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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EXPLORATION OF BUDDHIST ORDINATION CULTURE IN MYANMAR

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#### ABSTRACT

"In Myanmar, the Buddhist ordination ceremony symbolizes the great renunciation of Buddha and also the ordination eight years-old son of Lord Buddha. Both this historical event symbolized and dramatized harmoniously in the ordination ceremony to join the monastic Sangh Order as a novice-hood and monk-hood as long as they desire to stay there. The ordination ceremony is an essential part of their life in Myanmar. The ritual performance of *pabbajjā* and *Upasampadā* ordination ceremony currently being practiced in Myanmar will be approached here by five stages of study: the first is introduction of the two kinds of ordination according to stories illustrating; the second is the role of supporter in ordination ceremony; the third is about the entry day of ordination ceremony; the fourth performer is actual ordination ceremony day; and the fifth exploration is three types of present ritual ordination in Myanmar."

#### INTRODUCTION

Ordination is the procedure and process by which individuals are consecrated, that is to perform various religious ritual and ceremonies. The procedure and ceremonies of ordination differ by religion and denomination. In *Theravāda* Buddhism, Ordination is basically of two types in logical order:

- *Pabbajjā* ordination; and
- *Upasampadā* ordination.

In the beginning of Buddhism, there was no difference in the method of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordinations as both ordinations could be accomplished only with the *saranagamana* formula. However, in tracking the historical events like the ordination of young Upāli and his companions in Rājagaha, a clear distinction is made between the statuses of the two types of ordination. The Buddha instructed the *bhikkhus* not to confer *upasampadā* ordination to anyone under the age of twenty years specifically referring to the group of seventeen boys headed by Upāli. The reason given was their immaturity, being under the age of twenty, their behavior was found very childish and immature such as making noises from night until dawn.

Therefore, it should be assumed that the age restriction was imposed by the Buddha to safeguard the solitude of elder *bhikkhus* and their tranquil meditation practices. For this reason, the separate name of *sāmaṇera* was applied to those of a younger age classification. This is a different lifestyle suited to the *Samgha* members at a younger age. Thus, *pabbajjā* or *sāmaṇera* ordination became the ordination for the younger candidates under twenty years old. (*Mahāvagga Pāli*, 1986). It is necessary to briefly illustrate here why there was the imposition of an age restriction with reference to an incident involving the father and his son. According to the *Vinaya Mahāvagga Pāli*, the father was ordained as a *bhikkhu* and his young son as a *sāmaṇera*. The people who saw the old *bhikkhu* and the young *sāmaṇera* going on their alms-round complained that the child might have been born of his wife, a *bhikkhunī*, because the *sāmaṇera* was too young to go for alms-round. For this reason, when the Buddha came to know the situation, a rule was laid down not to confer the *pabbajjā* ordination on one below fifteen years of age. It should also be observed from this story that from the age of fifteen up to twenty, boys should remain in the *Samgha* as *sāmaṇeras*. After a subsequent incident, out of compassion for two surviving young boys of a serious plague, the Buddha reduced the age limit for becoming a *sāmaṇera* to an age when one is able to scare a crow away.

This pattern of developmental evolution of the rule is not unusual. The first proclamation of the rule limited the minimal age to fifteen years was changed following an incident to allow the ordination of a boy as a *sāmaṇera* when he reaches a minimum age old enough to scarce a crow away, a “*kākuḍḍepaka*” (*Mahāvagga Pāli*, 1986). The two stories illustrate how and why the minimum age eligible to be initiated as a *sāmaṇera* and a *bhikkhu* were established. These two stories occurred prior to the *pabbajjā* ordination of the Buddha’s own son, Rāhulā who was ordained two years after the Buddha’s enlightenment. Starting with the *sāmaṇera* ordination of Rāhulā, the *saraṇagamana* formula became exclusively assigned for the initiation of *pabbajjā* ordination. Consequently, the *ñatti-catuttha-kamma* replaced the earlier *saraṇagamana* formula for the *upasampadā* ordination. The induction of the *pabbajjā* was simply recitation of the *saraṇagamana* formula. The applicant for *pabbajjā* must be a *kākuḍḍepaka*, old enough to scarecrows away and must have parents’ consent. This *pabbajjā* ceremony actually requires a *bhikkhu* to be an *upajjāya*. The applicant’s head is shaved and puts on ochre robes. The Three Refuges (*saraṇagamana*) are repeated after one’s *upajjāya* and one thus becomes a *sāmaṇera*. Then, in way of ordination, three evolving development in *upasampadā* (higher) ordination can be outlined in the *Vinaya Mahāvagga Pāli*:

- *Ehi bhikkhu* formula of ordination;
- *Saraṇagamana* formula of ordination: and
- *Ñatticatuttha-kamma* formula of ordination.

The *ehi bhikkhu* formula was used by the Buddha himself, especially in the early days of his enlightenment. In the history of *upasampadā*, adjustments were made to the inductive formula over the passage of time. In addition to the *ehi bhikkhu* formula, the *saraṇagamana* formula was permitted and subsequently replaced by the *ñatti-catuttha-kamma* formula. The changes were introduced as the need arose which generally concerned the preliminary duties, initiation by *ñatticatuttha-kammavācā* and the duties to be done after that found in the procedure. The preliminary duties for *upasampadā* ordination evolved, step by step, for instance, owing to the improper behavior of some *bhikkhus*, a rule was established that the *upajjāya* had to be chosen by a candidate before his ordination.

