THE CONCEPT OF NAT-WORSHIP AMONG THERAVADA BUDDHISTS IN MYANMAR

U NANDACARA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND
ACADEMIC YEAR 2014
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THESIS TITLE: The Concept of Nat-Worship Among Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar

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ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014

The Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University, has approved this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies.

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Abstract

This research is an examination of the concept of Nat-worship among Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar. Myanmar is predominantly a Buddhist country, but Nat-worship still exists in Myanmar and some Buddhists are more or less connected with Nat-worship. The Nat-worshipers vary in number according to the current situations on which they are facing. If they are fine, the number of Nat-worshipers stands in the same points or becomes less. If they are in difficult situations, the number of Nat-worshipers becomes increasing. This research analyzes the concept of Nats which consist of Local Nats (Myanmar-born Nats) and Devas from Buddhist texts in accordance with Burmese literatures, the way of practice in Burmese Theravada society, and the appearance of Devas in Tipitaka and its commentaries. This includes types of local Nats, Devas, their conceptions, and proper ways to deal with them. This research also examines how much Nat-believers understand and devote to their Nats, Nat-worship, rituals and ways of worship. Finally the research discusses and evaluates the accommodation of Nat-worship in Buddhism, the impact of Nat-worship on Burmese Buddhist society in negative and positive ways, and the impact of Buddhist thoughts on local Nat-worship as well.
## Contents

Abstract ..................................................................................................................... I

Acknowledgement ..................................................................................................... II

Content ..................................................................................................................... III

Abbreviation ............................................................................................................. VII

CHAPTER I ............................................................................................................. 1

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

1.1 Background and significance of research ......................................................... 1

1.2 Research objectives ......................................................................................... 8

1.3 Thesis statement ............................................................................................ 8

1.4 Selected literature reviews ............................................................................ 8

1.5 Definitions of terms used in the research ....................................................... 12

1.6 Research scope ............................................................................................. 14

1.7 Research methodology ................................................................................. 14

1.8 Research conceptual framework ................................................................... 15

1.9 Research expectation .................................................................................... 15

CHAPTER II ......................................................................................................... 17

Spirit worship ........................................................................................................... 17

2.1 Chapter Introduction ....................................................................................... 17
2.2 Pre-Buddhist religions in Myanmar .............................................................. 17

2.2.1 Tree worship .................................................................................. 22

2.2.2 Snake worship ............................................................................. 28

2.2.3 Naga worship ............................................................................. 30

2.3 Nat-worship ................................................................................ 37

2.3.1 Definition of Nat ........................................................................ 38

2.3.2 The previous term(s) for the word "Nat" .............................................. 44

2.3.3 Nat-worship in Myanmar ............................................................... 49

2.3.4 The Beginning of Nat-worship ......................................................... 52

2.3.5 The types of Nats ...................................................................... 54

2.3.6 How Nats are worshiped? ................................................................. 58

CHAPTER III : Buddhism and Devas ............................................................ 64

3.1 A brief account of Buddhism in Myanmar ............................................ 64

3.2 Devas in Buddhist texts ................................................................ 67

3.2.1 Three types of Devas ................................................................. 67

Who are Visuddhi Devas? ................................................................. 74

3.2.2 What Buddha said about Devas .................................................... 78
3.2.3 Conversation between Buddha and Devas ............................................. 82

3.3 Relation of Buddhism and Devas .......................................................... 83

3.3.1 Nats and Paritta ............................................................................ 84

3.3.2 Merit-making and Devas ................................................................. 87

CHAPTER IV .................................................................................... 90

The impact and accommodation of Nat-worship in Burmese Buddhism – positive and negative aspects ................................................................. 90

4.1 Some reflections on (local) Nat-worship ................................................ 90

4.2 Discussions on Nat-worship ................................................................. 96

4.2.1 Did Buddhism promote Nat-worship in Myanmar? ........................... 96

4.2.2 Misunderstanding on the concept of Nats in Buddhism .................... 102

4.2.3 Can Nats help and protect the people? .............................................. 104

4.3 The Buddhist accommodation of Nat-worship in Myanmar .................. 111

4.4 The impact of Nat-worship on Burmese Buddhists ............................... 112

4.4.1 Negative aspects .......................................................................... 113

4.4.2 Positive aspects ........................................................................... 115

CHAPTER V .................................................................................... 118

Conclusion ....................................................................................... 118
5.1 A summary of the research findings ................................................... 118

5.2 Further research ........................................................................... 125

References ....................................................................................... 126
Abbreviations

AbD. = Abhidhānādīpikātīkā
Abhi. II = Vibhaṅgapāli
A. = Anguttaranikāya pāli

Example: (A. II, p. 124)

A = Anguttaranikāya pāli
II = Volume II
P = Page 124

AA. = Anguttaranikāya Aṭṭhakathā
BuA. = Buddhavamsa Aṭṭhakathā
DhpA. = Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā
D. = Dīghanikāya pāli

DA. = Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā of Dīganikāya
JaA. = Jataka Aṭṭhakathā
Khu. III = Udānapāli
Khu. V = Suttanipāta
M. = Mulapanṇāsa pāli
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MT.</td>
<td>Uparipaññaśa Tikā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.</td>
<td>Samyuttanikaya pāli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TipiD.</td>
<td>Tipitaka Pali-Myanmar Dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vi.</td>
<td>Vinayapitaka pāli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ViA.</td>
<td>Vinayapitaka Āṭṭhakathā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vima.</td>
<td>Vimāṇavatthu pāli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VimaA.</td>
<td>Vimāṇavatthu Āṭṭhakathā</td>
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<td>Wad</td>
<td>Wad Yoaksin</td>
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</table>
CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of research

The words “Nat, Devas, Nat-worship, Ahmya-Wea etc.” are more or less commonplace in the daily life of a Buddhist in Myanmar. In the history of world religion there were many traditional belief systems in each region and country though they might be the same or different from one another. Some traditional belief systems can still be found in some countries even in the present age. For example, spirit religions such as Phi in Thailand and Loas; neak taa or kmauit in Cambodia; Nat in Myanmar; and Chi in Nigeria are some of the traditional belief systems. Myanmar is also among the countries in which certain kinds of different belief systems can be seen. Myanmar is situated in South East Asia, and is a predominantly Buddhist country even though it is not officially appointed as one.

In 11th century, King Anawrahta ascended the throne during the Bagan dynasty in upper Myanmar where he ruled the Kingdom from 1044 to 1077 CE. He was very beneficial to the Burmese people in many ways – Business, education, religion, prosperity, security etc. He also united several kingdoms and made Myanmar strong and powerful. Thus Htin Aung, in his book ‘History of Burma’, described, “He was thus the founder of the first united Burmese kingdom and also the first Burmese empire” (Aung, 1965, p.34). As a powerful king in the history of Myanmar and one of true devotee kings to Theravada Buddhism, he introduced Theravada Buddhism into Myanmar with the help of Shin Araham, a Mon monk who was learned and well-trained in Theravada tradition and who came from Thaton in Lower Myanmar. At the time, Buddhism had already taken root in
Thaton. With the effort and support of King Anawrahta, the people in Myanmar started practicing Buddhism and the religion spread out into the whole country.

However, before Theravada Buddhism was introduced to the kingdom by King Anawrahta, there were certain spirit cults in Bagan (Myanmar) which people practiced in different ways including Nat-worship, astrology, and alchemy. They were, at the time, the most significant and favorable ones for the people in Bagan with regard to beliefs (Aung, 1975, p. 1). After introducing Theravada Buddhism into Myanmar, he persuaded his people to accept Buddhism and to abandon their cults or other religions as well. At first, it seemed to be very difficult for some people to abandon their cults or religions completely and immediately as soon as they embraced Theravada Buddhism. Aung (1975) described this situation, “But the people found it difficult to discard old beliefs and old practices immediately and resorted to stratagem” (p.3).

It is because the Burmese people followed the cults or religions handed down from generation to generation as a form of religious heritage that they had accepted, practiced and believed in the cults, religions for a long time. Furthermore, in persuading the Burmese people to abandon their old religions, King Anawrahta had to use force on some religious leaders such as Aris monks when he encountered the opposition from the Aris monks. The Aris monks held high position in religious affairs in the Kingdom. They controlled all cults and brought them under their patronage and management. Therefore, they became greatly influential to the people. The Aris monks opposed King Anawrahta’s wish, which was to convert the Burmese people to Buddhism, because they did not wish to lose their influence on people. However, the Aris monks were unable to make anything deviate from king
Anawrahta’s wish. Instead, having lost patience to the Aris monks, the king forced them to serve in the king’s Armies. Images of the gods of the planets and Hindu gods were seized and kept in a Temple which is called “Nat-Hlaung Kyaung” or “the prison of the gods”.

This event is described by Aung as follows:

“When Anawrahta made Theravada Buddhism the national religion of the country there was opposition from the Aris, as could be expected, and because they exercised great influence over the people, the king had no choice but to resort to religious persecution. The Ari monks were unfrocked and made to serve in the royal armies. All the images of the gods of the planets and the Hindu gods were seized and placed in a Vishnu temple, which was renamed ‘the prison of the Gods’” (Aung, 1975, p.3).

In the case of removal of the Aris monks and their gods at the time, this researcher thinks that there must be at least two reasons: (1) King Anawrahta wanted to remove the influence of the Aris monks on politics because the Aris monks were very influential as religious leaders and may have been involved in some political issues; and (2) the king wanted to introduce the pure form of Theravada Buddhism to his kingdom and he did not seem to want the involvement of other belief systems in his newly imported religion, Theravada Buddhism.

In this way, the King and his ministers tried to remove their old beliefs gradually, but one aspect of the old belief systems remains presently in Myanmar: Nat-worship. Historically, the Burmese worshiped many kinds of Nats in Bagan, Myanmar. People worshiped one or two of them: different people approached the various Nats with different thoughts. When the king’s order to abandon their old beliefs came out to them publicly, they, out of fear of their Nats, found it difficult to abandon the beliefs. They were more
afraid of Nats than King Anawrahta. The Burmese people could not discard the Nats even though they had discarded their other beliefs. People were performing ritual offerings in a quick manner with fruits, a short dance, and song. Finally the king understood that his people were extremely overwhelmed by great fear of Nats and needed time to figure out the situation clearly. So the King reduced the number of Nats to 36 and, as an innovation, introduced a new lord, Sakka in Pāli – (Sakra in Sanskrit) who is a celestial god and who is also the king of Devas in Tavatimsā and below it¹ – as the head of thirty-six lords and allowed them to be worshipped as thirty-seven Lords together:

“As for Nat worship, the people, in spite of the king’s edicts, went on worshipping the Nats, and Anawrahta finally decided to bring them over into Buddhism. The figures of the Thirty-six Lords were taken from their shrines and placed in the king’s great pagoda in an attitude of worship; he declared that the number was now thirty-seven, because Sakra, the king of the gods and guardian of Buddhism, was at the head of the pantheon. The cult of thirty-six Lords, therefore, became the cult of thirty-seven Lords, and Anawrahta replaced some of the earlier lords with the Nat spirits of some of his dead heroes” (Aung, 1975, p. 4).

In present day Myanmar, the Burmese still worship Nats or Nat-Pwe even though the universal religions particularly Buddhism play a very important role in Burmese societies and way of life.

Nat-Pwe is a Burmese term which is synonymous with Nat-festival. Here the Burmese word ‘Pwe’ means festival or drama. In Myanmar, Nat-Pwe is considered by some people as a kind of Nat-worship, but more precisely it is held to propitiate individual

¹ In Buddhist doctrines, there are six celestial worlds: Cātumahārājika; Tāvatimsa; Yāmā; Tusitā; Nimmānarati; and Paranimmānavasavatī. They are respectively high in position and Cātumahārājika is the lowest realm. Devas, Buddhist Nats, or deities live in those celestial worlds. Accordingly he is called Cātumahārājika Deva in general if a Dava lives in Cātumahārājika, and in the same way to other Devas.
Nats to which they belong. For the word ‘Nat-Pwe’, Melford E. Spiro, in his book entitled “Burmese Supernaturalism (expended edition)”, gave explanation to the readers truly and clearly:

“The Burmese word Pwe designates a variety of public performances whose object typically is entertainment. Thus, in addition to nat pwe, there is zat pwe, or the classical drama, anyein pwe, or a vaudeville show, and so on. Although the nat pwe is entertaining, its avowed purpose is propitiation, and I would assume, therefore, that it is the performance of a dramatic role, or the portrayal of a dramatic character, which is the generic designatum of pwe. In the classical drama, or zat pwe, characters from the Jataka stories are the dramatis personae. In the nat pwe, they are nats” (Spiro, 1978, p.108).

The causes that the Nat-Pwe is held may be different according to time, place, and situation. Sometimes the cause may be an illness, a danger, or a disaster to someone, a family or a village and it sometimes may be a success of business or education. The reason for worship is mostly the same: This is to propitiate Nats. If someone gets sick, gets success in Business and education, or gets into trouble, some people think that this is due to the Nats that the person worships. They might continue thinking that this is a result of their improper actions to the Nat – which can be bodily, verbally, or mentally – or that they might forget regular routines to the Nat. Therefore the Nat gives trouble to someone in a family or in a village.

Alternatively, if someone has succeeded something useful, special, important, or awesome in education or business, he or she thinks that this success is due to the Nat they are paying respect regularly. They believe that the Nat makes his or her life easy and the Nat helps him or her succeed in education, or business or something that they want. They forget to consider the empirical causes for bad or good things: such as the diseases, the
changes of the weather and improper use of something like food, drink, and medicine in sickness, and their proper efforts, wisdom or knowledge and luck in success. They think that all depends on Nats: no matter whether it is good or bad. They could not ponder more on the causes and they simply try to conduct Nat-Pwe.

Research motivation

The researcher was motivated by the following problems to conduct this research:

(a) In his curiosity, the researcher noticed that some people in Myanmar do not believe in Nāts at all; some do it very much; and some just follow and practice Nat-worship as a their tradition, because their parents believed in Nats and practiced Nat-worship.

(b) Min Si Thu, in his book entitled “Myanmar Naingan Nat Koekwe Hmuh thamaing – the history of Nat-worship in Myanmar”, described Nat-worship in present day Myanmar:

(1) Myanmar is well-known as a Theravada Buddhist country in the world, but some people in Myanmar do not understand Buddhism, very well, in which they believe and take refuge. Then, the respect to their own religion decreases and the people rarely rely on it. Instead, they pay respect to Nat or Deva and rely on them more. Moreover the Nats, the Nat-images, and Nat-shrines are introduced to be built beside Temples and monasteries, sometimes together even in the same ground or inside them.

(2) Buddha images are displayed together with Nat-images in the same level in Nat-Pwe or Nat-Kanaa which are increasingly popular from cities to villages (Sithu, 2011, p. 463).
R. Grant Brown in his paper "The Pre-Buddhist religion of Burmese" stated that Myanmar performs spirit worship to a lesser degree than other Buddhist countries. Brown mentioned thus:

"Burmese Buddhism, as practiced by the people, contains, though to a much less degree than the Buddhism of some other countries, some animistic beliefs which are probably inconsistent with the pure philosophy of Buddha, so far as that can be deduced from the texts which have come down to us" (Brown, 1921, p. 79).

On 2 - 3 of May, 2008, in Myanmar, Cyclone Nargis hit lower parts to Myanmar: Yangon and Irrawaddy. It particularly devastated to Irrawaddy Delta areas. Nargis brought fierce winds and heavy rain that brought death and destruction to agricultural fields and homes. According to reports, about 146,000 people were lost to Nargis. Many people assumed that more people may have been lost than were officially reported. On 30 of June, 2008, Wall Street Journal staff reported that as a result of Cyclone Nargis, Nat-worship increased in Myanmar.

During his stay in Thailand, the researcher has seen shrines for spirits at the corner of many houses and streets in Thailand and has taken notice of a kind of Devatas which are generally similar in concept to the Nats in Myanmar. He was curious and aware of Nats in Myanmar although he was not much interested in the subject while he was in Myanmar before his arrival in Bangkok. In addition to this, both Myanmar and Thailand are predominantly Theravada Buddhist countries. This fact is also interesting to do this research.
This research is significant as it would contribute to our current understanding on the impact of Nat-worship on Burmese Buddhism (positive and negative ways), and the effect Buddhism has had on Nat-worship in Burmese societies.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To study the concept of Nats – Devas and local Myanmar-born Nats – as appeared in Tipitaka and commentaries and Burmese literature, and as practiced in Burmese Theravada society.

2. To examine if the believers of Nats clearly understand what they believe in and how much they devote to those Nats.

3. To discuss and evaluate the impact of Nat-worship on the present Theravada Buddhist society in Myanmar.

1.3 Thesis statement

Myanmar is predominantly a Buddhist country. Most people in Myanmar are also Buddhists, but Nat-worship still exists in Myanmar and some Buddhists perform Nat-worship to some degrees. Therefore, what does belief in Nats imply in Buddhism and how does it impact upon Buddhist society in Myanmar?

1.4. Selected literature reviews

(1) Thirty-seven Nats by U Po Kya (1999)

U Po Kyar (1891-1942) was one of the most important Burmese authors for inspiring Burmese to be aware of the situation of politic, health, and education in the
country near the end of colonial period and after independence, and for reforming national education. He wrote several books in various areas like history and religion. He was interested in Nat after hearing a story of two young men and one Nat-kadaw\(^2\) and started studying the topic which culminated in the production of his book (the book is in Burmese and 148 pages long). He described three kinds of thirty-seven Lords in different periods and their historical background. He said that Nat-worship occurred historically in Myanmar but would grow or wane in popularity with time and circumstance (Kyar, 1999, p. 130). Kyar also remarked that the Nat-kadaws, who describe themselves as mediums, would take advantage of people’s belief in Nats and sometimes made people more fearful of Nats. The sick and ignorant were particularly vulnerable (p. 140).

(2) *Folk Element in Burmese Buddhism* by Maung Htin Aung (1975)

He is a well-known Burmese scholar nationally and internationally. He wrote many books and articles in both Burmese and English languages in wide areas such as history, anthropology, and literature. Maung Htin Aung also served as a Rector of Yangon (Rangoon at the time) University from 1946 to 1958 and was also the Chairman of the Burmese Historical Commission. “Folk Element in Burmese Buddhism” consists of nine chapters and 139 pages, and discusses Burmese culture and rituals pre- and post- Buddhism (here Buddhism means Theravada Buddhism which was introduced into Bagan, Myanmar).

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\(^2\) Once on the stairway to Shwedagon pagada which is a landmark of Myanmar, there was a Nat-kadaw who seemed to be young and beautiful. She was said to be possessed by Nats and she could tell what happened and what will happen. One day, two young men, who were bawdy, approached this Nat-kadaw and one of them pretended himself as a widower and asked the Nat-kadaw where his dead wife was now. The Nat-kadaw also pretended that she was immediately possessed by the dead-wife. The widower asked her this and that. Finally he hugged Nat-kadaw who pretended to be possessed by his dead wife saying “I cannot let you go again”. Nat-kadaw was so angry and disputed this (Kyar, 1999, p.6).
Among these rituals were Naga worship, the cult of alchemy, and the worship of the Thirty-seven Lords. With regard to the cults practiced in Myanmar, he remarked thus:

"With the passing of time people come to forget the pre-Buddhist and primitive origins of their folk beliefs in alchemy, astrology, and Nats, and learned to accept them as part of their Buddhism, just as they thought that the pre-Buddhist belief in the transmigration of souls was a doctrine of Theravada Buddhism. Thus at the present time many Burmese (in rural and primitive areas the majority) still consult their astrologer and make their offerings to the Nats, without ceasing to be good Buddhist. At certain times of the year, dances are still held through which the dancers try to become possessed by the Nat spirits; a few Burmese still even make alchemic experiments" (Aung, 1975, p. 4)

(3) *Burmese supernaturalism (expanded edition)* by Melford E. Spiro (1978)

Melford E. Spiro is a well-known American anthropologist. He was interested in the beliefs, cultures, and religions of daily life in Burmese society. He went to Myanmar in 1961 for his research interests and collected data for nine months. In March, 1962 he could no longer do research after the Socialist regime took control Myanmar. However he wrote two books regarding his field studies in Myanmar: 1) *Burmese supernaturalism (expanded edition)* (1978); and 2) *Buddhism and society: a great tradition and its Burmese vicissitudes* (1982). The first book "Burmese supernaturalism" consists of six main sections. Spiro as an anthropologist thoroughly explored Burmese cultures and beliefs. He described Burmese beliefs as follows:

"As a study of Burmese supernaturalism, this study attempts to describe and explain a variety of "supernatural" beliefs-ghosts, demons, witches, and those spirits whom the Burmese call nats. Of these four types of beings, it is the nats who loom most important in Burmese thought and behavior, their cultures comprising an organized and an elaborated system of beliefs, rituals and practitioners. Although these four types of beings are substantively distinct,
they are functionally similar. They are all “supernatural” in that their power is greater than man’s: they are either harmful or potentially harmful; and they all, therefore, are believed to use their power to cause human suffering. According to Burmese animism, then, supernatural intervention is the primary, if not exclusive explanation for an explanation which is remarkably different from that proposed by Theravada Buddhism, as it is taught and practiced in Burma” (Spiro, 1978, pp. 3-4).


Min Sithu, a Burmese author, investigated Nat-worship in Myanmar over different historical periods and correspondingly divided this book into three parts: the history of Nat-worship in Myanmar (early period); the history of Nat-worship in Myanmar (middle period); and the history of Nat-worship in Myanmar (contemporary period). This book mainly discusses the history of individual Nats and their evolution. This book is written in Burmese and consists of 240 pages.


Khin Maung Thann, a Burmese scholar in the field of psychology did his research on Nat-worship in several villages from psychological point of view. Thann had special intention to give, provide inspirations to the people who believe in Nats so that thinking and reasoning can bear in their mind. He wanted the Nat-believers to be aware of what they are doing in regard to Nat-worship. According to his intention, he described the nature of Nat, Nat-kadaw, and belief together with the nature of human mind standing on psychological points. In the preface of his book, he said thus:
"If one's everyday work is considered, there can be seen two types of work: the work which is done without thinking or any consideration and the work which is used to working this. In the morning people wake up, wash face, take shower, have breakfast, and go to work. When they are at work, there are a few things or works which have to be considered before they are done. There are more usual works than those mentioned above. Most people do not want to work or get involved in the work which has to be considered. Instead they want to do something which is not necessary to be considered, pondered. Those who work or get involved in the work which is necessary to be pondered are very rare" (Thann, 2006, p. 6).

On the back cover of his book, he again repeats the last statement from the quote above:

"Most people do not want to work or get involved in the work which has to be thought. Instead, they want to do something which is unnecessary to be considered, pondered. Those who work or get involved in the work which is necessary to be pondered are very rare".

