

CHAPTER II

LIFE AND WORKS OF U PON NYA AND HIS YODAYAR NAING MAWGUN

In this chapter, I will explain further about Mawgun, the life and works of U Pon Nya and his Yodayar Naing Mawgun. From thence, we will be able to evaluate the quality of U Pon Nya's Mawgun as well as compare and contrast with the one written by Letwe Nawrahta. In addition, I will be discussing Buddhist cosmology and the history of Mandalay. The whole picture of the Mawgun cannot be grasped or appreciated unless these subjects have been fully comprehended. However, since they are not directly linked to the main topic and to avoid confusion and mix up of events, they appear as appendix A and B.

2.1 More about Mawgun

The Myanmar alphabet is developed from that of old Brahmi, dating back to the 8th and 7th centuries BC and flowering in ancient India during the 3rd century BC. As time passed, a large number of Pali and a few Sanskrit words were adopted into Myanmar language through Mons.¹ According to available sources, the Myanmar language was first put to use in 1113 AD.² The assumption is that “Amugun” was born side by side with the advent of Myanmar language.

With the development of the Myanmar language, important literary works such as Buddhawin, Mahawin and Yazawin emerged. To record them and other important events in the life of the people for the benefit of posterity, Amugun had been widely employed. As textual evidences, many Amuguns inscribed on stone inscriptions were found in

¹ Myanmar Abidan, Union of Burma, “Introduction” Ministry of Education, Myanmar Language Commission, part I, (Published in No 27, Pyi Road, Yangon, 1978), page 1.

² U Hla Pe, Burma: Literature, Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhism, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), pages 35, 106.

Bagan and Sagaing periods. At that time, Mawgun had been written only in prose. One archetypal Mawgun of Bagan period was the description about the donation of offerings to the Lord Buddha. The kings, court officials and the people of Bagan put a list of their donated items in the Mawgun: monastery, garden, cows and goats, slaves, etc.

The change of word from “Amugun” to “Mawgun” took place in the First Innwa period. The style of writing also evolved from prose to epic poem. Likewise, the subject matters had transformed from the donation of things to the descriptions of royal elephants, palaces, royal long boats, battles, royal lakes, pagodas and so on.

In the traditional court of the Myanmar kings, the person who could compose a Mawgun was regarded as a man of great learning. People paid respect to him, for only a few could write in the grandiloquent style of the Mawgun.

According to the New Mawgun list, there are more than (120) extant Mawguns.³ The greatest Mawgun writer in history was Watmasut Nawaday who, in his lifetime, wrote as many as (20) Mawguns. Acclaimed as a prolific writer, King Bodawpaya conferred on him the prestigious title of “Nawaday” which connotes “flawless writer”. In the history of Myanmar literature, there exists five Nawadays. Even then, only two were the recipients of the title officially conferred by the kings. These versatile writers were Pyi Nawaday Gyi in the First Innwa period and Watmasut Nawaday in the late Konboun period.

Mawgun are perhaps the oldest kind of Burmese verse. One negative aspect was that the panegyric treatment of the subject matter often lessened the historical value of these poems.

The first Mawgun composed in verse form was “Pyi Sone Mawgun” by soldier-poet Shin Htwe Nyo.⁴ It was an account of King Maha Thiha Thura’s military campaign

³ Dr. Ye Ye Khin, *Sit-naing Mawgun (3) saung hnit Aphwint kyan*, Ph.D Myanmar literature thesis (Yangon University, 2007, unpublished), page 7.

⁴ U Pe Maung Tin, *Myanmar sarpay thamaing (History of Burmese Literature*, (No. 122, 31 street Yangon, U Mya Thaug (01784) Khittayar publishing house, 1987), Page 59.

when he sailed down the river Irrawaddy to suppress his renegade son and uncle in the year 1472. It was brilliantly composed in a much detailed way that U Kala, a great chronicler, and the compilers of Hmannan Yazawin made the best use of this Mawgun in the writing of their respective chronicles.⁵

Relatively few Mawguns were found in Taungoo period because it was a period of fighting both internally and externally. Mawguns, however, re-flourished in the Nyaungyang period or Second Innwa period.

The tradition of writing Mawgun was passed down from generation to generation. Since the Mawgun prospered in the Konboun period, it can otherwise be named “the era of the Mawgun”. During the colonial period, Myanmar literature went into eclipse. Mawgun writings also met the same fate. It was only with the founding of the Burma Research Society in 1910 that an impetus was given towards the systematic study and revival of Myanmar classics. Even then, the study of Myanmar literature found a proper place in the curriculum of Rangoon University only in the 1930s thanks to the efforts of late Professor U Pe Maung Tin. In the aftermath of independence, nationalist fervor came to the fore. There were attempts to revive everything Myanmar. Old Myanmar words like Mawgun regained their stature. This time, the meaning of the word amounts to “permanent record”. Nowadays, Mawgun is commonly written when the construction of new roads, bridges or buildings have been completed.