In the *bhikkhu-saṃgha*, there exist two types of ordination: *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā*. Three formulas of *upasampadā* ordination were applied according to their respective procedures. Among these three, the *ñatti-catuttha-kamma* formula alone has been practiced by the *Samgha* for the purpose of *upasampadā* ordination since the demise of the Buddha. Just as the *upasampadā* ordination is performed for the *bhikkhu-saṃgha*. Nowadays, in the modern time, the performing of ordination ceremony types of situation is also dissimilar from Buddhist country to country. In Myanmar, a particularly interesting and descriptive ordination rite is performed. It is also called *shinpyu-yahankham-ahlū*, meaning, donation of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordination ceremony. For a Myanmar Buddhist family, the ordination ceremony is an important part of ceremony in their life to cultivate many real merits of supporting the *Sāsana*.

**The Supporter in Ordination Ceremony:** Ordination is a central affair of the *Samgha*, necessitating a mandatory quorum of *Bhikkhus* prescribed by the *Vinaya* for its

accomplishment. But the traditional support of the kings and well-wishers has gradually taken a central place in these matters of the *Samgha* from outside the circle of the actual ceremony. Support a candidate for ordination has become a tradition for Myanmar Buddhists known as “*yahan-dagar*” (male supporter of a *bhikkhu*), “*yahandagarma*” (female supporter of a *bhikkhu*) and “*shin-dagar*” (male supporter of a *sāmaṇera*), “*shin-dagarma*” (female supporter of a *sāmaṇera*). The role of supporter to the newly ordained *bhikkhu* plays an important part in the monastic tradition of the *Samgha* in Myanmar. The supporters, the *yahan-dagar* and *yahandagarma*, are those who provide the eight essential requisites to a candidate for ordination with the thought. By doing so, they will accrue merits for this life and hereafter. They usually support the essential needs of that *bhikkhu* for life, while some pious devotees regard that *bhikkhu* as their very own son, looking after his needs and even portioning him among their children to heir heirlooms. Regardless of whether one is related or not, they ordain the one to whom they are devoted in their heart. *Sāmaṇeras* with good qualifications in studies of the canonical texts, especially those with the highest marks or at the advanced level of *pathamabyan* monastic examinations are sought after by supporters who are rich and powerful for the privilege of sponsoring the cost of their ordination ceremony. It is a few describe how the sponsors lavish the ordination ceremony according to Buddhism in Myanmar tradition.

**Preparations for Ordination Ceremony:** The ceremonies of ordination have become detailed into a complex religious ceremony central to Buddhists in Myanmar. They bear their different names dependent on the candidates. In the case of the candidates of *sāmaṇera*-hood alone, it is called *shinpyu-ahlū*, the donation of *pabbajjā* ordination. For candidates of *sāmaṇera*-hood and *bhikkhu*-hood, it is called *shinpyu-yahankham-ahlū*, meaning, donation of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordination. In this thesis, the researcher will discuss two kinds of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordinations because of all ceremonies are related and much closed. If daughters are included in this ceremony, the prefix *nartha*, “the auspiciousness of ear-boring” is added, for example *shinpyunartha-ahlū* or the donation for *pabbajjā* ordination and ear-boring. Whatever the kind of ordination, the donation usually becomes shortened *Ahlū* which means “the great donation.”

It is believed that *shinpyu* or *shinpyu-nartha-ahlū* is the most important and inevitable duty of Myanmar Buddhists to be fulfilled. Consequently, these ceremonies are held as grand as they can afford. These ceremonies represent a coming of age for both parents and children. On the one hand, adults tend to feel inferior and not attained of the status worth of respect until they have sponsored such a ceremony and on the other, a son is not considered to be a good Buddhist or worthy son until he has fulfilled the *pabbajjā*. Therefore, all members of family are socially compelled to fulfill to the best of their ability the *Ahlū*. From the time of the birth of a son, parents start thinking of that ceremony and save for many years to meet the lavish expense of the special occasion of *Ahlū* by the time their children, and especially sons come of age. Their newborn son fills parents’ life with great expectation of forthcoming donation ceremony. When the son reaches the age of five or six, the *Ahlū* is held to the limit of what parents and family can afford for that ceremony. Wealthy families will frequently sponsor the *pabbajjā* not only for their own son but also help other boys whose parents cannot afford the expense of that

ceremony. If a family does not have a son, the *pabbajjā* ceremony of a relative's son may be sponsored to cultivate this wholesome deed. There is also a tradition that when one family holds an *Ahlū* for their own sons and daughters, their relatives' sons and daughters are also invited to be the postulants called "shinlaungs". Therefore, the number of postulants may be one or many at any *Ahlū*. (*The Initiation of Novicehood and the Ordination of Monkhood in the Burmese Buddhist Culture*, 2002)

The *Ahlū* has thus become socially compulsory and the most important of all religious ceremonies for Myanmar Buddhists. This is why the lay people understand that the merit accrued by the celebration of *Ahlū* is the most auspicious of the manifold kinds of meritorious deeds acquired through charity (*dāna*). This act is also valued as the highest spiritual and ethical deed for posterity, for which both the parents and child accrue immense merit in this life and the hereafter. The parents are blessed by this supreme meritorious act which is the noblest and holiest they can ever fulfill towards their sons. They are cultivating the real merit of supporting the *Sāsana*, "sāsanānuggaha", by offering their own son to the *Sāsana*, by doing which the parents consequently become the close relatives of *Sāsana*. This type of offering is the noblest *dāna* in Buddhism. Moggaliputtissa Thera's comment to the King Aśoka regarding the real benefactor of the *Sāsana* was that "Even a lavish giver of gifts like [you] is not a kinsman of the religion, [a] giver of wealth is he called, O ruler of men. But he who lets son or daughter enter the religious Order is a kinsman of the religion and [together with this] a giver of gifts" (*Ibid*). Hence, it is the great expectation of every parent in their life to give the *Ahlū* for their son so that he may gain what is difficult to obtain, that is, *sāmaṇera*-hood, "*pabbajjitabhāva*". On the other hand, every son should receive the *pabbajjā* in order that his parents may accrue the merit of religious sponsorship, "*sāsanadāyaka*".

