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Village Administration in Upper Burma during 1886 – 7
Ma Kyan*

The British dethroned and deported King Thibaw on Sunday the 29 November 1885. His territories were proclaimed to be part of the British Empire on 1 January 1886. After some contemplation Lord Dufferin decided that Upper Burma excluding the Shan States should be administered directly. Accordingly the Hluttaw was abolished on 31 March 1886 and the Chief Commissioner, Sir Charles Bernard, took charge of the civil administration in Upper Burma. The administrative system in use in Lower Burma was introduced. But the village administration could not be given a legal footing until October 1887. During the first two years after the British annexation the old order of things prevailed in villages with a little or no modification at all. This paper tries to give an account of the village administration during those two years; in so doing it attempts to bring out some features of the village system in Upper Burma during the last days of the Konbaung dynasty. It is also an introduction to a critical study of Sir Charles Crosthwaite's Village Regulation of Upper Burma.

In establishing British rule in Upper Burma, administrative convenience, simplicity, and above all, cheapness were the guiding principles. Thus the administrative system, based on territorial divisions and in use in Lower Burma, was conviently and readily adopted. During the year 1886, Upper Burma excluding the Shan States was parcelled out into 4 Divisions comprising 17 Districts. With the development of the territorial system there appeared a territorial hierarchy with Divisional Commissioners, District Commissioners, Subdivisional officers and Township officers in charge of divisions, districts, subdivisions and townships respectively. The Government strictly confined itself to three basic functions, namely, maintaining law and order, administering justice and collecting revenue. But this government by officialdom affected only the urban areas. Unless the village dwellers, who were the majority, could be brought under control the Government was in no position to perform its essential functions. At that time most of the villages in Upper Burma were up against the British. Therefore a strong and effective village system was necessary. In Lower Burma the Village organisation was neglected and had degenerated into a mere revenue system with village headmen, styled Kyedangyi, becoming mere village watchmen and drudges. Neither for uniformity nor for cheapness could the Lower Burma village system be introduced into the Upper country where a stronger and better village organisation existed. Therefore during the early years prior to the enforcement of the Upper Burma Village Regulation the British Government allowed the existing arrangements to continue. The local officials who submitted were also retained in service.

The British found it very difficult to maintain the old village system. Most of the villages were up against the new Government. The local officials, especially the influential and powerful ones did not submit and no strong and trustworthy persons

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1. The Upper Burma Village Regulation was enacted on 28 October 1887
2. The divisions and districts at the end of 1886 were:
   (1) Northern division — Mandalay, Bhamo, Katha, Ruby Mines, and Shwebo districts
   (2) Central division — Ava, Sagaing, Kyaukse, Ye-u, and Chindwin
   (3) Southern division — Myingyan, Pagan, Minbu and Taungdwingyi
   (4) Eastern division — Meiktila, Yamethin, and Nyingan.
could be obtained in their places. The respectable persons were either unwilling to serve the foreign masters or they were afraid of the punishment inflicted by those who were raising the standard of rebellion against the British. In the chaos consequent to the annexation many villages in Upper Burma were deserted. Sometimes they were burnt down by the British or by anti-British camps. Moreover, the District Officers who came to govern Upper Burma were men, either with Indian ideas or with Lower Burma experiences. Few understood or could appreciate the existing Burmese village system. Although it was claimed that the existing order was allowed to continue in actual practice it was left to the discretion of the District Officers who viewed and weighed everything with their Indian or Lower Burma standards. Some simply did not maintain the indigenous system in its integrity. They endeavoured to model the administration on the lines to which they had grown accustomed to in Lower Burma. Accordingly, there were breakdowns or amalgamations of myothugyi and thugyi ships, dismissals or dispensing with local village officials, and the system familiar to the people was greatly subverted. Hence during the years 1886-7 the arrangements varied a great deal in different districts. This was also partly due to the indigenous system which lacked uniformity or set rules and allowed each locality to have its own traditional regulations and set-ups. A brief survey of the old system in general would suffice.

Under the Burmese Kings there existed a very strong village and local organisation through which the country had been administered. Under the control of the officials appointed by the King, the civil, criminal, and fiscal administration of the country was conducted by the Myothugyi and Thugyi. They were called by different names in different parts of the country. The essence of the system was that each village had its responsible headman. Under the Burmese rule the duties of a Thugyi were, generally, to collect revenue and to keep order in his village. He had police powers in regard to the investigation of cases and the arrest of offenders, and also exercised magisterial powers which could not exactly be defined. He acted as an arbitrator and judge in civil disputes. He had some officials under him. They assisted him in carrying out his duties. The Thugys were exempted from taxation and they got 10 per cent on the revenue collected. In some places they held land by virtue of their office. There also existed, in some places, a higher system of organisation where the villages and their headmen were grouped under a superior headman known as Myothugyi. This superior headman was also known by some other appellations, as Shwehu or Pawhmaing, according to the locality. His post was hereditary. He possessed considerable influence and power and acted as the chief constable or magistrate within his jurisdiction. He often appointed Thugyis in villages under him or confirmed them in their succession to office. This may be said to be the general pattern of the old village system. But a good deal of diversity of practice prevailed in different districts.3

