that its appearance has been heralded by translations into Burmese of various stories from different sources which being the works of mostly non-Burmans must have served as models to the Burmese.<sup>41</sup>

As stated above, ‘Pantha Ma Sa U’ and ‘May’, the two non-political novels, among the impressive list of publications on politics,, published by Nagani (Red Dragon) Publishing Association, emerged as adapted ones.

As the Left Book Club in England had an impact on Myanmar anti-colonialists, with the aim of spreading leftism in Myanmar, Nagani Publishing Association was established in 1937. With those aims: to understand the true beliefs, to nurture political Bohmus (Majors) and Sitkes (second-in-command of a military unit), and to measure and deliberate the forces and steps of those who are fighting against the colonialism on the other side, Nagani Publishing Association was founded. Most of the books published are non-classics but translated works. Most are political. Non-political adopted fictions like ‘Pantha Ma Sa U and ‘May’ became Myanmar classics.<sup>42</sup>

The present paper is to focus on the review of ‘May’ written by Dagon Taya published in the era of Nagani Publishing Association. ‘May’ was first published in 1941.

His pen-name is Dagon Taya and family name is (U) Htay Myaing. He was born in a village of Kyaiklat Township in 1919. As being engrossed in art, literature, music, painting, and politics, he became an editor for ‘O-wei Magazine’<sup>43</sup> while he was one of the leaders of the University Students’ Union. He has been a famous poet, novelist, and a critic as well. He has been in high praise for his playing piano and painting oils.

After the Second World War, he published ‘Taya Magazine’. He stimulated new interest in literature among the writers of Myanmar by establishing a slogan: ‘Sapaythit – The New Literature’. He was the chair of Myanmar Writers’ Association, Myanmar Poets’ Union and the

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<sup>40</sup> The Burmese Novel (in English), *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Rangoon, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication No. 2, 1960, pp. 405 M-410.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> The Research Paper entitled ,Myanmar Translated Classical Literature’ (in Myanmar) read by Min Kyaw at the paper reading section at the Sarpaybeikman, published in 1992, pp. 307-208.

<sup>43</sup> The Voice of the Students’ Union and that name represents the cry of a fighting peacock (Khit-Daung),

vice-chair of the World Peace Congress (Myanmar). He was also one of the founders of the Writers' Union of the Union of Myanmar (formerly known as the Writers' Literature Club).

His famous works encompass a broad range of topics. *May* (topic is given after the name of the main woman character) (1941), *Myaing* (also the name of the heroine) (1941), *Myuyitwaitho Nway-Oo-Nya-Mya* (The Dizzy Nights in Spring), *Kyapanyesui* (Lotus and Pure Water) (1953), *La-young-shoon-mya-tho-Nya-ta-pa* (A Night that the Moon Lit Lavishly) (1964); *Doh-Khit-Ko Yauk-ya-myi-hma Ma-lwe-pa* (Inevitably to be ushered into our very age) (1973), *Sunapaparanta* (The Land West of the Ayeyarwaddy River) (1987), *Sein-mya-Ayeyar* (Emerald Green Ayeyarwaddy) (1987), *San-da-ya Saya* (The Pianist) and *Sabe-Oo* (Thee Formost Jasmine) (1961) are novels. 'Dagon Tayar's Dagon Taya' is his autobiography, published in 1950. *Yoke-pon-Hlwary* (The Portrait) (1955) is about the sketches of his contemporaries. *Ghadalarij* (1951) is about China. *Ah-lan-ka* (The Prosody) (1962) is his collective poems. The other two books, *Sapay Thavbotaya*, *Waibanye*, *Hlotesahmu* (Literary Theory, Criticism, and Movements) and *Ahhka Veda* (Aesthetics) have high literary values.

'May' is the most prominent as it was first published by the historically well known Nagani Publishing Association on 8 August 1941. It has been re-published five times so far. Dagon Tayar has been an influential poet and writer throughout the history of Myanmar literature. Similarly, 'May' has been the best seller for its every issue. What is more, the author's style of writing 'May' exhibited the valiant craftsmanship that became a stimulant to a new literary circle in the anti-colonial era.