Occasionally, there are communal *shinpyu-ahlū*s in some parts of Myanmar such as a *pabbajjā* ceremony of one hundred postulants, of one thousand postulants in mass. Such grand ceremonies are publicly sponsored and organized by a well-known abbot, or a religious leader or a powerful official. Thus, Myanmar society is consolidated and unified by the spirit of the *pabbajjā* ceremony. It also happens that a rich individual or group gives the financial support to celebrate this kind of ceremony, or some well-known and glorious *sayādaws* also can do so. The *Ahlū*s celebrated when a boy candidate comes of age in his early adolescence in general, but the ceremony can be performed at any age. The *Ahlū* may be held for a candidate even at the delicate age of five but only if he can chant the Three Refuges *Pāḷi* phrases quite articulately. There is no upper age limit for *pabbajjā*, so a boy can be given the *pabbajjā* at the very late age of 15 years or more for which he will be known as an old novice, "*koyingyi*". A boy can be initiated as a *sāmaṇera* not just once in a life. A boy may remain in *sāmaṇera*-hood for any length of time, be it for a day or lifetime, leaving *sāmaṇera*-hood at any time one wishes. Also, the *pabbajjā* can be repeated more than once for a boy, if desired. The simple affair of ordination becomes a communal affair in Myanmar with a splendid feast to celebrate the traditional *Ahlū*. To illustrate the more traditional cultural elements of ordination, which are still to be found in rural areas of Myanmar, a description of a typical rural *shinpyu-nartha-ahlū* unspoiled and in keeping with ancient traditions will be described. Such ordinations are usually held in the cold

season in rural areas and during the summer schooling holidays in urban areas. However, the *Ahlū* can be celebrated at any time of the year. As to the rural *Ahlū*, around five or six months before the *Ahlū*, an auspicious date and time for the ceremony is carefully calculated by the *bhikkhus* or lay astrologers. In this case, local abbots usually have a good knowledge of the auspicious days and dates of a year, and they can suggest a suitable time and date. As soon as the date is fixed, a number and list of *bhikkhus* the donor wishes to invite must be given to the abbot who must approve and in turn distribute their invitation to each nominated *bhikkhu* to the *Ahlū*.

With dates set, a whole train of systematic preparations for the *Ahlū* set in motion. Firstly, a troupe of traditional Myanmar orchestra is engaged. It is also essential for a consecrator or anointer, a "*bhisek-sayar*" who performs an anointing ceremony of the postulants by formally pouring lustral water whilst reciting narrative songs and poems, which symbolizes the *abhiseka*, "the consecration or anointing ceremony" at the coronation of a new king. Even in the cities like Mandalay and Monywa, the *pabbajjā* ceremony is not complete without a *bhisek-sayar*. Then a *maṇḍap*, a "grand marquee" and its ornate prefab marquees, "*maṇḍapsin*" are also hired. These three things, orchestra, *bhisek-sayar* and grand marquee, are the essential requisites of any *Ahlū*. With these secured, the other items of preparation can be dealt with. Royal costumes are required for the public presentation of the postulants and usually rented beforehand. Then a studio set, electric generator, and other fixtures and fitting are required. To serve food for the forthcoming guests, lots of foodstuffs such as rice, cooking-oil, onions, salt, pepper, dried fish, dried shrimp and tea have to be purchased especially for the main feast of the *Ahlū*. Capable cooks in the village are recruited in advance to cater for the *Ahlū*. Invitations composed in formal rhymed prose are printed and circulated well in advance to all of the donor's friends and relations.

When the ceremony is drawing near, the postulants are sent to a monastery to receive key instructions from the abbot and to memorize some important *Pāḷi* words. The robes and other paraphernalia of *sāmaṇeras* are also made ready. About three days before the date of the *Ahlū*, the main and secondary marquees are erected in the donor's compound. The secondary marquee or dining house serves as a temporary dining hall and enclosure. Tables are shared by each home in the village and other items collectively owned by the village such as plates, cups, spoons etc. are brought from the storage to the dining hall. In a village, all inhabitants energetically render their service to the *Ahlū* as it draws near. Everybody, young or old, male or female in the community extends helping hands and ardently contributes their labour to the donors for the necessary preparations. Normally, the *Ahlū* may be performed by an individual family, but in reality, it develops for a communal celebration. The entire society becomes active and alive due to each the important role of each individual. An *Ahlū* provides an occasion for villagers from widely scattered areas and different social backgrounds to come together in common service. The ladies artistically make special gifts to be presented to all guests as a token of the donor's gratitude for their moral support and participation. Huge long cheroots and cigars, small hand fans and packets of pickled tea leaves are to be made as presents. Even young children are employed with small errands. All the duties are voluntarily contributed generously by rural society. The donor supplies the basic

materials and the rest is done by the volunteer villagers. Everybody is eager and happy to contribute their spiritual and physical services towards the *Ahlū*. The volunteers are fed by the donors for several days prior to the *Ahlū* days. The completed marquee resembling a palace of the ancient kings of Myanmar is adorned with its cultural furniture of paintings from the *Jātaka* stories, colorful decorations, sheets curved in shape and many other ornaments that look beautiful to behold symbolic of the palace of Siddhattha, the Buddha-to-be. Loudspeakers in and above the marquee blare out songs, only are interrupted by announcements of news and calls to action.