This repeated statement implies that the people, who believe in Nat and who worship Nat, do not consider what they are doing and that they do not want to ponder whether the belief in Nat is reasonable or not and that they do not have capability of reasoning on what they believe. People just follow and practice the Nat-cult without deep consideration and understanding. Then with regard to belief, he also remarked one case thus: fear, fright, sorrow and lament can make believers even extremists in belief (p. 18). This book is in Burmese and consists of 146 pages.

1.5 Definitions of Terms used in the Research

1.5.1 Nat: The word "Nat" consists of two types of Nat: 1) Local Nat – thirty-seven lords and other local-born Nats; and 2) Devas – Buddhistic Nat. If a Burmese says Nats, it can be one or both of them. Of course, the word "Nat" is generally translated into spirit, but it does not cover or reach to the sense that the word can
refer in a Burmese’s mind. It means respectfulness and honourableness.
Therefore the word “Nat” contains two types of Nat mentioned above if it is
used without any specification. Indeed, the word, when it is used, refers to one
of the two types, but not two simultaneously. What this means in use depends
on the situation: for example, *Lu Nat Brama*; and *Nat-Pwe*. The former “Nat” in
the first phrase refers to Buddhistic Nats or Devas, while the latter in Nat-Pwe
means local Nats.

1.5.2 Nat-kadaw: a person who manages Nat-Pwe. Nat-kadaw can be male or female,
but mostly female. It is translated as shaman, Nat-medium, or Nat’s wife (only
for female). When it refers to a male, we sometime call it as *Nat-saya*. Nat-
kadaw leads the Nat-Pwe or Nat-worship.

1.5.3 Nat-saya: shaman or male Nat-kadaw.

1.5.4 Nat-Pwe: a kind of festival to propitiate the local Nats. It is held when people
are successful in a venture and sometimes when they are in trouble. To perform
the Nat-pwe, a traditional orchestra, a singer, and a Nat-kadaw are required. It is
sometimes translated into Nat-festival.

1.5.5 Nat-worship: the term “Nat-worship” contains the meaning of 1) believing that
local Nats can give believers trouble and contentment, reward and punishment
and of 2) praying and offering things to the Nats in order to propitiate them.

1.5.6 Devas: a Pali term which means “celestial gods, Deities, Buddhistic gods, or
Buddhistic Nats”.

1.5.7 Ahmya-Wea: a Burmese term which means “sharing merits that one has done
with others so that they can rejoice at the merits”.

1.6 Research scope

The scope of this research is as followings:

1. To examine the Nat-beliefs in Myanmar and the rituals that they carry out concerning Nat-belief or Nat-worship;

2. To study how the belief and rituals in Burmese society impacts on Buddhism in Myanmar;

This research is limited to Buddhist society and does not deal with Nat-worship in other religions. This research also does not provide an in-depth examination of the history of Nats and does not focus on all kinds of Nats.

1.7 Research methodology

This research relating to Devas in Buddhism, Thirty-seven Lords in Myanmar, spirit cults and Nat-worship in Burmese societies, and beliefs and rituals about Nats was conducted through the study of primary reference sources — i.e. Buddhist texts, books and articles written by various authors — which were related to the topic. Some unpublished sources were also used in order to gain a big picture of Nat-worship in Myanmar. These sources were oral historical reports as passed down through the generations by word of mouth and the researcher's own personal experiences in Myanmar.

From an anthropological view of Nat-beliefs in Burmese societies, as a secondary source to this research, the researcher conducted field research and collected observational data. Furthermore a few documentary films, which show the nature of Nat-Pwe and Nat-kadaw were used in support of this research.
1.8 Research conceptual framework

1.9 Research expectation

1.9.1 To achieve an understanding of Nats and Nat-worship.

1.9.2 To understand how people deal with Nats in Burmese society.
1.9.3 To know the impact of Nat-worship on Buddhism in Myanmar and Buddhist thought on Nat-worship.
CHAPTER II

Spirit worship

2.1 Chapter Introduction

Different belief systems with diverse cultures had existed in South East Asia as in other parts of the world. The term “belief system” here refers to the individual beliefs, (such as spirit worship which had already taken root in South East Asia), which were present before the advent of the main world religions – Brahmanism, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. – had been imported to South East Asia. There were two different types of periods in South East Asia with regard to belief systems: (1) the period before main world religions and (2) the period after the imported main world religions. A Thai Scholar, Prapod Assavahirulhakarn also divided the period in Southeast Asia into two in relation to belief system (Assavahirulhakarn 2010). He used technical terms ‘prehistoric or Indic religion and historic religion’ in his book entitled “The Ascendancy of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia” published in 2010. He noted that in using the term ‘prehistoric’ that though the term usually means the belief systems which disappeared when historic religions appeared, it here refers to both belief systems which have disappeared and which are still being existed in present (Prapod, 2010, pp.25-26). However it is clear that several belief systems were abundant in Southeast Asia and some still exist today in these societies.

Indeed, as far as the researcher knows, it seems that the traditional belief systems appeared at the beginning of Human race in the world. He thinks, with regard to how the traditional belief systems in the early age gradually developed in human societies, Humans
can imagine and understand the belief systems in the early age of human race for example the Greek belief systems (Athenian gods). This is because the series of belief systems in the human history shows the development of religion or belief systems and how they gradually changed and became important in human societies. At the time of the Lord Buddha, with regard to the belief systems of the people, the Buddha stated that people believed and worshiped many things out of fear. The Buddha’s statement will be demonstrated with historical events during the Buddha’s time.

On one occasion the Buddha went to the forest so that he could meet and teach the Dhamma to an ascetic, Aggidatta. The ascetic had one thousand disciples who were also Ascetics like him, and lived together in a forest by setting disciplines themselves and finding the way to liberation. The leader, Aggidatta used to teach his disciples to worship the hills, trees, forests in or on which they lived and depended on in order for them to achieve liberation from Samsāra, the cycle of Birth and death. To make it short, the Buddha met Aggidatta and asked how he taught his disciples. Aggidatta said their way of worship was for the sake of liberation (DhaA. II, p.159). Eventually the Buddha expounded to them that it is not the way to liberation and he gave them the way to liberation. As result, the leader ascetic and his followers attained the enlightenment and liberation. The Buddha uttered the following verses; they can be found in Dhammapada:

_Bahum ve saranam yanti, pabbaññi vanānicca._
_Aramarułkhaçeyāni, mañussā bayaçajītā._
_Ne tam kho saranam khe mam, ne tam saranamuttamam._
_Ne tam saranamagamma, sabbadukkha pañuccati._ (Dhp. 188-189)

Meaning:
“Driven only by fear, do men go for refuge to many places –to hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines. Such, indeed, is no safe refuge; such is not the refuge supreme. Nor by resorting to such a refuge is one released from all suffering” (Buddharakkhita(Trans.), 1985, p. 36).

Herein the fact that the researcher wants to point out is that before the ascetic and his followers met the Buddha, the belief system for the ascetics was worshiping hills, mountains, trees, etc. and the belief system appeared to them within their society only and they made it spread out. In such way, many belief systems or religions appeared to different societies in different places and in different times. Therefore some sociologists such as Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx described that religion is the product of society (Northcott, 2007, p. 198).

Moreover, some tribes or societies dealt with and worshiped natures. They worshiped the sun, the moon, the mountain, earth, the water, the river and what has gone under the category of nature worship. Of course, such kinds of worship are called nature worship by the modern people. With Regard to the relationship between humans and nature, Lawrence E. Sullivan (1987) described many kinds of nature worship in his article which is entitled ‘Nature: worship of Nature’, in encyclopedia of religion, Vol.9, 2nd Ed. as following:

“Through nature, modes of being quite different from the specifically human reveal themselves to the religious imagination. The sun, the moon, and the earth, for example, can symbolize realities that transcend human experience. Throughout the history of religions, “nature” frequently is perceived as initiating a relationship with humankind, a relationship that is the foundation of human existence and well-being. In large part, this relationship is expressed in forms of adoration, a response of the total personality, or of an entire religious community, to the phenomena of nature.

… the worship of nature thus highlights both the freedom of the sacred to appear in any form, and the capacity of the human being to recognize it for
what it is in any expression. It also underlines the capacity of profane reality itself to become a transparent symbol of something other than itself, even while remaining what it is” (Sulivan, 1987, p.9438).

Sulivan (1987) observed several cultures that worshipped nature and gave reasoning why people in some cultures worship nature. According to him, people in some tribes respect the sky as the manifestation of divinity or they honor and salute the sky as the place of gods. For example the Konde in east central Africa worship Mbamba which is believed that this is a divinity and also lives with his family in the highest place above the sky. When the Konde need rain, they offer prayer and sacrifice to the god in the sky. Similarly people in some regions like the Numana of the Niger River valley in West Africa believe that the sky is the place of the heavens. More interestingly and importantly, if something falls from the sky, they believe that the objects fallen from the sky are from the heavens where gods live. Those objects often become religious objects of cults. For instance, the Numana of the Niger River valley in the West Africa worship small pebbles, because they believe that the small pebbles came from the sky (p.6438).

For ancient people, everything around them would have seemed strange, full of secret and fearsome. They would have thought thus: who lives in the deep and dense forest? Where does the forest lead and where would they arrive if crossed into the dense forest? In the deep forest, what kinds of wild animals would they face? Would it be dangerous for them if they encounter the wild animals unexpectedly? They considered fire, great mountains, big rivers, and anything huge in the same way. However at the time, they could not understand the nature of the environment and they did not experience them enough, so in their mind, their thought and their way of living consisted of unknowing, confusion, and
uncertainty. These states led them to feel threatened and fearful, and the states at the same time led them to find refuge in one way or another in order that they can keep their mind stable and secure. A Burmese Scholar Khin Maung Thann, who is also a psychologist, has described these facts and situations—the belief and ways of thinking in early age—from psychological point of view in his book entitled “Extremism, Nat-belief, and psychological aspect—Ayuthihmu, Nat-koekwelhmu,( ne) Ceitpanna Shuehtaunt”.

According to Thann, when the people in the early age started using fire, they found it useful. Of course the fire is very useful in order to cook foods and meats and to protect against the cold and to get wet things dry as well. However it is also fearsome. If it burns, it can cause death. When they experienced a big fire in forests or mountains, they thought thus: there must be possessor of fire; the possessor must have great power; who possessed the fire? What should we do in order not to give danger to us? Then even though they did not have clear answer and vision, they started paying respect to fire. When they encountered great mountains, they did the same things: Who lived in the great mountains? Who possessed them? If they hunted there in the great mountain, would it be dangerous for them? Should they request permission from the possessor to hunt there? And unexpectedly when they experienced the rockfalls from the mountains or some parts of the mountains due to earthquake or anything else, fears arose in them and they worshiped mountains to free from danger concerning the mountains and to propitiate to the unseen possessor of the mountains that they imagined. This same attitude was applied to the rivers too. They found river(s) which flow roughly and sometime smoothly. When they found it useful, they became happy and thankful and when they found it dangerous, harmful and fearful, they
feared it. Eventually, they started paying respect to nature due to two facts – fear and happiness (Thann, 2006, pp. 32-33).

2.2 Pre-Buddhist religions in Myanmar

First of all, the researcher thinks that the term “Pre-Buddhist” used here should be clarified with regard to what this means, because the term might be confused or misunderstood if it is not clarified here. The word ‘Buddhist’ in pre-Buddhist does not mean early Buddhism which had existed before Bagan kingdom which was united by the King Anawrahta. It just means Theravada Buddhism which was introduced to the Bagan kingdom or Myanmar by Anawrahta in eleventh century. Of course, there were a certain form of Buddhism in early Myanmar, but it could not be clearly clarified that what form of Buddhism it is. The form of Buddhism in early Myanmar will be mentioned in third chapter “Buddhism and Devas”. Early Buddhism, in Prome kingdom and early Bagan kingdom, shared some kinds of Buddhist thoughts to some indigenous belief, and indigenous belief also received some concepts from Buddhism and combined them with their own as a common belief system. Surely some indigenous belief or some pre-Buddhist cults like tree-worship consist of some Buddhist elements and concepts which belong to both Theravada and Mahayana schools of Buddhism. Therefore, the word ‘Buddhist’ in Pre-Buddhist refers to only Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar which was introduced by Anawrahta, otherwise there might be contradictions in the facts that the researcher will use in the research.

2.2.1 Tree worship

Tree worship is a kind of indigenous belief or pre-Buddhist cult in Myanmar. Even though there are small facts that can be traced back with respect to when tree worship
started, it seems that tree worship was started soon after Burman or Burmese came to settle down in Myanmar in five century C.E. It is due to the fact that the Burman had already worshiped trees before they came and settled down in Myanmar. According to a Burmese author, Ashin Esika who wrote the book entitled “Theravada Buddhism”, Burmans, in 2000 BCE, before their arrival in Myanmar lived in the north west of China and worshiped trees. Esika mentioned thus:

“4000 years ago (in 2000 BCE), Burman did not yet settle down in Myanmar. They, who will be called Burman in future, settled down and lived in north-west of China at the time. They were, at the time, called “Chang”, the name of the tribe. Chang came to Myanmar and settled down for the sake of several reasons in 5 century CE, Historians said that Chang had already worshiped Nats since they came to settle down in Myanmar. The Nats that they worshiped were house Nat or family Nat, field Nat, mountain Nat, forest Nat, and tree Nat. They sometimes sacrificed animals to propitiate the Nats that were believed that the Nats could make field fertile and make cultivation successful” (Esika, 1998, pp. 98-99).

How were trees worshiped? Trees were worshiped by people with several different things which are available for them. The things to offer may be different from one place to another. Some people offer rice and curry to trees; some people, foods or snack to tree; some people, flowers; some people, clothes; and some people offer meats to tree. Some offer light with candle lighting. Some offer water with small pots or glasses. Some build shrine under the tree that they worship, and offerings are kept in the shrine. It seems that offering things depend on the belief of the people who live there in a certain place. Do they believe that they have to offer snack to a tree, they offer snack; do they believe that they have to offer clothes to a tree, they offer clothes to a tree; and do they believe that they have to offer meats to a tree, they offer meats to a tree and so on. Of course, if they do not have
such things to offer a tree that they usually do, they at any rate have to buy them or find
them out. In worshiping trees there may generally consist of three actions:

(1) They will pay respect to a certain tree;

(2) They will offer things to the tree;

(3) And they will pray in order to be free from danger and in order to be successful in
what he or she is doing or going to do.

One or all of the above actions can be seen when someone worships a tree. In olden
days, usually in a rural area, when a person went to a forest, they brought foods, snacks to
eat and to offer them to a tree if they see a particular tree to be worshiped on the way. If
they do not have anything brought to offer when they see a tree to be offered, they will find
flowers around and they will take them and offer them to the tree. Sometime people
worship trees with a piece of cloth. In worshiping a tree with a piece of cloth, people cover
and twist a piece of cloth around the tree. Sometimes people tie and fasten the piece of
cloth to a branch of the tree as flags. The kinds of trees people worship are usually big and
sometimes tall as well. Such trees can be found inside or outside villages or on the way to
other villages or in deep, dense forest. There is no particular fact and rule, and type of tree
in order to regard as a tree to be worshiped. Every kind of tree can be worshiping object. It
depends on the people who believe tree-worship. If the people believe that they should
worship a particular tree – no matter what kind of reason it is –, the tree becomes an object
of worship. Foreign scholars, who are interested in Burmese cultures, also observed this
fact. Of course, the fact was described by Shway Yoe in his book entitled “The Burman: his
life and notions” thus:
Chapter II: Spirit worship

“When a Burmese starts on a journey he hangs a bunch of plantains, or a twig of the The-bye tree, on the pole of the buffalo cart or the stern of the boat, to conciliate any spirit whose beat he may intrude upon. The fisherman makes offerings in his nat-sin every time he launches his dug-out; the lonely hunter in the forest deposits some rice and ties together a few leaves whenever he comes across some particularly large and imposing tree, lest there might be a thi’pin-saung nat dwelling there. Should there be none, the tied-back twigs will at any rate stand in evidence to the taw-saung nat, the demon who presides over all the forest” (Yoe, 1963, p. 238).

Then another scholar, Louis Vossion also observed this in the same way and mentioned it in his article “Nat-worship among the Burmese” thus:

“When a Burmese has to leave his village to go to another part of the country, he will never start without having consulted his horoscope, and also without hanging to the wheels of his bullock-car a few branches of the sacred Thabiepene (Eugenia Malaccensis) to propitiate the Nats who may reside in the points he is about to cross. The same fact may be observed in the very heart of the forest: when a hunter or traveler comes across a big tree he never fails to deposit an offering of flowers and rice at its feet, in case it be the residence of a special Nat; if on special Nat reside there, the Nat of the forest will appreciate his intention and protect him on his way” (Vossion, 1891, p. 110).

Why are trees worshiped? Do they just worship trees without any sense? Or is there any other thing which consists in tree worship? People worship trees but their intention is not trees; they do not worship just trees, instead they worship the Nat or spirit in trees. It is because they believe that those particular trees are possessed by powerful Nat or spirit. It seems that the origin of the concept which believes that trees are possessed by Nat or spirit derived from indigenous belief, which is not connected with Buddhism, and Buddhist thoughts as well. The tree worship comes from indigenous belief has been mentioned above. Herein the latter will be described with respect to how the concept of tree worship came to appear to the people from Buddhist thoughts.
In Buddhism, there is a term which is related to Tree worship. This is “Rukkhāthadēvata”. The term is the combination of two words – Rukkhaṭṭha and Devatā. Rukkhaṭṭha can be divided again into “Rukkha and ṭha”. Here the word ‘Rukkha’ means tree and ‘ṭha’ means living or residing. So the word “Rukkhaṭṭha” – the combination of the two words ‘Rukkha and ṭha’ – means living or residing in or on Tree. Then Devatā means Nat, deity, (or spirit) in Burmese sense. Therefore the term “Rukkhaṭṭhadevata” – the combination of ‘Rukkhaṭṭha and devatā’ – means Nat or spirit living in Tree.

There are also Burmese terms for this word. When this word is used in Burmese, it is translated into two ways – Rukkha-soe nat and thit-pin-saung nat. The word ‘Nat’ is synonymous with Pāli word “Devatā”. In the word “Rukkha-soe”, Rukkha is Pāli word and means tree; and soe is Burmese word and it can be translated into English as governing or governor, however the word “soe” here means living or residing. That’s why, the word ‘Rukkha-soe’ – the combination of two words: Rukkha in Pali and Soe in Myanmar – means the resident living in Tree. Then together with the word ‘Nat’, the word “Rukkha-soe nat” means the resident Nat or spirit living in Tree.

The latter term ‘Thit-pin-saung nat’ is a Burmese word which is also synonymous with Rukkhāṭṭhadevatā. Thit-pin means tree in English, and saung here refers to residing or living although it literally means protecting or protector. Therefore the combination word “Thit-pin-saung nat” means the nat living in Tree. It does not mean the nat who protect trees. The term “Rukkha-soe nat” was derived from Rukkhāṭṭhadevata, and thit-pin-saung nat is a translation of pāli word “Rukkhaṭṭhadevata and these three words are synonymous terms.
There was a real story regarding Rukkha-soe nat during the Buddha’s time. On one occasion, a group of ascetics who lived in a mountain went to a city. When they crossed the land, which was difficult to get foods and water, they became tired. In the meantime, they found a large tree under which they could take a rest. While taking a rest under the tree together, the leader of the ascetic group thought that it would be very pleasurable if they get food and water in order to refresh. Immediately the Rukkha-soe nat, who lived in the tree, knew the leader’s thought, and prepared food and water, and appeared in front of ascetics and offered them to the ascetics. The ascetics wondered at the Rukkha-soe nat’s power which can be created foods and water for ascetics. That’s why, they asked, “Why you are so powerful? And what kind of kamma did you do in previous life?” The Rukkhau-soe nat replied that he just kept precepts for a half day and died of ailment caused by flatus at the same day. The kamma that he kept precepts for a half day made him powerful in the life of Rukkha-soe (AA. I, pp. 332-333).

Then there is also another story which is remarkable for the concept of tree worship. This can be found in Pācittiya Pāli, Vinaya. At one time, a monk cut a tree, but the monk did not know that the tree was possessed by a female Nat and her son who lived in the tree. Unfortunately her son was injured when the monk cut the tree. Therefore the Nat was so angry and she was about to hurt the monk in return. However she controlled her mind and approached the Buddha and mentioned this. In this case, the Buddha laid down a rule in Vinaya in order not to cut trees (Vi. II, p. 51).

Those stories are very common to Burmese Buddhists. It seems that the concept of Rukkha-soe nat is influential to people in Myanmar. With the first story, people believe and
accept that there is Rukkha-soe nat in a tree and the nat is powerful: (the bigger the tree is, the more powerful the nat in the tree is). Then they want protection and reward from the nat. With the second story, people fear nats, because the nats would harm them if they treat the nats in an appropriate way. They do not want any harm. They want to be free from dangers. Therefore it seems that these two facts from Buddhist thought led the people to worship trees. The influence of the two facts to the people can be seen in some cases like cutting a tree, even though it is few. If there is a situation that a large, big tree has to be cut down, he or she pay respects or worships the tree with or without offering before cutting it.

### 2.2.2 Snake worship

Snake worship is a type of indigenous belief, but most people in Myanmar believe that Nagas are superior to snakes. In Burmese minds, Nagas are more powerful than snakes or serpents though they are similar. Some Nagas can take the form of humans if they wish and they can behave as human for certain period of time or under certain conditions. Of course they cannot maintain their bodies as humans in some conditions. The facts will be discussed in detail under the title of Naga-worship. Contrary to Nagas, snake cannot take the form of humans. Consequently people do not much consider snake as a worshiped object. However, according to some scholars, it seems that there were a few groups who worshiped snakes in Myanmar.

According to R. Grant Brown, snake worship can be found everywhere Buddhism is found (Brown, 1921, pp. 79-80). For Brown, it seems that snake worship came with Buddhism. He demonstrated that the concept of snake worship can be seen in dragon-
embraced pagodas and a cobra's hood over the head of Buddha. These facts, according to him, imply that there was snake worship in Myanmar although it cannot be stated how much influential it was. Here is what Brown said:

“They [ancient beliefs and ceremonies of the people] survive in the dragon-embraced pagodas, of which there are several beautiful examples; in the frequent representation of a cobra's hood over the head of Buddha; in the reverence paid to the Indian god Indra or Sakra, who has been converted into a kind of Buddhist archangel; and in such ceremonies as the libations of water offered to the Earth-god Wathondaye (Vasundhara) at feasts and funerals, in which monks take part and which are regarded almost as an integral part of Buddhism. Before the time of the great Burman king Nayyata (Anuruddha) of Pagan, who reigned in the eleventh century, the Mahayanist form of Buddhism seems to have been prevalent, though to what extent it was accepted by the people can only be guessed. It appears to have been overgrown by the animistic beliefs and practices in corporate in it, some of them no doubt indigenous, for snake-worship was common to all the countries through which Buddhism passed” (Brown, 1921, pp. 79-80).