The Government saw that it was impossible to govern a multitude of people without some organisation as it would be to manage an army without officers or without a regimental system. Hence it was observed that the village system should be maintained and strengthened. During the year 1887, Sir Charles Crosthwaite endeavoured to collect all the available information about the village system in Upper Burma, and the powers, privileges, and duties of the local officials while he was drafting his Upper Burma Village Regulation. But the information obtained was very fragmentary and inaccurate as the Deputy Commissioners could not freely move about their districts which still remained out of their control. Nevertheless, it was enough to show clearly how the entire government of the country had rested, and

1. Judicial Dept. No. 100-81 P, dated 8 Sept. 1887, para 2, UBHP (Jud), December 1887, p. 837
2. Thugyi Is land
3. The Sinaw provides in detail various practices prevailing in different districts.
that it did not rest on the local and plainly indigenous organisation. As stated above the tendency of some of the officers was to model the Upper Burma village system on lines prevailing in the lower country. Therefore much had already been done to break up and disintegrate the old machinery. The general picture of the village administration in Upper Burma during 1886–7, the existing old order and the changes made, may be summarised as follows.

The Commissioner of the Northern division stated that no substantial alterations had been made in his division and that it was the desire of his District Officers to adhere to the existing state of things. But his statement was not well grounded. The Deputy Commissioner of Mandalay plainly reported that he had not maintained the Burmese system in its integrity and that he had made considerable changes. According to him, the local officials subordinate to the Myowuns and Myothugysis were the Ywa-ok, the Thugyi, the Ywagaung, the Ywa Saye, and the Ywazaw. The Ywa-ok, had power to try small criminal and civil cases and he could flog and imprison. He was paid by fees in criminal cases. Each Ywa-ok had a certain number of Thugysis under him. The Thugyi exercised the same jurisdiction as Ywa-ok in cases which arose in his village, but the Ywa-ok had power to transfer to his own court all cases brought before the Thugyi. Each Thugyi, in turn, appointed a certain number of Ywagaungs under him. The Ywagaung had in his village the same powers as the Thugyi in his circle. The Ywacey was the Thugyi’s clerk and Ywazaw or the village crier was the peon who carried summons, orders etc. None of these officials had power to decide important cases either criminal or civil. They were neither concerned with the revenue collection. The thathameda or capititation tax was collected by the Thamadis and the land revenue was farmed out. The Thugyi received 10 per cent of the thathameda collections, of which he paid one per cent to the Myothugyi. In villages occupied by ahmudans, the classification was different. The local officials were called by regimental terms such as Tathmu, Thenataye, Thwe-thawkkyi, Akyat.

The Burmese village system appeared to be most complete and elaborate in Mandalay district. But, as stated above, the Deputy Commissioner did not adhere to it. He replaced the Wuns by the Subdivisional Officers and though he did not do away with the Myothugysis he appointed Myooks in their places. The Thugysis were given the right to collect the thathameda and the land tax. Moreover, they were given indefinite police powers and the Ywa-oks were entirely done away with. The Deputy Commissioner thought the Burmese system to be complicated and proposed to abolish the Myothugysis and to appoint Ywagaungs and Ywalaugysis on the same line with Lower Burma.

The Deputy Commissioner, Bhamo, reported that he found different arrangements in different乡镇es within his district. However, one common feature was that the revenue was collected by the headman of the village who was known by the name of Tamon, Thugyi or Pawhmaing. There were no Myothugysis in the northern part of the district. In those places, the Tamon, Thugyi or Pawhmaing was remunerated by receiving 10 per cent on revenue collection and by being exempted from the thathameda. But in some places there were Myothugysis and in between Myo-

1. Judicial Dept. No. 100-81P, dated 8 Sept 1887, para 2, UBHP (Judd) December 1887, p. 837
2. G.D. Burgess
3. ‘Rural Police and Revenue System’, Memorandum from the Commissioner, Northern division, No. 117-101A, dated 4 June 1887, UBHP (Judd), Dec. 1887, p. 879
4. J.E. Bridges
5. From the Dy. Commissioner, Mandalay, No. 392-98, dated 4 May 1887, UBHP (Judd), Dec. 1887, p. 881
6. Ibid
7. Captain C.H.E. Adamson
8. In this district Tamon and Pawhmaing are said to be synonymous with Thugyi.
thugyi and Tamons, there were Kayaing-ok Chaung-ok or Taik-ok. The Kayaing-ok received no remuneration but he was exempted from the thathameda. He had nothing to do with the collection of taxes. His duties were to pass on orders to Tamons and see that the orders were carried out and for that he usually received paddy, rice, salt, etc. from the villages under his charge. The Kayaing-oks served as men round whom the Tamons and villagers would gather in cases of alarm or danger. In the southern part of the district, namely, Kaungton, Shwegu, and Mohynin, there were Myothugyi. These Myothugyi had Myodeins and Myosayes attached to them. The Myothugyi received 10 per cent of the thathameda and paid a certain portion of this percentage to the Tamons and thugyi under him. He had civil powers and the fees levied there from formed part of his remuneration. The Myothugyi exercised no criminal powers whatever except when the Wun deputed him to try particular cases.1