In the evening prior to the *Ahlū*, an image of the Buddha is brought ceremoniously from the village monastery for the duration of the *Ahlū* and placed in a temporary shrine made in the marquee. As a result, people take off their footwear before entering the marquee and pay respect to the shrine. Next, a tray of offerings including three combs of bananas, a coconut and a few other things are put on the roof of the marquee and dedicated to Shin Upagotta, an *Arahant* believed to have the powers to ward off natural as well as supernatural calamities such as storms and untimely rains. Lengthy protection is needed in general, as a *shinpyu-ahlū* lasts two days, the entry day followed by the *pabbajjā* day.

**The Entry Day of Ordination Ceremony:** On the entry day, the orchestral troupe arrives and starts entertaining the guests around 8:00 a.m. playing a fare of traditional music. The relatives and friends bustle about with the duties they have accepted for the *Ahlū*, while the guests and dignitaries keep arriving and acknowledge the *Ahlū* with various presents, such as money and other things. Most of the guests from all neighbor villages and towns who are invited come on the entry day to encourage the donors by providing some presents. They do not need to meet the donors personally but leave the presents and names with the board of receivers (trustees) usually situated at the entrance of the main marquee. They are given gifts in return such as cheroots and cigars, small hand fans and packages of pickled tea and on entering the marquee they can then enjoy the entertainment of the orchestra. In the meantime, the dinning-hall marquee goes into full swing serving lunch of local favorites including one main dish and two or three side dishes all to the guests' hearts' content. The dining marquee serves a free flow of newcomers all daylong and is usually crowded with people relishing their meals sitting on mats around each table to cater to the huge audience. Hundreds of people are served at a time, with one shift following another till the late evening. One and all, invited as well as uninvited ones come to enjoy the great feasts. In the village of donor and its neighbour villages, a village crier publicly announces to come and enjoy the *Ahlū* around two or three days before the entry day of *Ahlū*. It is a Myanmar saying "*Meegodate*", meaning, "put out the smoke" which implies by coming and eating at the feast on that day, they do not need to light be cooking fire at their home.

Therefore, entire family residents in those villages come to enjoy that great feast. It becomes thus the biggest feast day of an *Ahlū* and it resembles the great feasts narrated in the stories of the Buddha, such as in the instances of the donation of Vessantarā, Sumedha, Kosala, and Velāma, etc. who contributed a great amount of their *mahādāna*, the great donations to those at the celebration irrespective of whether they were invited or not, be they low or high casts. Postulants are beautified all morning. They are adorned in special

princely dress, with a long white blouse, a long silk lower dress, crested head-dress, a sash, and a double-edged sword which are all the regalia of a king. They now become the princes ready to renounce the world. They are shown before the public with pomp and spleen dour, the focus of public attention. Dressed in royal costume of silk, gold and precious stones, they glitter in the sunshine. In the days of the kings, this was the only opportunity for the average commoner to wear such royal apparel, for its appearance was never allowed by the king, with transgression severely punished. However, the postulants, about to enter the *Samgha*, were regarded as extraordinary persons, much nobler than royalty; so, the king happily conferred this privilege on *sāmaṇera*-designates. This extension of privilege is still celebrated in the dressing style of the traditional *Ahlū*.

The female postulants are dressed in grand ornamented clothes called "*mallikā*", the abbreviation of *mahālatāpasādhana*, a one-piece lady's dress bedecked with matched jewelry or other ornaments made with the different kinds of precious jewels. It is reported that only three ladies, Visākhā, the great female supporter of the Buddha, Mallikā, the chief consort of King Pasenadi of Kosala and Sumanadevī, deserved to wear this type of dress in this Buddha's dispensation. Taking these women as precedence, teenage postulant girls are usually embellished in this beautifully ornamented dress of the occasion of the *Ahlū*. Girls have the right to jointly enjoy this ceremony for the special purpose of ear-boring, nothing more is necessary for them to do after the ceremony, but some girls seek admission into Buddhist nunhood for a few days or for life. However, this rarely happens in Myanmar today. Around noon time, it is the turn of the *bhisek* to entertain. Standing in front of the orchestra, facing the audience dressed in *brāhminical* cloths of knee-length- white-coat, long-silk-sarong, and a Myanmar turban, the *bhisek-sayar* gathers all postulants around him. Composed in manner, he starts with an introductory speech to audience with backing music by the orchestra. A *bhisek-sayar* needs to be a good speaker with speech to arrest the interest of audience. Before the actual consecration of *bhisek*, he congratulates the donors and postulants, by name, in a pleasant voice sometimes interjecting his recital with narratives, stories and songs suited to the *Ahlū*. Then he feeds a lump of rice to each postulant and puts a band of cotton thread around the necks of the postulants praying for longevity, prosperity and advancement of wisdom. This wearing of the ritual amulet made of a band of cotton thread is called "*letphwekhyeemhyinsut*". Then *bhisek-sayar* uses suitable flowers to sprinkle ceremonial water from conch shell with on the postulants saying prayers to grace them. This is called *bhisekmhyaug*, "actual consecration". It symbolizes the coronation or consecration of ancient Myanmar kings when water was poured on prince's forehead to consecrate him as a king along with conferment of the other necessary insignias of a king. Sometimes, to stir the interest of public, a *bhisek-sayar* conducts a debate with members of orchestra on some controversial points in traditional, cultural or on religion. He concludes by having the male postulants cradled a silver cup or an alms-bowl in their hands and go around the audience to receive any gifts from the onlookers who usually present them with cash, handkerchiefs, towels, soap, etc. It is really striking to see them like young princes were going around. Soon after the conclusion of the *bhisek*, the orchestral troupe takes a sojourn till the night. At night starting from around 7:00 p.m. the orchestral troupe resumes entertaining the audience with nonstop song and music. They regale the guests and villagers,

from near and far with music and dancing until far into the night. If there is no dancing, two or three members of the orchestra entertain the audience as stand-up clowns. They relate humorous stories they have experienced or heard, tell jokes, sometimes even at a slight expense of the donor, especially if they have not been fed or treated well. It is customary for the relations and friends of the donor to present them with cash awards. If the orchestra is popular among the people, the marquee will be overcrowded that night, and even if not so popular, the audience usually fills with villagers enjoying the live-spectacle of such an occasion. The orchestra plays to the crowd as best they can, catering to younger people with modern music and songs in the early night and more classical music and tunes later in the night for the elders.