In his book **“On both sides of the Tenasserim range”**, Sunait Chutintaranond rightly pointed out that Mawgun, Eigyin, Chronicles and Ayedawbon kyan, all these important documents are a collection of invaluable sources for the study of Thai-Myanmar warfare history or Myanmar-Siam warfare which cannot be found anywhere in the Thai documents.⁶

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Sunait Chutintaranond and Than Tun. **On Both Sides of the Tenasserim Range: History of Siamese Burmese Relations**, (Bangkok 10330, Thailand, Chulalongkorn University Phayathai, 1995), Page 54.

2.2 The life of U Pon Nya and his works

Since the olden days, there have been numerous well known poets and writers in Myanmar. But we can say that only a few can match U Pon Nya in fame. In addition to his skills in composing various kinds of poems, U Pon Nya was one of the founders of Burmese drama after Myawaddi Mingyi U Sa who wrote the first Myanmar court play "Enaung Zat (Prince Inao)" and U Kyin U, a pioneer dramatist in the reign of King Bodaw. U Pon Nya was a humorist-satirist and excelled in burlesque.

His fame spread high and low but his life, full of ups and downs, ended shortly after the rebellion by two princes, Myingun and Myingondaing, against their father, King Mindon.

It is befitting to describe the background of U Pon Nya's time before his biography and literary achievements are presented. Only then, will the life and works of U Pon Nya be more comprehensible and confusion can be avoided over mix ups of events and the people.

At the end of the early Konboun period which started from King Alaungpaya to King Bodawpaya, the late Konboun period began with the era of King Bagyidaw (AD 1819-37). This king moved his capital from Amarapura to Sagaing. It was during his reign that Myanmar lost the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824 the result of which was the imposition of huge war indemnities of 10 million rupees or 1 million pound sterling on Myanmar, a demand for the provision of a British resident and the subsequent annexation of Manipur, Rakhine and Tenasserim regions by the British.

At the close of the war, internal struggle between King Bagyidaw and his brother, Prince Tharrawaddy broke out. Powerful Min-tha-Gyi U O, a brother of the chief queen, devised a plot to arrest prince Tharrawaddy. The prince retreated to the town of Tharrawaddy. Later, he emerged victorious and became king (1837-46). On the death of the king, his son Baganmin (1846-53) ascended the throne. In his reign, Myanmar was defeated again in the second Anglo-Burmese war of 1852 and the British carved out the

lower part of Myanmar from the map. Out of despair, the king entered a state of semi-insanity and the country was in chaos.

Here, we witness history repeating itself. A conspiracy was hatched by Minister U Pwa, the Minister for Granaries, to force Prince Mindon to leave from the royal capital. The prince together with his brother Prince Kanaung retreated to Shwebo. After securing sufficient men and weapons, an army under the command of Prince Kanaung besieged the Capital. At that time, the royal army had to fight on two fronts; against the British and against Mindon and Kanaung's army. The king surrendered with his notorious Queen Nan Madaw Mae Nu. Prince Kanaung brought 5 regalia to Shwe Bo for Mindon to ascend the throne.⁷ Kanaung was then made the Crown Prince, an act which upset many of King's sons. The King founded the new city of Mandalay and named his capital "Yadanabon Naypyitaw" (The bejeweled capital).

Although Prince Kanaung was an official heir apparent to the throne, many the king's sons did not like him. One reason was that the crown prince restricted the sending of senior princes to rule their given appanages.⁸ Moreover, they thought that only a son should receive the crown and sceptre. And King Mindon, having fifty three official wives and an indefinite number of concubines, had forty eight sons to choose from, complete with sixty two daughters.⁹

Thus, the two sons by the name of Myingun and Myingondaing rebelled against their father and uncle. In fact, Crown Prince Kanaung was not only their uncle but also father in law of the ring leader Prince Myingun. The rebellion was eventually put down but the Crown Prince fell dead during the fight between rebels and the royalists. The two princes escaped; Myingun to Vietnam which was then French Indochina and Myingondaing to Yangon. U Pon Nya, a famous astrologer, was charged with revealing the opportune moment to start the rebellion to the princes.

⁷ Dr. Ma Tin Win, *History of Ten Kings*, (Yangon 2008), page 286-287

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Shway Yoe, *The Burman, His Life and Notions*, (the Dominion of Canada by George J. Mcleod Limited, Toronto, 1963, Norton Library), Page 456.

Owing to the King's attempted purge of rebel leaders, suspicion stalked Mandalay. Another rebellion had been set off by prince Padein, son of murdered crown prince Kanaung. He attracted large masses of followers, treaded the victory ground at Shwebo and marched on Mandalay. There were reasons to believe that the king seriously contemplated abdication. Nevertheless, with the advice of his chief queen, a respected astrologer, who consulted her charts and predicted victory, he carried on to fight and crushed the rebellion.¹⁰

2.2.1 The life of U Pon Nya

U Pon Nya was born in the town of Sale about the year 1807.¹¹ His father U Myat Htwa was a tutor of prince Tharrawaddy who fell fighting for the prince during the rebellion. His mother Daw Hson was from the lineage of the Governor of Sale. He was named Maung Poat Si and at six years of age, he was ordained a novice.