The Deputy Commissioner effected some changes in that existing order and proposed some more alterations. He thought the Kayaing-ok exactly corresponded to the Yazawutgaung of Lower Burma. Hence his idea was to turn the Kayaing-oks or Taik-oks into district police paying them from Rs 5 to Rs 10 per mensem, according to the size of their charges. Accordingly, he appointed 19 Taik-oks, old and new, to perform police duties in Sinkin, Bhamo, and Shwegu townships. He also was not in favour of the Myothugyi and suggested that Myothugyi should no longer be allowed to exercise any judicial function. The Myothugyi under his charge were therefore retained simply as Revenue Officers on the Lower Burma model. The Myodein and the Myosaye were dispensed with. As for the Tamons they were placed under the Kayaing-ok and were made to perform the duties of the Kyedangyi of Lower Burma. Where there were no Myothugyi, the Tamons were allowed to collect the revenue and they received their commission direct from the Deputy Commissioner.2

A different arrangement existed in the Ruby Mines district where the Deputy Commissioner reported non interference with the old village system. Under the Burmese Government there existed four grades of local officials, namely, So-thugyi, Thugyi appointed by the King, Thugyi appointed by the Myothugyi, and Se-eingaung. So-thugyi were actually Myothugyi and performed the duties of collecting taxes and revenue from the mines. They received 10 per cent on their collection. The Thugyi appointed by the King were placed in charge of large villages containing about 100 houses or more. They received only 5 per cent on their revenue collection while the other 5 per cent went to the So-thugyi or Myothugyi. Though they worked under the Myothugyi they could not be dismissed by him. The lesser kind of Thugyi were no better than the Se-eingaungs. They were appointed by the Myothugyi and received whatever the Myothugyi chose to give them. They were exempted from the thathameda. The Se-eingaungs were appointed only in large villages. The Deputy Commissioner maintained the old arrangement intact and reported the result to be satisfactory. His only suggestion was the grouping of small villages into a big one of about 50 or 70 houses to be placed under a Thugyi and a Se-eingaung appointed for every 20 houses.4

The other Deputy Commissioner who was in favour of the indigenous system was G.W. Shaw, in charge of the Myndaung district.5 He observed that the old system was good and required no modification at all. However, he stated that the arrangement in the Kawlin Subdivision differed from that prevailing in the rest of the district.

1. From the Dy. Commissioner, Bhamo, No. 23-11 dated 25 May 1887, UBHP (Judl), Dec. 1887, p. 884
3. G.M.S. Carter
4. From the Dy. Commissioner, Mogok, dated 7 May 1887, UBHP (Judl), Dec. 1887, pp. 885-6
5. Later known as Katha district
He alluded to the O-thugyi of Nagasin; and in Pale, the villages were usually placed under the charge of a Ywagaung and there was a Ywa-ok over them. In the rest of the districts the local officials were generally the Thugysis and the Myothugysis. The Myothugyi collected thathameda and received a commission of 10 per cent. He was responsible for the peace and order in his circle but enjoyed no criminal powers. He exercised civil powers receiving fees of Rs 10 or Rs 15 in cases of value and Rs 2 or Rs 3 in small cases. The Asiyin assisted him in these matters and, in the absence of the Myothugyi, the Asiyin acted himself. Besides the 10 per cent commission the Myothugyi enjoyed the rent, generally 20 baskets in every 100, levied on Government land let out by him to cultivators. In the headquarters of the Myothugyi ship there were a Myodein, a Myosaye and a Myomagaung. Myomagaung was the equivalent of the thugyi in other villages. These officials were remunerated by grants of tax free land and by exemption from thathameda. Each village had a thugyi who under the Myothugyi was responsible for peace and order and for his charge. The Thugyi received no commission and his only remuneration was a free grant of land during the time of his office. The land sometimes yielded about 1000 baskets. He was also exempted from thathameda. Under the Thugyi there was one Hnozaw, sometimes also called Kyezaw or Ywazaw. He was a messenger and was remunerated by exemption from thathameda and by a small holding of rent free land. Se-eingaung system did not exist in the district. Where there was no land, the Myothugyi paid his subordinates in paddy. Neither Myothugyi nor Thugyi has criminal powers.2

The Deputy Commissioner thought very highly of the Myothugyi. He described him as the backbone of the social system and stated that he would in no case abolish the Myothugyi. The only point he would like to modify was the powers of the Myothugyi in the trial of civil cases. However, he suggested that arbitration be allowed to continue without any objection.3