Maung Htin Aung also mentioned that there was snake worship in some parts of Shan states and in Popa hills (Aung, 1975, p. 78) and he believed that the cult of Naga worship might be development of snake worship. This also implies that there was snake worship in the past before Naga worship was wide-spread. Aung described as following:

“Moreover, the worship of the Naga could have developed from the worship of the snake and, as has been noted above, in the Shan state and at Popa there are traces of a snake-cult. However, in these regions it is not so much the snakes, but their Nat masters who are worshipped. Thus, the Burmese snake-charmer goes to the Popa region, makes his offerings to the Popa Nats, promises to bring back the snakes within three years, and then proceeds to trap some cobras. The Burmese consider the Naga to be half animal and half spirit and do not identify it with the snake, with the result that, unlike the Southern Indians, they set upon and kill snakes, including cobras, whenever they find them” (Aung, 1975, p. 110).
2.2.3 Naga worship

Naga-worship was also one of the pre-Buddhist cults in Myanmar, but it does not exist any longer. It has disappeared in Myanmar since Anawrahta suppressed the cult at the time when he introduced Buddhism into Bagan. Of course, as has been mentioned above, Anawrahta forced some people and persuaded some in order to abandon their old religions. The cult of Naga-worship was one of the cults which have disappeared over the time. With regard to appearance and conception of Naga in Myanmar, a Burmese historian, Aung described thus:

"The Burmese Naga is similar in many ways to the Indian Naga and the Chinese Dragon, but it is difficult to say whether the worship of the Naga was originally a native cult or borrowed from the neighbouring regions of Manipur and Yunnan. ... the Burmese consider the Naga to be half animal and half spirit and do not identify it with the snake, ... the Burmese Naga is dangerous when angered, and its mere frown turns the human being into ashes. Even when not angry its breath can blind a human being as it is so hot. It can assume human form and, on the whole, it is a benevolent being. The Burmese believe that Nagas live at the bottom of deep rivers, seas and oceans and in the bowels of the earth. Although they can fly in the air they do not do so too often because they will become exposed to attack from their eternal enemies, the gallon (garuda) birds" (Aung, 1975, p. 110).

With regard to when and where Naga-worship was started in Myanmar, scholars agree with Burmese chronicles. They have the same views and they all accept that Naga-worship was started in Tagaung which is believed that this was the earliest and the most ancient capital in Myanmar. Tagaung is situated on the bank of Irrawaddy River, a hundred and twenty four miles north of Mandalay. However it is now just a village. However with respect to the fact that whether the Naga-worship was a native one or this came from other countries, it seems that scholars have different views. Maung Htin Aung (1975) said: "it is
difficult to say whether the worship of Naga was originally a native cult or borrowed from the neighbouring regions of Manipur and Yunnan. Moreover, the worship of the Naga could have developed from the worship of the snake (P.110).” But a scholar monk from Myanmar, the author of “Theravada Buddhism” written in 1997, said that the cult of Naga-worship came from India. He mentioned that the cult arrived in Myanmar (Tagaung) together with settlers from India. He said: “the cult of Naga-worship spread out Southeast Asia where Dravidians from India settled down (Esika, 1997, p. 137).” This implied that the cult of Naga-worship in Myanmar derived from India.

Anyway, there was Naga-worship in Tagaung, Myanmar. This was certain and the cult of Naga-worship flourished in Tagaung together with other beliefs. Some archeological evidence exists such as a shrine which reminds the people the cult of Naga-worship in old-time Tagaung. There is a Naga statue within the shrine. Regarding the feature of Naga and the concept of it and the shrine, R. Grant brown mentioned thus:

“Buried deep in the ground is a huge log, the upper part of which is carved into the semblance of a head measuring, with the headdress, over four feet in height, and covered with gold-leaf. The features are grotesque: bulging eyes, a long-bridged nose with exaggerated nostrils, a very short chin, and no mouth. Between the eyes are leaf-like conventional ears somewhat in the shape of tails. Once a year the doors of the shrine are thrown open, and adults permitted to see the image, if they dare to look, and make offerings to it. Children are not allowed to see it at any time, least its grotesque features excite their laughter, and the god be offended. Men take off their shoes or dismount from their ponies when passing the shrine, and it is said that those who omit to do so are thrown violently to the ground, and vomit and sometimes die” (Brown, 1921, p. 93).

Then there is also a very famous legend, concerning the concept of Naga in Tagaung, which is called “Maung Pauk Kyaing”. The Maung Pauk Kyaing in the legendary Burmese
Chapter II: Spirit worship

history is known nationally and widely. According to the legend, Maung Pauk Kyaing went to a famous school, which was also called Tetkatho\(^1\) where the rich and smart students attended at the time, when he was at the age of learning. Unfortunately he was not smart enough to study there. He could not learn anything in order to be satisfied though he spent time much long. The teacher, having noticed this, gave him three formulas and asked him how to apply them. The formulas are as follows:

1. Thwa ba mya hkayi yauk – Distance is gained by travel;
2. Me ba mya Saga ya – information by inquiry;
3. Ma eik ma ne athet she – and long life by wakefulness (Ko, 1913, p. 146).

The three formulas are so famous that they are composed in songs. In short, Maung Pauk Kyaing, using three formulas on one occasion, fought and killed a Naga and became a king in Tagaung. Therefore he was also known as Thado Naganaing. Here Thado refers to him and Naga just means Naga and Naing means victory. So Thado Naganaing means the person who had a victory over Naga. Taw Sein Ko described: “Maung Pauk Kyaing is a well-known character in legendary Burmese history, as Thado Naganaing. He was the ninth of the 2\(^{nd}\) dynasty of sakya kings supported to have reigned at Tagaung” (Ko, 1913, pp. 146-148).

Some scholars like Khing Maung Thann, with regard to the legend, assumed that the cult of Naga worship might be strong in Tagaung. To reduce the cult of Naga, the people created the legend and made it spread out. King Maung Thann gave reasonable remarks on

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\(^1\) Tetkatho is a Burmese term for the Pali word “Takkasila”. Takkasila is a place where can be studied several subjects and it refers to university. So these terms – Tetkatho in Burmese, Takkasila in Pali – are synonymous with the word “University”. 
cult easy and comfortable in order to lessen the cult’s influence and enable people to abandon the cult. Indeed, the status of Nagas is lower than the status of Human, according to Buddhism, although some Nagas are so powerful that they can transform into humans. They do not have much hope in Buddhism; they are not allowed to be a monk and they cannot attain enlightenment because they are animals. Some are devout to Buddhism and they are protectors of Buddha and his followers as servants protect their Lord and soldiers protect their Kings and Queens.

Maung Htin Aung (1975) also had this view mentioned above and described, “Buddhist literature had modified the pre-Buddhist conception of Naga, and the Naga were shown to be adherents of the Buddha (p.111)”. In Buddhist literature, one can find mention of several affairs or events involving Nagas. On the day that the Buddha-to-be would attain enlightenment under Bodhi tree, having had his meals donated by Sujata, the Buddha cast his bowls into the river, Ganga saying: “if I will attain enlightenment today, may the bowl go to up-stream” (BuA. P.9). The bowl floated up-stream about 80 cubits and finally sank and knocked the bowls which were placed there by past Buddhas and near a Naga’s grand building. The sound made when the bowls touched, the Naga king, whose name is called ‘Kala’ recognized and said that someone will attain enlightenment very soon to become a Buddha (Tambiah, 1975, p. 177).

After attaining enlightenment (Buddha hood), in order to contemplate all Dhamma that he attained, the Buddha spent seven weeks continuously sitting and looking at the Bodhi tree from seven directions. At one direction, the sixth of the seventh weeks, while the Buddha spent under Mucalinda tree which was situated a few yards away from the Bodhi
tree, a heavy, thunderous rain with strong and cold winds picked up all of a sudden. A Naga king, who was named as Mucalinda for he (it) lived in a lake near this Mucalinda tree, came out and sheltered the Buddha by winding his coil seven times round the mediating Buddha’s body and holding his hood over the Buddha’s head, wishing this: “May not the Buddha suffer from cool, heat and insects like mosquitoes” (Vi. III, P.3).

On another occasion, a certain Naga wanted to be a monk. He took the form of human and approached monks and asked them to allow him to be ordained. He was thus ordained. He lived in a certain, small building together with another monk. At night, when he fell asleep, his body would return to its original form, a Naga. When another resident monk, who was walking outside the building, came into the building and saw a big Naga lying down and winding its coils in the small building. He fearfully shouted saying, “Naga, Naga, here is a Naga”. Then all knew that he was not human but Naga. In this case, the Buddha laid down a rule that animals including Nagas are not to be ordained (Vi. III, p.121). Then some Nagas occasionally came to the Buddha or some monks in order to keep Uposatha precepts. There is also a section which is called Naga samyutta in Buddhist texts. The Naga

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3 Although Nagas can change their bodies into human form, they get back (return) to their original form, Naga form in five conditions:

1. When Nagas have sex each other;
2. When they fully fall asleep;
3. When they are in mother’s womb;
4. When they change their old skins into new skins; and
5. When they die (Vi. III, P. 121)

In Pali text, the first two are mentioned (Vi. III, p.121), but in its commentary, all five conditions are mentioned as all are reasonably possible (ViA. III, p. 304).

4 Uposatha is a Pali term which means approaching to secluded or noble place to keep precepts, and living well after keeping precepts. Uposatha precept consists of eight factors such as refraining from killing any beings and is kept on Buddhist Sabbath day.
samyutta describes why Nagas became to be and how many kinds of Naga⁵ there are, and so on.

These events in Buddhist texts help people understand about Nagas, reduce their devotion on the Naga cult, and eventually abandon the worship of Naga.

In the present day, there is no Naga cult and no Naga-worship in Myanmar as mentioned. However one Naga related belief still remains on the Burmese calendar although it not such an important event in Burmese daily life. This is the belief that someone should not enter a Naga’s mouth or head and should not go against Naga’s scales when he or she has to leave, travel. According to this belief, Naga’s head or mouth faces four directions in a year. The Naga’s head faces each direction for four months of each year. In Myanmar calendar, there are also twelve months in a year. Naga’s head turns towards the west and its tail towards the east in the first, second, and twelfth month of Burmese year; the Naga’s head faces north and its tail points towards the south in the third, fourth, and fifth month of the Burmese year; the Naga’s head faces east and its tail points west in the sixth, seventh, and eighth month of the Burmese year; and Naga’s head turns

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⁵ There are four kinds of Naga according to Samyuttanikaya (S. III, p. 202). They are:
1. Antaja Naga;
2. Jalābuja Naga;
3. Samsedaja Naga; and
4. Opapāṭika Naga.

They are classified into five groups in accordance with their birth. Antaja Nagas are born from their egg; Jalābuja Nagas, from their mother’s womb; Samsedaja Nagas, from moisture; and Opapāṭika Nagas are spontaneously born as a Naga without the instrumentality of parents.

They are better than other respectively in status: the last three are better than the first one; the last two, the first two; and the last one, the first three (S. III, pp. 202-206)
Chapter II: Spirit worship

37

towards the south and its tail turns towards the north in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh month of Burmese year.

According to this belief, if someone enters into the Naga's mouth (head), or if someone goes against the direction of Naga's scales, he or she will have ill-luck and disaster may result. Therefore, people in Myanmar especially in rural areas in the past tried to avoid traveling, entering Naga's mouth, head and going against Naga's scales. This belief no longer holds in modern day Myanmar. This belief cannot be considered an important one in the current global culture. In this way, it is this author's belief that this superstition will gradually disappear from the memory of men.

2.3 Nat-worship

Nat-worship is an indigenous and primal religion of Myanmar. Throughout the history of Myanmar, this belief in Nats has been present for a long time. Alongside the history of Burmese land, this belief has firmly rooted into Burmese societies. This belief rooted in Myanmar very earlier than main religions - such as Hinduism, Buddhism etc. - in Myanmar. The Nat-belief has never disappeared totally from Myanmar since it appeared to the people in Myanmar. Nat-worship is more or less involved in Burmese societies even though it cannot be said that all societies in Myanmar accept and practice Nat-worship. There are many people and societies that do not practice the Nat-worship such as monks and lay devotees who know the teaching of Kamma in Buddhism. However Nat-worship has existed side by side with other beliefs in Myanmar.
Chapter II: Spirit worship

38

Until now belief in Nats still remains in Myanmar although other beliefs such as Naga and snake worships have since disappeared. Later, main world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism etc. came into existence in Myanmar. In spite of the advent of the new world religions in Myanmar, Nat-belief still exists in Burmese societies. One thing must be remembered as remarkable; In accordance with time, place, and condition, the concept of Nat-worship has changed over time to adapt to societies. Otherwise Nat-belief could not have survived into the modern age. Some aspects of Nat-worship have been combined with other beliefs particularly with that of Buddhism. Other concepts were not combined with other practices, and remain as they were introduced originally. As time has changed, Buddhism flourished and spread across the whole country and remains strong. The Nat-believers accept Buddhism as a superior to Nat-worship, but some people do not dare to abandon the Nat-worship (while others dare to do so). So they mainly practice Buddhism but occasionally practice Nat-worship as well. Some scholars such as Lehman K. Frederic (Encyclopedia of Religion (2nd Ed., Vol. 9), 2005, p. 1328) describe some Burmese Buddhists as two-religion holders: Buddhism and Nat-belief.

2.3.1 Definition of Nat

Several scholars have defined the word Nat in accordance with their understanding. Some could touch the core meaning and some could meet with the sense of Nat in Burmese mind. However the definition of the word “Nat” is still loose. First of all, several definitions from various scholars should be mentioned here in order to get the context, the meaning and general idea of the word Nat. Christmas Humpherys in his book entitled “A popular Dictionary of Buddhism” defined the word “Nat” in Myanmar as the nature spirits.
Chapter II: Spirit worship

He said: "the nature spirits of Burma [are] still worshipped in village shrines" (Humpherys, 2005, p. 147). It seems that Humpherys understood the worship of the nature spirit in Myanmar as that of the Devatās\(^6\) of Sri Lanka.

Similarly, in 1891, Louis Vossion described Nats in Myanmar as Spirits in general and he also said that no one could exactly define the word "Nat" with regard to what the 'Nat' means in accordance with its etymology. However Vossion defined or classified Nat in two ways. He said this as following:

"The spirits, in Burmah, are called by the name of Nats. The word Nat, whose etymology has not yet been definitely settled, even by Burmese scholars, such as Mason, Judson, Sir Arthur Phayre, Bishop Bigandet, has two widely different meanings. The first is properly applied to the Dewahs, or inhabitants of the six inferior heavens belonging to the Hindu system of mythology\(^7\). The second sense is entirely different: it means the spirits of the water, of the air, of the forest, of the house, in fact of all nature, animate or inanimate, under all its aspects and manifestations" (Vossion, 1891, p. 107).

Vossion gave an explanation with example for the reason why he classified Nat in two ways. For the first meaning, he described the expression of Burmese on the occasion that the king has taken his last breath. The expression is "Nat youa sanvi" (Vossion, 1891, p. 107). People in Myanmar usually use the expression 'Nat youa sanvi' when the king died. The "Nat youa sanvi" means that the king has been reborn in Heavenly world. It does not matter whether the king or the queen is really reborn in Heaven or not\(^8\). The reason for the

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\(^6\) Devatā is a Pali word, and literally means those who shine from their bodies, and refers deities.

\(^7\) The researcher thinks that the people in Myanmar has clear understanding with regard to the six inferior heavens which come from the Pali texts; and there is no reference relating to the six inferior heavens belonging to the Hindu system of mythology.

\(^8\) In Buddhism, there are many realms to be reborn after one's death: such as Heavenly worlds, human world, hell, hungry ghost etc. we believe we will be reborn in one of the realms as long as we are not Arahant. For Arahants there is no more rebirth and no more realms, because the present life is the last one.
expression is that the kings in Myanmar usually did many good things, and he supported and provided for the needy, the helpless, monks and nuns and he protected all in the country and patronized the Sāsana, the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore people believed that their king or queen had done many good things that may allow him or her to be reborn in Heaven when they die. Vossion understood that the first kind of Nat, which is in the six Heavens, is the Nat as understood by the Burmese.

The second meaning for Nat, according to Vossion, is more understandable than the first one. It is more commonly understood by the people.

Shway Yoe (a Burmese name), whose original name was James George Scott, wrote a book which was entitled “The Burman: His life and notion”. Shway Yoe discussed about Nat and spirit-worship in a chapter. With respect to the etymological meaning of the word ‘Nat’, he also did not trace back the word in history for a better definition. He just followed his predecessors on the subject of Nat like General Phayre and Bishop Bigandet. It seemed that he got an interesting definition with regard to the word Nat. Following his predecessors, he simply mentioned that the word Nat might derive from the Sanskrit term Nath⁹ which means “master, husband, lord”. However, he did not seem to be satisfied with this information and he remarked that no one could yet settle on the origins of the word Nat. However he understood the way that the Burmese express the word and he defined Nat in two ways which are also similar to Vossion. They are: 1) Nats in six heavens and 2) the Nat of the house, the air, the water, the forest, etc. (Yoe, 1963, pp. 231-232). He said as following:

⁹ Nātha in Pāli: worthy of refuge, respect, etc. for being free from something bad and for something good.
“What concerns us is the fact that “nat” means in Burmese two distinct kinds of individuals. It may be applied to the inhabitants of the six inferior heavens, properly called devas, who figure in Hindu mythology, and have thence been transferred to the Buddhist world system. Kings and virtuous people are rewarded with happiness in these six seats after a good life upon earth” (Yoe, 1963, p. 232).

Among the two kinds of Nats, the Nats in the six Heavens are the models of the people in Myanmar. People do not usually intend to be reborn as the Nat of the house, the air the water, the forest etc., because people understand that the Nat in the six heavens are more superior to the Nat of the house etc. According to Buddhist literature, Lu Chanther,¹⁰ Nat Chanther¹¹ and Nat-Kaung, Nat-Myat refers to the Nats in the six heavens. They believe that they will get Lu chanther or Nat Chanther, and Nat-kaung Nat-myat¹² will help them if they do good deeds such as doing charity, keeping precepts¹³ and so on.

Melford E. Spiro was very interested in Nat-belief in Myanmar. In his book entitled “Burmese supernaturalism” he discussed Nats in many ways. He expressed how broad the word Nat implies. In some contexts, for example, the word Nat refers to even households or the leader of a house. One of his definitions on Nat is as following:

“Generally, “nat” refers to a class of supernatural beings who are more powerful than man and who, therefore, can affect him either for good or for evil. That power is a salient component of the meaning of “nat” is suggested by a variety of contexts in which the term, presumably by extension, is used metaphorically. Thus the senior male in the household (i.e., the husband-father)

¹⁰ Lu Chanther is the Burmese translation of the Pali word “Manussa-sukha” which means happiness and welfare in the human realm.

¹¹ Nat Chanther is the meaning of the Pali word “Devasukha” which means happiness and welfare in the six heavens.

¹² Nat-kaung and Nat-myant are synonymous terms in Burmese sense and means good Nats or devas.

¹³ Keeping precepts in Buddhism means refraining from killing, stealing, having sexual misconduct, telling a lie, having intoxicant and so on.
referred to as the *ein ya in u nat*, the nat who lives in the front of the house. In the formal structure of the Burmese family, the husband-father has power over his wife and children" (Spiro, 1978, p. 41).

Grant Brown also defined Nat as either spirit or disembodied spirit. According to him, Nat cannot be seen; he further mentioned that this is not Nat if they can be seen; in fact, they are *Tase* in Burmese term or ghosts in English. Here is what he exactly stated:

"The Burmese word *nat* is usually translated "spirit," or "disembodied spirit." These terms, however, are much too wide. The spirits of the dead may remain in the house where death took place until bidden to depart, or may annoy the living by returning to the occupations they followed in life, or may hover about cemeteries and frighten the wits out of passers-by, but that does not make them *nats*. When they are visible they are called ghosts by us and *tase* by the Burmese. A *Nat* is something quite different. The word is the equivalent of our word god, in the sense in which we speak of the gods of ancient Greece and Rome. How exactly a spirit becomes a *nat* it would be difficult to say, though it seems often to have been by royal decree ... The term is applied to the spirits or gods of mountains, of rivers, of whirlpools, of trees, of villages, of houses, of earth and sky, of rain and wind, of a hundred other things" (Brown, 1921, p. 82).

Maung Htin Aung described the original meaning of the word "Nat" and he said what is referred by the word Nat. He mentioned thus:

"The term Nat originally meant a lord and involved an idea similar to feudal overlordship. A Nat was a spirit who has some dominion over a group of people or over a certain object or objects. The spirit who had dominion over a small withered tree was as much a Nat as the spirit who had dominion over a particular village or district. The suzerainty of a Nat was both territorial and personal. The Nat guardian of a village had power over all those who were born in the village or born of a village family, wherever they might be, and he also had power over all who came to his village during the time they remained there. He would inflict no harm, nay, he would even give his protection to those who recognized his suzerainty, and such recognition could be expressed by an offering of rice or fruit, a few words of supplication or a gesture of homage" (Aung, 1975, p. 2).
If the word Nat in Myanmar is generally defined or translated as spirit, it does not cover the whole meaning of the word ‘Nat’. Nat is not exactly the same as the spirit which is understood in the English dictionary, in the west and elsewhere. Indeed, in the mind of Burmese, some Nats are like human beings although they cannot usually be seen and some are like spirits. The definition of Nat by some scholars such as Humpherys, Louis Vossion, Shway Yoe only refers to the Nats in six heavens. The Nat in six heavens cannot be translated into spirits, instead it should refer to Deva, Devata in original Pāli or deities, because the term spirit cannot cover the meaning of Nat in the six heavens. Grant Brown and Maung Htin Aungs’ translation on Nat does not yet match with the sense of the word “Nat”. Their translation seems to means some nature Nats and some among thirty-seven lords (thirty-seven Nats) in Myanmar. It does not seem to include the Nat in the six heavens.