From his religious title “Shin Pon Nya”, he came to be known as U Pon Nya. He learned the scriptures under the tutelage of Khin Gyi Sa and Khin Gyi Thar,¹² both abbots from Sale. Being a precocious child, he could recite various treatises, poems and chronicles by heart when he was still a novice. At the age of 20, he became a monk. His teacher was then the Bamaw abbot.

At a time when Baganmin ascended the throne, U Pon Nya's uncle U Pwa, a tutor of Baganmin, and his teacher Bamaw Abbot were entrusted with the high posts in the court. Taking advantage of it, U Pon Nya left the monastic order and became a layman. Through them, he gained access to the court and attended on the king.

In 1853, Baganmin was dethroned by Princes Mindon and Kanaung. As customary, the new rulers executed U Pwa who was then a powerful Minister in the

¹⁰ Thant Myint U, **The River of Lost Footsteps**, (Oxford University Press, 2007), Page 142.

¹¹ Maung Htin Aung, **Burmese Drama**, (Oxford University Press, Amen House, London, E.C.4, First published 1937, Fourth impression 1957), page 72.

¹² U Pe Maung Tin, **Myanmar sarpay thamaing (History of Myanmar literature)**, (Yangon, U Mya Thang (01784) Khittayar Publishing house, 1987), page 282.



court. Circumstances forced U Pon Nya to enter monkhood again. Later, with the help of the Bamaw abbot, he again took the life of a layman and served under the new king.

It is interesting to note that though he received fame from foretelling the fortune of others and writing astrological works, he jeopardized his own life by trying to serve many times in the court. He may have known from the very beginning of his fate or destiny. One oral history stated that he begged the king for the exemption from the punishment by death and that a proclamation was made according to his wish, for the king was a great admirer of U Pon Nya.

U Pon Nya was conferred the title "Minhla Thinkkaya" and granted the village of Ywasi as his appanage.¹³ Despite being born with a crippled arm, he was popular among court ladies as well as female commoners. This aroused the jealousy of men which in the end led to his demise.

In 1865, the Myingun–Myingondaing Ayedawbon (struggle) broke out. The rebels attacked the palace exactly at noon. Soon after the attack, the crown prince and a number of important court ministers were killed. The king was then in the Summer Palace with the British resident Col. Sladen.¹⁴ The Summer Palace was a small building outside the stockade of the main palace. There was an entrance called the Eastern gate. The rebels foresaw the event that the king would appear in this way, and they stationed a man near the gate to murder the king.

On hearing about the rebellion, the king rushed back to enter the main palace through the eastern gate. When the King saw the man, not knowing that he was waiting to kill him, he ordered the man to carry him to the inner circle of the main palace as it was the custom of royalty not to travel on foot. The man who was also an old servant of the king was too frightened and stupefied to carry out the assigned duty when he encountered the king. So, the king had a narrow escape by riding on the back of his would be assassin.

¹³ Thant Myint U, **The Making of Modern Burma**, Page 112. See also Sasodaw Mya Attupatti, **Biographies of Royal poets**, Hmawbi Saya Thein, Pages 390-394.

¹⁴ Shway Yoe, **The Burman, His Life and Notions**, (the Dominion of Canada by George J. Mclead Limited, Toronto, 1963, Norton Library), Page 255 .

Upon reaching the main palace, the man's sword accidentally slipped away from its scabbard as he knelt down for the king to dismount. Eyeing the misfortune, Hlaythin Atwinwun who happened to be close by immediately beheaded the old servant as it was forbidden to carry any weapons inside the inner palace. The revolt was finally quelled by the king's men on the selfsame day.

U Pon Nya was allegedly thought to have connived with the rebel princes. He gave the princes an appropriate time to revolt as foretold by the stars. Later, U Pon Nya defended himself that he was compelled to make this ungrateful act to the king for fear of the nearest sword. However, U Pon Nya was charged with treason. After the trial, he was sent to the house of Myotha Governor U Thar Oh as a prisoner on parole.¹⁵ During custody, it was revealed that he had some amorous adventures with the junior wife of the Governor.

In the following months, another plot to overthrow the king was discovered and the conspirators were executed. U Pon Nya was also put to death with them under the Governor's order. The king, after all things returned to normalcy, remembered U Pon Nya and asked his whereabouts. When he heard the news of the tragic death of the great poet at the hands of an obscure Governor, he said wearily "Alas, a man was killed by a dog".¹⁶ U Pon Nya died in the year 1866.

However, King Mindon's attitude was worthy of note. According to G E Harvey, when the king disliked someone, he just said "Take him away, let me never see his face again." Then, everybody knew what followed these words¹⁷. Some days later, the king asked the man's whereabouts. When he was told the fate of that man, the king took out some lines from the books on religion or Lokaniti* to recite regretfully. After that, he was occupied with other important affairs as usual.

¹⁵ Maung Htin Aung, **Burmese Drama**, A Study, with Translations of Burmese Plays, (Oxford University Press, Amen House, London, E.C.4, First Published 1937, Fourth edition 1957). Page 74.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ G E Harvey, **History of Burma**, (The Beginning of the English Conquest; Longmans, Green and Co. 39 Paternoster Row, London, E.C.4, New York, Toronto Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, 1967), Page 321.