His very first sentence of 'May' has been remarkably referred back as an example of new writing.

Le-nu-aye-ka-ta-nwe-nwe-ne-ko ... (The wind, soft and cold, is still gently and playfully teasing.)<sup>44</sup>

It can be said 'May' has both literary and historical values.

The strikingly written introduction to the story by Thakin Ba Hein, especially the first line, also sets tongues wagging whenever the story needs to be referred. It says:

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<sup>44</sup> *May*, by Dagon Tayar, August 1998, p.1. - The first sentence of Beverley Nichols' 'Self' reads: „The outside of the Misses Perrings' seminary for young ladies was not an inspiring spectacle, even on a brilliant morning in May, 1918.“ [Editor's note]

Reading 'May' is like drinking champagne. It is because its 'taste' is not like those of other foods and nutriments which are ever the same. It makes us feel an unusual flush. Once it is placed on the tongue, its taste becomes different. It is more unusual than those eaten before. It cannot be easily gulped down. The first gulp leaves us hot and flushed. While reading it, we daren't think of what new things are. But, anyway, we have to dare have the passion as we experience it. What we need to accept its tender care is a good grasp of it you have. The more grasp you have, the tastier the read. His idea is portrayed in the style of *art nouveau*. The viewer must be capable of seeing its every detail. The rays of it is beautifully shining before us. The rays shine down like a trick of an illusionist. It is said to be its art. Those illusory things are said to be the taste of an intoxicant.

'May' was a college student with any guidance. She was footloose and fancy free. As soon as she left school, she came across well-off people. First she had no idea about them. She could not size up their situation. Finally May knew them well. When she knew them well, she abandoned the place only because of that well-off persons. Later she danced to the tune of her desire to become a well-to-do person. The writer of the novel satirized the rich by standing on the side of May. The novelist displays his art of depicting the life of May. In drawing the portrait of May, he neither adds any extra-touches, nor applies any colours he likes. He only does it as his eyes witness her. Here is one thing. The texture of the paint is right. The ornament for beauty is there. The style is sophisticated. When he finishes his final touch, he gently puts it on the stand. The novelist never points out to us where the light or the shade is. He leaves it to the viewer. Being analytical to increase the power of knowledge is a sort of flavour.

Ko Htay Myaing (Dagon Taya)<sup>45</sup> who wrote 'May' was by then a student. He is an executive committee member of the University Students' Union. Last year he was a propagandist. He became an editor for Myo-nyunt Magazine published by the Whole Burma Students' Union and Ou-wei Magazine published by the Rangoon University Students' Union. He is the writer who has given birth on the stage of the Union Association. The short stories, articles, and poems written by him are read in Dagon, Ghanthaloka, and University College Magazines. He made his literary debut as a poet. He became a novelist now. He has profuse ideas for poems. As a poet-novelist, he uses poetic words in writing. Very beautiful. His diction in writing novels is like a garland of flowers. Another thing is that he is a sculptor of words. He carves new words. His writings are lavishly composed of new words. What he writes is rhythmically<sup>46</sup> composed.

He is a revolutionist. He creates new things by revolutionizing old-fashioned ones. Instead of using *lepyelenyin* (gentle breeze), he uses *lenuaye* (soft and cold wind). Instead of 'play', he writes 'tease playfully'. In this way, the taste of what he is different from someone or something is like drinking champagne. The picture of May will appear to be an object before you like clouds of smoke spiralling up. That object is nothing but the story of May. To be intoxicated, you have to go on to read the novel beyond the introduction.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Maybe, the explanation in brackets was added only in the later editions. [Editor's note]

<sup>46</sup> In the original text the word „Rhythmic“ is written in Latin letters. [Editor's note]

<sup>47</sup> An introduction to the first issue of May written by Thakin Ba Hein, 8 August 1941, Nagani Publishing Association. 'Tahkin' means Master, this is an honourable title given to each and every member of Doh-Bamar-Asiayone (Our Myanmar Society). Thakin Ba Hein was not only famous for his book entitles 'Danashinloka' (The Capitalists' World but also for his leading role in anti-colonial movements.