If someone in Myanmar talks about Nat, this can be one in the six heavens or among the thirty-seven kinds of Nat. Both are called in the term “Nat” in general. Nats in the six heavens can be seen if they show themselves and can be heard when they want us to hear them. This kind of Nat will be described in the third chapter more thoroughly. House Nat, village guardian Nat, mountain Nat or the Nat of mountain, the Nat in the forest or the Nat of forests, of trees, of rivers, of rain and wind etc., which are called in the name of nature Nat (or nature spirit) are included in one of six heavens – Cātumahārājika realm. The second kind, the thirty-seven lords cannot be seen; they are considered to be spirits. They

14 Sometimes, they (Nats from six heavens) let the people see them in one way or another if there is a special purpose.
15 House Nat, water Nat, forest Nat are included in one of six heavens called ‘Cātumahārājika’.
were humans in previous life. The Burmese also believe that they became Nat when they died, but nobody knows how and why they became Nats. No one can prove whether they really became Nats or not.

For example, people think that Taungbyon Minnyinaung do not like pork because they were Muslims; if someone brings pork to the shrine of Taungbyon Minnyinaung, the Taungbyon Nats will be angry. Then some avoid pork curry to bring it to the brothers' shrine and some believers of the two brothers do not have pork even for the whole life, even though they are not Muslims. For the case U Minkyaw, he was a drunkard and died as a drunkard. People believed that he became a Nat and is one of thirty-seven lords and people considered that he loves alcohol. As fried chicken is enjoyed together with alcohol, people offer alcohol and fried chicken to U Minkyaw. Therefore the word “Nat” should not be translated into other terms; instead the word should be used in its original context with specific definition with regard to what it means here. If there is a case to translate Nat into English, Nat should be translated in two ways: Deva or deity and spirit, because the word “Nat” can refer two different types of Nats: one in six havens as well as the thirty-seven lords.

2.3.2 The previous term(s) for the word “Nat”

The belief in Nat was brought to Myanmar by the Burman as mentioned above. Though they believed in and worshipped Nat since they arrived in Myanmar, they did not use the word “Nat” at first. There must be word(s) which they used in order to refer to the Nat at the time, because it seems that the word “Nat” was adopted from imported religions.
and the word is used to refer to their worshiped object. Further clarification is needed with regard to imported religions in Myanmar. In early Myanmar, there were mainly two imported religions: Buddhism and Hinduism. Of the two religions, it is likely that the word "Nat" was introduced by Buddhism into Myanmar people, because Buddhism penetrated deeply into Myanmar society and spread out across the whole country whereas Hinduism was less successful.

The influence of Hinduism to Burmese society is low in Myanmar compared to neighboring countries like Cambodia. Some scholars have indicated that Hinduism flourished in Southeast Asia, but not enough in Myanmar to overwhelm the cult of Nat. Therefore it is unlikely that the word "Nat" came from Hinduism. Regarding the conditions of Hinduism in Southeast Asia, a Thai scholar, Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, (2010) stated that among Indian religions, Buddhism only was able to penetrate other countries; Hinduism did not migrate outside of India. Although it reached other countries, it was never adopted as a mainstream religion in the countries it spread to, due to its limited systems such as caste system. Propod mentioned thus:

"It is generally accepted that Buddhism is a missionary religion, and that is the reason why it spread so effectively both within India and beyond. In fact, Buddhism was the only Indian religion that was able to flourish outside the confines of the subcontinent. Even though Hinduism reached Southeast Asia at about the same time as Buddhism, it never became the principal creed of the common people. This does not mean that Hinduism did not play a role in Southeast Asian religion, but by its very nature Hinduism was unable to attain a status equal to Buddhism. The success of the Buddhist missions also reveals the "portable" sanctity of Buddhism. Its sacredness was not bound by territory as was Hinduism, which forbade its chief representatives, the Brahmans, from traveling abroad" (Prapod, 2010, p. 58).
The prominent Burmese Maung Htin Aung also had the same view on Hinduism in Southeast Asia and in the case of Myanmar he stated that the influence of Hinduism in Myanmar is low, and he devised an experiment to illustrate acceptable reasons in respect to the failure of Hinduism to take a major hold in Myanmar:

"Burma was the one country in south-east Asia where Hinduism failed to penetrate deeply. Though image of Brahmanical gods have been found both at Prome and Pagan, their number is very small when compared to the thousands of images of the Buddha and Buddhist votive-offerings that have also been found. Moreover, Brahmin astrologers were in the service of the king both at Prome and Pagan and, in addition, there were settlements of Hindu merchants. Doubtless, both astrologers and merchants must have brought their images of Hindu gods. Thus the Hindu images that have been found do not prove that Hinduism was prevalent at Pagan ..." (Aung, 1975, p. 130).

Therefore the word "Nat" must have been adopted from Buddhism rather than Hinduism. There is a Pali word "Nātha\(^{16}\) in Buddhism which means master, lord or husband. The word "Nat" derived from the Pali word "Nātha" (Nātha to Nath to finally Nat). The word was adopted into local belief taking 'lord' as its meaning. U Aye Naing (2010) also mentioned this in his book "Nats, Devas from Buddhist texts - Buddha Kyanlar Nat Devata Myar" taking an explanation from a book called "Voharalinatthadipani\(^{17}\)" (Naing, 2010, p. 39)

So what is the term used before the word "Nat"?

Before the word "Nat" was adopted to refer to their worshiped object(s), the people used their own words which were understandable to their individual societies or tribes. The

\(^{16}\) Nātha indeed can refer five: 1) Budda; 2) Arahantship; 3) King (lord); husband; and one's body (Tipi-D, Vol. 11, pp. 527-530).

\(^{17}\) Voharalinatthadipani: This is a book which gives the exposition of unknown and difficult words in texts and original words in Burmese terms.
words, which refer to their worshiped objects, mean lord and contain the meaning of respectfulness and honorableness. Some of these words are still used. When the worshiped objects (or Nats) are specifically mentioned, these words are still used even though the word “Nat” has been adopted as general term for their worshiped objects. People, for example, use *two Taungbyon Mins* (*Taungbyon Min Napar*): Min Giy and Min Lay, and they do not usually use *two Taungbyon Nats*, and sometime Min Gyi and Min Lay are referred together as *Taungbyon Min Nyinaung*\(^{18}\) because these two were brothers. These terms for worshiped objects are different from one place to another. Here are some common words which refer to their worshiped objects before the introduction of the term “Nat”: Min, Ashin, Ashin Gyi, Bodaw, Bobo Gyi; and Ashin Ma, Thekhin Ma, Meldaw, Poun Min. The former five terms are used to refer the male Nats and the latter for the female Nats.

All these terms take on the meaning of respectfulness and honorableness. It does not matter whether they are really respectful and honorable or not or whether they loved or hated. The terms are accepted and used by believers. The terms are used as titles prefixed to the name of the worshipped being. Here are some examples: U Min Kyaw; Yor Ashin Gyi; Mandalay Bodaw; Shwe Nyanung Pin Bobo Gyi; and Taungdaw Ashin Ma; Yordaw or Taungdaw Thakhin Ma; Poppa Meldaw; Poun Min Taung. For more detail, in U Min Kyaw, the original name is U Kyaw and when it joins with the title word ‘Min’, it becomes U Min Kyaw or Lord U Kyaw; in Yor Ashin Gyi, Yor means village and Ashin Gyi refers to the Nat who is believed to protect the village. So the combined word ‘Yor Ashin Gyi

\(^{18}\) Nyinaung is a Burmese term which means brothers.
Chapter II: Spirit worship

means Lord of the village; in the same way they named after their village or place: Mandalay Bodaw – the lord of Mandalay; Shwe Nyaung Pin Bobo Gyi – the lord of Shwe Nyaung Pin, Shwe Nyaung Pin is the name of a tree; Taungdaw Ashin Ma – the lady of Mountain, Taungdaw refers a mountain; Taungdaw Thekhin Ma – the lady of mountain; Poppa Meldaw – the mother of Mount Poppa; Poun Min Taung – the lord grandmother of Mountain. Here in the word “Poun Min Taung”, Poun means grandmother; Min, lord; and Taung, Mountain.

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<td>1</td>
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<td>Taungbyon Min Napar, Taungbyon Min Nyinaung; (2) U Min Kyaw or Min Gyi Kyaw; (3) Thikya Min (4) Bo Min Khaung</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td><strong>Thakhin Ma</strong> Taungdaw Thekhin Ma</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Bobo Gyi</strong>: Shwe Nyaung Pin Bobo Gyi; Sulay Bobo Gyi</td>
<td><strong>Maldaw</strong>: Poppa Meldaw; Pago Meldaw;</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td><strong>Amal</strong>: Amel Gyun; Amel Yin; Amel poun Min</td>
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2.3.3 Nat-worship in Myanmar

Nat-worship consists of several factors: belief, offering, propitiation, prayer, taking refuge, sharing merits, and sending metta (loving-kindness). Belief in Nat is a kind of Nat-worship; offering things to Nat is also Nat-worship; propitiation to Nat, prayer to Nat, taking refuge in Nat, sharing merit to Nat, and sending metta to Nat – all individual factors are Nat-worship too.

Here in, belief in Nat contains two things in general: (1) if believers worship Nat properly and regularly, the Nat that they worship can protect them from dangers, natural disasters; the Nat that they worship can deliver them safely from dangerous situations if they are faced with dangers and the Nat that they worship can make their fields fertile, make cultivation, business and education successful. (2) If the believers do not worship Nat properly and regularly, the Nat that they worship do not protect them from dangers and natural disasters, and do not save them from dangerous situations. Moreover the Nat that they worship can give harm and difficulties to them and can make unsuccessful in their ventures.

Offering to Nat is a form of Nat-worship. It can also contain two things: (1) offering material things and (2) sacrifice of animals, even humans historically. There may be two reasons in offering things to Nat: (1) in order to make the Nat friendly and to fasten the Nat friendships; and (2) to get any help from the Nat.
To propitiate Nat, the believers often held the Nat rituals or Nat festival(s) which is called *Nat-kana* in Myanmar. Prayer to Nat is done by the believers for the purpose of success in business, education, health and so on. Then they also do this prayer in order to be free from dangers and difficulties, when they are in danger and difficulties. However for Nat-worship, there is no text-reading in prayer to Nat, because there is no text and no doctrine regarding Nat. They just simply pray by saying thus: “please help me, please save me, let me be free from danger, let me succeed in this and that and so on”. Taking refuge in a Nat means finding refuge in Nat for example when something (or somebody) threatens them or their belongings. They find refuge in Nat so that the Nat protects them and they can be saved and free from the threatening situations. It does not matter whether the Nat actually protects them from danger or not.

What is sharing merit with Nats? Sharing merit (Ahmyawea) is a Buddhist belief which means announcing and giving merit (Kusala$^{19}$), which has been done by someone to other so that others can rejoice in his or her merits. According to Buddhist literature, if you announce to and share your merit with others, this is a kind of merit-making which is mentioned in Buddhist text “Pattidāna$^{20}$”. If someone rejoices at other’s merits when other

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$^{19}$ Kusala is a Pali term. It contains at least two meanings: no fault; and happy, pleasant result. Something which is no fault and will be happy, pleasant result as a consequence is called Kusala. According to this definition, if one does Kusala in mental, verbal, or physical, there is no fault in doing this and there will be happy, pleasant results to him or her as a consequence. Kusala is translated to various words: merit, good deed, and meritorious deed. For Bhikkhu Bodhi, it is translated as Wholesome in his book “A comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma” (Bodhi, 1999, p. 46).

$^{20}$ “Sharing merits or good deeds with others is known as pattidāna. [Patti = what you have gained; dāna = giving or sharing] A donor will no doubt enjoy the benefits of his dāna. The desire to share with other the merits gained is indeed magnanimous. We all, after doing a good deed, should proclaim, “All those who can hear me, share my merits. May you all gain as much benefit as I do,” and share the merits gained. This is pattidana, which in itself is a separate good deed” (Janakabhivamsa, 1999, pp. 185-186).
shares their merits – indeed, no matter whether they share their merits or not, rejoicing at other’s merits should be done. –, he gets merit which is called Pattānumodana in Buddhist text. Therefore people usually share their merits after they have done merits so that the Nat can rejoice at them and the Nat itself gets merit. In sharing merits to Nats, there may be two intentions: (1) from Buddhist point of view, this is understood that it should be done whenever someone has done merit in daily life; and (2) the Nat who receives and rejoices at the merit will love the people who give, share and in return the Nat might protect the people.

What is sending Mettā to Nat? This is also a Buddhist concept and a similar concept to sharing merits. Mettā is a pali term and translated as loving-kindness. Sending mettā is developing good wishes in mental or verbal for particular people or no one in particular in order that people will be well and happy. Here is a way to send mettā people: “May all beings be free from danger. May all beings be free from domanassa (mental suffering) and have peace of mind. May all beings be free from physical sufferings and be well. May all living beings be prosperous and maintain themselves to live a long life (Janakabhivamsa, 1999, p. 105)” For particular persons, here is an example to send metta: “May my parents be free from danger etc.; May the (particular) Nat be free from danger etc.” some people

Bhikkhu Bodhi translates Pattidāna as Transference of merit (Bodhi, 1999, p. 209).

Ashin Janakabhivamsa, a Burmese well-known Buddhist scholar described Pattānumodana thus: “Rejoicing when a donor shares his merits is known as pattānumodana. When someone shares the merits gained, you ought to appreciate it and proclaim “sadhu” (well done) thrice. Feeling glad for the good deeds done by others is laudable. It has the nature of muditā (sympathetic joy). But to achieve genuine pattānumodana merit is somewhat difficult. A customary and unwilting proclamation of “well done” without sincere rejoicing is not pattānumodana but mere formality. And sometimes one may not really feel glad of meritorious deeds of others. Instead one may even cultivate envy and jealousy which amounts to issa” (Janakabhivamsa, 1999, p. 187).
believed that, because of sending Mettā to Nat, the Nat may in return love the people and protect them when they are able to do so.

All factors mentioned above are Nat-worship due to the activities, traditions, and rituals concerned with Nats. It should be noted that: it does not matter whether the Nat they worship exists or not; there is no need to prove it; nobody demands to do so and many people do not think that it should be pondered whether it is true, possible, and reliable or not; and the believers to Nat will traditionally go on to reach the shrines which are concerned with their Nat and rituals, propitiate the individual Nat, pay respect, offer things to Nat and so on.

2.3.4 The Beginning of Nat-worship

It is difficult to determine when Nat-worship began in Myanmar as there are no historical documents relating to Nat-worship. Though some religious archeological evidences have been found in Myanmar, these are more concerned with other religions rather than the Nat cult. A few of these documents refer to Nat cults, but do not indicate when the Nat-worship began in Myanmar. Despite no historical facts and documents regarding Nat worship, people in olden days orally passed down knowledge of Nat-worship from generation to generation through myths, folksongs, rituals, festivals, plays, chanting, and folklore and so on. Some elements of Nat worship have disappeared from Myanmar and some have changed in concepts and forms, due to several reasons. One reason is time and advanced knowledge due to modernization.
With regard to some elements of Nat-worship that have disappeared, the researcher’s own experience may be used as an example. Recently in summer, 2012, he visited his native village\(^{22}\) in Myanmar. He had several conversations with villagers. In one of conversations dealing with traditional beliefs with his family members, in some context he noticed that his mother has changed and abandoned one of her old beliefs and she no longer practices it with the advent of the advanced knowledge and information through modernity and modern technology. This is note-worthy as it was a belief that was passed down generations ago. His mother used to wave a sword when strong winds came. In his village, strong wind usually comes in summer, sometimes looks like tropical cyclone. If the strong wind came through, she used to find a sword and wave the sword saying this “Don’t come. Go away, Go away. You see this sword?” She believed that if the sword is shown and waved, the wind would be fearful and go away without damaging the village. Although other family members did not do it, she did it. It did not matter whether it had an affect or not. She was told by her forebears and she continued the tradition. However, recently she stopped this custom. In this way, with the advancement of knowledge and with the advent of modernity, some elements of Nat-worship have disappeared from the land.

Despite the fact that the beginning of Nat-worship in Myanmar cannot be known, an assumption can be done that Nat-worship began since the people came and settled down in Myanmar because the belief in Nat (spirit) — though different in form — can be found in all human societies around the world. Nat-worship in Myanmar also seems to have increased and changed forms. It increased and changed through the kingdom of Tagaung, the

\(^{22}\) Ohn Twe village, Hti Lin Township, Magway division.
kingdom of Prome, and finally the kingdom of Bagan. Nat-worship increased throughout history until worship of Thirty-seven Lords had to be limited. In Bagan dynasty, the increasing Nat-worship was stopped at the time of King Anawrahta in one hand and, on the other hand Buddhism came to flourish with the constant support of the king.

2.3.5 The types of Nats

Many people including scholars categorize the Nat in Burmese mind into many groups. However the Nats can be classified into two groups in brief: (1) Deva Nat, (2) Local Nats, because the heavenly Nats in the six realms and nature Nats such as mountain Nat, forest Nat etc. are included in Deva and Thirty-seven Lords and other local-born Nats are included in Local Nat. A few more explanations should be given here regarding why the term “Local Nat” is used. Among people including foreigners, Thirty-seven Nats are widely known as a term and the Thirty-seven Nats, even though only a few people can count them, are popular due to some Nat festivals which are held yearly. Yet, there are many other kinds of Local-born Nats that are important in different regions. In some parts of Myanmar, Thirty-seven Nats are not known as the term “Thirty-seven Nats or Lords”. For them, their particular Nats are more important than any other Nats. There are many other important Nats for different people in different regions. Therefore, the term “Local Nats” is used to encompass all kinds of local-born Nats under one category.

Here are some categorizations from various scholars. Spiro categorized the Nats in Myanmar as following:

1. Deva Nats;
2. Nature Nats;

3. The Thirty-seven Nats;

4. Personal Nats; and


However Spiro firstly recognized three general categories which are known to the average Burmese according to him. Here is what he stated:

"... we may say that the average Burman recognizes three types of nats. First, there is a type which comprises nature spirits of various kinds – spirits with differing degrees of power, of jurisdiction, of character, and of prominence, all of whom, however, are associated with such natural phenomena as trees, waterfalls, hills, paddy fields, and so forth. A second type, refereed to collectively as devas, resides in various of the Buddhist heavens and is characterized as the guardian or protector of the Buddhist religion (the Sasana). A third type, each of whose members possesses a historically (or mythologically) identifiable biography, is known as “the Thirty-seven” nats" (Spiro, 1978, p. 42).

Simon Pau Khan En following the average reorganization of Nat in Myanmar classified three categories, which are widely known to people especially intellectuals, in his research work: (1) Nature Nats; (2) Deva Nats; and (3) Thirty-seven Nats (En, 2012, pp. 382-385). A Burmese scholar, Taw Sein Ko, classified the Nats into five groups in general:

1) personal spirits; 2) family or house spirits; 3) communal spirits; 4) genii or dryads; and 5) disembodied spirits. They are defined by Taw Sein Ko as following:

“(1) personal spirits, who watch over the interests of individual persons; (2) family or house spirits, who preside over the destinies of families; (3) communal spirits, who are they tutelary gods of clans and tribes, and the extent of whose territorial jurisdiction is clearly defined; (4) the genii or dryads, who inhabit trees and rocks, hills and mountains, rivers and streams, lakes and seas, and (5)
spirits, who are doomed to continue their existence in a disembodied state” (Ko, 1913, p. 158).

All categorizations go under two main groups: Deva Nat and Local Nat. Apart from the types of Nats, the Thirty-seven lords (or Nat) should be listed here as they are under the group of Local Nats. The lists of Thirty-seven Lords can be found in a few different forms for they were listed in different periods in accordance with their importance at that time. According to Minister Myawaddi and the devotees of the Nats, the Nats who were in the pre-Bagan period, Bagan period, Ava period, and Toungoo period were listed to be Thirty-seven. For those in charge of the Nat-images in a temple called “Shwezigon Pagoda”, they do not recognize the Nats who belonged to a later period than Bagan as one of Thirty-seven Lords; they just recognize the Nats who belonged to Pre-Banga and Bagan periods and those are listed in Thirty-seven (Aung, 1975, p. 108).

Then in the book of Sir R. C. Temple, another different list of Nats can also be seen (Temple, 1906, p. 34). He categorized five groups based on the Nats of different periods. They are: (1) Duttabaung cycle Nats – those who belonged to Tagaung and Prome periods; (2) Anawrahta cycle Nats – those who belonged to Anawrahta time in Bagan; (3) Ava Mingaung and Bagan Alaungsithu mixed cycle Nats – those who belonged to late Bagan and Ava dynasties at the time of the Kings; (4) Tabin Shwedi cycle Nats – those who belonged to Toungoo and Pegu at the time of the King; and (5) Bayin Naung cycle Nats – those who belonged to Pagu at the time of King Bayin Naung (Temple, 1906, pp. 38-39).

Temple described the list of Thirty-seven Lords as authentic. Yet, in consideration to the history of the devotees, of the periods, and of the Nats, no one (except King Anawrahta)
had authority to state that such and such lists are authentic, because some Nats in a list of Thirty-seven Lords are not important in some periods and places. Sometimes, some Nats, who are not included in Thirty-seven Lords, are more important than the ones included in the Thirty-seven in particular places and times. In this case, some Nats are omitted from the list of Thirty-seven and other Nats are substituted into Thirty-seven. It is remarkable that although the Nats in the list of Thirty-seven may change, the number of Nats has not. Additionally, with regard to the facts as to the kinds of people who became Nats in the history of Nats, Sithu Myine addressed common facts which are known to many people. They are:

1. Being famous personally
2. Being smart in personality;
3. Having done something famous and important;
4. Being killed by force or anything else; and
5. Being dead by an accident [the sixth fact is similar to 4 and 5, therefore not mentioned here.] (Myine, 2010, p. 45).

If someone with above traits died in the past, people believe that they became Nats — what Burmese sometime called Nat-scine. Some translated Nat-scine as green Nat or green ghost, however, this definition is too loose translation. Although the Burmese word ‘scine’ can be translated as meaning the colour green, when it is suffixed to the word nat as in Nat-sine, it refers to those who died of accidents or force and became Nats. Looking through the legends of each of Thirty-seven Lords, almost all of them died in accidental or extremely sad ways. Therefore Maung Htin Aung said: “It will be seen that out of the Thirty-six
[Thakya Nat is excluded], thirty-five suffered tragic and violent deaths.” (Aung, 1975, p. 104). Simon Pau Khan En also included the tragic lives of Nats when he mentioned the common characteristic of the Thirty-seven Nats. He said thus: “All the Thirty-seven Nats, except two, have tragic lives” (En, 2012, p. 391).

2.3.6 How Nats are worshiped?

People worship Nats in different ways. Based on individual Nats and believers, offering and ways of worship differ. People consider the previous life of the individual local Nat and they prepared appropriate offerings to the Nat. For example, Mahagiri Nat was a human being before he became a Nat. He was burnt to death in previous life. People considered that coconut water or coconut oil was used to treat burns, before the advent of modern medical science. Consequently they believed that it is a proper way to offer coconut to Mahagiri Nat. This assumption became a custom for worship of Mahagiri Nat until present day.