* Book of Morality.

Thinking himself a bodhisattva (the future Buddha) and being a great convener of the fifth Buddhist synod, he boasted that in his reign, never a death sentence was passed on anyone by himself. Considering the King's behavior and the nature of sins committed by U Pon Nya, the cause of his death was clear from the very outset.

Now follows the last poem of U Pon Nya just before the boatman sailed him home;

"Well, there it is. If I must part my lips to speak,

I'd say the outcome of my former lives is now revealed.

Even such as the kings of Kosala – Monarchs and rulers of people living lives

Of great renown in their palaces of gold, must ever perish when their time is

At an end – this thought gave me a pang of fear at the sceptre of relentless births and deaths.

And as the sins committed in his past existence, turned against him, came – as mine do now – to cut him down, he fled to a rest house,

There to die like a dog, unheeded.

Well, I knew the wrong, and yet when driven on by fate – the return for actions of the past – this splendid intellect of mine did not see so clear. Now am I face to face with my misdeed."¹⁸

2.2.2 His works

U Pon Nya was a writer of humorous satire against various types of men. His humor was also to satirize the fads and fashions of the time. He had often been criticized for his coarse jokes.

¹⁸ 80th anniversary of Than Tun, Articles and Papers of Than Tun, (Published by Po Wa Offset, No 147, 45 street, Botataung, Yangon, April 2003). pp 228-229.

An aggregate of (4) Mawguns written in his life time were "Yadana Nadi Mawgun", "Hpondaw Bwe Mawgun", "Yodayar Naing Mawgun" and "Mandalay Bwe Mawgun".¹⁹ Among them, "Yadana Nadi Mawgun" was said to be the best. The main concern of the Mawgun was the beauty of the river, but he wrote less about it and extremely extolled the glory of the king. The king himself warned him to reduce the amount of praises and wonders put to him. This kind of excessive praising was also found in his "Yodayar Naing Mawgun". However, it can be said that by writing these Mawguns, U Pon Nya became more prominent in the royal court.

U Pon Nya wrote a variety of poems. Apart from these poems, he wrote over (60) Mittar Sar (letter of affection). These letters were one of the Myanmar literary forms. It emerged in the first Innwa period. Though it sounds like "love letters", it is not the kind of letter exchanged between lovers. Originally, it was a letter of guidance to the king sent by monks advising him to rule the country in accordance with the code of conduct and kingly virtues. In the ensuing periods, these letters were written by both monks and laymen alike. In it, the elders gave guidance to the youths for dealing with worldly affairs. It can also be a didactic letter consisting of homilies and advice.

Later, these letters were sent from brothers to sisters, mothers to sons, teachers to pupils, monks to laymen and vice versa. It became a line of communication, imparting wisdom from one person to another based on their fondness of each other. In the Konboun period, the subject matter of these letters expanded and covered various subjects such as letters of sympathy on cow, shin byu* and so forth. His expertise in writing these letters established fame in this field also.

He wrote over (30) dramas and religious novels. Out of all his work, 'Chandaka elephant king' novel was the most artistic of all. This story and many others were taken from the Jatakas. He was so successful in modifying them that many of them became classics in Myanmar literature.

¹⁹ U Pe Maung Tin, *Myanmar sarpay thamaing (History of Myanmar literature)*, (Yangon, U Mya Thaung(01784) Khittayar Publishing house, 1987), Pages 211,214,311.

* Shinbyu ceremony refers to a Buddhist rite by which a male youth (usually) is initiated into the order as a novice and is termed noviciation or novitiation.

U Pon Nya was a realist in Drama. His masterpieces were “Paduma”, “Vessantara”, “Wizaya” and “Water Seller”. His dramas reflected the political situations of the day. He wrote his first play “Paduma” as an admonition to those ladies of the court who were indulging in romantic intrigues with courtiers. When confronted with anger and complaints of the court ladies, he wrote “Vessantara” at the behest of the King to appease them. “Wizaya” was said to have been written in support of Prince Myingun who had been wild and troublesome as the youthful Wizaya. The proposition was that Myingun would bring greatness to Myanmar if he were entrusted with the throne.²⁰ By writing this play, U Pon Nya was suspected of popularizing the prince who later rebelled against the king. “The water seller” was aimed to remedy the rupture which was brought about at one time between the King and the Crown Prince.

He was the foremost poet, scholar and essayist of the day. He wrote astrological works and won further fame as an astrologer.

So great was the fame of U Pon Nya that in those days, whenever a piece of good work came out, people were quick to give credit to U Pon Nya for it. As such, the contemporary writers of U Pon Nya were very upset and discouraged. They expressed their bitter feelings through their works that as it happened more often than not, they no longer had the guts to undertake their writings under those circumstances.

2.3 U Pon Nya's Yodayar Naing Mawgun

Despite this Mawgun being widely known as "Zinmme Naing Mawgun" or "Yodayar Naing Mawgun", it is also called “Mandalay Bwe Mawgun”. U Pon Nya, while eulogizing the glory of the successive kings from Mahasamada up to King Mindon, wrote about the incursions by the Siamese in the year 1853 and the royal city of Yadanabon Naypyitaw (Mandalay).

