

Traditional Elephant Dance from an Anthropological Point of View

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Abstract

Kyaukse is famous for its elephant dance. In the Pagan Period, King Anawrahta propagated Buddhism by dispatching the white elephant on which the relics of the Buddha were carried on Mount Shwe Tha Lhyaung, Kyaukse. Elephant toys were donated in commemoration of the event. Later man-stuffed elephant dance has been vogue in the country. Elephant dance is simple enough to be seen and appreciated in Thadingyut. There are three steps of elephant dance- Nat-doe, Ah-yai, and Ah-yin. Dancers of elephant dance groups go round Kyaukse for donations during Lent. There are many elephants for the contest, but only a few elephants win. Dance groups entertain in some festivals, initiation ceremonies and special occasions as some people hire them. But they cannot get money all year round. The losers are willing to dance for the next year because it symbolizes gratitude to King Anawrahta, for the welfare of the people in the area, prosperity, etc. Elephant dance is not an economy-based rite because the expenses for the contest do not cover even the capital. A new kind of ritual- obligatory ritual - is added in Spiro's definition. Some elephants entertain the audience by spending some money, some youths dance with their joking elephants to amuse the audience. The elephant dance provides the livelihood of toy masters and local people. Now, high expenses burden the elephant dance groups. Toy elephant stands for Kyaukse and when pilgrims go to Shwe Thein Taw Pagoda, Kyaukse, children and people buy toy elephants made of paper or cloth as souvenirs. Nowadays, elephant dance seems to be endangered although there are some innovations in the dance. As the dance has lasted for over one hundred years, it can be assigned as an intangible cultural heritage through cooperation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. Communal money in and around the town will support the festival and the dance for years.

Keywords: elephant dance, Kyaukse, Spiro

Introduction

There are twelve seasonal festivals in Burma. Most of them are religious because Buddhism flourishes in the country. Burmese people hold and participate in twelve seasonal festivals happily. They are not for fun but for emergence of versatile scholars in the country, and military personnel for defense of the country, development and peace in the country (Aye Naing, 2017, p.3). Some festivals vanished but they have been transformed into a new flavor. There are unique festivals in some areas. They are Ah-yoke-thwin festival in Pagan, buffalo fight in Tavoy and elephant dance in Kyaukse.

Kyaukse is famous for the Elephant Dance. In colonial times, a certain professor in Rangoon University assumed that the First Home of Burma was Kyaukse. But conservative historians objected to his hypothesis. There were papers on both topics in Burmese and English. One book is "Burmese History Before 1287: A Defence of the Chronicles," compiled by Maung Htin Aung. Kyaukse is famous in the academic milieu. There are nine seasonal festivals in Kyaukse among which the festival of elephant dance is the most popular ever held. The dance is held on the eve of Thadingyut (7th month of Burmese lunar calendar) full-moon day. There are three kinds of elephants in the dance contest. They go round Myo Ma market three times and dance before the umpires. The winners gain prestige and after the contest they are hired to entertain people in pagoda festivals, initiation ceremonies, etc. But the losers enter the contest annually so as to show gratitude to King Anawrahta. Their activities might strengthen religious zeal and good weather conditions. Some elephants do not join the contest but entertain townspeople and guests at the contest. They render social services for the town. Toy masters, shopkeepers and businessmen get their income by making souvenirs. The winners might not run their elephant dance all year round but just for some months. But the losers continue competing through gratitude to King Anawrahta, hope of good weather, religious zeal, etc. Some arguments are- How do some elephant groups try to win the prize, why do losers compete annually and is the elephant dance economy-oriented, are Spiro's hypotheses on ritual complete, etc.