If somebody offers coconut to Mahagiri Nat, there are some dos and don’ts to follow according to Nat-believers. They are: 1) there should be coconut water inside the coconut and occasionally a new coconut must be offered; 2) the coconut should be sprayed with perfume; 3) the coconut should be fanned by handmade fan from time to time; 4) two knives should be placed, one on the left and one on the right side of the coconut; 5) a couple or husband and wife cannot sleep near the coconut which is being offered to the Nat; 6) hibiscus and candle must not be offered to the Nat (Thann, 2006, p. 64).
Further examples of specific Nat-worship are illustrated in the case of the Taungbyon Nats and Kogyikyaw Nat. Taungbyon Nats, who are brothers, were believed to be Muslims in a previous life. Muslims do not eat pork. Therefore, people thought that offering pork to the Taungbyon Nats is inappropriate. This custom is still adhered to today. In the case of Kogyikyaw Nat, he was a drunkard and loved cockfights in his previous life. He was considered to be delighted at having alcohol together with fried chicken and therefore, the Kogyi Kyaw Nat is offered alcohol and fried chicken. The cases described above illustrate how Nat offerings differ from one to another. For Nature Nats, which are included as Deva Nats but the story of whose previous lives are unknown, there is remarkably no special requirement or custom to follow. People offer different offerings to them.

With regard to where and how they worship Nats, some worship Nats at home; some - usually farmers worship Nats in field where they cultivate; and some go to where Nat-shrine is and worship Nats. When they worship Nats at home, the Nat usually belong to them. The Nat is what they called Mizain Hpazain Nat. Here the Burmese words “Mi and Hpa” mean mother and father respectively and zain means belonging or being connected, related. Therefore Mizain Hpazain Nat is connected to their parents and belongs to children too. Things that may be offered to these Nats are primarily rice, betel, pickled tea, coconuts, bananas and water and flowers. The type of offerings may differ for some Mizain Hpazain Nats. For example as mentioned above, if the family’s Mizain Hpazain Nat is Mahagiri Nat, they need to offer a coconut wearing a piece of red and white clothes (at the top of coconut) together with knives, a fan, water, and flowers at a corner of their house. When
their Mizain Hpazain Nat is Kogyi Kyaw Nat, then they need to put a small horse made of wood or anything else and offer alcohol and several pieces of cloth for the horse to wear.

However the small shrine at home is not common to all Nat-worshipers. Some do not have Nat-shrine at home and they do not offer things to their Mizain Hpazain Nat regularly. In many places like Ohn Twe, Kon Sal in Hti Lin Township, Yaw region, the small shrine at home are absent, because people in the region do not put anything which is concerned with Nats at home. Instead, they build a Nat-shrine outside villages or in the nearest forest and the Nat-shrine belongs to the whole village communally. The people, though they do not have Nat-shrine at home, offer offerings to the particular Nat when they think that they need the help from the Nat. Offerings are presented at the shrine, for example, when one of their family members has to go traveling, or has to sit for the exam, or is suffering from any disease. Moreover, according to Spiro, in other events like at one’s birth, at novitation ceremony, at wedding ceremony, at one’s death, at cultivation and harvesting, Nats are propitiated to by offering things (Spiro, 1978, p. 108).

Historically, offering to Nats had sometimes involved sacrifices such as killing fowl, pig, ox, buffalo etc, and sometime even a human23. Simon Pau Khan En found out several reasons why people sacrificed animals. He described thus:

> “...from the slaughter of a human victim to the mere offer of plantains at a shrine. A few miles beyond the administrative border of the Upper Chindwin District a boy or a girl is annually bought from a distant village and killed with much ceremony, the blood being sprinkled on the rice which is to be used as seed.” (Brown, 1921, p. 85)

See also Spiro’s “Burmese supernaturalism” (1978, pp. 104-105).
“The People offer differently, on the basis of the seasons, the situation and the participants. Some Nats are propitiated according to the seasons, in the sowing or harvest season, for example. Some Nats are sacrificed to in times of sickness and crisis; while some sacrifices are offered according to the calendar in a set period. Some of the sacrifices are offered only by the household or from within one specific clan, while some sacrifices are participated by the whole community” (En, 2012, p. 436).

Then Simon briefly listed five kinds of Nat sacrifice based on selected ethnic groups according to different purposes. They are:

1. Family Nat sacrifice;
2. Communal Nat sacrifice;
3. Occupational Nat sacrifice;
4. Curative Nat sacrifice; and

There is also another way of Nat-worship which is called Nat-kana or Nat-Pwe. Though they – Nat-kana and Nat-Pwe – are the same in feature and performance, the terms are used differently. When this type of Nat-worship is held in a particular house, this is called Nat-kana; and when this type of Nat-worship is held in particular places where are participated by many people from the same village or different places, this is called Nat-Pwe. Sometimes, Na-kana is called Nat-Pwe but Nat-Pwe is never called Nat-kana.

In Nat-kana Pwe, there are a few things which are necessary to perform it. They are: 1) an orchestra; 2) a singer(s); 3) a Nat-kadaw; and 4) Nat-images. The orchestra has to play Nat-songs which are related to or associated with particular Nats, and the singer has to sing Nat-songs. Each of them must have their abilities to perform well. Nat-kadaw is the main
important person in Nat-kana Pwe. The Nat-kadaw chooses a proper orchestra and a singer(s) to a particular Nat-kana Pwe, and the Nat-kadaw collects Nat-images for it. These requirements are for the small Nat-kana Pwe like house Nat-Pwe. If the Nat-Pwe is bigger than this, there will be more performers than this in quantity: for example two, three or more orchestras; more singers; more Nat-kadaws etc. The purpose of Nat-kana or Nat-Pwe is basically to propitiate particular Nats and it also consists of asking the help of particular Nats and rendering special thanks to the Nats for some special boon. Correspondingly there are three types of Nat-Pwe. They are:

1. House Nat-Pwe (or Nat-kana Pwe);
2. Village Nat-Pwe (or regional Nat-Pwe); and

House Nat-Pwe is sponsored by a householder. It is rather expensive to perform. The householder has to hire an orchestra, pay Nat-kadaw, provide the Nats with offering things, and feed the assembly who comes to his house. If a householder sponsors Nat-pwe in his house, people around the house, particularly children and those who love dance and song, gather there to see orchestra and dance and listen to songs. It usually lasts for three days. However there is no limited days and times in Nat-kana Pwe regarding with how many days should be held in a time and how many times in a year. It depends on financial support from sponsor, but usually not more than ten days are held at one time anyway. This kind of Nat-Pwe is usually sponsored by a householder, when he or his family member succeeds in education, business or anything else.
Chapter II: Spirit worship

Village Nat-Pwe is held to propitiate the Nat which belong to the whole village. In a village, it is not unusual to have a Nat and its shrine which belong to the whole village. The village Nat-Pwe is held once a year in a fixed date, but it is not common to all villages. Spiro said that Village Nat is propitiated three times a year by villagers (Spiro, 1978, pp. 108-109), but it is also not common to all. It depends on the individual villages and their customs. The aim of village Nat-Pwe is for the welfare of the whole village members. In village Nat-Pwe, people collect foods, offerings which are proper to the village Nat and gather at its shrine and offer to the Nat. It does not take too long; it lasts for two, three hours; it does not need an orchestra and there is no performance: dance and song usually. If the village Nat belongs to many villages, then the village Nat-Pwe becomes regional Nat-Pwe, because many people from other villages come to participate in the Nat-Pwe. Accordingly in the regional Nat-Pwe, orchestra, dance, song etc. can be seen as in house Nat-Pwe and it is also held once a year and hosted and managed by committee members appointed by people.

National Nat-Pwe is also held once a year. No Nat-Pwe has been officially appointed as a national Nat-Pwe at present, but if many people all over the country who believe in Nats gather and participate in a Nat-Pwe like Taungbyon Nat-Pwe it is then seen as a national Nat-Pwe due to the nation-wide participation. However in Burmese, people do not have a term that refers to a national Nat-Pwe. They just simply use, call the particular name to the Nats: Taungbyon Nat-Pwe, U Minkyaw Nat-Pwe etc. for instance. This Nat-Pwe is the same to regional Nat-Pwe; what makes the national Nat-Pwe different is that it is bigger than the regional Nat-Pwe with more participants and more performances.
Chapter II: Spirit worship
CHAPTER III

Buddhism and Devas

3.1 A brief account of Buddhism in Myanmar

Theravada Buddhism is the main religion in Myanmar. As a result, Buddhist thoughts or teachings are influential to the people. Consequently if there is a case to talk about religion or belief in Myanmar, anyone cannot omit Buddhism. Particularly if someone chooses his or her subject as Nat in Myanmar, he or she cannot avoid Buddhism in Myanmar; he or she will definitely have to mention Buddhism—at least in general. It is due to the facts that Buddhism flourished and spread out across the whole country even though the advent of Buddhism to Myanmar was late comparing to some indigenous religions such as Nat-cult, the cult of Naga. Buddhist thought and cosmology are involved in almost all parts of Myanmar.

Buddhism took root in Myanmar a long time ago though it could not be dated definitely. According to Burmese traditions, Chronicles, and the histories of some pagodas, Buddhism arrived in Myanmar before Common Era and even during Buddha’s time. A Soviet scholar U Kan Hla (a Burmese name), whose original name was Sergey S. Ozhegov believed that Buddhism reached Myanmar in early Common Era. His special interest was in the architecture of Myanmar (Hla, 1979, p. 95). From the standpoint of architectural studies of Myanmar, Hla (1979) described this: “A few surviving architectural monuments in Pyu cities indicate that the formation of the basic types of Buddhist religious buildings—stupa and temple—occurred during the beginning of the Christian era (p.101).” When the second
Pyu city, Theyekhettaya\textsuperscript{1} became powerful in 4 century C.E, Buddhism also seemed to flourish there.

Those ideas are supported by Chinese records on Pyu city and archeological evidences in Theyekhettaya. Kan Hla described the Chinese account of Pyu city: “There are over one hundred Buddhist monasteries with courts and rooms all decked with gold and silver, coated with cinnabar and bright colours ... there are twelve gates with pagodas at the four corners: the people all live within” (Hla, 1979, p. 97). Daw Swan Kyi also mentioned the Chinese record of Pyu in her book as follows:

“In 8 century C.E, Phyu sent a group of people, who consisted of 35 members to entertain cultural performance, to Han (China). Han people liked it very much. Phyu’s songs and performance were concerning Buddhism. There were twelve songs which they performed there in the Han record. According to Han record, old and new history, Phyu dynasty was big, wide, and beautiful. In the phyu city, there were twelve gates and there were many stupas at the four corners of the city and there were over one hundred Buddhist monasteries and outside the place gate, there was a white Buddha Image made of marble stone in 100 feet high” (Kyi, 2000, p. 6).

However Patrick A. Pranke, in his article “Myanmar” which can be found in encyclopedia of Buddhism, argued that the religion of Theyekhettaya was of diverse and multiple forms of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and indigenous cults. His reason was that different forms of images – Visnu, Mahayana bodhisattvas, and Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist inscriptions – were found at excavation of ancient Pyu city, Theyekhettaya (Pranke, 2004,

\textsuperscript{1} “The Burmese name, considered by Burmese scholars to be the most appropriate. The other, “Arakan” spelling of the name, is Tharekhittara. In English texts, the Indian name Sri Ksetra is usually used. In direct translation, the name means “Magnificent Field.” The manes “Old Pyi,” “Old prome” (“Prome” – the English version of the name “Pyi”), and “Hawza” (the mane of a railway station and village) are also widely used” (Hla, 1979, p. 95).
p. 574). Contrary to Pranke, Maung Htin Aung had said that Theyekhettaya was a Buddhist country and archeological evidence in 1926 made it clear that Theravada Buddhism did flourish in Theyekhettaya (Aung, 1975. P. 126).

In 1926 excavation, 20 gold plates, upon which some Theravada Buddhist texts were inscribed – Suttas, Vinayas, and Abhidhamma –, were found. Moreover, even at the gate of old Prome, a stone-pillar, upon which the Mora Sutta, Ratana Sutta, and Maṅgala Sutta in Pāli are inscribed, was found. Additionally, Pāli (script and language) was used in Theravada Buddhism (Kyaw, 2013). Maung Htin Aung argued that images from Hinduism and gods and goddess from Mahayana does not prove that the sects flourished at Prome. He gave two facts: (1) the number of images is very small when compared to the thousands of images of the Buddha and Buddhist votive-offerings that have been found and, (2) regarding why the images existed in the Kingdom, Brahmin astrologers were in the service of the Kings and Hindus merchants [Chinese merchants as well] who settled in Prome (Aung, 1975, p. 130). When Buddhism reached Bagan, it did not flourish at first as it did at Prome. The people of Prome did not even know what kind of sect it was. Then when the Great king Anawrahta ascended the Bagan throne in the 11th century, he realized that there was need of a new religion in his kingdom. He introduced Theravada Buddhism to his kingdom with the help of Shin Arahant and Theravada Buddhism flourished again and spread across the country. Since Buddhism and other beliefs such as Nat cult have been in the land for such a long time, it is reasonable to assume that there must have been encounters or relationships between the two in some form.
3.2 Devas in Buddhist Texts

In Buddhist texts, the Burmese term “Nat” is equal in meaning to the Pali words: Deva or Devatā. Even though there are other words such as Yakkha in Buddhism which can refer to Nats, the two words – Deva and Devatā – are usually mentioned when the subjects are about Nats. The Deva or Devatā derive from the root word ‘Divu’ which literally means cheerfulness and playfulness. Therefore Deva or Devatā is defined as those who are cheerful and playful with visible form, sound, small, taste and tangible (Rupa, Sadda, Gandha, Rasa, Voṭṭhavva). Other definitions of Deva and Devatā can also be found occasionally in the texts; and the definitions consist of mundane and supra-mundane results. They are:

1) those who can give people wealth, high position in power or authority;
2) those who are worthy of special venerations by people and who can also be worthy to accept offerings from human;
3) those who admonish people by showing cause and effect with regard to what is good and what is bad, what should be done and what should not be done; and
4) Those who are praiseworthy and approach-worthy for the reason to avoid suffering, disaster, damage or epidemic (Naing, 2010, p. 39).

3.2.1 Three types of Deva

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2 AbD. 11-12:

“Dibbanti pañcakāmagupādihi kijantiti devā.
... Devā eva devatā, sakatthe devasaddato tāpaccayo ...”
There are generally three types of Devas3 in Buddhism which are expounded by the Lord Buddha. They are mentioned in Vibhanga Pali which is the second text of Abhidhamma in Theravada pali texts. They are:

(1). Sammuti Deva (Sammuti Nat in Burmese);

(2) Upapatti Deva (Upapatti Nat in Burmese); and

(3) Visuddhi Deva (Visuddhi Nat in Burmese).

Among them, who is Summuti Deva and why? Sammuti Devas are kings, queens, princes, princesses, presidents, and great leaders. They are recognized by the rest of people in their particular places as their chief, leader, or monarch and they are also paid due respect, proper places and appropriate honour. Therefore they are called Summuti Devas. Summuti also means recognition by others.

With regard to the status of Sammuti Devas, they are usually above other people for the reasons mentioned above. They can be worshiped by paying due respect and appropriate honour and by helping provide what they need. Then in return, one can hope for the benefits of worshiping them. Sammuti Devas can give worldly wealth, high positions and good opportunities if there are conditions to do so; they can also suggest something useful in life – it may be for business, education, or way of life; and they can help occasionally what is needed. However, there can also be side effects in worshiping Sammuti Devas, because they are worldly people; they have mental defilements such as greed, hatred,

3 Abhi. II, p. 437
delusion, conceit, jealousy etc. as ordinary people do; and from time to time they can change their mind and decision based on their feeling.

Who are Upapatti Devas and why?

Upapatti Devas are not those who were born form mothers’ womb (Jalabuja), those who were born from any kind of egg (anttaja), and those who were born from Lotus, from a hole in a tree and from mud and things which are humid (Samsedaja). Indeed, Upapatti Devas are those who were born in Cātumaharājika to the highest realm in the system of thirty one planes in Buddhism. One thing must be remembered that they were born in those planes immediately after they died in previous life, and that they become like 16-year-old girls for females and 20-year-old boys for males as soon as they are born in their individual realms, and that they do not have pregnancy. Among the Upapatti Devas, those who reside in the six celestial realms are called as Devas only, but those who reside in twenty realms above the six celestial realms are called in two ways: usually Brahma and sometime Devas.

The two terms – Deva and Brahma – are usually used in separate ways, but when the two terms have to be reduced or used in brief, the term ‘Deva’ is used to refer to both Devas and Brahmas collectively. The Buddha, for example, used the term ‘Deva’ referring Devas and Brahmas when he taught the chief disciple, Venerable Sāriputta about five destinations (Pancagati). According to Mahāsihanāda sutta in Mulapannāsa, expounded by
the Buddha to Venerable Sāriputta, there are five destinations (pañcagati) where living beings can be reborn after the death of the present life. They are:

1. Niraya (hell);
2. Tiricchānayoni (the realm of animals);
3. Pettivisaya (the realm of hungry ghost);
4. Manussa (the realm of human); and
5. Deva (the realm of Devas).

The five destinations is the reduction of thirty-one planes in term. The first three – Niraya, Tiricchānayoni, and Pettivisaya – are describing four awful planes which are the lowest realms in system of thirty-one planes; the fourth one – Manussa –, the realm of the human which is above the four awful planes; and the fifth one – Deva – describes twenty realms: six celestial realms above human and sixteen Brahma realms above the six celestial realms. Therefore, even though Deva is a single term, it sometimes refers both Deva and Brahma in meaning.

With regard to the status of Upapatti Devas, they can be higher or lower than people, because this depends on their virtues and Puñña – good deeds. If they are better than people in virtues, they are higher than people in status. In the same way, if people are better than Devas in virtues, then the people are higher than the Devas in status – the Devas are lower than those people. Some people are very virtuous, wise, kind, generous, dutiful, and

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4 According to Buddhist thought, all beings except Arahant will be reborn in a realm of thirty-one until they attain arahantship. Arahants, who have attained arahantship, will not be reborn, because they have eradicated all causes which generate rebirth.

5 M. I, p. 106
praiseworthy. Such people are worshiped or paid respect by even Sakka, Thikya Min (the king of Devas) and needless to say the other low Devas. Some Devas give protection which can be done by themselves to those people with love and some Devas follow human’s request or order with respect.

For example, on occasion Sakka, Thikya Min had to go to a beautiful garden in Tāvatimśa. Therefore he asked Mātali, his disciple to ready his vehicle. Mātali did as his master said and replied his master as to he had done and everything was ready to go there. Sakka, Thikya Min came out from his palace and he, on the stairs to down, paid respect to eight directions: east, west, south, north, southeast, southwest, northeast, and northwest. The disciple Mātali, seeing his master who is worshiping to the eight directions, thought that Sakka, Thikya Min is powerful, he is the king of Devas, and he governs the Devas who are in two realms: Cātumahārajika and Tāvatimśa and, he paid respect to eight directions though. Mātali wanted to know why Sakka, Thikya Min paid respect to eight directions. So he asked his master thus:

“Oh Sakka, there are many people, Devas who pay respect to you. Then who or what do you pay respect?

Then Sakka, Thikya Min answered Mātali thus:

Of course, Mātali, there are many people and Devas who pay respect to me. However I also pay respect to monks and ascetic who practice Dhamma well and human who do good deeds, who have virtues, and who look after their wives and children properly without conducting anything wrong and bad” (S. I, pp. 235-236).

Furthermore, some Devas follow human’s request or order with respect if necessary. To demonstrate this, there should be mentioned another story which is related to this statement.
At the time of the Buddha, there was a well-known lay devotee who was called “Anāthapintika”. He was rich enough to do what he wanted at that time. His original name was Sudatta. He used to provide foods, clothes, etc. to those who were in need of them. Accordingly he was later called “Anāthapintika” which means he who provide foods to the hopeless and homeless people. Anātha means those who are homeless and hopeless; pintika means giving or providing foods. Indeed, he gave away foods, clothes, robes, building, medicine and so on to not only homeless and hopeless people but also monks and nuns. Unfortunately he lost his wealth, while giving what others wanted.

In this case, a Deva, who lived in his house, considered that this was a good time to speak and give advice Anāthapintika, because he has been waiting for such a time. The lay devotee offered foods to monks at home every day. When monks came into the house, the Devas could not take his place and he had to move for awhile due to the virtues of the monks. Only when monks went back, he took his place again. He was not satisfied with this situation. He did not want to see monks coming into the house. Therefore when the devotee lost his wealth, the Devas thought that this was a chance to dissuade the lay devotee from inviting monks to his house and offering foods to them.

The Devas approached the devotee with his thought. The devotee asked who he was and the Devas replied that he lived in his house and the reason why he approached him. The Devas said that he was rich enough to do anything before, but since he lost his wealth due to his generosity, he should stop giving. Hearing the Deva’s words, the lay devotee thought that he was a lay disciple of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Samgha; the Devas had asked him not to offer to monks; he thought that this was wrong and unacceptable. Finally the lay
devotee, Anāthapintika reacted by asking the Devas to leave his house. The Devas had to follow the devotee’s order as he could not dare to face the devotee anymore. Therefore, the status of Devas depends on their virtues (DhaA. II, p. 8).

The ways of worship to Upapatti Devas are: offering foods, candle lights, or anything proper; sending and developing Mettā, loving-kindness to them; sharing merits, which have been done, to them. Benefits of worshiping Upapatti Devas can also be expected in return. On account of offering foods, candle lights or anything proper from time to time, sending Mettā, loving-kindness, and sharing merits with them, the Devas who are receiving offerings, respect, and love from people will in return love those people and they will protect those people from danger or unpleasantness and help them with kindness if they can do so. This is because the Devas think that the people are not their relatives but because people offer things and share their merits with Devas, the Devas want comfort and welfare of us. Following this thoughts, love and desire to help people, arise in the Devas and the Devas help the people in the present life as much as they can. Regarding this, the Buddha suggests that man should give or share his good deeds or merits, which have been done, to the Devas near him as recognition of their existence and a sign of respect to them. This is mentioned in Udāna Pali, Khuddakanikaya as following:

“In whatever place
a wise person makes his dwelling,
—there providing food
for the virtuous,
the restrained,
leaders of the holy life—
he should dedicate that offering
to the devas there.”
They, receiving honor, will honor him; being respected, will show him respect. As a result, they will feel sympathy for him, like that of a mother for her child, her son. A person with whom the devas sympathize always meets with auspicious things”. (Udana, 2012, p.121, (Thanissaro, Trans.)