The Mawgun with its (56) stanzas comprises three parts. The first part deals with brightness and fortitude of King Mindon. The second part is about the three battles

²⁰ Maung Htin Aung , **Burmese Drama**, A Study, with Translations of Burmese Plays, (Oxford University Press, Amen House , London, E.C.4 , First Published 1937, Fourth edition 1957), Page 107 .

between Myanmar and Siam over Keng Tung and the last one is related to the founding of Mandalay in the year 1857.

2.3.1 Part I of U Pon Nya's Mawgun (Hpondaw Bwe Mawgun)

This Mawgun starts with the coronation ceremony of King Mindon. U Pon Nya made an assertion that the king was a scion of solar race^{*} and descendant of the sakyan^{*} clan. His forebears were from Mahasamata to Prince Siddahta^{*}, the last descendant of the Sakyan clan and then to the successive rulers of old capitals of Myanmar. It mentions that at one time, Innwa was destroyed by the Mons, the event of which was in some ways analogous to the world destroyed by fire. Out of this chaotic situation, King Alaungpaya united the country, became a refuge for his countrymen and the dominant ruler of Jambudipa^{*} Island.

Each descendant king of Alaungpaya up to Baganmin was duly glorified and the movements of the capital cities from Shwebo to Amarapura to Sagaing were mentioned. Then U Pon Nya described the period of turbulence during which the British Raj came from India and caused trouble and consternation in the land as the fortune of the country was dimmed.

As foretold in prophetic saying and divine auguries, thievery and heresy thrived, famine stalked the land, the country's glory dwindled and the teachings of Lord Buddha were on the wane. In searching for a person who could lead the country out of this predicament, the Saka^{*}, ruler of two realms of Tavatimsa^{*} and Catummaharajika^{*},

* There are two royal lines of descent from Mahasamata, one is solar race and the other is moon race. (Pa. adiccavamsa)

* Lendgandary Indian Prince Okkamukha (mouth of furnace) founded the Sakya race together with his younger brothers and sisters in ancient India. (Pa. Sakiyavamsa)

* Secular name of Lord Buddha meaning "One whose desire are fulfilled."

* One of the four islands located south of Mt. Meru in Buddhist cosmology.

* Lord Indra in Hindu mythology.

* Six level of paradise above Mt. Meru.

* The realm of four guardian spirits of the world.

stumbled upon the future Buddha i.e., King Mindon, residing in Tusita* celestial realm. He was deferentially requested to be reborn as a human being and become the defender of the Buddhist faith.

Owing to rumors that Prince Mindon would plan to grab the throne, he was compelled to leave the palace for Shwebo. U Pon Nya paralleled this incident to the situation in which Lord Buddha departed from the palace at night to take refuge in the forest. In the struggle, it was Prince Mindon who emerged victorious and became king. Unlike their past arrogant attitude, the British paid great respect to the new king and sent valuable presents including the ship "Ye Nann Cakra". A hundred other kings who ruled the countries around Myanmar also rallied round him*.

Then the kingly virtue and the aptitudes of King Mindon are mentioned. The king was a man of considerable learning, cultured and polished. He was well versed in the intricacies of astrology and had thoroughgoing knowledge of Vedic learning. The king also envisaged the creation of a new city "Mandalay". Although King Duttabaung of Sri Ksetra* city, King Asoka from Pataliputta*, King Duttagamani of Ceylon and King Anawrata of Arimaddana* city were the upholders of Buddhist faith, they had been guilty of taking others' life. But in the case of King Mindon, he was totally free from any sin or blemish. Moreover, the young king was in the mould of a Universal Monarch. His power and glory was immeasurable. No one could discover a single fault with the king just as Mara the evil one and the youth Uttara* could not find out any mistake on the part of Lord Buddha after the enlightenment.

* Tusita, literally the Realm of the Happy Dwellers, the fourth highest out of six planes of habitats of celestial gods, is the realm where the Bodhisatta, the future Buddha, traditionally dwells until it is time for him to be reborn as a human being and achieve enlightenment.

* Myanmar kings traditionally style themselves as the monarch of 101 nations.

* Fields of Glory, name of the city of Pye in ancient times.

* Modern Patna in Bihar state, India.

* The ancient formal title of Bagan meaning "crusher of enemies".

* Uttara was the pupil of Brahmayu who stayed close to the Lord Buddha for seven months. He was sent by his mentor to find out whether the Buddha was replete with the 32 distinguishing marks of a superman.

U Pon Nya concludes the first part with the event of the consecration ceremony of pouring water on the king's head. Gods and demi-gods, Brahma deities, the four kings of Catummaharajika did not fail to attend. Gods sent gifts as tribute to the king; a wish fulfilling gem, a cat's eye gem with fifty six rays, a cloud formed pearl, a thunderbolt-like weapon with a hundred teeth, a thoroughbred horse and a white elephant. And kings from diverse lands and various islands paid tribute to the unrivalled king.