**Actual Ordination Ceremony Day:** With the breaking of the next day, comes the actual *pabbajjā* day. The orchestra (without the *bhisek*) strikes up soon after dawn, and keeps on playing intermittently until the *shinlaungyū*, the “taking the postulants”. This is the afternoon procession that takes postulants round the village and to the monastery. On this day, all the guests and villagers are fed breakfast in the dining hall enclosure. Nearly the whole morning is taken up dining. Then, guests make cash contributions towards the *Ahlū*. The donor responds to their act of *cetanā*, “good-will” by giving them cheroots, small fans, pickled tea packages, etc. as return-gifts. Needless to say, the invited *bhikkhus* are sumptuously feasted that morning at the village monastery. The most heartfelt part of an *Ahlū* is the afternoon procession, the “*shinlaungyū*” or “*shinlaunglai*”. (Tabhavathanthayar, 1994).

This is the procession of postulants, donors, relatives, friends and other well-wishers going through along the village main road to the monastery lead by continuously beating the Royal Myanmar Drum, “*byaw*”. The procedures will depend on the presiding person of that procession. A *shinlaungyū* is a merry affair and the great event of the day for the *Ahlū*. The royal drum announces the time of departure and keeps the march in procession. As a rule, the royal drum leads the walking procession, starting with the most elderly gentlemen who brings a flower vase, and then side by side the main male donor, carrying an alms-bowl in its carrier bag, hanging on his right shoulder, and the main female donor, carrying a tray on her head, bearing the golden robe as an offering to the Buddha image. There follows the *kwuntaung*, a slaver of gold for the ceremony borne by a beautiful lady whose beauty deserves public acknowledgement in that locality.

Other pretty ladies of the village come after her, holding bouquets and flower baskets, and they are known as the *pandaunggaing*. Relatives of the donors come next in couples of husband and wife, each man carrying an alms-bowl and each woman a set of robes. Next the female postulants in their royal costumes follow in single file. Then everybody in the village and all guests join the great procession in single file to where the ordination ceremony will be performed. Then the turn of *shinlaungs* comes, starting with the sons of the donors carried by four men on royal palanquins carried by four men. The other *shinlaungs* follow on royal palanquins in single file. While on the procession, the *shinlaungs* scatter coins, pop-rice and popcorns out of huge silver vessels whilst children jostle with one another to pick up the coins scattered on the ground. Young men shelter each *shinlaung* with golden umbrellas above his head. Lastly a group of lads follow reciting composed verses, which sound very melodious and inspiring.

A leader sings the first lines and the group recite the refrain. At the end of every stanza, they shout in unison “*shoh-shoh-shoh*”. This long procession is followed by a musical troupe to entertain the onlookers overwhelmed by the whole atmosphere. This great procession marches to the village monastery going around it clockwise thrice. The procession then returns to the *maṇḍap* where the journey comes to an end, and the *shinlaungs* are returned to the monastery for the actual *pabbajjā*.

**Pabbajjā section of Ordination Ceremony:** It is only the actual *pabbajjā* that concerns the *bhikkhus*. So, the *bhikkhus* have the *shinlaungs* head shaved etc. and the task of the *pabbajjā* ordination is carried out by the *bhikkhu* concerned. This is the real essence of the *pabbajjā* ceremony which elevates the boys to the status of the sacred lives of *sāmaṇeras* from the ordinary persons in the profane world. After the formal *pabbajjā*, they are no longer common average boys, but ochre robed *sāmaṇeras* recognized as being spiritually superior to all laity including their parents. Therefore, even the parents pay respect by proffering *aṅjalī* to the newly ordained *sāmaṇeras*, including their own sons. This reverential act by parents is the most moving scene of the entire ceremony. It is the normal custom for children to bow down in this manner to their parents. However, this time, the roles are reversed and the *sāmaṇeras* receive their parents’ respect and *aṅjalī*, it is a deeply significant experience to encounter this. This is because the *sāmaṇeras* are no longer parents’ own sons, but the sons of the Buddha, to whom they should pay their reverence.

Then the *bhikkhus* are cordially invited along with the new *sāmaṇeras* and escorted by an *upāsakā*, a village gentleman, to the *maṇḍap* to acknowledge the donors for their tremendous generosity. All the *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras* in order of their *vassas* are placed on a huge spacious stage for the *Samgha*, where the numerous offertories meant for them are placed on display and exhibited. Then the senior *bhikkhu* delivers a short sermon stressing the various merits to be derived from the *shinpyu-ahlū*. At the end of sermon, all the members of the *Samgha* recite in unison the *paritta*, the sacred protective discourses. Finally, the water libation is performed by the donors pouring the water jointly. The donors then announce that they share their merit with others. Thereupon, the audience in sympathetic joy responds in unison, “*Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu*”, “Well done, Well done, Well done!”. Then the *bhikkhus* leave the *maṇḍap* in solemn procession followed by the newly ordained *sāmaṇeras* for the monastery. This is the final of Myanmar traditional *shinpyu-ahlū* ceremony. (The Initiation of Novice-hood and the Ordination of Monkhood in the Burmese Buddhist Culture, 2002). The newly ordained *sāmaṇera* is known as a *koyin* in Myanmar, a novice or *sāmaṇera* in *Pāḷi*. To differentiate, the young novice is “*koyin-lay*” and the old is called “*koyin-gyi*”. From that time onwards, a *sāmaṇera* is a regular listed member of the *Samgha* for as long as his *sāmaṇera*-hood, but he cannot participate in the functional ceremonies of *Samgha* which is purely the affair of fully ordained *bhikkhus*.