Literature Review

In Thailand, according to the Legend of Queen Cama (Camadevivamsa), the Mulasasana Legend (Tamnan munlasana), and Chinakalamalipakon (Jinakalamalipakaranam), Chamathewi was a strikingly beautiful princess who came from the Mon kingdom of Lavapura (Lavo, or Lopburi). The princess Chamathewi was sent to Lamphun and she brought Buddhism, together with five hundred monks, to Hariphunchai. It took about three months to get to the city. Then she became queen there. She endeavored to propagate Buddhism in the kingdom by erecting temples and leading the countrymen

on the path of Dhamma. She also observed the precepts, donated alms-food to monks and created Buddha images. As a result, Hariphunchai was transformed into a flourishing Buddhist city as well as the center of the Lamphun kingdom. She was a warrior, too. Because of her unblemished beauty, a Lawa king on the mountains near Doi Kam (the foothills of Doi Suthep) sent a marriage proposal. But the queen rejected the proposal. There was a war between the countries. She defeated the king. She ruled for years. Then she abdicated and ordained as a nun. The monument in Lamphun was started in 1980 and completed in 1982. Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, now His Majesty the King of Thailand, graced the monument's grand opening on October 2, 1982. There are two major ceremonies of worship held yearly to commemorate the date of Queen Chamathewai's birth and death. Provincial governor and local government officials worship and celebrate her birthday either in September or October but the largest celebration focuses on August 14. The majority of participants in these rituals are older women, transgendered individuals and children. Because Queen Chamathewi is regarded as a prominent female leader in Lan Na mythology, her supporters-cum-worshippers are mainly females. Very few men are involved. Sometimes a spirit medium communes with the queen's spirit and females and transgendered individuals act as a medium to Chamathewi's spirit. In the case of the Queen Chamathewi Monument, it is believed that one should not make a wish for true love because the queen was separated from her husband (Ooi Keat Gin & Grabowsky, 2017).

In Monywa, Burma, the rite of Pon Ma Kyi worship is done on 3rd waxing moon of Tabaung. On 2nd waning moon, women fry white and red pancakes and fish. Then they cook brinjaj and pea. At dawn on 3rd waxing moon, they lay a mat on the ground and offer white and red pancakes, pea, brinjaj, pickled tea and rice in a plate to Pon Ma Kyi spirit. Then they pray for ample yield and prosperity. Children shout, "Lady Pon Ma Kyu, please drop gold and silver." They watch the offering so that it is not to be snatched by dog, cat and chicken. In the morning they can partake the meals. Farmers make a sheaf of paddy by wearing flower, and clothes in the form of Pon Ma Kyi spirit. They put the sheaf, sticky rice, coconut, banana, white and red pancakes, flat circular stone used for grinding Thanakha (*Limonia acidissima*) and mirror on a cart. They sing a song and worship the pile of paddy seven times clockwise. They believe that much yield would be accrued (Kyaw Than Tun, 2008).

In Shan State, Taunggyi District, Taung Yoe nationals hold Tar Tet Pwe, the first festival of twelve seasonal festivals. On the festive day, villagers hang their donations on Padesa tree and bring rice, betel quids, robes, snacks and vegetables and go to the pagoda or monastery where Tar Tet Pwe is held. Long ago, Mee Lone (rocket) was launched. There are two kinds of Tar Tet Pwe- Pwe Win and Pwe Htwet. The former means that those from neighboring villages come to the monastery and make a hierarchical procession- elder ones holding a pennon, women carrying bowls of offertory, musicians

playing drums and gongs- goes round the pagoda or monastery clockwise three times. They worship the abbot and observe five precepts. The latter means that monks headed by the Buddha are served with meals and then guests far and near are also served. In the afternoon, host villagers with their offertories and musicians go in procession. Then other villagers follow them. Hosts worship monks and observe precepts, listen to the Dhamma of the monk, donate to monks and share merits accrued to all beings. They dance to their heart's content. Tar Tet Pwe implies to be courting time for damsels and youths. Host villages collect money to entertain villagers and guests communally. Neighboring villages either help or donate to the hosts (Thu Zar Aung et al., 2018).