In Shwebo district the organisation was fairly complex. It was a cavalry district called Shwpyitaung Myinne where almost all the people were supposed to be mounted. Hence the names of the local officials referred to horsemen, Myinsaye and Myingaung being the officials. They corresponded to Thenatsaye and Thwe-thaukkyi of the amhutan areas.4 The Myinsayes were next in power to the Myintat Bo and under Myingaung there were Myinsis. The Myingaungs and Myinsis were appointed by the King. All the Myin Officers had civil, criminal, and fiscal powers.5 There were also Myothugysis, Thugysis and Ywa-oks. Occasionally Thugysis were appointed Myinsis also. The Deputy Commissioner reported that every large village or group of small villages had a Thugyi and in most villages there was a Ywagaung under the Thugyi. Under the Burmese rule Myothugysis and Thugysis were appointed by the King and were hereditary. They settled only petty criminal cases such as assault and abuse. But they had civil powers and tried all civil cases. If the parties were not satisfied they could appeal to the Myingaung and thence to the Myinsaye. The Ywa-ok was appointed by the Wun or by the Myinsaye. There was no Se-eingaung system in the district. But the Deputy Commissioner had introduced it.7 Apart

1. O-thugyi (အျို) was a title given to the headmen of Shan villages, particularly to those who rendered service to the crown. Judson’s Dictionary, 146
2. From the Deputy Commissioner, Myaung No. 101-26, dated 18 May 1887, UBHP (Judl), Dec. 1887, pp. 882-3
3. UBHP (Judl), Dec. 1887, p. 883
4. From the Deputy Commissioner, Shwebo, No. 2 T, dated 7 May 1887, UBHP (Judl), Dec. 1887, p. 882
6. B.K.S. McDermott
7. From the Dy. Commissioner, Shwebo, No. 55, dated 13 April 1887; UBHP (Judl), Dec. 1887 p. 880
from that the Deputy Commissioner seemed to have followed the existing practice. His report conveyed only one suggestion that the Thugyis should not be exempted from the Arms Act.

The Kyaukse district of Burmese times was said to be divided into the charges of 8 Myothugyis. In 1887 the Deputy Commissioner reported that he had already appointed 9 Myothugyis. The report conveyed a clear indication that the Deputy Commissioner was much inclined to modify the old arrangements on Lower Burma basis. The other local officials in the Kyaukse district were Ne-ok, Thugyis and Segyi. Se-zingaung did not exist in the district. The Ne-ok seemed to be an office peculiar to Kyaukse. The Deputy Commissioner turned them into circle officers but they were called Myothugyis. Thugyis were appointed one for every village or group of villages.

With regard to the remuneration of the Thugyis the old practice seemed to vary within the district. The Thugyi usually got 10 per cent on the thathama collections and paid 10 per cent of his net receipt to the Myothugyi. Sometimes the Myothugyi and Thugyi made their own arrangements as to the division of the commission. The Thugyi, besides his share of commission on the thathama collection, shared the Segyi’s commission on water-rate and land revenue in many cases getting as much as one third. The Deputy Commissioner wanted the Myothugyi to be in line with the Taikthuyi of Lower Burma. The arrangement deprived the Myothugyi of the fees from his judicial functions. To compensate this the Deputy Commissioner proposed that the Myothugyis be remunerated by 10 per cent on all thathama collections up to Rs 10000 and 5 per cent above that, with the Thugyi having no share in it. The Segyi was maintained as the collector of land revenue, thus answering to the Taikthuyi of Lower Burma. His other suggestions were to give each Thugyi a revenue free grant of land and to appoint an officer similar to the Yazawutgaung in Lower Burma. But the Commissioner, Central division, was of the opinion that the Myothugyi should perform the duties of the Yazawutgaung as they were remunerated liberally.

Ava remained as a separate charge only up to September 1887 and during that period the old order of things with a slight modification seemed to prevail. The Deputy Commissioner reported the appointment of 25 Thugyis and 3 Myothugyis who were paid Rs 30 and Rs 50 respectively in addition to the usual 10 per cent commission. Moreover, Thugyis were granted 10 to 20 acres of tax free land. They exercised certain police powers and had jurisdiction in civil cases, where the subject matter was under Rs 50 or Rs 100 in value.