Another comment in praise of 'May' is made in the article entitled 'Pygmalion and the story of May' written by Khin Myo Chit, the late reputed woman writer in Myanmar and in English.

Pygmalion, the Cyprian King and sculptor, as mentioned in the ancient Greek mythology, fell in love with Galatea, an image of his own carving to which Venus gave life. Dagon Taya in writing 'May', strongly resembles Pygmalion as he feels extremely attached to 'May' within his heart. Asking the others for any comment is completely out of question.<sup>48</sup>

The next comment made by Journalgyaw Ma Ma Lay says something about how the Burmese (Myanmar) writers are adept in the art of story-telling as stated in the beginning of this paper.

After reading 'May', Dagon Taya's good art of story-telling is not to be mentioned. I feel like writing to express thanks to Dagon Taya for his great depiction of women characters in his novel.<sup>49</sup>

With the advent of English, inaugurating the dawn of western culture, the Burmese (Myanmar) novel at last makes its appearance. The Myanmar are good at adapting themselves to their environments and already making progress under the new influence. The Myanmar novel, one of the results, has been heralded by translations into Myanmar of various stories from different sources of western novels. It is already known that inscriptions, histories and moral tales were written in good prose very early in the history of Myanmar literature. Even the greatest Myanmar Monk poets could not resist the temptation of narrating in prose. For example, Shin Maha Silalumsa of the fifteenth century was famous for his prose narratives – Rajawan Kyaw and Parayana Vatthu. Thus Myanmar prose shared equal honours with Myanmar poetry. In the early twentieth century in the history of the development of prose styles in Myanmar, there emerged many fictional narratives in prose. Some of them are adopted ones including Dagon Taya's 'May'.

The work which served as the model to 'May' is 'Self' written by Beverley Nichols, one of the Penguin classics, first published in May 1922. Dagon Taya's 'May' was published 19 years later than its model. And even Beverley Nichols' work is not his own. He admits that in his foreword to a later Penguin edition of 'Self'.

One of the reasons why this novel is reissued, in such an alarming cheap edition, is in order that the intelligent reader may amuse himself by spotting the number of authors from whom its ideas are gently but firmly stolen.

It is a very young novel. I was still undergraduate when it was written, and though I already had two other novels to my discredit, I had not yet learnt the art of covering up my tracks, which, in literary circles, is described as 'the acquisition of personal style'. Some of the book, it is true, is exceedingly personal and some of it isn't really so bad, when you come to think of

<sup>48</sup> Pygmalion and the Story of May by Khin Myo Chit, Taya Magazine, vol. 9, p. 74.

<sup>49</sup> Dagon Taya's May by Journalgyaw Ma Ma Lay, Journalgyaw Journal, 17. January 1948, vol. 11, No 6, p. 29.



it ... there's some dialogue that rings true, quite a lot of quiet humour, and a tremendous gusts for sheer wickedness which is very appealing. All the same, its influences are unmistakable.

But if copied, at least I copied from the best models. The whole story, of course, owes a heavy debt, (which is happily uncollectible) to *Vanity Fair*. Nancy in *Becky* are sisters, not only under the skin, but outside it, for even their personal appearances is strikingly similar. Their careers have much in common and so have their accomplishments, although Nancy descends to the depth with far heavier footsteps than her enchanting prototype.<sup>50</sup>

One of the best novels from which Beverley Nichols took the source of his novel 'Self' is thus 'Vanity Fair', the masterpiece of the English novelist and essayist William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1862). Thackeray was a voluminous writer and one of the masters of English realism and was among those famous in the period of mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century known as the age of Victorian literature.