2.3.2 Part II of the U Pon Nya's Mawgun (Yodayar Naing Mawgun)

In this part, U Pon Nya gives full accounts of the three battles which broke out in 1852, 1853 and 1854. He starts with the events happening in the year 1852 AD, two years before the ceremony of anointing the king's head with pure and limpid water.* The king of Ayutthaya, having carried out minor aggressions against the Shan Yuan territory during the previous reigns of Myanmar kings, was said to have entertained thoughts of encroaching Myanmar territory.

Hsenwi-Bwa, governor of Keng Yung Gyi and the 12 Lu Shan districts approached the King of Ayutthaya to plant incongruous ideas. The King fell in with the plan and appointed his younger brother Chao Sivarat as commander in chief to invest as far as Keng Tung. Under his command, twenty four armies were mobilized and the army advanced with the accompaniment of the sounding of trumpet and drums. The lord of the town of Nan with a force of over five thousand from Mong Pong later followed the main army.

Anticipating the situation in the nine Maw Shan states in the east, King Mindon raised General Min Hla Min Htain Kyaw to a kingly status to overall charge of the campaign. Commander of the vanguard Tein Gyar Min Gaung who was farsighted and skillful in generalship was sent forward to give battle. He entrusted senior warrior Bala

* Muddha bhiseka or head-consecration

Jeyya Kyaw a regiment of three units each a hundred strong from Keng Yung, to take up defensive positions.

On the east sandbank of Thanlwin River, Shan leaders headed by the Chieftain of Keng Tung were given an army of three thousand men to march as one column. Deputy Commanders Naymyo Thamanta Kyaw Thu, Naymyo Thura Nawratha and Min Kyaw Thiha Minhtin took the command of the regiments from Tagaung - Mo Dar region and preparations were made for the coming battle.

Due to the assault of three columns of the Vanguard each with the strength of five hundred under the command of Tein Gyar Min Gaung on the twenty four units of Yun Shan at a place called Pyeng Sam, two miles south of Keng Tung, Yuan Shan forces had to retreat from their original stand to re-position at Sawmsili, west of Keng Tung after making a detour of Kho Po Ho. While they were on the move, the Myanmar army launched an attack and went after them. In this battle, the two generals, Sao Vanna, heir apparent of Chiang Mai and the brother of the Chief of Lampang were captured dead. A war elephant, fully caparisoned, was also captured as booty.

While besieging the town, twenty eight armies under the command of Chao Hsenwiraja, brother of the king of Bangkok made several attempts to overrun the city. However, their efforts were all futile. Then the forces led by Tein Gyar Min Gaung headed for the Sawmsili hills where the Ayutthaya forces were stationed and attacked along three routes crushing the enemies in a pincer movement.

Due to immeasurable virtue and power of the king who was on the threshold of nirvana, a wondrous event occurred in which deities misled a contingent of one thousand five hundred troops headed by Tak Hsenwise, the lord of Mong Lun, into Keng Tung and they were easily captured.

This is the description of the first victory won by King Mindon over Ayutthaya forces in the year 1852.

The King of Ayutthaya reviewed the battle and proclaimed at the royal audience that even Saka with his adamantine weapon would not be able to deter him from his

course. He spoke of his intention to attack the neighboring nine Shan states in Myanmar territory.

The King ordered the Crown Prince, Viceroy of Keng Yung and his uncle to lead the campaign. The army of twenty thousand soldiers with one thousand war elephants, cavalry and uncountable chariots were formed under the command of warrior mandarins Phra Bayiddhi, Phra Grumbahu and Sawbwa Trivumsa, lord of Keng Lun and Binnya Pravum, lord of Mong Nam, and the whole army marched into the territory of Myanmar.

One column penetrated up to Mong Niong, sixty miles east of Keng Tung and bivouacked there. Another column came by way of south of Keng Tung and encamped at Ho Pong clearing. Their strategy was first to overrun Keng Yung Gyi and the twelve districts of Lu Shan and then take over nine Keng (fortified) towns and the nine Mong regions.

On the other hand, King Mindon deputized General Mingyi Maha Nawratha to administer the nine highland Kamboja Shan states and ordered him to base at Mongnai where six thousand troops could be called up to national service. In addition to five long standing units of Mongnai, many stalwarts were called into service from all Shan states which lay west of the Than Lwin river.

Two well known mandarins, Minhla Minkhaung Kyaw and Nemyo Minhtin Thihathu were appointed as deputy commanders. The Myanmar army marched on the 14th day in the months of rains (Waso). Commandant of Yin Khe contingent, Nga Kyaw Gaung was given the task of garrisoning and holding the city of Keng Tung. Kareni chieftain Ah Baw of Kye bogyi deployed his forces to seal off the road from Chiang Mai. After these tactical manouvours had been made, Mingyi Maha Nawrata with his four combat arms²¹ arrived at the bank of Than Lwin river. While the armies were about to cross the river, one strange incident occurred. A battle hardened Elephant named Yan Naing violently refused to plunge into the river. It swam out to cross the river only when the royal order was read out.