According to worshipers, people hold festivals and worship to show thanks to the God and spirit and reunite with old relatives and offer foods to all. In like manner, the essences of the Elephant Dance can be seen in the research.

Rationale

There are twelve seasonal festivals round the year in Burma. In the festival, dance accompanies to some extent. In Kyaukse, elephant dance is annually held in Thadingyut. Three months before, the elephant dance groups entertain the townsfolk and keep donations for further charity. As the weight of the elephant is heavy, only strong and steadfast men can dance. The dance brings unity and cooperation among members of the troupe. The elephant dance embodies gratitude to King Anawrahta. And the festival is unique to Burma. The research question of the paper is, "Why do townsfolk hold the elephant dance in Kyaukse?"

Research Methodology

Descriptive and narrative study designs were used in this study. The study area is Kyaukse. Study population covered 20 individuals. The study had been conducted from 2018 till 2019. Data collection was based on key informant interviews, focus group discussion and individual interviews.

Background History

Kyaukse once recognized as the Rice Bowl of Burma is a prosperous town. As townspeople are Buddhist, many monks study Buddhist texts in thirteen monasteries. Students can learn in schools, technical university and agricultural training school in the town.

For the purification of Theravada Buddhism, King Anawrahta established a certain pagoda on Thalyaung hill in Kyaukse. Then he donated ten toy elephants made of gold and silver to the pagoda. In commemoration of the act of King Anawrahta, in Thadingyut, elephant-shaped snacks had been

offered on the eve of Thadingyut full-moon night and on the next day, snacks had been thrown down the hill. Then, later, elephants made of mud and then bamboo and paper were donated. Some carried squatting elephant by poles. But, in 1238 Myanmar era, Hsaya Nge Gyi introduced making man-stuffed elephants. Only then did elephant dance make an appearance. Each troupe has gone round Myoma market for three times because it was believed to be a religious dance (Yi Soe, 1993, pp. 11-2).

Elephant Dance

In Thadingyut, lights are offered to the Blessed Buddha. During Lent, troupes of elephant dancers entertain the townsfolk around the town and then people offer some money. After the elephant dance competition, they donate to the Triple Gem. On the eve of the full-moon day of Thadingyut, traditional elephant dance is held. Two men enter the hollow elephant made of bamboo, paper and cloth and dance aesthetically. There are three kinds of elephant dance. They are Nat-doe, Ah-rai and Ah-yin.

Nat-doe dance is that after the elephant has been made, an artisan raises offertories to worship Utena Nat. Then two men enter the hollow elephant and bow down to pay respects three times.

Ah-rai dance means that the dance is boisterous enough to be liked by audience. It is the attack between the wild elephant and the mahout. The wild elephant tries to trample and gore the mahout, in return, the man holding a goad or chopper or spear protects himself from being crushed to death and scuffles after the elephant by rolling and plunging from side to side. Then he tactically clambers, mounts on the elephant and aims with his weapon.

Ah-yin dance is an elegant dance. Such dance matches with songs such as classic, modern, the blues or even hip-hop. In fact, elephant dance is hard enough to dance. The two men must frolic coherently, carry the whole weight of the elephant, and listen to the music (Yi Soe, *ibid*, 1993, pp.58-61).

During the elephant dance, the competing elephant such as the embroidered elephant, traditional elephant and baby elephant, etc., entertains by bowing its forehead to the ground and dancing with rhythmic beats of music before the central shed and other sheds of umpires by going round Myoma market three times. The umpires score marks on natural beauty, adornment, harmony among members of the troupe, varieties of Burmese musical instruments (solo drum, oboe, cymbals, gong, bamboo clappers), correct timing, pleasantness, attraction to audience, traditional preservation, same clothing, etc. At 8 o'clock at night, the competition finishes. Then the umpires from the sheds come, put in the table and prepare to award first, second, third and consolation prizes for three kinds of elephants.