Who are Visuddhi Devas?

There are three kinds of Visuddhi Devas. They are: Buddha, Pacceka Buddha and Arahant. Who is Buddha? The Buddha is an arahant, fully enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One. The Buddha has those nine attributes and one can dedicate the Buddha with one of the nine attributes. Moreover, there are three kinds of Buddhas. They are:

6 This is a very important fact. Further information should be remembered according to Venerable Mingun Saydaw’ notes:

“[Three kinds of Buddha]
(a) Future Buddhas called Paññādhika with the factor of predominant Wisdom always present in their endeavours become after fulfilling their perfections (pārami) for four asankhyeyya and a hundred thousand aeons.
(b) Other future Buddhas also believe that they can become Buddhas by fulfilling perfections, and in their mental make-up such belief is predominant. With them faith plays a greater role than Wisdom. They are therefore called Saddhādhika future Buddhas, “Future Buddhas with predominant faith.” Since they are not led by Wisdom by Faith in their fulfillment of perfections they cannot become Buddhas after four asankhyeyya and a hundred thousand aeons, by only after eight asankhyeyya and a hundred thousand aeons.
(c) There are still other future Buddhas who rely solely upon their Energy (industriousness). For them wisdom is not a principle factor. Neither do they place emphasis on the Faith that perfections lead to Enlightenment. Holding that Energy brings about Buddhahood, they give top priority to Energy in their fulfillment of perfections and become Buddhas only after sixteen asankhyeyya and a hundred thousand aeons. They are therefore called Viriyādhika Future Buddhas, “Future Buddhas with predominant Energy.”

Thus it should be noted that three designations — Paññādhika, Saddhādhika and Viriyādhika are applied only to Future Buddhas. Otherwise one would think that they belonged to fully enlightened Buddhas. There distinctions exist only while they remain as future Buddhas, but once they attain Buddhahood, they are
who was always with predominant wisdom (Panña) in his endeavors for Enlightenment; (2) Saddhādhika Buddha who was always with predominant faith (Saddhā) in his endeavors for Enlightenment; (3) and Viriyādhika Buddha who was always with predominant energy (Viriya) in his endeavors for Enlightenment. All Three kinds of Buddha are called Visuddhi Devas.

Who is Pacceka Buddha? Pacceka Buddhas are the Buddhas who attain enlightenment by themselves, but they are not likely to the three kinds of the Buddha mentioned above. They know Dhamma themselves, but they cannot let others know what they have known. They attain enlightenments, but they cannot let others attain enlightenment by delivering what they have learned as the three kinds of Buddhas do. They do not have four types of disciples: Bhikkhu, male monks; Bhikkhuni, female monks; Upasaka, male devotees; and Upāsikā, female devotees as Buddhas do. Therefore they are called Pacceka Buddhas. Pacceka means separation and Buddha means a knower or an awakened one. Pacceka Buddha is translated as lesser-Buddha by some scholars. Pacceka Buddha’s powers, energies, Sīla, Samādhi, Panña etc. are lesser than a Buddha’s.

Who are Arahants? Arahants are those who have attained enlightenment or Arahantship by listening to the teachings of the Buddha and practicing in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha. They have not come to understanding the Dhamma and attained enlightenment through their own efforts. They know the truth and eradicate mental

all identical in respect of wisdom, faith and energy. One cannot say which Buddha is more accomplished than the other in each of these aspects”. (Vicittasarabhivamsa, 1990, pp. 7-8)
defilements and attain enlightenment only after they have heard the teachings of the Buddha.

Why are the Buddha, Pacceka Buddha and Aranhant called Visuddhi Devas?

Visuddhi means purification. Before discussion about this here, the opposite of Visuddhi should be mentioned first. The opposite of Visuddhi here are Kilesas of which there are ten. The ten Kilesas are: Lobha, greed; Dosa, hatred; Moha, delusion; Māna, conceit; Diṭṭhi, wrong views; Vicikiccha, doubt; Thīna, sloth; Uddhacca, restlessness; Ahīrika, shamelessness; and Anottappa, fearlessness of wrongdoing. Kilesas mean afflicting one’s mind or causing to defile one or one’s mind. If the Kileśa, which is translated into mental defilement, arises in one, he or she is overwhelmed adversely by the Kileśa—no matter if it is only Kileśa or multiple Kileśas. He or she is afflicted because the Kileśa, mental defilements defile them by dragging him or her down to a mentally soiled and depraved condition. Therefore Visuddhi here means purification from mental defilements. The Buddha, Pacceka Buddha, and Aranhant have eradicated all mental defilements and consequently they have purified themselves. Therefore they are called Visuddhi Devas (Visuddhi Nat in Burmese).

What are the status of Visuddhi Devas and ways of worshipping them?

With regard to status of Visuddhi Devas, the Buddha is above all on planets and the Buddha is second to none in everything such as Śīla (morality), Samādhi (concentration), Pañña (wisdom) and so on. Pacceka Buddha is in the second position and Aranhant is under Pacceka Buddha in status. They are receptively the highest Devas in
terms of Sīla – morality, Samādhi – concentration, and Pañña – wisdom. Visuddhi Devas are the best Devas and praise-worthy and worthy of special veneration from Upapatti Devas, Summuti Devas and all other beings. In respect of ways of worship to Visuddhi Devas, there are many ways to do this. Some of them are: offering four requisites of the Devas which are robes, food, monastery, and medicine; listening to their Dhamma talks; reciting the Dhamma; contemplating body, mind, feeling, and Dhamma as they really are; practicing Dhamma as taught by the Devas; sending and developing Mettā to them; sharing Mettā to them as described above.

With respect to the benefits of worshiping Visuddhi Devas, the welfare of this life and next life can also be achieved through the ways of worshiping mentioned above. Some people say that Buddhism is only for the welfare of one’s next life and is not concerned with the present life and cannot offer worldly happiness and only offers supra-mundane happiness. This conception is wrong and comes from misunderstanding of the teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha taught many discourses which are related to the welfare of the present life. Ayudhāhanakumāra⁷, for example, had been free from danger and had lived long for 120 years after worshiping Visuddhi Devas. Dīgajānu Sutta⁸ in Inguttranikāya explains the welfare of beings in the present life and hereafter. K. Sri Dhammananda translated, interpreted and described it in his famous book called “What Buddhists believe” as follows:

“The Buddha told him [Dīgajānu] that there are four things which are conducive to a human’s happiness in this world. (1) he should be skilled,

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⁷ DhaA. I, pp. 423-424  
⁸ A. III, p.107
efficient, earnest, and energetic in whatever profession he is engaged, and he should know it well (*utthāna-sampadā*); (2) he should protect his income, which he has thus earned righteously, with the sweat of his brow (*ārakkha-sampada*); (3) he should have good friends (*kalyana-mittata*) who are faithful, learned, virtuous, liberal and intelligent, who will help him along the right path away from evil; (4) he should spend reasonably, in proportion to his income, neither too much nor too little, i.e., he should not hoard wealth avariciously nor should he be extravagant—in other words he should live within his means (*sama jivikatā*).

Then the Buddha expounds the four virtues conducive to a layman’s happiness hereafter: (1) *Saddha*: he should have faith and confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values; (2) *Sīla*: he should abstain from destroying and harming life, from stealing and cheating, from adultery, from falsehood, and from intoxicating drinks; (3) *Caga*: he should practise charity, generosity, without attachment and craving for his wealth; (4) *Pāñña*: he should develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering, to the realisation of Nirvana” (Dhammananda, 2002, pp. 201-202).

Moreover there is no side-effect in worshiping Visuddhi Devas and there is also no danger or threat from Visuddhi Devas. Why? Because Visuddhi Devas by no means threaten anyone in any situation, and unlike other Devas which includes local Nats (or Thirty-seven lords), Visuddhi Devas never ask anyone any offering which is regular or irregular, any festival which is annual or un-annual and any veneration which is normal or special. One can pay respect to them when he or she wants and he or she can forget them without giving any regard. There is no reason to be angry at Visuddhi Devas because they have eliminated all mental defilements including hatred, anger, aversion etc. The Visuddhi Devas are the safest ones to be worshiped. There will be good results in worshiping them and no bad results for sure as long as one follows the instructions given by them.

3.2.2 What Buddha said about Devas
Devas (Upapatti Devas) are much better than human in wealth and luxury. They are all the time enjoying and lusting for five sensual pleasures: visible form, sound, smell, taste, and tangible object. Human cannot enjoy all sensual pleasures as much as they want, because they are struggling for their living, foods and so on. For Devas they do not need to find foods or necessities as humans do; when the time comes for having foods, everything is ready for them to have foods as a result of good kamma that they have done in their previous lives. In the same way, clothes, homes, accommodations are ready when they need them due to the previous good kamma. The Devas are different from one to another in their wealth, luxury, power and so on. Why is that? This is because they have different degree or power of kusala⁹ – Dāna, Sila, and Bāvana – done in the past. Some have strong kusala and some have weak Kusala. For those who have strong kusala that had been done in the past, their wealth, luxury, power etc. are better than those who have weak kusala done in the past.

In addition to this, there are two other reasons which make them different as more powerful Devas or less powerful ones: (1) Kusala that had been done at the time of the Buddha or Sāsanā (dispensation); and Kusala that had been done at the time when there is no Buddha or Sāsanā. (2) Bavanikanti which means lusting for particular life. Those, who have done kusala – Dāna, Sila, and Bāvana– at the time of the Buddha or Buddha’s dispensation, are more powerful than those who had been done at the time when the there is no Buddha or Sasana, because Kusala at the time of the Buddha or Buddha’s dispensation

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⁹ Kusala consist of three kinds: Dāna, Sila, and Bāvana in a brief account. Dāna means giving, donation, or charity; Sila, keeping precepts or refraining from killing etc.; and Bāvana means developing mental state, calm or insight meditation. All Kinds of good deeds or merits go under one of the three categories. For example, helping other goes under Sila; giving Dhamma-talk or explaining what other do not understand goes under Dāna; and understanding or viewing things as they really are goes under Bāvana.
can included associated kusala regarding Buddha or Buddha’s dispensation and it has great prosperous results, whereas kusala at a time with no Buddha cannot do such things.

With regard to Bavanikanti – lustful wish for life, there are three remarkable devotees at Buddha time. They are Anāthapintika, Visākhā, and Bimbisāra. All of them were very close to the Buddha. They all donated, supported the Buddha and Buddha’s dispensation with several necessary things including big, beautiful monasteries. They all were Sotāpanṇa – stream-entry – in the rank of Buddhist states. However when they died, their destinations were different due to their lustful wish for life (Bavanikanti): Bimbisāra was born in lower realm – Cātumahārājika; Anāthapintika, in a higher realm – Tusitā; and Visākhā, in the realm of Nimmānarati.

With respect to Deva’s realm, there are six realms respectively from low to high: Cātumahārājika; Tāvatimsā; Yama; Tusita; Nimmānarati; and Paranīmmitavasavatti.¹⁰ In the realm of Cātumahārājika, there are four Devas who govern the realm. They are namely Dhatarattha, Virulaka, Virupekkha, and Vessavanna – also called Kuvera. They govern the realm instead of Sakka who is called “Thikya-min” in Myanmar. The realm of Tāvatimsā is governed by Sakka. Indeed, he is the king of the two realms. The realm of Yama is governed by Suyāma Deva; the realm of Tusita, by Santussita Deva; the realm of Nimmānarati, by Sunimmita Deva; and the realm of Paranīmmitavasavatti is governed by Vasavatti Deva.

¹⁰ Here are definitions of the Pāli term for six celestial realm: Cātumahārājika – the realm of the four great kings; Tāvatimsā – the realm of the thirty-three Gods; Yama – the realm of Yama Gods; Tusitā – the delightful realm; Nimmānarati – the realm of the Gods who rejoice in (their own) creation; and Paranīmmitavasavatti – the realm of the Gods who lord over the creation of other (Bodhi, 1999, pp. 190-191)
Life-span of the Devas:

(1) The life-span of the Devas in Sātumāhājīka is 500 (five hundred) celestial years. This is 9,000,000 (9 millions) years according to human reckoning. 50 (fifty) years in human world is one day and night in Cātumahārājīka. Such 30 celestial days are one month; such twelve celestial months are one year; and such 500 celestial years are life-span of the Cātumahārākīka Devas.

(2) Life-span of the Devas in Tāvatimsā is 1,000 celestial years and is 36,000,000 years in human's reckoning. 100 years in Human world are one day and night in Tāvatimsā.

(3) Life-span of the Devas in Yāma is 2,000 celestial years and is 144,000,000 years in human's reckoning. 200 years in Human world are one day and night in Yāma.

(4) Life-span of the Devas in Tusita is 4,000 celestial years and is 576,000,000 years in human’s reckoning. 400 years in Human world are one day and night in Tusita.

(5) Life-span of the Devas in Nimmānarati is 8,000 celestial years and is 2,304,000,000 years in human’s reckoning. 8,000 years in Human world are one day and night in Nimmānarati.

(6) Life-span of the Devas in Paraninmitavasavatti is 16,000 celestial years and is 9,216,000,000 years in human’s reckoning. 1,600 years in Human world is one day and night in Paraninmitavasavatti.

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<th>Realm</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Cātumahārājīka</td>
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<td>2. Tāvatimsā</td>
<td>100 HY</td>
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3.2.3 Conversation between Buddha and Devas

There have been many conversations between Buddha and Devas in many occasions at the time of Buddha. Some of them were about lay people; some of them were about monks and nuns; some of them were about Dhamma; and some of them are about Devas. They used to come to the Buddha if they wanted to ask questions or express their views that arise in their mind. Only in Samyuttanikāya, there are two sections which are called “Devatā-samyutta and Devaputta-samyutta” respectively. The two sections consist of 111 Suttas or discourses and all the Suttas describe the conversations between Buddha and Devas. Many more discourses regarding the conversations between the Buddha and Devas can also be found in many other Buddhist texts. One notable occasion or conversation is provided below as an example.

On one occasion, the Buddha was at Rājagaha. Four Devarājas – the four great kings of Devas – approached the Buddha and addressed him thus: “Venerable sir, there are three kinds of Ogres who are respectively high, middle, and low in rank or power. Some of them believe in the Buddha and follow and practice the teachings of the Buddha, whereas most of them do not believe in the Buddha. Why? This is because the teachings of the Buddha...
seem to be against them, their will, their wishes or their way of life. The Buddha basically teaches everyone not to kill or take one’s life, not to steal what is not given, not to have sexual misconduct, not to tell false speech, and not to drink any alcohol, wine or intoxicants. Contrary to his teachings, the Ogres love killing and eating meats and flesh. As some monks reside in secluded places and some Buddha’s lay disciples lived in the countryside, they might be disturbed or hurt by the Ogres. Venerable sir, please let your disciple learn and recite the Paritta which is called “Atanatiyasutta” in order to protect themselves from Ogres and any devil else.” The Buddha accepted their suggestion. Here is as it was:

“Then sitting to one side, King Vessavana said to the Lord: ‘Lord, there are some prominent yakkhas who have no faith in the Blessed Lord and others who have faith; and likewise these are yakkhas of middle and lower rank who have no faith in the Blessed Lord, and others who have faith. But, Lord, the majority of the yakkhas do not refrain from these things, and to do so is distasteful and unpleasant to them. Now, lord, there are disciples of the Blessed Lord who dwell in remote forest glades, where there is little noise or shouting, far from the madding crowd, hidden from people, suitable for retreat. And there are prominent yakkhas living there who have no faith in the word of the Blessed Lord. In order to give these folk confidence, may the Blessed Lord learn the Atanata protective verses, by means of which monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers may dwell guarded, protected, unharmed at their ease?’

And the Lord consented with silence” (Walshe(Tran.), 1987, pp. 471-472).

3.3 Relation of Buddhism and Devas

The relationship between Buddhism and Devas is recorded in Buddhist history. Throughout the history of Buddhism, there have been many connections between them one way or another as mentioned above. Understanding and following such textual Buddhist
examples, Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar give proper recognition of Deva’s existence to
the Devas in their daily life: activity or something related to religious affairs.

3.3.1 Nats and Paritta

“To many Theravada laypeople, paritta chant is an apotropaic practice, performed in order to bring protection from danger, relief from crisis, and spiritual blessings. Paritta rituals are believed to secure a blessing or protection for worldly pursuits, such as the beginning of a business venture, a house-warming, or a marriage. As a Burmese monk in Silver Spring, Maryland tells me, “especially rural folk [in Myanmar] are superstitious. If they have an epidemic they think evil spirits are terrorizing them. They ask monks to chant all these suttas” (Greene, 2004, p. 51).

What is Paritta? Parittas are some selected suttas such as Metta sutta, Ratana sutta, Mangala sutta etc. which are expounded by the Lord Buddha and some Parittas are compiled by elder monks. They are recited or contemplated by monks and nuns, and some laypeople for the purpose of protection from bad luck, evil spirits and for the recovery of illness, bad fortune. Paritta literally means protection from danger, ill-luck, or something bad and it is meant to protect those who recite, contemplate, or listen to the suttas. The reference to Devas in Paritta chanting should be described here.

Regarding Metta sutta\textsuperscript{11}, during the Buddha’s time, five hundred monks approached and asked the Buddha to teach them meditations which are appropriate to them. The monks intended to stay at a forest for three months in rainy seasons which is called Buddhist lent (Vassāna). The Buddha taught them proper meditations. Having received proper instruction on meditation from the Buddha, they went to a forest in accordance with their intention. When the monk entered into the forest, the Devas (Rukkhasoe Nats) in the forest saw them.

\textsuperscript{11} DhaA. I, pp. 199-201 (Pancasatabhikkhu Vatthu).
Chapter III: Buddhism and Devas

The Devas went down to the earth (ground). They usually live in trees together with their children, but now they descended to the earth with their children as they respect the monks and their virtues.

The Devas thought that monks would stay at the forest for very short time; but two, three weeks later, they understood that monk would not go anywhere. At the same time, they found it very difficult for them to live on earth (ground) with their children. Therefore they sought ways to send back monks outside the forest. They showed monks unpleasant, fearful visible forms and shouted unpleasant and fearful sounds. Seeing such visible forms and hearing such sounds, monks could not concentrate on meditation and consequently there was no progression in meditation. Therefore the monks went back to the Buddha and mentioned this. The Buddha taught the monks Mettā Sutta, loving-kindness, to develop and send to the Devas and all living beings. Then the monks again went back to the forest and developed Mettā and sent it to Davas and all living beings. Due to the power of Mettā (loving-kindness) which overwhelmed the Devas, Devas became patient, polite, peaceful, friendly and kind to monks. They no longer showed unpleasant, fearful visible forms and shouted unpleasant, fearful sounds. Instead, they loved and helped the monks. From then on, Monks could concentrate on meditation and finally attained enlightenment.

In Ratana sutta\textsuperscript{12}, once Vesāli city had shortage of food. At the same time, serious diseases were rampant in the city and some ogres entered the city. The danger from ogres to the people became serious. The people approached the Buddha and asked him to protect them from the danger of ogres. The Buddha taught Ratana sutta to Ven. Ananda and

\textsuperscript{12}KhuA. I, p. 135 (Ratanasuttavannana)
monks. Ratana sutta can protect the reciter, listener, or contemplator from the danger of ogres, evil spirits, devils, ghosts and so on. Then Ven. Ananda leading other monks went to Vesāli which was covered with three walls and recited Ratana sutta throughout the walls. Due to the power of Ratana sutta recited by monks, the ogres ran away and people in Vesāli became safe and secure.

In the story of Ayuvaḍḍhanakumāra\(^\text{13}\), a child was in danger of being eaten by an ogre within seven days. The Buddha instructed that the child was to be encircled by the monks (kept in the middle of monks) and for the monks to recite Parittas and some other Suttas for seven days, one group after another without stopping the recitation. When virtuous monks recited the Dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, powerful Devas approached them to listen to the Dhamma. When powerful Devas came to monks, less powerful Devas moved back and devils and ogres etc. ran away. Then being recited paritta for seven days in accordance with the guidance of the Buddha, the victim (the child) became safe and secure because the danger to his life was within seven days.

Finally this child lived a long life until the age of 120. By reciting Metta Sutta, Devas love the reciter, listener, and contemplator and give protection as much as they can; by Ratana Sutta, and other Suttas, one can be free from danger like the people in Vesāli and the child called “Ayuvaḍḍhanakumāra”, and devils and evil spirits etc. can also be repelled. Therefore in paritta chanting or any Dhamma chanting of Myanmar, Devas are usually invited to listen to the Dhamma and to share merits to them. It does not matter whether

\[^{13}\text{DhaA. I, pp. 423-435 (Ayuvaḍḍhanakumāra Vatthu)}\]
monks or laypeople chant, recite the Dhamma, they firstly invite Devas. The invitation verses by elder monks are known to many:

"Samantā cakkavālesu, Attragacchantu Devatā; Saddhammam Munirājassa, Sunantu Saggamokkhdam; Dhammasavanakalo Ayam Badantā" (Wad. p.6).

Meaning: "Oh, Devas from all over universe! Come here to listen to the Dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, which can give you [a good destination], heaven, and freedom from Samsara – the cycle of birth and death. Oh Devas! This is the time to listen to the Dhamma."

3.3.2 Merit-making and Devas

The reference to Devas can also be found in several donation ceremonies. People in Myanmar and Burmese people in other countries occasionally invite monks for breakfast or lunch. Sometime, they go to a monastery and offer breakfast or lunch to all the resident monks and novices and also provide visitors, relatives who come to their donation ceremony. In such food donation, there is an agenda which is usually used to perform the auspicious occasion. The agenda normally consists of six or seven items. They are:

1. Food donation;
2. Veneration to the three Gems – the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Samgha;
3. Keeping precepts in front of monks such as "I undertake the precept refraining from killing one’s life; I undertake the precept refraining from stealing what is not given and so on."
4. Offering some more things such as robes to the monks;
5. Chanting Parittas by the monks and listening to the Paritta by the laypeople;

6. Listening to the Dhamma-talk addressed by a monk to the laypeople;

7. Developing and sending Metta\(^\text{14}\) to Devas and all living beings — such as “May all Devas be free from danger. May all Devas be free from mental sufferings (Domanassa) and have peace in mental. May all Devas be well and free from physical sufferings and have peace in physical. May all Devas be prosperous and maintain themselves to live a long life.”; and

8. Sharing merits, which have been done, to Devas, parents, teachers, beneficial people, and all living beings such as “I have done such and such good deeds or merits; I have such and such meritorious deeds or merits; I share them to you; please rejoice at my good deeds or merits so that you can get the same and be the welfare of your life”.