**Upasampadā Section of Ordination Ceremony:** Some ordination ceremony and some donors celebrate their *Ahlū* associated with the *upasampadā* ordination. If included *upasampadā* ordination programme in their *Ahlū*, they purchase the essential requisites of the *upasampadā* candidate in advance. They usually sponsor a related *sāmaṇera* or an intelligent *sāmaṇera* who has reached twenty years of age, or

sometimes a candidate who ordains intentionally for a temporary period of time, a *dullabha bhikkhu*, or a *bhikkhu* who takes renewed ordination, “*punopasampada*”. If the *Ahlū* involves a *yahan-khan* “*upasampadā* ordination”, then the *Samgha* concludes the ordination in the *sīmā*-hall and are ready to receive the reverence of the *shinlaungyū* procession when it reaches the monastery. As mentioned, ordination is the affair of the *Samgha*, so the *Samgha* alone can carry this out. When the procession arrives at the monastery, the newly ordained *bhikkhu* comes out of the *sīmā* and the donors and their relatives, the *bhikkhu*'s parents and relatives and other well-wishers, waiting in line near the *sīmā* door, pay reverence to the new *bhikkhu* and offer requisites like robes, towels, soap, washing powders, handkerchiefs, etc.

This tradition of donating at the completion of ordination is based on the belief that the new *bhikkhu*'s precept at that time is of the highest purity, flawless and held in the highest esteem of the laity's eyes. The new *bhikkhu* who has just come out of the *sīmā* is considered as scrupulous and holy as an *arahant* by his virtue. Then, the donors offer him something so that they may cultivate the great wholesome conditions of longevity, beauty, bliss, strength and wisdom. The merit of offering to a newly ordained *bhikkhu* for life is perceived superior to offering a temporary *bhikkhu* or repeatedly ordained *bhikkhu*. Then the newly ordained *bhikkhu* for life is carried on a special royal palanquin borne by four strong men and heads the long procession that will return to the *maṇḍap*. On arrival at *maṇḍap*, the new *bhikkhu* gives a short sermon to the audience which concludes with the donors' pouring water libation and sharing merit with others.

This ceremony is filled with real excitement for the new *bhikkhu*, because this is usually his maiden presentation to an audience. In the meantime, the task of *pabbajjā*s completed at the monastery and finally, all the invited *bhikkhus* come to the *maṇḍap* to receive the offertories, the donors perform the libation and sharing merit and the whole ceremony is successfully finalized. The above-mentioned roles and procedures are observations of *shinpyu-ahlū* in the upper part of Myanmar. Unlike the village tradition, in urban areas there is another tradition of not differentiating between the *bhikkhus*, they ordain for life, temporarily or repeating their ordination when making offerings to the *bhikkhus* after the ordination ceremony. Then, the family members of the ordained *bhikkhu*, his supporters and their relatives and other invited people assemble just outside the *sīmā* hall, are ready to give the offertories to the senior *sayādaws* and to the ordained *bhikkhus*. The newly ordained *bhikkhu* usually comes out of the *sīmā* first followed by the senior *bhikkhus* in order of their *vassa* years. The awaiting devotees offer requisites like robes, towels, soaps, washing-powders and so on to the *bhikkhus* with due respect. This is called, *thein-sin-laung*, meaning “donating to *bhikkhus* emerging from the *sīmā* hall”. The traditions may therefore vary depending on the regions, especially between rural and urban areas. In most villages, the *shinlaungyū* procession proceeds to the village monastery by means of palanquin borne by four men and in some rare incidents by horses.

However, in towns and cities, palanquins are rarely used, in their stead automobiles become the means of carrying the *shinlaungs* in contrast to the village tradition. The entire urban procession is composed of a convoy of cars headed by the car carrying the principle *shinlaung*, the son of the donors,

followed by other cars with the remaining *shinlaungs* and *magaitsaungs*- girl postulants in royal costumes - and then the donors and their relatives, friends and other well-wishers, with a procession by a music troupe car playing the occasional music and singing the songs suited to the *Ahlū* taking up the rear. Unlike the village *Ahlū*, the urban procession moves along the main road and on a route that presents the postulants to worship the *nats*, the Myanmar traditional spirits, for example, to the Bobogyi at the foot of Mandalay Hill, and then proceeds around the celebrated pagoda of the town or city like Mahāmyatmuni Pagoda in Mandalay, and Shwedagon or Swetaw Pagoda in Yangon.