Kyaukse townsfolk, neighboring towns and villages, people from far away region come to see the elephant dance. As Kyaukse lies on Rangoon-Mandalay highway, cars and vehicles are diverted to other ways so as not to disturb the dance. When friends and relatives come to the dance, hosts entertain guests and friends at home.

There are over twenty elephant toy masters in Kyaukse and they make competing elephants, small elephants and elephant heads. Some masters embroider elephants in the town, others order for embroidery in Mandalay. As there is Shwe Thein Taw pagoda in Kyaukse, it is a pilgrimage site. Pilgrims from all over the country come to worship the pagoda. On return they buy elephant toys, and other souvenirs. So, toy masters give toys to shopkeepers for sale. They earn their living by making elephant toys.

Local people sell elephant toys, bamboo clappers, drums, goads etc. as souvenirs of Kyaukse during the Elephant Dance and on other occasions. They also sell CD-ROMs of the Elephant Dance annually. They stamp T-shirts and shirts as souvenir of Kyaukse, the Elephant Dance in Kyaukse, souvenir of Shwe Thein Taw Pagoda etc., in Kyaukse and sell such clothes. CD-ROMs of the Elephant Dance are annually shot and they seem to be a kind of souvenir. Pilgrims and spectators buy such souvenirs of Kyaukse. When children accompany, they buy elephant toys, bamboo clappers and some CD-ROMs of elephant dance. They try to imitate the elephant dance in their free time.

It is known that in Buddhist literature, in fact, there are five qualities of elephant. They are: the elephant crushes the earth; it turns its whole body when it looks; it has no permanent lair; it revels in the water, plunging into glorious lotus ponds full of clear pure cool water; and it lifts up its foot with care and puts it down with care (Pu, 2006, pp.373-4). Through superior intelligence, men can control and train elephants in their warfare and work. Moreover, men imitate elephants and dance like an elephant.

As there are three kinds of elephants, expenses differ from one to another. The embroidered elephant costs about 20- 25 lakhs, traditional elephant about 7- 10 lakhs and baby elephant about 4- 5 lakhs. There are also other expenses such as automobiles, costumes, band, generator, etc. Some wealthy persons (Moe Zaw, Zaw Gyi Maung, Aye Yar Maung, Kay Thi Oo) hire celebrities such as actor, actress and Burma Got Talent vocalists so that their elephant attracts the audience. People follow such elephants because they are the fans of such celebrities. When a certain group wins the prize, they get 3 or 5 lakhs. But with sponsorship they get 20 or 25 lakhs for the first prize.

For fund and sponsor for the festival, the Regional, District and Township administrative bodies donate about 10 or 15 lakhs but the amount differs annually. At the opening ceremony the Prime Minister and members of the ministries of Mandalay Region attend. Then, Kyaukse Association in Yangon also gives funds. The main sponsor is Kamboza Bank, Kyaukse Branch. Other entrepreneurs in Kyaukse sponsor the festivals. Some people headed by the administrative staff donate money for the festival so as to maintain a unique festival in the country. What is striking is that town's elders do not collect money from the townsfolk.

On the full-moon day of Thadingyut, in the morning, the awarded elephants climb Mount Shwe Tha Lhyaung. Then, town's elders and members from Kyaukse Association in Rangoon carry gold and silver-hued elephant toys, go round the Shwe Tha Lhyaung Pagoda three times clockwise and pray for peace and prosperity of the world. Then, ten kinds of elephants made of wheat and gold and silver-hued elephant toys are donated to the Buddha. They share merits accrued to King Anawrahta. Then the awarded elephants entertain townsfolk (Moe, *ibid*, pp. 34- 35).