2. D.J.A. Campbell
4. Segyi was the man in charge of the weir and was responsible for the maintenance and repair of it. He was also responsible for the distribution of water among the irrigated lands, the measure of the area irrigated by his canal, etc; he had revenue duties also. Kyaukse District Gazetteer, pp. 78-9
5. UBHP (Judy), Dec. 1887, pp. 876-7
6. F.W.R. Fryer
7. From the Commissioner, Central division, No. 16-626, dated 27 May 1887, UBHP (Judy), Dec. 1887, p. 875
8. Ava and Sagaing districts were amalgamated in September 1887, UBHP (Public), Sept. 1887, p. 257
9. G E T. Green
10. From the Deputy Commissioner, Ava, No. 5-34, dated 16 June 1887, UBHP (Judy), Dec. 1887, p. 887
The local officials in the Sagaing district were Myothugyi, Taikthugyis or Taik-ok and Taugyis. Se-enguang also existed in the district. The number of appointments were said to be 71 Thugyis on the east of Mu (Sagaing and Samon townships), 115 on the west of Mu (Allakappa, Chaung-u-Amyin townships), 1 Myothugyi in Sagaing, and 3 Myothugyis and 3 Taik-oks on the west of Mu. The Deputy Commissioner considered that the rank, position and power of the Thugyi under Burman rule were very similar to those of the Patels in Bombay. They were respected by the villagers and exercised great authority. They enjoyed magisterial, police and revenue powers. They were remunerated by the usual 10 per cent on the thalhameda collection, exemption from taxation, customary commission on civil cases and customary fees on petty criminal cases. The Deputy Commissioner endeavoured to maintain the indigenous system and place it on a firm basis. He issued tagayaung sayyuns, palm leaf certificates of office, such as were issued under the Burmese kings. His only suggestion was the reorganisation of circles, comprising 10 to 20 villages, each under Myothugyi or Taikthugyis alias Taik-ok. The Myothugyi or Taikthugyis was to exercise control over the Thugyis of his circle. He was to be paid a salary of Rs 15 or Rs 30, be exempted from taxation and was to have a grant of land.

In 1886 Ye-u district was formed out of the Myedu, Tabayin and Indauktha Wanships of the Burmese time. Under the Burmese regime Tabayin was divided into 20 circles, each containing about 560 taxable households. Each circle was placed under the charge of a Thwethaukkyi, who within his own charge exercised criminal, civil and revenue powers. As regards Myedu only the portion on the western bank of the Mu was included in Ye-u district. It contained about 3622 taxable households and was divided into 8 Thwethaukkyships. Indauktha consisting about 604 taxable households was governed by a Myothugyi. In 1887 the Deputy Commissioner reported appointing Five-house gaungs, Ten-house gaungs, Ywagaung-thugyis and Thwethaukkyis according to the old system. The Thwethaukkyi had authority over the Thugyis in his thwethauk in criminal and revenue matters. The Deputy Commissioner considered them very useful and suggested retaining them in any future scheme. He also laid down rules for the guidance of all Myooks, Myothugyis, Thwethaukkyis, Thugyis, Ywagaungs, Se-enguang, and villagers. His rules were actually the forerunner of Sir Charles Crosthwaite’s Upper Burma Village Regulation. The rules provided for dealing with the people by villages and not by individuals. Therefore responsibility was enforced on the village as a whole for the good behaviour of its members, and for any crime committed within the limits of the village. Some of the Burmese customs were also given a legal basis. Thus the Track Law

1. A. R. Colquhoun
2. Patel or Potali – The headman of a village having general control of village affairs, and forming the medium of communication with the officers of Government. Hobson-Jobson, 685
3. From the Dy. Commissioner, Sagaing, No. 456-14 dated 2 and 7 April 1887, UBHP (Judi), Dec 1887, pp. 857-60
4. In March 1893 Ye-u and Shwebo districts were amalgamated under the name of Shwebo and was placed in the Central division. Report on the Administration of Burma, 1893-4, p. 3
6. Taze, Kabaungy, Kanbauk, Inkoka, Nabeik, Gwgon, Ayingaung and Mu Anaukpet, UBHP (Misc), Oct. 1886, p. 106
7. UBHP (Misc), Oct. 1886, pp. 105-06
8. W. N. Porter
9. UBHP (Judi), Dec. 1887, pp. 873-4; see appendix.
10. The principle of enforcing the responsibility of villages for crimes which they may be presumed to have committed or committed is recognised in section 21 of the Lower Burma District Cesses and Rural Police Act. That section has been practically a dead letter in accounts of the delay and trouble caused by the necessity of referring every case to the Chief Commissioner. UBHP (Judi), Dec. 1887, p. 832
was observed and any village to which the tracks of any dacoit or thief was traced
was made responsible for his surrender or arrest or for taking the track on. The
rules also included keeping of a regular and efficient watch and ward, reporting of
the arrival and departure of a stranger or guest by the host concerned, and building
of a strong hedge round the village. In fact, most of the drastic measures provided
for in the Upper Burma Village Regulation of 1887 could be traced to the rules laid
down by the Deputy Commissioner of Ye—u.¹