Finally, the procession of cars arrives at the monastery where their actual *pabbajjā* is to be performed. The role of *bhisek-sayar* at an *Ahlū* is unknown to Yangonites and the people of lower Myanmar but is instead incorporated into wedding ceremonies. It is the observation of this author that town's people put more emphasis presenting the *shinlaungs* to *nats* to worship than villagers. Even though there are the village *nats* hrines in villages, villagers hold the belief that the *shinlaungs*, who are going to be the sons of the Buddha, are higher and nobler than the very *nats*, so instead of worshiping the *nat*, it is the *nats* who should pay reverence to the *shinlaunngs*. These traditions of *shinpyu-ahlū* echo the time of Myanmar kings' reign, with the wearing the king's regalia passed from the introduction of the monastic examinations at the time of King Bodawphya as mentioned earlier. The *pazinlaung* and *shinlaung* level exams with their particular rewards for candidates is an indication that all candidates for monastic examinations were allowed to wear royal costume, jewels and rings and the king granted carriage to each candidate on a palanquin and with the presentations of royal requisites befitting their status. Similarly, to this day, postulants continue to be dressed in royal costumes for the occasion of *shinpyu* and are borne on royal palanquin by male bearers in the *shinlaungyū* procession. The cultural traditions at a *shinpyuahlū* in rural areas are still strongly linked to the past. The majority of Buddhists in Myanmar celebrate the various kinds of *Ahlū* on a grand level as they can afford. Nevertheless, there are some *sayādaws* who severely condemned these pompous traditional celebrations which cost the donors large amount of money needlessly. The attempts to reform the old traditional ceremonies have focused on substituting the new procedures which simplifies the method of *pabbajjā* in line with the texts and commentaries and to keep the *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordination a plain and simple affair. Ashin Janakabhivamsa, in the *Anāgatsāsanāyay*, says that “having animals like cow and pig killed for meat and expecting others to contribute to an *Ahlū* which stresses ostentatious-ness, cuts both ways, incurring expense and offence. In a truly auspicious *pabbajjā*, no one thinks highly of this kind of *Ahlū* or whether the young applicant dresses in royal costumes and is consecrated, beside which, consecration does not increase merit”. (*Anāgatsāsanāyay*, 2002) Furthermore, the celebrated *Sayādaw* Ashin Paññajota, the founder of Dhammadūtatoya Meditation Centre also opines that “the *pabbajjā* with the Buddha's approval: (1) is the completeness of the eight requisites; (2) is absent of a *shinlaungyū* procession; (3) does not present postulants to the *nats*; (4) is devoid of entertainment like music, singing, or dancing; and (5) does not waste money on the great feast. The *pabbajjā* in line with these factors is the *pabbajjā* that the Buddha approves. And again, he says of the proper intention of *pabbajjā*: (1) the *pabbajjā* for the endowment of the *Sāsana*; (2) the *pabbajjā* for the

support of the *Sāsana*; (3) the *pabbajjā* for carrying out the duty of the *Sāsana*; and (4) the *pabbajjā* for the propagation of the *Sāsana*". (*Buddha-neekya-shinpyu-pwe-hnint shin-kyint-wut*, 1979) From the perspective of these *sayādaws*' views, it is found that the aforementioned ostentatious grand ceremonies associated with the *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordinations have no positive result for neither the *Sāsana*, nor the donors and *shinlaungs*. The method of *pabbajjā* of Ven. Rāhulā, the son of the Buddha, is taken by these *sayādaws* as an example of *pabbajjā* the Buddha approved. This essence method of *pabbajjā* is just of three aspects, the shaving of the head hair, the donning of the monastic robes and receiving the Three Refuges. As both *sayādaws*' views were based on the *Piṭaka* and not to be faulted, the ancient traditional ceremonies are being reformed by reverting the practice of *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordination back to its simplest form. Nevertheless, the traditional style of *Ahlū* can be still seen celebrated in most parts of the country due to its strong sociological influence in Myanmar society.

### Three Kinds of *Upasampadā* Ordination in Myanmar:

There are three types of *upasampadā* ordination currently practiced in Myanmar. These can be listed as follows:

- *Yahankhan*, major ordination;
- *Thein-thut*, renewed ordination or repeated ordination; and
- *Dullabha-yahankhan*, temporary ordination.

**Yahankhan, Major Ordination:** The ceremony of *upasampadā* ordination for a *sāmaṇera* who has gone forth for life since youth is called *yahankhan* or major ordination. This ordination ceremony is usually held on a grand scale if the candidate is famous in studies or in behavior, as affluent donors are very keen to sponsor the ordination of such a *sāmaṇera* not because they admire and are much devoted to such a *sāmaṇera* but because of the social status reflected upon them from sponsoring such a *sāmaṇera*, etc. Even if a *sāmaṇera* is not renowned, some wealthy persons may sponsor his *upasampadā* ordination out of Myanmar custom when the candidate reaches twenty years. Such sponsors are not usually found for a mature *sāmaṇera*' *supasampadā* and so parents, relatives or friends take up this meritorious sponsorship without an elaborate ceremony, as the focus is upon the ordination itself and not the status or social ties. However, this type of ordination usually involves as many *bhikkhus* as the donors can afford to invite because of the expectation that the candidate will follow the monastic precepts for life. For such an ordination, many participating *bhikkhus* celebrated for their pursuance of precepts are invited by the donors "*yahan-dagar*" to ensure fulfillment of the perfection of assembly of *Samgha* "*parisāsampatti*". (*Ibid*) If the donors can afford, they will invite forty or fifty *bhikkhus* for the sole purpose of the ordination. A *bhikkhu* who ordains in this manner is commonly referred to in Myanmar as "*yahan*" or sometimes "*u pazin*". One who undergoes *upasampadā* from an unbroken status of *sāmaṇera*-hood from youth is called "*ngephyū*", meaning a "*bhikkhu* purified in his youth", to differentiate him from one who ordained later in life.

**Thein-htut, Renewed Ordination:** The second type of *upasampadā* in Myanmar is *thein-htut*, "renewed ordination", which is a kind of repeated ordination. It is also known as *kanhtut*, *sikkhāhtut* or *pnopasampadā* in *Pāli*. Though this tradition originated in the renew ordination of the Bagan

Dynasty, the present-day renewal is neither the same in intent or practice. The ancient practice was to renew ordination to ensure the validity of one's ordination with the candidate's term of *vassa* reset from the date of their "renewed" ordination. Over time this practice developed into a custom of *bhikkhus* renewing their ordination but not canceling their accumulated term of *vassa*. Therefore, the renewed ordination practice turned into the practice of re-ordination in the present day, which just repeats the previous ordination. The intention of this practice as explained in the *Pācityādi Aṭṭhakathā* is "to make their ordination firm and stable, by so doing, nothing is wrong". (*Pācityādi Aṭṭhakathā*, Vol. I, 1991).