They first provide foods to monks and gather in a suitable place and perform the items mentioned above. Such religious performance can also be seen in other Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand etc. For instance, there are seven or eight items to perform such a ceremony in Thailand. Phya Anuman Rajadhon described this in his book entitled “Popular Buddhism in Siam and Other Essays on Thai Studies”. To perform a

\(^{14}\) For more clarification, the following notes, given by Ven. Janakabhivamsa, should be mentioned here:

“Developing Metta
Keep your mind incessantly occupied with metta and you will really develop metta for all. In other words metta must be developed so that your mind becomes enriched with loving-kindness.

Radiating Metta
When you radiate metta directed to someone while concentrating your thoughts on that person and wishing, “May so and so be prosperous”, your metta will communicate with the person on the receiving end. It happens as if your metta has reached that person’s mind. Therefore when you radiate metta directed to someone, people today say “you send metta to someone” (Janakabhivamsa, 1999, pp. 104-105).
Chapter III: Buddhism and Devas

Buddhist ceremony, they start lighting candles by the host or the honorable person in the audience. This is followed by lighting incense sticks, worshiping the three Gems, pronouncing three refuge formulas of the Three Gems, keeping five precepts, asking to recite Buddhist texts, preparing the roll of sacred cord and reciting texts (Rajadhon, 1986, pp. 58-59).

Furthermore, in Myanmar there are public Dhamma-talks given by monks to the laypeople in the evening usually — sometime at day time, when people are free from their daily work. The public Dhamma-talks are widely held in Myanmar. The agendas such as veneration to the three Gems, keeping precepts, etc. are applied to the public Dhamma-talks too and finally people share their merit to all beings including Devas. To sum up, Devas are invited to every merit-making ceremony or event and are shared merits at the end ceremony. Therefore the relation between Devas and Buddhism can be seen in one’s daily life one way or another.
CHAPTER IV

The impact and accommodation of Nat-worship in Burmese Buddhism – positive and negative aspects

4.1 Some reflections on (Local) Nat-worship

As mentioned in previous chapters, some people in Myanmar have dealt with many forms of Nats which are classified into two types of Nats in brief: local Nats and Deva Nats. Of the local Nats, some old forms of Nat-worship such as Naga-worship and some indigenous beliefs and elements like sword-waving had disappeared from Myanmar as time has been moving forward and human’s knowledge has been advancing to be able to reason with things. However, at present time, the concept of Naga has changed that some Nagas are Buddha’s disciples and protectors of the Buddha as the people learn the teaching of the Buddha such as the story of Musalinda\(^1\). Therefore, some people built Naga image under or around the Buddha images and pagodas in the senses that Nagas are followers and protectors of them. One remarkable thing regarding this concept is Naga-yone Bayar which is commonly seen in Myanmar. Maung Htin Aung gives the explanation of Naga-yone Bayar thus: “The name ‘Naga-yone’ became a term to describe an image of the Buddha with the coils of the Naga body being round, or a pagoda with large Naga figures around it (Aung, 1975, p. 113).”

Contrary to the beliefs that have been abandoned, some beliefs or elements of Nat-worship are still alive. Moreover some rituals such as Nat-Pwe or Nat festivals seem to be

\(^1\) Vi. III, pp. 3-4
very popular with some people particularly with those who are so fearful, greedy, and self-indulgent. Taung Byon Nat-Pwe and U Min Kyaw Nat-Pwe, for example, are very famous and are held yearly. Taung Byon is a village situated about ten kilometers north of Mandalay. Two brothers from the royal army were believed to have become Nats in the village after their death and were given a shrine. The Nat-Pwe, which is particularly held in the village for the two brothers, is called Taung Byon Nat-Pwe. According to Benedicte Brac de La Perriere, three annual festivals are held in the village in order to propitiate and honor the two Taung Byon brothers: 1) their departure to China for the war in December; 2) their return in March; and 3) their disappearance in August (Perrier, 2005, p. 71). However the former two are not known to many while the latter is known to many people. This third event is remembered as Taung Byone Nat-Pwe. In a report by Eleven Media Group on Sunday, 18 August 2013, there were tens of thousands of people who participated in Taung byon Nat-Pwe on the eleventh day and there would be around one hundred thousand people in 15 days: from the first to the last days. It reminds me a statement of Ninian Smart. Ninian Smart once stated: “religious studies sometimes has to contemplate political and economic facts” (Smart, 2007, p. x).

Economic facts and self-indulgence can be seen in those Nat-Pwes. This is described in the book “Please accept my respect smilingly and laughingly – Pyon Yoa Lea Kantaw Kham Par, Yee Yoa Lea Kantaw kham Par” written by Nu Nu Yee (Inn Wa). In the first chapter, she mentioned three characters: a thief, a poor woman, and a rich woman. All of them are not satisfied with their situations or lives. The thief asked a favor to Nats in

2 http://news-eleven.com/local/22327; zotero://attachment/2242/
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship

order to steal money easily. The thief thought that he could easily steal money in past years, but this year he could not do so even in that crowded Nat-Pwe. The poor woman asked to have a lot of money in business and she mentioned how she admired the two brother Nats and she also asked the Nats to forgive her husband for he does not believe in them. The rich woman asked to get back her husband’s attention. She was full of sadness in mind and she was not able to be happy even though she was rich enough, because her husband was believed to have been seeing other women. The main character (Nat-kadaw) in the book explained the chapter of self-indulgence in Nat-worship. The Nat-kadaw did anything good or bad for his standing and was self-indulgent. His purpose to be Nat-kadaw is to be self-indulgent (Yee(lnnwa), 1994, pp. 21-31). Moreover Benedicte Brac de La Perriere also gives remark on economic factor in Taugn Byone Nat-Pwe. She said: “They [Nat festivals] represent important, even vital, economic events for the villages involved and structure economic and social exchanges at the regional level (Perriere, 2005, p. 65).” Yee (Innwa) and Perrier caught the involvement and reason why the Nat-pww are famous and crowded.

Furthermore, in another book “You are welcome by offering the golden sarong – Wat Lal Taw Shwe Pasoe Tanththo Lo Kyuo Mal” written by Khin Khin Htoo, she described U Min Kyaw Nat-Pwe in upper Myanmar. The influences of economic factors are evident in this Nat-Pwe. A large market near the Nat-shrine appears once year during the Nat-Pwe (Htoo, 2008, pp. 115-132). Things sold or exchanged at this market include farming products and domestic products. This is an example of a long tradition which festivals (whether pagoda or Nat-pwe) become the market places where goods are exchanged.
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship

Ashin Esika stated that Nat-Pwes are famous in some societies because of the following factors: (1) those who are indulged in debauchery and all kinds of sensual pleasure; (2) those who are so greedy or who long for everything; and (3) those who are fearful (Esika, 1998, p. 113). Another scholar, Ven. Dhammapiya also found out the five basic facts of Nat-worship which are similar to Esika. People worship Nats based on: (1) fear; (2) greed; (3) to seek refuge in; (4) fear of abandoning their traditional belief; and (5) poor or limited understanding of Nat-worship (Dhammapiya, 2008, p. 11).

Professor Ven. Nandamalabhivamsa, the rector of ITBMU also has similar view. According to him, Man has capacity to ponder things naturally, but the capacity does not work when fear and desire hinder him. He described this in the preface of Ven. Dhammapiya’s work “Buddhism and Nat-worship” published in 2008.

“Human thought or consideration and human struggle or efforts are bigger, wider, stronger, more powerful and more capable of doing anything than those of other beings. They have mighty thought and capability and they can create many things even the world. However fear and desire in human make them weak and incapable of reasoning. These facts lead human to find refuge: some objects or somebody. Only can Human know the true cause(s) which are creating their life and which are bringing differences in life, with their sharp, wide, and deep knowledge and wisdom. We can find the facts that they do not have such knowledge and wisdom and, that they extremely fear for danger and poverty and, that they long for wealth, fame, and power in high position. These facts in human make them weak in dealing with Nat-worship, Nat-belief, or spirit-worship. At the same time, the facts or the weaknesses of human attach and pull them in order that they cannot refrain from worshiping Nats or spirits” (Nandamalabhivamsa, May, 2007).

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3 This is the abbreviation of “International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University” in Yangon.
Therefore, the basic causes for the popularity of Nat-Pwe are these three factors: extreme fear, extreme greed, and extreme self-indulgence. Other factors such as finding refuge in one of 37 Nats or any other local Nat and fear of abandoning their traditional beliefs stem from these three basic factors. From the very early age of human history, people started worshiping several objects with fear. For example, one should remember the people who lived in forest and near mountains and volcano in the past. When the trees in the forest fell down due to strong wind or certain natural disasters, the people thought that someone or some spirits who are powerful in the forest were angry with them. Therefore they made trees fell down. Similarly when the mountains near them fell down or when the volcanoes near them erupted, they did the same things. People assumed that the powerful spirits made mountains fall down or made the volcanoes erupt, because they were angry with the people. They therefore feared what they thought were powerful spirits. They did not want them to be angry and they feared of punishment from them. Therefore they started worshiping several objects such as trees, mountains and volcanoes. In the same way, people in the present age fear their Nats. They do not dare to miss regular offerings or annual ceremony to their Nats. In fear, some believe that if they forget regular offerings, the Nats will be angry and make their business fail, or that the Nats may make their family members sick. For instance, people who believe in Taung Byon Nats come to the Nat-Pwe every year, no matter where they live in the country. They go to the Nat-Pwe even if they are barely able to afford the money or the time.

Extreme greed or selfishness is a reason why Nat-Pwes are popular. For their greed and selfishness, people attend Nat-Pwes and they do reasonable or unreasonable things
there. In the past, kings and people sacrificed many animals, according to the instruction of fortuneteller, for the sake of their luck and fortune, no matter whether it is reasonable. In present day, some still approach the Nats and go to Nat-Pwe with the hope of getting help and favor from their Nats believing and they still sacrificed animal in some contexts. They hold Nat-kana, worship, or offer several things to Nats at home or some other shrines so that their husbands and sons are to be promoted in high position, their business, with or without enough effort, is to be succeeded, their gambles are to be won, the so-called hint from the Nats for gambling (such as gesture of something and dream) is to be gotten, their failed marriage life due to something like adultery is not to be broken off, and so forth.

Extreme self-indulgence in Nat-dance, Nat-music, and sensual pleasures is also another important cause of the crowded Nat-Pwe. This can be understood if one gives proper intention to the Nat-Pwe such as a big Nat-Pwe like Taung Byone or a small Nat-Pwe which is held at one’s home. The Nat-Pwe is held for propitiation to their particular Nats, but there must also be a hidden purpose which is for their enjoyment. They themselves want to participate in ceremonial entertainment to their particular Nats. Therefore, there is a colloquial term ‘Pyaw Pwe Shwin Pwe Paytal’ which means providing entertainment to certain local Nats. A Nat-believer asks to his or her inherited Nat to give him or her favor for example in business and promises that he or she in return will provide entertainment to the Nats if he/she is successful in the necessary cases.

Moreover, Nat-kadaws ask the Nat-believers to provide entertainment to the Nat if the request is fulfilled; these Nat-kadaws also remark that one’s success is due to the favor of the Nat, and that he or she must pay ‘Pyaw Pwe Shwin Pwe’ to the Nats for further
success. The Nat-kadaws are very fond of dancing and singing to entertain Nats. They get benefits from the Nat-Pwes such as mental satisfaction and material gain or comfort. The dance and music in the Nat-Pwe are so attractive. The Nat-kadaw can dance and sing very well. For some people, when they hear singing or music from Nat-Pwe, they are attracted to the Nat-Pwe and want watch and join in the singing and dancing. Sometimes the audiences are allowed to participate in dancing and singing in the Nat-Pwe. More than this, the audience sometimes can have good food and drinks such as fried chicken and special wine or alcohols in the Nat-Pwe. If the sponsors or Nat-kadaws to the particular Nat-Pwe scatter money for the purpose of enjoyment, the audience can grasp them. All in all, self-indulgence is one of the basic drivers of Nat-Pwes.

4.2 Discussions on Nat-worship

4.2.1 Did Buddhism promote Nat-worship in Myanmar?

Regarding the crowded Nat-Pwes in Myanmar, there may have been a question among some people: “Did Buddhism promote Nat-worship in Myanmar?” Buddhism clearly explains the concept of Triple Gems, of Kamma (cause and effect), and of Devas – Visuddhi Nats, Upapatti Nats, and Sammuti Nats, and also guides people to take refuge in themselves and to rely on their own efforts. Contrary to this, Nat-worship or Nat-Pwe which is practiced by some is based on fear, greed, and delusion. Some people want to take refuge in and rely on the Nats who could not be confirmed whether they really exist or not. Moreover, Nat-worship done by the people today is particularly to 37 Nats and other local Nats. Buddhism has nothing to do with them unless they are Devas – Visudhi Nats,
Upapatti Nats, and Sammuti Nats. Furthermore, this question can be considered or approached from three aspects in order to give answers or to understand the situation of Nat-worship: (1) the situation of Nat-worship before Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Myanmar; (2) the situation of Nat-worship after Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Myanmar; and (3) Buddha's teachings which would be directly or indirectly related to the concept of Nat-worship.

Before the introduction of Theravada Buddhism to Myanmar, there were several belief systems such as Naga-worship, Snake-worship, and Nat-worship in Myanmar as mentioned in second chapter. The degree of those beliefs might be more or less different from one another. Among them, Nat-worship was particularly widespread in the country. There was a Nat-shrine in front of every house in Bagan dynasty. There seemed to be very complex in the belief or religious systems of Bagan dynasty at the time, because there was also another sect of religion which was very influential to people there in Banga and which would be also considered as a kind of Buddhist sect. This is called ‘Ari’. This sect also gave special favor to or interest in Nat-worship.

In this situation, the new king to Bagna dynasty, King Anawrahta felt that a new religion needed to be introduced to his kingdom. He soon met a Buddhist monk called “Shin Araham” who came from lower part of Myanmar “Thaton” and who also belonged to Theravada Buddhism. The king was satisfied with the manner and practice of the monk and Buddha’s teaching which was delivered by the Venerable Shin Araham. Therefore, the king accepted the teachings of the Buddha and introduced Theravada Buddhism to his kingdom.
It is very clear that Nat-worship before the introduction of Theravada Buddhism to Myanmar was widely accepted and practiced.

After introduction of Theravada Buddhism to Myanmar by the King Anawrahta, the king studied the teachings of the Buddha from Shin Araham and he patronized Buddhism and made it in Myanmar. Remarkably, he canceled the existence of a sect called “Ari” in his kingdom as their concepts and practices were far different from Theravada Buddhism and the king forced the leaders and the followers of the sect to serve in military.

Moreover, the king campaigned for the abandonment of Nat-worship in his kingdom. He collected Nat-images to show that Nats were not that much powerful as some people thought and the king kept Nat-images in a temple which is later known as Nat Hkeng Kyaung (the monastery where Nat-images were kept). He also forced people to destroy Nat-shrines in front of their houses. People, out of the fear of the king, destroyed shrines in front of their houses, but some people rebuild small shrine inside their houses, because they also feared the Nats. They tried to worship their Nats secretly so that it was unaware by the king. However the king knew that it was very difficult for some people to abandon Nat-worship. Therefore, the king finally reduced the number of Nats to 36 and Thikya min (the king of Upapatti Devas) was placed into 36 in order to be 37 Nats and was appointed as the chief of the 36 Nats (Aung, 1975, pp. 73-74). Some powerful kings such as Bayinnaung forbade the sacrifice of animals in Nat-worship.

In Buddhism, the Buddha suggested that one should not take refuge in others. Instead, one should take refuge in himself or herself. [It does not matter whether mundane
or supra-mundane affairs, one should mostly take refuge in oneself]. Only if one tries by self, will he or she gain what is difficult to gain in the world (Dhap, 37).

In Dhajaggasutta of Sagāthāvagga Pāli in Samyuttanikāya, the Buddha said that people should remember and recite the attributes of the Triple Gems – the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Samgha when they feel fear or become anxious. For example, people sometimes have to go to forest or secluded places at day or night time and they might become fearful or anxious because they are being isolated from other people. During this time, people should remember the attributes of one of the Triple Gems. If one does not remember the attributes of the Buddha, he or she should remember the attributes of the Dhamma; if he or she still does not remember the attributes of the Dhamma, then he or she should remember the attributes of the Samgha. If one remembers the attributes of the Triple Gems or one of them with the intention of their meanings, he or she will overcome the fear and anxiety (S. I, pp. 220-222).

In the story of Aggidatta in Dhammapada, the Buddha described that seeking refuge in forests, mountains, parks, and shrines are not safe and secure. Instead, one should take refuge in Triple Gems so that he or she can hope the liberation of Samsara, the cycle of birth and death. The Buddha implied that he did not suggest or support the idea of finding refuge in mountains, trees or forests mentioned above, and that one should seek refuge in three Gems if he or she wants to know the four Noble truths and be free from Samsara (DhaA. II, p. 159). Here are the verses expounded by the Buddha:

“Human beings who tremble in fear seek refuge in mountains, forests, parks, trees, and shrines (Verse 188).
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship

These are not secure refuges. They are not the supreme refuge. One who takes refuge in them is not released from all sufferings (Verse 189).

If a wise person were to take shelter in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Samgha, he will observe the four noble truths with high wisdom” (Verse 190) (Weragoda Sarada (Trans.), 1993, pp. 621-622).

Therefore, Buddhism did not promote Nat-worship in Myanmar, because Nat-worship in Myanmar become less important after Theravada Buddhism was introduced to the country. The introduction of Theravada Buddhism to the country also brought understanding of Theravada Buddhism.

Two pieces of evidence of Buddhism not promoting Nat-worship in Myanmar are as follows. One is a documentary film which consists of an interview about Nats and another is films which contain derisive satires on Nat-worship. In the documentary film called “Friends in high places”, a foreign woman who was curious about Nat-worship interviewed a Burmese woman who lived in Mandalay who also knew traditional belief and culture. When asked why some Nats are so popular in Myanmar. The Burmese woman answered: “because of Nat-kadaw, some Nats become very popular”. According to her, Nat-kadaws are dramatic and good performers. They dance and sing songs beautifully for the Nats. These facts (dancing and singing beautifully) made the Nats famous. It seems that the more dancers and singers are good, the more the Nats become famous. The Burmese woman added some more information about Nat-kadaw:

“When some dance for the Nats, they are not possessed by the Nats. It is like the dancers who entertained the king. People make offerings and entertain the Nats. When the king held an audience, he had to be entertained. In a similar way, people entertain Nats. Some mediums [Nat-kadaws] lie people and say the Nats possess them” (Merrison, 2011).
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship

Then, some directors, actors, and actresses make films of Nat-worship and Nat-kadaw with the intention to indicate their falsehood. In some films such as “Nat-kadaw Ma Saw” and “Htoo Lae Htoo Tal Mue Lae Mue Tal Dot Kogyi Kyaw”, the falsehood of Nat-worship and Nat-kadaw can be seen. The director and actors also humorously described the real conditions of Nat-worship outside the play and showed the Nat-kadaw cheating people. They still give thoughtful hints regarding Nat-worship and Nat-kadaw even though they mainly make films funny. In the film called “Nat-kadaw Ma Saw”, Ma Saw, a Nat-kadaw in the film, is the main character. She had two daughters and a son in the film and also had an informer who told her what was happening at different corners of the city. The informer also brought a victim to Ma Saw. Ma Saw told the victim what happened and why it had happened to the victim as if she really knew about it (having been informed by her informer beforehand). Moreover she also has a little knowledge of human psychology. She combined human psychology and the information from her informer and cheated her victims by pretending as if she knew all to be possessed by Nats (Khaung, 2011).

In the fictional film “Htoo Lae Htoo Tal Mue Lae Mue Tal Dot Kogyi Kyaw”, a Nat-kadaw was performing in a Nat-Pwe. The actor and his friends in the film wanted to drink whisky, but they did not have money for this. Therefore they looked for ways to earn some money and they came across the Nat-Pwe. They met the Nat-kadaw as old friends. The Nat-kadaw also pretended them as his old friends as he thought he could add more numbers to the Nat-Pwe. The actor danced, drank whisky, and ate fried chicken by pretending that he was possessed by a Nat and also shared his good tidings with his friends. The Nat-kadaw expose them although he knew that it was not real, because he was the one
in the first place who pretended that the actor was possessed by the Nat. Eventually the actor fell down due to being drunk. Although the film was a comedy, it brought light to the issue that Nat-Pwe and Nat-kadaw were cheating people (Seine, 2010). Such cheating, pretending, dancing, and drinking alcohols are not found in Buddhism. Therefore it indicates that Buddhism did not promote Nat-worship in Myanmar.

4.2.2 Misunderstanding on the concept of Nats in Buddhism

There is also another fact/reason why Nat-worship is practiced in Myanmar. This is misinterpretation of some Buddhist texts which leads to misunderstanding. The concept of “Devatābali”, for example, is often misunderstood. Some Nat-worshipers refer to Devatābali as an evidence that the Buddha suggested people worship or pay respect to Nats. Some of them probably think that Devatābali means worshiping or paying respect to Nats as they do/take refuge in triple Gems. Indeed, the Buddha simply said to pay respect to Nats as you do proper respect to your relatives, visitors, Kings, Queens, or government officers etc. The Buddha used the same term “bali” for five things in the same passage with similar intentions. They are mentioned in Pattakamma sutta⁴, Adiya sutta⁵, and their commentaries: (Devatā means Devas or deities and, bali here means giving proper things.)

1. Nātibali – paying proper respects to relatives;
2. Atithibali – paying proper respects to visitors;
3. Pubbapetabali – paying proper respects to those who have gone;
4. Rajabali – paying proper respects to the Kings or Queens; and

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⁴ A. I, p. 379
⁵ A. II, p.39
5. Devatabali – paying proper respects to Devas (Upapattidevas).

In Dhananjânisutta of the sub-commentary of Uparipaññasā, Natibali is doing what should be done to relatives such as giving aid, providing necessity as much as you can. Atithibali is doing what should be done to visitors such as giving accommodation, providing foods and so forth. Pubbapetabali is sharing Kusala, meritorious deeds to those who have gone when you do meritorious deeds. Rajabali is doing what should be done to the Kings or Queens such as giving tax and so on. Devatabali is doing what should be done to the Devas such as giving foods, flowers occasionally. According to Tipitaka Pāli-Myanmar dictionary, bali can mean three things: tax, offerings, and paying respect.