The Chindwin district² had been a single charge till September 1887 as authority
could not yet be established in most part of the area. It was divided into 5 Sub-
divisions, namely, Alon, Mingin, Kindat, Legayaing,³ and Kabaw valley⁴ and village
administration followed the former arrangements. The old order was rather complex
and complicated as the local officials were known by various appellations. The
Deputy Commissioner⁵ appointed 5 Myothugiyis and 213 Thugiyis in Alon Subdivision,
3 Myothugiyis, 2 Shwehmus and 20 Thugiyis in Mingin Subdivision, and 1 Myothu-
giyi, 2 Shwehmus, 5 Thugiyis, 4 Tamons, and 4 Ywa-oks in Kindat Subdivision. In
Legayaing Subdivision 53 officials were appointed of whom 3 were Myothugiyis, 4
Shwehmus, and the rest Thugiyis, Tamons, Pawhmaings and Ngwegunhmus. In Kabaw
valley Subdivision 2 Myothugiyis called Myodeins, 1 Thugyi, and 11 Tamons were
appointed.⁶ Shwehmu was the same as Myothugyi and Tamons were generally syno-
ymous with Thugyis. But sometimes Pawhmaings and Tamons seemed equivalent to
Myothugyi as one Pawhmaing was found to have 64 villages and one Tamon 34
villages under his charge. Se-eingaungs existed in most villages except in Legayaing
Subdivision where in large villages there was a gaung for every 20 to 30 houses, and
separate gaungs for smaller villages and hamlets. The remuneration received by the
Thugyis varied considerably and depended very much on individual influence.
The recognised fees were the 10 per cent commission on the thathamda collection, fees
in petty criminal and civil cases, and gebo⁷ varying from Rs 2 to Rs 30. Some of the
Thugyis held land granted by the Huttaw. In Kabaw valley all land was said
to be under the control of the Thugyis and Tamons who allotted holdings to cultivators,
reserving what they required for themselves. Se-eingaungs and gaungs received no
remuneration. They were only exempted from the thathamda. No modification
of the existing order was attempted except that the Deputy Commissioner had ordered
the Thugyis not to take remuneration beyond what they received on thathamda
collections.⁸

The local arrangements in the Eastern division comprising Yamethin, Meiktila
and Pyinmana districts varied a good deal in Burmese times. The Commissione⁹
called that he was quite averse to making extensive changes in the existing state of
things merely to secure uniformity.¹⁰ But it was found that in some townships,
where the country had been very disturbed, and where the majority and often all
the old thugyis rose up in revolt, the old arrangements had in many cases been set

¹. From the Dy. Commissioner, Ye—u, dated 5 April 1887, UBHP (Jutd), Dec. 1887, p. 873
². Divided into Upper and Lower Chindwin district in September 1887, UBHP (Public), Sept.
1887, p. 257. Now renamed Mawlike and Monawa districts vide Notification Nos. 553 and 554
³. In 1905 the name was changed to Homalin Subdivision, Upper Chindwin District Gazetteer,
⁴. In 1891 Kale township was added and became Kale—Kabaw Subdivision, Upper Chindwin
District Gazetteer, 55
⁵. F. D. Raikes
⁶. From the Dy. Commissioner, Chindwin, No. 65—8, dated 24 June 1887, UBHP (Jutd), Dec.
1887, pp. 896—7
⁷. Fees from newly married couples
⁸. UBHP (Jutd), Dec. 1887, pp. 896—7
⁹. H. St. G. Tucker
¹⁰. From the Commissioner, Eastern division, No. 504—1—7, dated 28 April 1887, UBHP (Jutd),
Dec. 1887, p. 861
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Aside altogether. In such cases new circles were formed without reference to the existing arrangement and a new set of thugis were appointed. Wherever the arrangements had been recast the tendency had been to follow the Lower Burma system and a single Dain or Circle-thugyi took the place of a large number of petty thugis.

The local officials under old regime could be roughly divided into five classes, namely, (1) Myothugyi, (2) Dain-thugyi, (3) Thugyi appointed by the King, (4) Thugyi appointed by the Myothugyi or Dain-thugyi, and (5) Ywagaungs. The Dain-thugysis were in charge of considerable tracts including many villages. Sometimes they were under a Myothugyi but sometimes they appeared to be directly under the Wun or local governor. Thugysis appointed by the King were of superior class but they were under the control of the Myothugyi or the Dain-thugyi. The inferior class of Thugysis appointed by the Myothugyi or the Dain-thugyi were no better than the gaungs. The line of demarcation between the different classes was not always clearly marked, and all the five classes were not found together in any part of the Eastern division except in Yamethin district.¹

In Yamethin there used to be a hereditary Thugyi known as Ngamyo-thugyi. He held one circle himself and the rest of the country was divided among numerous Dain-thugis. In his circle or dain there were petty thugysis appointed by the king, and thugysis and gaungs appointed by himself. The Deputy Commissioner² replaced the Ngamyo-thugyi by a Myook and a Dain-thugyi was appointed for the Yamethin circle. Six other dainthugysis were also formed by readjusting and modifying the old boundaries considerably.