Some elephants try to win prizes in the contest. They work harmoniously to achieve the goal. They compose new songs about King Anawrahta, Kyaukse area and elephant dance. Dancers rehearse songs and dance many times within time schedule. They practice some tricks to attract the audience. Stamina to dance for twenty minutes is essential because dancers shoulder the weight of the elephant and dance with the song melodiously. The owners also support dancers with money, clothes and other necessities. If they win the first prize in the contest, the whole group is overjoyed. The winners are hired to entertain locally in such activities as initiation ceremony, pagoda festivals. Sometimes they go to foreign countries for the dance. Members of the group, including the owner of the elephant, get money. After one year, they gather and donate money to build monastery, pagoda, etc. for the propagation of Buddhism. Contrarily, the losers compete through religious zeal, hobby and enthusiasm for the enjoyment of the people. The winners acquire fame and money after the competition but the losers waste money, time and even energy. They suffer degradation. But, for the next year they are willing to compete in the dance.

Aye Yar Min Elephant

It is known that there are three kinds of elephants in the elephant dance- baby elephant, traditional elephant and embroidered elephant. There are about fifty elephants in Kyaukse area. Every animal has its name but after some time owners change their elephants with new names. Among the elephants two elephants are mentioned.

In the rite of elephant dance, *Aye Yar Min* elephant is the most popular not only in Myanmar but also in ASEAN countries. The group of *Aye Yar Min* elephant has won ten prizes. Such years are 1994, 1997, 2000, 2004, etc. In 2002 at the Diamond Jubilee of Buddhist Association, Beik town, the name of *Aye Yar Min* was changed into *Myay Aye Yar* and performed there. So, a prize was won. Nowadays, *Myay Aye Yar* (Grandson Aye Yar) competes. In fact, *Aye Yar Min* troupe is the biggest in Kyaukse.

In 1998, traditional Folk Dances of ASEAN countries were held in Singapore. *Aye Yar Min* elephant was selected and the group went to compete. Among 27 groups the elephant dance won the first prize. Then a special prize was also given. Ko Hmat Tin placed in fore legs and Ko Min Thu in hind legs.

On 25th May 1998, a group of 28 members headed by Director General of the Ministry of Culture, went to Singapore by air. Myanmar Cultural Dance Troupe was sponsored by Metta Welfare Association and other groups. On 27th, in the second session of the programme, the audience applauded elephant dance in Golden Theatre, Singapore. On 31st, Myanmar Cultural Dance troupe performed U Shwe Yoe and Daw Moe duet dance, Pagan royal dance, Kyaukse elephant dance, Myanmar traditional Thingyan dance merrily (Myat Jhan, Mission of Shwekyauung Sayadaw Shi Fa Zhao in Singapore, Lat Moe Swe Press, Rangoon, 2010, First Published, pp. 34-6).

In 2008, under the patronage of the Venerable Shi Fa Zhao of Golden Pagoda Buddhist Temple, president, Metta Welfare Association, Singapore, *Aye Yar Min* elephant went to Singapore and appealed to the audience. There, Maung Cho took his place in fore legs and Ko Min Thu in hind legs.

Ko Min Thu said as follows:

“We're successful because we co-operate diligently to rehearse a scene of catching elephant and we have floral designers, competent dancers and composers. We practice the dance for twenty minutes nightly. We practice to do some tricks such as walking on a plank, mounting flights of steps, tubs and pivotal chair. Man in forelegs is essential to dance on the ground but so is he in hind legs at high places. Money gained by performance throughout the country has been donated for the propagation of Buddhism e.g., monasteries, pagodas, Kahtain- robes and monks.”

Nwe Soe Elephant

There are many elephants in Kyaukse. Among those elephants, two elephants are more popular. They are New Soe and Aye Yar Min. In order to trace past events, the elders of Nyaung-Khayauk-Pin quarter, Kyaukse, were interviewed about *Nwe Soe* elephant. U Kyaw Swe, U Khin Maung Thein, U Kyaw Myint and U Tun Tin said as follows.