²¹ The four combat arms consist of elephantry, cavalry, chariots and infantry.

While stationed at Keng Tung, forces led by Deputy Commander of Hsenwi were sent out to lure the enemy. The battle between Chiang Mai forces of three thousand troops with a hundred rampaging war elephants and Myanmar forces under the command of Minhla Minkhaung Kyaw in Mong Hsat broke out. Unable to withstand the attack, the lord of Chiang Mai had to make a detour to the east of Loi Leng hill. On their retreat, they were shot at by the Karenni who had been laying in ambush. In this battle, three generals were wounded and taken prisoner.

At this juncture, the King of Yonaka with his sixteen regiments arrived and was able to lay siege on Keng Tung. They concentrated on attacking three places: the pagoda hill, Keng Lep and Kamkaw. However, the three commanders from Myanmar armies, chieftain of Laikha, Crown Prince of Keng Tung and the governor of Mong Lap sallied out to lure the enemy. When the enemy were trapped, seven thousand troops carried out an assault to crush them. The Siamese were totally dispersed and the general in command by the name of Phra was decapitated.

Here, U Pon Nya wrote another humorous scene. Owing to King Mindon's glory, the two powerful big guns (a pair of cannon) from the Siamese side defied the order to open fire and remained silent. At worst, they rolled themselves into the Myanmar stockade.

Seeing the signs of assuming the defensive from the enemy's side, the chief of the Shan armies hurled himself into the thick of the battle. Though the governor of Keng Lun, Trivumsa tried to contain the attack, he himself was seriously injured and had to run away while governor of Keng Hsen lost his life. The commander in chief of Phrae also tried to escape abandoning his umbrella and drum which was the symbol of his official status. When the king of Ayutthaya saw this shameful act, the king blocked his retreats and killed him on the spot. Many troops were rounded up and all kinds of weapons, elephants and horses were taken.

This is U Pon Nya's description of the second battle which broke out in the year 1853.



It is mentioned that the third battle broke out in 1854 AD. General Maha Nawratha chose Crown Prince of Laikha's throne to destroy the enemy's elephantry which was being used for resupply of troops. Though the forces of the crown prince were checked with elephantry, they were able to smash it into smithereens.

The generals of the king of Ayutthaya held the view that the city of Keng Tung could be won through siege tactics. While enemy troops were being replenished, Saka who wanted to show the perfection and the greatness of the king to the Yun lords, created a miracle in which millions upon millions of celestial warriors were revealed to enter into Keng Tung. By seeing it, the Uncle of the king of Ayutthaya under cover of the forests ran away from the battle field. Without the leader, the whole army retreated from the siege of Keng Tung.

Knowing the possibility of the enemy's retreat beforehand, Myanmar and Shan troops cut off the escape route and avidly pursued. It took seven consecutive days to carry piles and piles of various weapons, equipment, elephants and horses.

2.3.3 Part III of the U Pon Nya's Mawgun (*Mandalay Bwe Mawgun*)

The third part of Mawgun begins with the accomplishment by the king of the founding of the city of Mandalay. Legend has it that once Lord Buddha visited and alighted on top of the Mandalay hill. Ten thousand ogres who dwelled in it brought offerings for the Buddha. Among them was a sweet and lovely sixteen year old ogress named Canda Mukhi. So much was the reverence for the Lord Buddha that the young and lissom ogress plucked off her breast and made an offering of it.

Upon seeing this great devotion, Lord Buddha preordained that after half of a fifth millennium year later; this ogress would be reborn as a king and found a great city at this place. Then, his religion would shine like a sun in that city.

As the Saka and Brahma deities appealed to King Mindon to build a new city, the mandarins of the court set out on the journey to reconnoiter the ground. With the help of

Visukamma, chief architect of Tavatimsa heaven on Mount Meru, the auspicious site was chosen in the year 1856.

The ground was consecrated with the recitation of mantras by eighty one Brahmins. No matter how majestic and magnificent the palaces of King Maha Panada, primeval king and direct descendent of Mahasamada and Saka, ruler of Tavatimsa must have been, one could not see them with one's own eyes. However, everybody could see personally the palace of king Mindon to extol the wonders of such a fabulous palace.

Vejjayanta palatial mansion* and the palace of King Mindon might equally be marvelous but the latter should be considered as more serene and pleasing because the king was soon to be endowed with the three qualities of full enlightenment: remembering past existence, acquiring divine eyes and finding the Dharma.

In the year 1857 AD, a royal procession was made with great pomp and ceremony to transfer the capital from Amarapura to Mandalay. Here, U Pon Nya gave the description of the organization of the Myanmar army. The formation of the basic unit of the traditional four combat arms of Myanmar army was the combination of one war elephant with its three mounted elephantry troops, one war chariot, three cavalrymen and five infantrymen. It is called "patti". There are altogether nine stages: patti, senamukkha, gumba, gana, vahini, putana, samu, aniki and akkhobhini. Formation higher than patti may arrive at by multiplying the base with three at each stage, proceeding in this manner to complete eight stages. Only the ninth stage of "akkhobhini" is made by multiplying with 10.