A body of works was written in England during the reign of Victoria (1837-1901), a long period of magnificent achievement. Its leading lights include, in poetry, Robert Browning, Edward Lear, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson; in criticism, Matthew Arnold and George Ruskin; and above all, in the novel, Charles Dickens, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, William Peacemake Thackeray, and a host of slightly lesser names.<sup>51</sup> Thackeray's main character is a woman, Rebecca (Becky) Sharp, so that the original title of his novel is 'Vanity Fair, a Novel without a Hero' (1847-1848). Producing a type of representative human character sketch in novels may it be descriptive, realistic, or satirical, is the main task of the novelists who need talent and pencraft to create a human virtue or vice or general.

There are two categories of fictional characters – flat and round characters as described by the course of their development in a work of literature. Flat characters, as it were, are two-dimensional in that they are relatively uncomplicated and do not change throughout the course of a work. By contrast, round characters are complex and undergo development, sometimes sufficiently to surprise the reader.

The two types were described by E.M. Forster in his book 'Aspects of the novel'. The examples he gives is Charles Dickens' Mrs Micawcer; of a round character, William Thackeray's Becky Sharp.<sup>52</sup>

'Vanity Fair' has been acclaimed as one of the best novels in literature or as one of the best pictures in the filmic world. It was starred by Mary Selway. The novel can hold specific interest for readers while the filmic interpretation attracts the attention of the film viewers because of Mary Selway's brilliant versatility in acting. The blurb of the films runs thus:

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<sup>50</sup> Foreword to 'Self' by Beverley Nichols, published in Penguin Books, 1938, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Victorian Literature, Webster's Reader's Handbook, 1997, p. 536.

<sup>52</sup> Flat and round characters, *ibid*, p. 202.

Our first peek into the world of this film is a peacock feather, and it sets the stage both visually and metaphorically for a colourful story about a woman who uses her allure to get what she wants. Thackeray's 'Vanity Fair' is provocatively subtitled "A Novel without a Hero". It is the story of two young women, one rich, one poor, both looking for in an era when people were supposed to take what they were given without trying for more. And true to his word, Thackeray does not give us the usual character arcs – it is not about redemption or consequences or lessons learned. It is an unsentimental tale of foolish, snobbish, and greedy people and their efforts to get what they think will make them happy: money, social position, love.<sup>53</sup>

And Michael Willington the critic of the Chicago Tribune remarks that the film is "lusciously entertaining".

Those evidences show that Beverley Nichols, an enthusiastic young writer and an undergraduate became inspired to carve 'Nancy' out of 'Becky'. That is why Beverley Nichols says: Nancy and Becky are sisters, not only under the skin, but outside it.

Becky (Rebecca Sharp) became an orphan, when her mother, an opera singer, as well as her father, an artist, died and grew up at Miss Pinkerton's Girls' School. Her very intimate friend at school was Emily Sedly. Both departed each other when they finished school. Becky became a governess, a woman who is paid for to care for and teach children by staying at their home, at Sir Pitt's house. She was well-versed in music, drawing, and French. Sir Pitt tried to arouse Becky by words and manners. She overcomes it. Sir Pitt's respected Aunt Metilda liked her and brought her to London. Becky married Captain Rowdon Crawley, an heir to Aunt Metilda instead of Joseph Sedly, Emilia's elder brother, who loved her much. Becky was in trouble because Rowdon was a gambler. To pay back heavy debt, she approached Lord Steyne. Rowdon suspected and accused her of disloyalty. They separated. Affluent women of London stayed away from her because she was lower in status. They were also jealous of her because she was wise and more educated. Later she went to Germany and became a wanton woman. Sedley knew that and sought after her. She went to India where Joseph had become very rich and became his beloved wife.

Miss Pinkerton's Girls' School becomes Misses Perrings' seminary for young ladies in 'Self' Becky becomes Nancy and Emily becomes Helen Travers. Joseph Sedly becomes Walter Travers. On leaving the school to work as a governess, Becky dropped back from the carriage Dr. Johnson's dictionary given as a gift to her. Nancy reads the introducing letter to the vicar's wife written by Miss Perrings and tore it into tiny fragments. Sir Pitt has been transformed into Mr. Jackson, the vicar. The ladies at the garden party including Mrs. Jackson were jealous of Nancy's musicality and

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<sup>53</sup> The blurb of Vanity Fair in filmic version,

fluency in French. Nancy blackmailed the vicar and went to live in London. Ella Barnes, who had been a model to the same artist as Nancy in the old days, introduced Bill James to Nancy. She went wrong with him. Later she went to stay at Helen's house and married her brother Walter. Nancy persuaded Otto Kraft who had been introduced to her by Helen and Walter to loan her money and had an adulterous affair with him. Later, the vicar appeared and revealed that Nancy got affairs with Bill James and Kraft. Walter and Nancy separated. Finally, Nancy got back to Bill whom she wanted to devote her life to.