'In the elephant dance, nowadays, the oldest elephant is Nwe Soe. It is 75 years old. It seems that the elephant has participated since 1946. Long ago, there had been no competition. To maintain tradition, elephants went round the market for three times but some for several times. So, some elephants after crossing railway tracks were broken into pieces.

We don't know the origin of *Nwe Soe* elephant. Then the elephant was given the names of *A 1* and later *No Two*. After *Nwe Soe* song had been a hit, the elephant was named after *Nwe Soe*. In fact, U Ba Aye made *Nwe Soe* elephant and then U Aye Kywe, a son of U Ba Aye, mended the elephant. Both artisans were born in Nyaung-Khyauk-Pin quarter.'

Nwe Soe won third prize when we competed with national costumes. As Golden Jubilee of *Nwe Soe* elephant, the group won third prize again. At this time, the elephant was embellished with gold paper. Now, the elephant is awarded as the oldest elephant by the committee.

Entertaining Elephants

In the Lent, some elephants go round the town and entertain before houses in wards. Townspeople donate some money. Old and young folk and even children like to see the elephant dance. Sometimes they watch the elephant practice tricks in the house compound. Most elephants compete in the dance contest. But there are some elephants that do not compete. They are Myoma White Elephant, Kay Thi Oo, Aye Yar Min, Shwe Wah Maung, Moe Zaw, and Zaw Gyi Maung. In fact, Myo Ma White Elephant has been headed by Town's elders and it is about one hundred years old. In the contest the white elephant commemorating the event of King Anawrahta takes the first of the contests. The elephant plays a leading role in Kyaukse area.

U Myo Thant and Daw Aye Kyaing have two elephants- Kay Thi Oo and Nyo Min Khant. The former entertains people in the dance. Their son presides over Nyo Min Khant for contest. They hire some popular actors, actress, vocalists and even contestants from Myanmar Got Talent or other programmes in the country. They spend money for the entertainment- 20 or 25 lakhs for the embroidered elephant, 20 or 30 lakhs for one popular vocalist (at least three vocalists are hired), 10 lakhs for budding singers, band, cars, generators, etc. It costs about 100 lakhs for a day. Other elephants such as Moe Zaw, Zaw Gyi Maung, and Aye Yar Maung also hire one or two vocalists to entertain the audience.

Joking Elephants

Some youths and adults collect money to make an elephant unsystematically. Then they wander round the market and dance merrily and boisterously. People like to watch them dance with tattered

elephant with amusement. After some hours the elephant raises its head and other members hold torn parts of the elephant on shoulders. They eventually jump into the ditch with animal parts and take a bath there.

Discussion

The elephant dance in Kyaukse had its origin in the propagation of Buddhism all over Burma through auspices of King Anawrahta. Everybody is enjoying and awe-struck enough to see performance of man-stuffed elephant dance. When the elephant is made, the dancers worship Utena spirit. Kyaukse townsfolk believe that King Utena who could control elephants through mantra was brought up by a hermit on Mount Min Mway in Kyaukse. At first Burmese people believed in pre-Buddhist and primitive origins such as alchemy, astrology, Nat, etc. Later they hold such practices as well as Buddhist observances in their daily life.

In fact, the winners cannot meet the daily needs all year round from being hired to entertain folk on special occasions and festivals in the cold season. The dance probably can't provide a whole year's income.

In Thailand, Queen Chamathewi founded Hariphunchai, introduced Buddhism there, built religious edifices and led countrymen to a virtuous life. She was a brave warrior and fought against war. Later, she entered into the Order of Nun. She is worshipped as a heroine in Lamphun. Local people and visitors worship her. Most of worshippers are females and transgendered persons. In like manner, King Anawrahta is known as the founder of the First Burmese Empire. He introduced Buddhism in Burma in Pagan Period. He propagated Buddhism by having the relics of the Buddha carried on the white elephant in the country. He built religious monuments in Pagan and in parts of the country. He managed dams and irrigation systems for paddy cultivation. He fought wars against enemies. But, he was killed by a buffalo. He is not worshipped as a hero of Burma's development in the country.