The extent of changes in other districts of the Eastern division were also considerable. In the olden days Pyinmana appeared to have been divided into a number of myothugysis and dainthugysis, with Dain-thugysis reporting directly to the Wun. The Deputy Commissioner³ grouped these circles into five townships under Myooks, the villages being managed by thugysis and gaungs under them. It was also noticed that the Deputy Commissioner was inclined to convert the gaung into Kyedangyi of Lower Burma. In Taungnya township the local thugysis took up arms against the British and the circle formerly full of petty thugysis was divided into two thugysis only. Hence the old thugyi organisation practically disappeared. The arrangements in Pyawbwe township seemed much simpler than in Yamethin. There were about 30 circles under the Thugysis some of whom could be classed as Dain-thugysis. But others were little more than Ywagaungs. Yindaw township had a Myothugyi and the country was divided under him between 20 Thugysis. The Myothugyi was replaced by a Myook and a Dain-thugyi was appointed for the centre circle, the villages under him being managed by 23 gaungs. Meiktila had been the seat of a Wun and the township was divided into a number of dains with Dain-thugysis reporting direct to the Wun. But in Mahaing the Dain-thugysis were placed under the charge of Myothugysis. The Deputy Commissioner retained the dain-thugysis but he tried to do away with the Myothugysis. The Wundwin township comprised what had been known as the Shwepyi Yan Aung Ashe Mvinne. It had been governed by a Myinsaye, with 113 Thugysis under him. A Myook took the place of the Myinsaye and in place of the 113 Thugysis 16 Circle-thugysis on the Lower Burma model were substituted by the Deputy Commissioner.⁴

¹ Memorandum by the Commissioner, Eastern division, on Thugyi arrangements, UBHP (Judd), Dec. 1887, p. 861
² S.H.T. De La Courneuve
³ Major T. M. Jenkins
⁴ Memorandum on Thugyi arrangements, UBHP (Judd), Dec. 1887, pp. 861-4
The Deputy Commissioner considered the 10 per cent commission on thathameda collections a very liberal remuneration for the Myothugyi, Dain-thugyi and Thugyi. Where the Myothugyi administered the whole circle direct he took the whole commission and the Dain-thugyi and thugyi took the percentage for the respective circles under their charge. The village thugyis and gaungs did not enjoy any share of the percentage. All the officials from Myothugyi down to gaung were exempted from payment of thathameda, "p-hern" and chwe-shin.

With regards to Minbu, Myingyan, Pagan, Taungdwingyi and Thayetmyo districts which constituted the Southern division, no particulars were forthcoming from the Deputy Commissioners. The existing local arrangements with Myothugyi, Thugyi and gaungs appeared to continue. In Thayetmyo district the existence of Taik-thugyi as in Lower Burma was noticed. The Report on the Revenue Administration of 1888 mentioned the existence of 1 Myothugyi, 50 Taik-thugyi and 32 Ywathugyi in the Upper Burma portion of the Thayetmyo district. The Commissioner considered the Thugyi as the general factotum of the State and wished to make him responsible for gathering information. He pointed out the application of section 45 of the Criminal Procedure Code, under which thugyis could be punished for neglecting to give information of the resort of deceit in their jurisdiction. It is not unlikely that this led to the substitution of a new section for section 45 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in the Upper Burma Village Regulation. The Commissioner also suggested a system of rewards.

Irregularity in size of the charges was also very marked in the village organisation under the Burmese regime. Some of the Myothugyi ships were very large while the number of villages under one Thugyi varied greatly in different parts of the country. There were 40 patty thugyis under a single Dain in Yamehin while the Yindaw Myothugyi had 20 Thugyis under him. The Myinsaye who governed Wundwin area had 113 thugyis under his charge. In Ava district the average number of villages under a Myothugyi was 23 and under a Thugyi 11 while in Kyaukse the average number under a Myothugyi was 37.8 villages. But the division was very unequal as the Mokkaya Myothugyiship for instance was by far the largest, containing nearly one third of the villages in the district. The irregularity was further marked in the Chindwin district where each of the Alon, Mingin, Kindat, Legayaing and Kayhay Subdivisions had a different arrangement. In Alon subdivision 113 thugyis administered more than one village. The average number of villages in a Myothugyi circle varied from 5 and 7 in one place to 23 in another within the subdivision. In Mingin subdivision the average was stated to be 20. In Legayaing subdivision the 24 largest circles in the subdivision contained 280 known villages, the figures varying from 64 villages under Myitsin Kuhnhtiya Pawhmaing, and 34 under the Lesaw Taman to 3 villages in each of the three circles of Kinsethywa tract. In 1888-9 there were 10 Myothugyi in Shwebo district. The charges were very irregular in size, one Myothugyi having 85 villages under him. Similar inequality was noticed in Katha district where...
the largest circle under Manle Myothugyi had 113 villages while the smallest circle contained 3 villages only.¹

Some of the Deputy Commissioners were much averse to maintaining large circles while others disliked the idea of having small villages under various petty thugysis. Large circles provided the Myothugyi with great power, good income, and large following. It was also found that most of the rebel leaders were the powerful Myothugyi exercising great influence over their large circles. Hence the breaking up of Myothugyi ships and converting of Myothugyi into circle-thugyi on Lower Burma fashion followed in some parts of the country. But in some districts petty thugysis were dispensed with and the villages were amalgamated into circles in charge of a circle-thugyi. Therefore the system of circle thugyi in some districts was the legacy of the indigenous arrangements, while in others it was the creation of the British officers themselves. In 1890 the Financial Commissioner observed that there was great diversity of practice and that in some instances these diversities were due to the custom found in existence at the annexation and in others to the idiosyncrasies of individual Deputy Commissioners, some of whom had engraved on the Upper Burma stock the Lower Burma Village system.²