The procession of the great King and his retinue was escorted by gods and deities also. The king was exceedingly glorious and as he observed the code of kingly conduct, a rare occurrence took place. The Saka sent the valahaka pearl, a gleaming pearl born of the sky which was guarded day and night by ogres on top of Mount Vepulla, to King Mindon through a courtier god in the guise of a crow.

* Saka's palace in Tavatimsa heaven

Another gift Saka presented to the king was a white elephant from Kalay country in the northern part of Chindwin River. During King Mindon's reign, the country with its capital Mandalay was peaceful and its opulence rivaled the divine realm of Nimmanarati, the fifth highest realm of Tavatimsa. The king practiced the five principles of moderate or sensible living. As the king was a pre-eminent person, he was regarded as august an entity as a stupa, the crest of a pinnacle symbolizing preeminence.

2.4 Conclusion

According to Dr. Hla Pe, the lineage of the Myanmar kings is baffling to the Myanmar as well as to foreign scholars for it is mentioned in Myanmar literature that Burmese kings had two main fountain-heads of ancestorship: Pyu-zaw-di of the pre-Bagan period, and Mahasamada, the first elected king of this world cycle.²² In describing the ancestorship of Myanmar kings, U Pon Nya follows the Mahasamada theory.

And his writing reflected the political situation of the country at that time. Myanmar landed on hard times when the British came twice to plunder the country and took away the land. The King had no choice but to make peace with the British. The need of the hour was to remedy the general deterioration of the country. The King manipulated the situation so deftly that the British gave due respect to him. U Pon Nya extolled the towering magnificence of the king's glory and even called him a future Buddha.

U Pon Nya wrote only four Mawguns in his life time and they were not as outstanding as his other works. We can even venture to say that U Pon Nya was more brilliant in writing poetry and drama than Mawguns. One weakness of the Mawgun was tendency to over eulogize on the king's glory. It may be his personal trait but we can also guess that the king himself, like all other kings do, would more or less expect some sort of eulogy from him as was the custom of the court.

²² Dr. Hla Pe, **Burma: Literature , Historiography, Scholarship, Language, Life and Buddhis**, (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), Page 49.

U Pon Nya peppered his Mawgun with some humor and describes incredible scenes. We found his writing on a pair of cannons and the parade of Saka's celestial warriors was so amusing when we read through all tedious details of the wars.

U Pon Nya was skilful in combining three subject matters to place in one Mawgun. As he came from monkhood, his writings revealed his in depth knowledge about Buddhist literature. He showed his mastery of enlivening the characters whether they were from heaven or hell such as Saka, Brahma and so on.

He was flawless in weaving the vivid episodes of the Mawgun but the description of the scenes of the battles was not as clear and comprehensible as the one written by Letwe Nawrahta. One reason for this is that U Pon Nya's wars were smaller in size and less important than that of Letwe Nawrahta.

Mawgun contains many historical facts and figures. There are many important dates and events in history. It reflects the critical moment of the country during the reign of Baganmin. We can partly learn about the conditions prevailing in Siam and the Shan states. The documentation of the making of a new capital city and the organization of old Myanmar four combat arms are also interesting to note.

All in all, though we cannot say that U Pon Nya's Yodayar Naing Mawgun is excellent, it contains a lot of facts and figures about the country and the people at that time. Hence it has the merit of being considerably informative.



Figure. 2.1 King Mindon(1853-71) , reproduced from Myanmar Encyclopaedia CD-Rom.



Figure. 2.2 Prince Kanaung , reproduced from Myanmar Encyclopaedia CD-Rom.

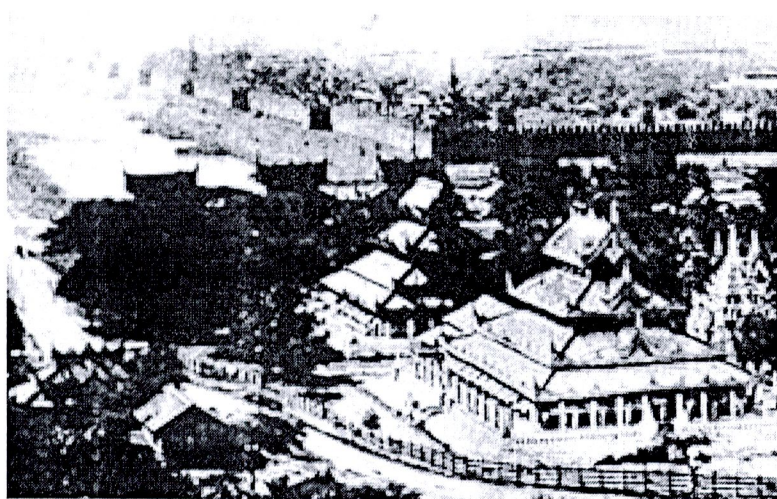


Figure. 2.3. Mandalay palace (bejewelled city), reproduced from Myanmar Encyclopaedia CD-Rom.



Figure. 2.4 Mandalay palace, reproduced from Myanmar Encyclopaedia CD-Rom.