The Elephant Dance is similar to Pon Ma Kyi worship. Farmers worship Pon Ma Kyi spirit with pancakes and meals. They feed children with such foods. They make a woman with hay stack, sing and dance around the pile of paddy. They pray for much yield and good weather. Now, Pon Ma Kyi worship seems to be extinct and farmers worship as a token at home or in the farm. In like manner, townsfolk in Kyaukse worship elephant, at first the white elephant that brought the tooth relic of the Buddha. Then, they have changed into the elephant dance and prayed for the welfare of the world. The pagoda trustee throws a competing elephant made of paper and cloth down the hill and some townsfolk pray for prosperity and throw small toys too.

Tar Tet Pwe is a New Year Festival. It is held communally. Not only the host village but neighboring villages help. Rocket is rarely hurled in the festival. People go round the monastery or pagoda three times and donate to monks. Monks and guests are served with meals. Then they share merits to all beings. They dance happily. Host villages give their reciprocity to neighboring villages when they again hold such festival. Youths are happy enough to seek after their destined lovers. But, in the elephant dance in Kyaukse, the elephant dance is not held with communal donation but individual expenditure plays a vital role. When those from neighboring villages come to watch the elephant dance, hosts entertain them. Elephant dance is not a kind of courting time in Kyaukse area as Kyaukse seems to be urbanized.

Kay Thi Oo and other elephants entertain the audience with their bands and singers. Their aim is to attract the spectators and promote the elephant dance in Kyaukse. In other words, joking elephants entertain the people in a different style in the elephant dance. People are amused to see the joking elephant dance merrily. Their aim is the same. The elephant dance is the symbol of Kyaukse Town and a unique festival in the country.

According to Melford Spiro (1982), there are three concepts in ritual- instrumental, expressive and commemorative ritual. Commemorative ritual deals with the event of the Buddha. In fact, it is believed that Kakusan Buddha, Konagamana Buddha, Kassapa Buddha and Gotama Buddha had visited Mount Shwe Tha Lhyaung and preached the Dhamma to five hundred yogis, five hundred hermits, guardian spirit of the mount. As the guardian spirit of the mount could live long till the life time of the Gotama Buddha and after hearing the Dhamma he made a golden image of the reclining Buddha and built a pagoda. Anawragta renovated the pagoda on the mount.

Expressive ritual venerates to Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha). On the full-moon day of Thadingyut, after the Elephant Dance, town's elders provide monks with dawn meals at Shwe Tha Lhyaung Pagoda. A senior monk addresses sermon to them and shares merit to all beings in the universe. In the morning the elders and folk go round Shwe Tha Lhyaung Pagoda three times clockwise, pray for the welfare of the people in the world, donate snacks and figures of elephants to the pagoda and share merit accrued to King Anawrahta. They devote to the Triple Gem and benefactor of Kyaukse area, i.e., King Anawrahta.

Instrumental ritual is done to gain some goal or end. It implies to be extrinsic goal- physical (health, beauty, and so on), social (wealth, honor, fame, power, and so on), and natural (rainfall, plentiful crops, and so on). By performing the Elephant Dance at the foot of Mount Shwe Tha Lhyaung in

Kyaukse in Thadingyut, the townsfolk believe that they would get many crops, prosper economically and live in sound health and peace of mind.

In 2019, there was an elephant with many innovations- it can lift a log, pump water, smoke a cigar, eat grass and even excrete its feces, etc. The audience liked to see the elephant with such new creations. But, the most important fact is that it is difficult to meet the expenses for the elephant dance. Later the elephant dance is expected to be endangered.