To sum up the village administration in Upper Burma during 1886-7 depended greatly upon the idiosyncrasies of the individual Deputy Commissioners who were imbued with Indian ideas or Lower Burma experience. Arrangements varied a great deal in different districts. This was partly due to the existing order and partly to the creation of the British Officers. Though the administrative system in use in Lower Burma was conveniently and readily adopted the Lower Burma Village organisation which had degenerated into a mere revenue system could not be introduced into Upper Burma where a better village organisation existed. Hence the indigenous village system was allowed to continue. Under the Burmese rule diversity of practice in village administration prevailed. In some areas the arrangements were complex and complicated. The local officials were known by various appellations. Arrangements in Myine and Ahmudan areas differed from those in other parts of the country. The average number of villages in each myothugyi or thugyi ship varied considerably in different districts. The irregularity in size of the charges was followed by the difference in income and power of the officials concerned. The method of remunerating the thugyi also differed from place to place though the general practice of 10 per cent commission on thathameda collections appeared to be followed.

The indigenous system was not maintained in its integrity. Some Deputy Commissioners endeavoured to model the village administration on lines they had grown accustomed to in Lower Burma. Some wanted to abolish the Myothugyi while others considered him the backbone of the social system and recommended retaining the Myothugyi and his equivalents in any future scheme. In some districts Myothugyi was made answerable to the Talathugyi of Lower Burma. The tendency to rename or to convert Thugyi and his equivalents into Kyedangyi of Lower Burma was also noticed. The anomaly enhanced the complications as a Kyedangyi in Upper Burma was only the big or the highest tax payer and not a village official who was exempted from taxation. In place of local officials such as Myodein, Myosaye, Kayaing-ok and Ywa-ok, there appeared Yazawutgaungs in some districts and the system familiar to the people was greatly subverted. The year 1886-7 also saw the breaking up of some large Myothugyi ships and the amalgamation of some villages into circles. Many petty thugysis were set aside and in some districts the whole of the thugyi arrangement was swept away. Hence diversities and complications were not only inherited but also

¹ RRA, 1888-89, para 146, p. 44
² Minute by Sir Charles Crosthwaite, dated 6 Oct-1890, para 6, Upper Burma Village Manual, g196, p. 12
created. The state of things which prevailed in 1886-7 quickened the enforcement of the Upper Burma Village Regulation as the Chief Commissioner was aware of the evident danger of the Upper Burma village system degenerating as in the lower province. Even after the enforcement of the Upper Burma Village Regulation at the end of 1887, the idea of one village one headman could not practically be adopted. Some peculiarities of the old practice together with the irregularities created by the Deputy Commissioners remained long after the enforcement of the Village Regulation in Upper Burma.

Appendix

Extract from the District Officer’s Order-book, dated Hluttaik, the 4th April 1887.

The following rules are laid down for the guidance of all Myooks, Myothugys, Thwethaukkyys, Thuyys, Ywagaungs, Se-ingaungs, and villagers:

1. the village will be held responsible as a whole for the good behaviour of its several members;

2. all crime committed within the limits of any village will be detected by the people of that village, and the offender surrendered to justice failing which the village will render itself liable to punishment;

3. when the tracks of any dacoit or thief leads into any village, the people of that village will be held responsible for the crime, unless they can show they are innocent of having committed it and indicate the real offenders;

4. when a criminal is tracked to any village, or the surrender of any offender resident in any village, is demanded, the people of the village, to which the criminal is tracked or from which the surrender of the offender is demanded, shall give such criminal or offender up or show where he is with a view to his arrest; should they fail to do this, the village will be held responsible;

5. the arrival or departure of a stranger from any village will be reported by the villager whose guest he is to the ten-house gaung, and by whom to the Ywagaung, who will make enquiries about him, and if he appear a bad or suspicious character, or cannot give any satisfactory account of himself, the Ywagaung will arrest him and send him with a report of the facts to the nearest military or police post. Any village official or villager neglecting to report will be punished;

6. every village will be held responsible that the presence within or passage through its limits of any dacoits or other bad characters shall be promptly reported to the nearest military or police post, and that officials and people take measures to resist, and if possible, to defeat the dacoits;

7. every village will be held responsible that it lends the best aid in its power to every other village in the vicinity which may be threatened or attacked by dacoits, and that every assistance is rendered to any official whose duty it may be to pursue and capture dacoits or other bad characters while in the performance of such duty;

8. every village and every circle and village official will be held responsible that all the firearms within its respective limits or charges are surrendered to Government to be registered and returned to owners or otherwise disposed of as the Deputy Commissioner may direct;

9. every village and village official will be held responsible for regular and efficient watch and ward being kept for the prevention and detection of crime and arrest of criminals;

10. every village will be held responsible that a stockade be built round it sufficiently strong to prevent entrance or egress, except by the gates, and that such stockades be kept in good repair.