Based on this statement, Ashin Jāgara, the founder of the *Shwekyin Nikāya*, approved of renewed ordination saying that "although there is no doubt in the validity of ordination, a young *bhikkhu* should renew ordination under his *upajjhāya* by repeatedly reading the *kammavācā* in another *simā* to dispel any doubt that may arise among the community of *bhikkhus*". (*Lankāsāsanvisuddhikathā*, 1979) Ledī Sayādaw also states that "it is the best custom to renew ordination often during first of ten *vassayears* under various eminent teacher-*bhikkhus* to ensure it is a firm act, a *dalhikamma*". (*Vinayasamkhapekya*, 1955) Even the celebrated Sayādaw, Ashin Janakabhivamsa, renewed ordination twice within his first year at Gandhayūṃ Taiksīmā and finally at an *udakukkhepa-sīmā* in Sagaing. He did not accept any subsequent renewed ordination and later remarked: "Renewal of ordination does not make any different, it just increases one's friendly *dagardagarma* (male & female supporters)". (*Tabhava-thanthayar*, 1994) Accordingly, the renewal of ordination has become a customary tradition for Myanmar *bhikkhus*. From the view of the above Venerable *sayādaws*, the renewal of ordination fulfills a *bhikkhu*' s ordination in case where the previous ordination's validity may be under a doubt which cannot be confirmed. However, the original aim of renewal of ordination has been misinterpreted in recent times within Myanmar, overshadowing the positive effects of renewed ordination, by well supported and famous *sayādaw*'s renewing their ordination as a means of giving donors and well-wishers the privilege of sponsoring them in mundane and worldly affairs. Some famous *sayādaws* have received renewed ordination more than hundred times. In contrast, some *sayādaws*, instead of receiving renewed ordination, prefer their pupil candidates to receive a firm and believable ordination participated by large member of *Samgha*, trustworthy in keeping their precepts. The celebrated Mahāsī Sayādaw presented in a speech that "should there be a weak point in any one of the five factors of *sampatti* in the original *upasampadā* ordination, one should receive a renew ordination to dispel his doubt on his primary ordination. Should one's original ordination by doubtless, it is shameful for him to renew ordination just to increase the number of his supporters and to receive their donations. He just increases attachment to his supporters like an orphan being adopted". (*Vinayavinicchayotathā Uttaravinicchayo*, 1982) The re-ordination therefore should be undertaken only in cases when doubt is cast on the validity of one's first ordination.

**Dullabha-yahankhan, Temporary Ordination:** The last type of *upasampadā* in Myanmar is *dullabha-yahankhan*, "temporary ordination". The term *dullabha* here refers to what is difficult to gain, to obtain, to achieve, in particular, the five most difficult "to gain Buddha-hood, to gain rebirth as a capable human, to gain *bhikkhu*-hood, to gain faith in the

*dhamma* and to hear the wholesome *Dhamma*". The commentator Ven. Buddhaghosa compares these five most difficult achievements to prove "sāmaṇera-hood and bhikkhu-hood are the more difficult to obtain, than even Buddha-hood." (*Pārājikakaṇḍa Aṭṭhakathā*, Vol. I, 1959) Therefore, the Myanmar laity is eager to receive ordination in their free time making *dullabha* ordination a popular and widespread practice in Myanmar. This type of ordination especially refers to one who remains a *bhikkhu* intentionally for a short period like one week, nine days, two weeks, one month, etc. Such *bhikkhus* are called "dullabha-yahan", "temporary monk". Temporary ordination is more popular in lower Myanmar than upper, and it has nowadays turned to a tradition.

Among the above three types of *upasampadā*, the *Samgha* lays much stress on the first one with the other two not considered to be as prestigious in *Sāsana* as the first one. The reason is that both re-ordination and temporary ordination have tended in these days to be deviating in practice from their original aims and objectives. They have tended to become types of ordination orientated to get material gain and to win veneration rather than serve as a means to achieve the purpose of religious life, the unshakeable liberation of mind. Irrespective to which of the three types of *upasampadā* one intends, all are conducted under the same procedures of ordination.

### Conclusion

The present-day traditions of supporter were traced in the Anva period of Myanmar history and its involvement in ordination developed in the reign of King Bowdawpaya and King Mindon. The various kinds of ordination ceremony held in Myanmar come under the name of *Ahlū*. The way of celebrating lavish *Ahlū* in rural areas is totally different from urban areas. The celebration of the *Ahlū* on a grand scale is partly styled on the customs practiced by the ancient Myanmar kings and partly on the birth stories of the Buddha. The inclusion of a *maṇḍap* and orchestra along with a great feast are common to every *Ahlū* and a *bhiseik-sayar* in some regions, which all cost large amounts of money. Some learned *sayādaws* tried to reform this tradition into more simple form and their reformation has become effective in some parts of the country at present. Three types of the *upasampadā* ordination,

*yahankhan*, *thein-thut* and *dullabha-yahankhan*, are found to be currently practiced in Myanmar. The *yahankhan* is regarded as the most importance of the three as it is the *upasampadā* undertaken by the majority of monks who practice for life. *Thein-thut* is a kind of repetition in ordination by a *bhikkhu* already ordained, which reiterates the previous ordination. The last type of ordination is practiced by the laity who intends to be ordained on a temporary basis. Thus, the paper has presented an overall picture of the traditional cultural associated between *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* ordinations and the wider Myanmar Buddhist society.

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