At the end of 'Self', Beverley Nichols, as very talented and skilled in writing, tried to satirize the life of Nancy:

Back!

Back to the life from which she had prayed so passionately to escape.

But there was no escape.<sup>54</sup>

'May' by Dagon Taya is the perfect replica of 'Self' by Beverley Nichols. Through his charm of prosody, diction, and knowledge of music, he completely changed Nancy into May. Nancy becomes May, the real Myanmar woman with the utter spirit of Becky who ridiculed the vain glory of the then affluent class.

As Nancy was poetically and metaphorically dressed in Myanmar garb by Dagon Taya to become May, no readers can be doubtful about its source. Misses Perrings' seminary for young ladies has been reproduced as Teachers' Training College where May made friends with Ma Khin Si (Helen). U Ba Maung the landlord has the same character as his prototype, Mr. Jackson. Here is the garden party again but it is embellished with Myanmar traditional flavour – the ceremony of paying homage to the Nine Images, the Buddha and the Eight Arhats known as the Phaya Koezu. May is well versed in English and playing piano while Nancy in music, drawing and French. May's mother is a dancer and her father is a pianist. Walter Travers becomes Ko Kyaw Myint. Ella Barnes is now Ma Than Kyi, an old classmate, who also introduced May to Ba Thein (Bill James). Kraft becomes U Ba Nyunt who has an adulterous affair with May. May and Ko Kyaw Myint separated when her true story unfolds. Finally, she went back to Ba Thein the hot and passionate embrace was her last resort. The last lines in both books are the same with different language.

The result is that May written by Dagon Taya contributes to Myanmar literature. We owe great gratitude to Dagon Taya for his effort to adopt an English novel. The art of transforming a

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<sup>54</sup> Self by Beverley Nichols, published in Penguin Books, 1938, p. 245.

British character into Myanmar seems to be much more difficult than that of writing one's own. Such a writer needs three abilities – the perfect knowledge of the language from which another type of literature is reproduced, the perfect knowledge of his or her own language, and the magical power of writing that helps change one culture into another. Dagon Taya wrote *May* when he was an undergraduate like Beverley Nichols. Dagon Taya had already established his reputation as a poet. He might have wanted to do something unusual to make his novel debut. He might have read many other novels in English. Among them, he chose 'Self'. He might have the idea of satirize the upper social class in anti-colonial days in Myanmar. 'Self' and 'May' are said to be the same in structure. But the portrayal of characters and the set are different. The skeleton of 'May' is Beverly Nichols', the flesh is Dagon Taya's. That is because they belong to two different cultures and to two different societies.

Nichols' Nancy is more challenging to her society than Thackeray's Becky. Becky lived in mid-to 19<sup>th</sup> century and Nancy was in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. If compared with Nancy, May is more daring as she had to try to survive herself against social classification, lack of wealth, less opportunity to get a good job, and the hard time when Independence was not regained. The writer, Dagon Taya, indirectly pointed out to us that there will be much more spoiled women like May.

Nagani Publishing Association might have the idea of publishing some different issues like 'May' and 'Pantha Ma Sa U' which do not directly tell us about the era and situation under colonialism but indirectly stimulate the Myanmar readers, young and old, to have the spirit of freedom that will help our society liberate from the age when were enslaved.

In conclusion, Beverley Nichols might have satirized the society in England by writing 'Self'. Dagon Taya also daringly pointed out the the demoralized upper class and victimized impoverished people by writing 'May', that is said to have both literary and historical value.