Kyaukse townsfolk believe that the Elephant Dance is the only big festival held in the country. Although there are some difficulties in the festival, they try to keep up the tradition for years. They firmly hold that when they fail to hold the festival, such mishaps as famine, bad weather, pestilence, etc. would befall them. As a result, they hold the dance annually. Now, during the Covid- 19 pandemic, as the State bans from holding any religious or secular festivals and activities in the country, the dance is not held. But, Myoma White Elephant Group would hold the Elephant Dance as a token so that the countrymen would redeem from the pandemic.

The dance is performed by youths as baby elephant. So, children in the town play the elephant dance in their free time. They sing and dance, just as the dancers in the competition do. When they grow older, they learn how to dance systematically. It seems to be the best way to maintain the tradition of elephant dance.

According to an interview with Daw Tin Shwe, aged 86, a native of Kyaukse, elephant dance has been held for over one hundred years. So, the elephant dance should be nominated as an intangible cultural heritage of Kyaukse.

Conclusion

Melford Spiro (1982) said about three concepts of rituals- instrumental, commemorative and expressive. Concerning the Elephant Dance, it is an obligatory ritual because townsfolk hold the Elephant Dance to show their gratitude to King Anawrahta who rendered services for the welfare of the people in the country, especially in Kyaukse area. In return of gratitude and respect to the benefactor, they share merit accrued to the king after they have performed meritorious deeds. It is strongly believed that unless they hold the elephant dance, some mishaps would befall on the area.

Even the losers in the elephant dance are not discouraged from competing. They are enthusiastic enough to continue the dance for years. The dance symbolizes co-operation among elephant dancers and band members, individual or communal sponsor for the elephant dance, good weather, plentiful

yields, religious fervor, etc. So, the losers have been active to compete in the dance. They seem to render services not only for their interests but for the welfare of the people in and around Kyaukse.

In fact, some rich men in the town participate in the elephant dance through harmony, encouragement, material supports, etc. for the merriment of the audience. In like manner, some honorary elephant owners spend their money and effort for the maintenance of the elephant dance. Youths also render services for the dance by dancing with joking elephants. Those who dance in the baby elephants seem to keep up the tradition of elephant dance because they would hand over the tradition for years.

The elephant dance provides local people financially to some extent. Toy masters, souvenir sellers and block businessmen get income by making and selling toy elephants, elephant heads and apparels and T-shirts all year. Winners get their income by performing their dance in religious occasions and festivals. Some popular elephants go to foreign countries to entertain there. Then they support for the propagation of Buddhism in the country.

The elephant dance is not economy-oriented because capital investment is greater than the prize. As there are three kinds of elephants, prizes number nine. In other words, nine elephants win prizes and other elephants are losers. Commodity price rises year after year and expenses for the elephant dance are varied. Most owners spend much money for their elephants.

As Shwe Thein Taw Pagoda in Kyaukse Town is glorious, it is a pilgrimage site near Mandalay. Pilgrims pay respect to the pagoda and on return they buy toy elephants for their children or as souvenirs. So, Kyaukse stands for elephant. Then, they try to come and watch elephant dance in Thadingyut because the dance competition is unique for them.

In fact, elephant dance provides merriment, close association among siblings, friends, hosts and guests, harmony and co-operation among members of the dance group, awareness of artistic sentiments, etc. The dance also contributes to the local people economically to some extent. Moreover, more important is that it instills religious fervor one generation after another. Townspeople donate elephant toys and other offertories to the Buddha and pray for the welfare and peace of all people living in the world. It is a festival unique to Burma. As the elephant dance in Kyaukse has been held over one hundred years. So, under the guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, archaeologists and other scholars should co-operate for the task of nomination as an intangible cultural heritage in Mandalay Region. The townsfolk of Kyaukse endeavor to collect donations in and around Kyaukse area. If so, some funds would be supported for the maintenance of

the dance. They should endeavor for the nomination through their cooperation and enthusiasm. Then, the elephant dance will prolong for years through support of all citizens headed by the State.

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