Hence, Devatabali just means paying proper respects – offering foods, flowers – to the Devas when there is special occasion. In Buddhism, Devatabali is to be treated like other balis – Natibali, Atithibali, Pubbapetabali, and Rajabali. Moreover, Devatabali is similar to making friends. If someone makes friends with other people, he may, when necessary, get the help from others if they can give it. Conversely, if he does not make friends with other people, he cannot hope to obtain help from people because they do not know each other and they would not know what he/they needs. In the same way, Buddhism describes that the recognition of the Devas or making friends with them is wise as the Devas might assist when necessary. However Buddhism says that the Devas themselves are unable to directly give good or bad fortunes to someone. They can however increase the

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6 MT. III, p.197  
7 TipiD. Vol. 15, p.144
degree of bad or good fortune befalling someone. Therefore, in Buddhism, the term “Devatābali – paying proper respect to Devas”, the Buddha suggested making friends with the Devas in order to get some assistance from them when possible. The Buddha did not suggest worshiping or taking refuge in Devas as some people do in Myanmar, while even the Sakka (the King of Devas) whose status in Buddhism is Sotāpanna worships the men who are virtuous and dutiful in life. There is no way to suggest taking refuge in such and such Devas and local Nats.

4.2.3 Can Nats help and protect the people?

Can people hope any help from the Nats? Can Nats protect the people from danger? Can the Nats support the needs of humans? And if Nats can assist humans, it begs the question what kinds of Nats can provide assistance? These questions arose in the minds of many people in Myanmar particularly after Cyclone Nagis. In 2008, Nagis hit lower Myanmar and brought great amounts of destruction. Over a hundred thousand people are thought to have died as a result of the cyclone in the lower parts of Myanmar, in the delta area. Most of people in the lower delta area worshipped U Shingyi, one of the thirty-seven Nats, because U Shingyi is believed to hold power over the Sea and the delta area. U Shingyi is known as the “Ye Nyan Pia U Shingyi – the possessor of the Salty Sea”. However, when Nagis arrived, the people in the lower delta did not receive any warming signs and did not get any help from U Shingyi either before or after the cyclone. Therefore, doubts over whether.

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8 DA. II, pp.110-111
9 In Gahaṭṭvandanasutta. S. I, pp. 235-236
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship

It is unlikely that the Thirty-seven Nats and local Nats are able to help and protect people, because it is not certain if they even really exist. People imagined the Nats, created them in their mind, and practiced Nat-worship as if these Nats were existent. In Buddhism, it is rarely possible to get some help from the Upapatti Nats, and where and when they do, they only help righteous people. In Myanmar, for example, there is a female Nat who is believed to be related to the cultivation and harvest. The Nat is called “Pon-ma-kyi” and offerings are made to her at the time of cultivation in some places and during harvest in other places in order to achieve bountiful harvest. These people believe that they will be successful in harvest if they offer the Pon-ma-kyi regardless of actual success. The same Nat is worshipped in some parts of Thailand but has a different name “Me Posop or Mother Posop” which means ‘the Rice mother’ in Thailand (Rajadhon, 1986, pp. 135-139). This Nat might be worshipped in some other Buddhist countries as well but under different names because the concept of this Nat found in Buddhist texts.

During the time of the Buddha, there was an ogress who was also a kind of deity. The ogress used to kill men for her meal before she met the Buddha. She became a Sotapanna in Buddhist status after meeting the Buddha. As a result, she found difficulty in finding food, because a Sotapanna does not kill any living being. Therefore the Buddha asked a female devotee, who had connection with the ogress in previous lives, to provide the ogress with accommodation and food. The female devotee did as the Buddha said. Out of the gratitude to the family, the ogress, in return, provided some information regarding the weather thus: “The rain will come early this year. So you should cultivate early. The rain will come late this year. So you should harvest late.” People did as the ogress
suggested. The cultivation or harvest succeeded\textsuperscript{10} (DhaA. I, pp.33-34). Following this example, people seem to worship the Nat but this Nat is known by different names.

In human nature, if someone helps another, the person receiving help may in return give assistance or help (when he or she can do) even though it is not possible all the time. In the same way, Buddhism believe that if one gives offering to Nats, share merits from meritorious deeds that have been done, and develop and send Metta, loving-kindness to Nats, the Nats in return protect and help the people when they are able to do so. Understanding this nature, Buddhism gave a few suggestions to recognize the existence of Upapatti Nats near human and to pay proper respect to them. These suggestions and a few verbal help – directly or indirectly – from the Upapatti Nats can be seen in Buddhist texts and Burmese historical record as well.

The Buddha suggested that the wise should pay respect to house-Nats or other Nats by sharing Kusala, merits from meritorious deeds that have been done. A wise man should pay respect by giving offerings to the Nats once in four months or in six months and, sometimes should show his respect by offering on special occasions. The Nat who receive respects or offerings from the people think that “These people are not our relative, they offer things to us and they pay proper respect to us”. Thus the Nat show their respect to the people by protecting them from danger which will happen and by removing the danger which are happening to the people. Just as a mother gives a good care and protect her son, who came from her womb, from danger as much as she can, likewise the Nats help the

\textsuperscript{10} DhaA. I, pp. 33-34
people, show opportunity, and protect the people if the Nats are able to do so. The people, who are protected by the Nats, see good things (Khu. I, P. 188).

In Licchavikumāra Sutta of Pancaka Anguttaranikāya, the Buddha gave the message that Dear Mahānam, people respect to traditional Nats with his wealth and offering things to the Nats. Then the traditional Nats, who received respects and offerings from people, protect the people with the intention: ‘Be well and live long’. The people, who are protected by the Nats, do not lose their wealth and health. Instead they increase in wealth and health (A. II, pp.68-69).

In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of Dīganiyakāya, if the kings do not offer, in accordance with Dhamma, to the traditional Nats who have received offerings from previous kings, the traditional Nats do not protect the kings. Even though the Nats could not create harm or disease, they can make the increase of harm or disease which is happening to the people. In war, it is believed that the Nats protect the kings who give offering to them (D. II, p. 63).

In Ratana sutta of Suttanipata: “Oh Devas Nats, people offer you at day and night. Then you Nats should love the people in return and you should not forget to protect them from danger and help them be well and happy. The Buddha encouraged the Nats in this way. There are textual evidences regarding the fact that Nats protect and help people who are paying proper respect and offering to them (Khu. I, p. 312).

In Temijātaka, soon after he was born, the prince Temi, who was a Bodhisatta – Buddha to be, recognized previous two past lives: the life of hell and that of human. In previous lives, he was in hell before he was born to human life and he was a king before he
was in hell. He managed to do both good and bad things as a king. However demerits caused him to be born in hell when he died. When he was released from hell, he was born to royal family and he recognized both his previous two past lives. Therefore, he did not want to be a king again. However, according to royal custom, he must be crown prince. He was worried about this. In this case, a Nat, who was his mother in a past life, suggested him in order not to speak and pretend to be dumb. He did this until he turned 16 as the Nat said. So, the king did not think much about the crown prince. Then he could leave the palace and go forth to forest as an ascetic and he lived in the forest for the rest of his life (JaA. Vol.6, pp. 1-7).

Venerable Ananda, having attained Sotapanna – stream entry – in Buddhist status, used his time by giving Dhamma-talk to devotees. He could not attain higher stage of Dhamma in Buddhism. Therefore, a forest Nat reminds him for the welfare of Ven. Ananda: “Venerable, You have spent time by giving Dhamma-talk to the people. How does it help you attain higher stage of Dhamma in Buddhism? Please do not forget. Be mindful, Ven. Ananda. Therefore, venerable Ananda became aware and mindful and contemplated four mindfulness-based meditations and finally attained Arahantship before the first great Samgha council was held.

In another case, having gone for alms-around, a monk who lived in forest, returned to the forest. On the way to his place, the forest monk saw a lake where lotus flowers were blooming. He went to the lake and smelled the lotus. The forest Nat near the lake wanted the monk to be aware and mindful in Dhamma. Therefore, for the sake of the monk, the Nat said: “oh monk, you have stolen smell from lotus. Why? It is because you have smelled
what is not given to you. This is called a smell-thief or a thief of smell among thieves. You are a smell-thief (Saṃ. I, pp. 206-207). There had several discussions between both of them. Finally the forest monk practiced Dhamma and attained Arahantship.

In the commentary of Sakkapahña sutta\(^\text{11}\), there was a monk who was learned and very educated in Buddha’s teachings. He taught Buddha’s teaching to the disciples and audience for many years. Under his guidance, his many disciple monks had attained Arahantship, but he was still an ordinary monk in Buddhist status. His disciple who had attained Arahantship reminded him of this. Therefore he went to forest and started to practice Dhamma. He at first thought that he would attain Arahantship within a few days, because he knew all Buddha’s teachings thoroughly. Yet he did not attain Arahantship for 30 years. In the 30\(^{\text{th}}\) year, on one of Buddhist religious days after Buddhist lent, he cried thinking thus: “I have practiced Dhamma for 30 years; but I have not attained Arahantship. It seems that I am not to attain Arahantship in this life.” Thinking this, he became sad and he cried.

At that moment, a female forest Nat saw the monk and knew why the monk cried. She wanted to remind him and be aware of the nature of Dhamma therefore she also cried loudly. In this case, the monk asked:

Who is crying?

I am a female forest nat.

Why are you crying?

\(^{11}\) DA. III, 319-321
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship

Seeing that you are crying, I think that I can attain Magga and Pala—higher stages of Dhamma in Buddhism. Therefore I cried in order to get Arahantship.

When the monk heard the Nat's words, he remembered and became mindful. He thought thus: "Oh Mahasiva, even the female forest Nat laughs at you; this manner is not appropriate for you." (DA. II, p. 321). Then he contemplated the Dhamma more thoroughly and he soon attained Arahantship.

These are the cases described in Buddhist texts which involve Nats helping people. Such cases can also be seen in historical contexts. At the time of Bagan period, for example, king Anawrahta's father was always offered some amount of meal. A man always had his meal under a huge tree, which was called "Saung Chan Pin"; when he went to work and he always offered some amount of meal to the Nat in the tree before he ate.

One day, the Nat in the tree made appeared to the man and said: "You always offer me food before you eat meals. If you want to have a good fortune, please keep five precepts together with Saranagama—taking refuge in Triple Gems; use right speeches; and contemplate ten recollections for one thousand times." The man did as the Nat said and he soon became a king with the name of Kyaung Phu Min.

Therefore, the researcher believes, referring to Upapatti devas particularly to Caturmaharajika devas, Ledi Sayadaw suggested that people can worship, pay due respect to Lokapala Nats for the welfare of the present life, build Nat-statues and Nat-shrines, and offer things. Buddhist monks however must not worship, pay respect to the Nats and they should not build Nat-shrines and Nat-statues, but they can ask the people to build shrines.
and statues by giving wages. Those statues should not be offered by the monks, but people should be asked to do it instead of them. All of the above should be done for the welfare of the present life and freedom from dangers. Then even though one deals with Lokapa-Nats in this way, it does not mean that he leaves or deviates from taking refuge in Triple Gems because he is respectfully paying homage to the Triple Gems at the same time. (Myine, 2010, p. 20)

4.3 The Buddhist accommodation of Nat-worship in Myanmar

Some people worship local Nats such as Thirty-seven lords and other Nats who are not included in Thirty-seven lords. However the local Nats are not considered to be acceptable and respectable ones in Buddhism. They are believed to become local Nats (Nat-Scine) by the people when they died of an accident or persecution. Yet in Buddhist cosmological aspects, there is no concept of Nat-Scine. If ordinary people die, there are five destinations to go: Devas, Manussa, Niraya, Peta, and Tiricchāna. Nat-Scines are not Devas or the Nats in Buddhist texts, not Manussa, not Tiricchāna, and not in Niraya. In fact, Nat-Scines are Petas who are much lower than Manussa in status. Therefore they are not considered to pay due respects in Buddhism. However, in Buddhist ways of thinking, there is a good way to do if someone loves or thinks about the welfare of Petas. This is to do good deeds or merits and to share them with Petas so that Petas can rejoice at his or her good deeds and they can receive good results from their rejoicing. However this is one thing to describe here: there might be some local Nats who are under category of Catumahārājīka. If the local Nats are Bumma-soe or Rukkha-soe, the local Nats are acceptable to pay due respect, because they are included in Catumahārājīka.
Visuddhi Devas, of course, must be paid homage and, Upatti Devas and Sammuti Devas also should be paid proper respect for the reasons mentioned in chapter three. In addition to this, there is also another possible adjustment. This adjustment is Eine-Oo Nat which is worshipped in Myanmar particularly in rural areas and some parts of urban areas at present. Eine-Oo Nat is the father or grandfather of a family who leads the family. However Eine-Oo Nat can be male householder or female householder in a family though usually used for male. The concept of Eine-Oo Nat is acceptable to be paid respect in the sense that Eine-Oo Nat protects his or her family. Moreover paying respect to the Eine-On Nat in return by the rest of the family is showing deep gratitude and thankfulness. There is nothing false to do so. Therefore, the concept of Eine-Oo Nat and the worship to Eine-Oo-Nat are acceptable in Buddhism.

4.4 The impact of Nat-worship on Burmese Buddhists

The impact of Nat-worship on Burmese Buddhism can be seen in two ways: negative and positive aspects. This included interconnected impacts: for example the impact of Local Nat on Buddhism and Buddhist societies, the impact of Buddhism on Local Nats and societies who worship Nats. Some Buddhist thoughts shaped the idea of Local Nats and Nat-worship, some concepts of Nat-worship also shaped some Buddhist societies one way or another. Therefore, both negative and positive aspects are sometimes the sequences of Nat-worship, and sometimes become the causes to Nat-worship in return.
4.4.1 Negative aspects

First, people become fearful and anxious of unreasonable things. Therefore, they cannot consider whether their Nats, their belief, their rituals are reasonable or unreasonable. They fear to be against their individual Nats even in thought. A few years ago, a migrant worker, who was a native of Ohn Twe village\textsuperscript{12}, Hti Lin Township, was sick at Par Kant, Kachin state in rainy season. He saw a doctor. The doctor thought that it was a fever and he gave a prescription accordingly, but it did not work. Indeed, he was suffering from malaria. After two weeks, the symptom became clear as malaria, so the doctor changed his prescription.

At the same time, the patient thought, “I had been sick and I had seen the doctor for two weeks but nothing improved. It must be due to the Nats”. So he contacted his parents in native village and asked them to bring offerings to the Nats in the village for him. He soon felt better and recovered from malaria. However he thought that it was due to the Nat’s favor and his parents did the same thing. They did not think the doctor’s prescriptions had treated his malaria. They believed that their Nats can assist them, no matter how far away he was. In this case, the doctor did not say what disease it was, as the patient did not ask. If the doctor did not change his prescription when he knew it was malaria, the patient would have died of malaria. After hearing only one side of the story – the patient and his parents’, but not the doctor’s – some villagers also believe that the Nat is powerful. If they knew the doctor’s side of the story, how would they have viewed this story?

\textsuperscript{12} Ohn Twe is a village, where some parts of my field work are done, situated in Htin Lin Township, Magway Division
Another similar case happened in the same village in 2012. The people needed to buy wood from other villages while they were trying to make a bridge. Houses in the village and in the region are made of wood. They thought to cut down another kind of tree which is available in the nearest forest. They replied that such kind of tree is possessed by Nats and they did not dare to cut it down. Although they were poor, the villagers spent much money to buy wood from neighboring villages rather than source the readily available wood near their village. Fear and lack of knowledge led them to be blind on one hand and perceive Nats to be powerful on the other hand.

Second, people become lazy but are greedy. They long for wealth without exerting proper effort. They want to acquire material wealth and success easily. Therefore, they find easy ways that may or may not be legal. For example, some people gamble. They believe that their Nats will make them lucky, no matter whether they win the games or not. If they win, they are grateful to the Nats and if they do not win, they blame themselves that they are not lucky.

Third, they do not have confidence in themselves, their effort, and their knowledge. They do not seem to know their abilities, capabilities. For instance, they sometimes succeed in business, education, or anything on account of enough effort and proper knowledge in those cases, but they do not think about this reasonably thus “The success is due to enough effort and proper knowledge”. Instead, they consider that this is due to the Nats.

Fourth, some sacrifice animals when they worship Nats. It still can be seen though very rarely. In the past, animal sacrifice was commonplace in Myanmar. In Ohn Twe
village, for example, people brought domestic fowls to the shrine in forest and they killed them and cut off the wings, feet, and head. Then they hung them in the shrine with blood as an offering. (However this custom is no longer practiced nowadays. Instead, they offer snacks, home-made foods and so forth).

Fifth, some misinterpret some Buddhist texts which are about Devas in Buddhist concept and they misunderstand those texts. They try to link the concept of Devas (Nats) in Buddhist texts to local Nats. Misunderstanding of Buddhist texts is so dangerous for Buddhists, because it could not lead to the Buddhists’ goal, the liberation from Samsara – the cycle of birth and death.

Sixth, in some places, when a Buddhist child is going to ordain as a novice monk, he is shown to the local Nat. This is not mentioned in Buddhist texts and is unnecessary. However it still exists in some places as a local tradition.

4.4.2 Positive aspect

First, people easily came to understand and accept from Nats in Buddhist texts (Devas), Rukkha-soe Nats, Bumma-soe Nats, six celestial realms and so on, when Buddhism appeared to their societies. This is due to the fact that they had already accepted and believed in local Nats who cannot be seen prior to the advent of Buddhism. Moreover, Devas or Nats in the Buddhist texts sometimes can be seen if there is a special occasion. Maṭṭhakaṇṭalī-deva\textsuperscript{13} and Maṇṭuka-deva\textsuperscript{14} are examples. The two Devas considered how and why they became Devas after dying in their previous lives. Maṭṭhakaṇṭali, in his

\textsuperscript{13} DhaA. I, pp. 23-24
\textsuperscript{14} Vima. P.77; VimaA. P. 201
previous life, was so weak and near death. He was in bed and saw the Buddha, at the time, standing in front of his house. He could not say or do anything. At the moment, he was just very pleased in mind seeing the Buddha and died. He was born as a Deva due to the Kusala that arose in him at the time of seeing the Buddha.

The story of Manntuka-deva is another example. Manntuka-deva was a frog in his previous life. He was near the audience who listened to the Buddha, before he died. He also heard the sound coming from the Buddha. He listened to the clear, beautiful and powerful sound of the Buddha giving a discourse even though he did not understand what the Buddha was saying. While listening to the sound from the Buddha, he died of an accident and was born as a Deva. These two Devas approached the Buddha who was giving a Dhamma-talk to an audience and expressed their previous Kusala - meritorious deeds which caused to be born in celestial realm. People, having seen these Devas, truly believed in the Triple Gems and the doctrine of Kamma. Kamma is a Buddhist concept of cause and effect which teaches Buddhists the differences between people, even twins: some are short and some are tall; some are ugly and some are beautiful or handsome; some are poor and some are rich; some live long and some live short and so forth.

Second, Nat-worship positively impacts on environmental issues. People in some villages in Myanmar do not dare to cut off certain kinds of trees because they believe that the trees are possessed by certain Nats. For example, people in Ohn Twe village do not cut off ironwood (Pyin Thar). Instead of ironwood, they source other kinds of wood for use. Otherwise, they buy wood from other places. In some areas of Myanmar, big trees near villages are left as people believe that Nats possess the big trees.
Third, some aspects of Nat-worship changed morphed with the arrival of Buddhism in Myanmar such as the doctrine of Kamma. The doctrine of Kamma mentions cause and effect: For a simple explanation, if you do a good thing, you beget a good thing; and if you do a bad thing, you beget a bad thing. Therefore, though people in the past sacrificed animals as mentioned above, animal sacrifice eventually got phased out. Instead, presently, people offer Nats without killing animals like in the village of Ohn Twe.

Fourth, on some important Buddhist occasions such as the welcoming ceremony for Buddha relics from other countries and veneration ceremonies to Stupas, some people symbolize themselves as Devas (Upapattidevas), Brahmas, and Rajas - Kings. They dress up as Devas (Upapattidevas), Brahmas, and Rajas and pay respect to Buddha relics and stupas. The symbolization implies that the Buddha is the most respectable and admirable one in the world in term of Sila (morality), Samādhi (concentration), and Pañña (wisdom).

Fifth, in cultural dance or public dance, fallacy or mismanagement by others or government can be shown by people pretending that they are being possessed by Nats. Some actors and actresses indicate these cases in public by using satire.

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15 This is called dewar-win, brahmar-win, and Rajar-win in Myanmar which means that all Devas, Brahma, and Rajas welcome and pay respect to relic, stupas etc.
Chapter IV: The Impact and Accommodation of Nat-worship
CHAPTER V

Conclusion

5.1 A summary of the research findings

This study presents the concept of Nat-worship among some Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar. Although Theravada Buddhism took root in Myanmar a long time ago, some Myanmar people still practice Nat-worship together with Buddhism. In olden days, people in Myanmar practiced several cults: some practiced Snake-worship; some, Naga-worship; and some practiced Nat-worship. When Theravada Buddhism was introduced into Myanmar and it spread out the country, some cults including Snake-worship and Naga-worship gradually disappeared. With regard to the concept of Naga, notes are marked on certain days on some Burmese calendars: Naga’s head turns toward east, west, south and north in such and such months. This indicates the belief that someone should not enter Naga’s mouth or head, and should not go against Nagas’s scales when he or she has to travel. However this is no longer serious for contemporary people, particularly for young generations. Some young people do not even know about this belief.

Nat-worship sometimes becomes important for some people when they are in fear due to natural disaster or other negative event, and it is put aside and ignored when they are fine. Therefore Nat-worship varies in popularity: sometimes increasing in popularity and sometimes decreasing in popularity. It also implies that the belief or Nat-worship is not serious for them. However some people worship or respect their individual Nats with the belief that the Nats can help them succeed in business, achieve in education, and overcome
difficulties and so forth. Nat-worship can be seen briefly in two ways: worship to local Nats and worship to Devas. Local Nats include thirty-seven Nats and other regional and traditional individual Nats that are also used as Myanmar-born Nats sometimes. Devas are the Nats described in Buddhist texts. In brief, there are three kinds of Devas: Sammutidevas; Upapattidevas; and Visuddhidevas.

Regarding worship of local Nats, some pay respect to Thirty-seven Nats; some, regional Nats; and some pay respect to family or village traditional Nats. Although thirty-seven Nats are so popular in the matter of Nat-worship, there are many people who do not know about thirty-seven Nats. They just practice their regional or traditional Nat-worship. Regarding worship of Devas, people usually pay respect to Upapattidevas. They also worship Sammutidevas and Visuddhidevas, but this is in another sense – Buddha, Dhamma, Samgha, king, Queen, officers and so on. This is not in terms of Nat-worship, and also they do not consider that they are worshiping Devas in the name of Nat-worship. Some even do not know that there are Sammutidevas and Visuddhdevas and they do not have knowledge of who Sammutidevas and Visuddhdevas are.

People worship local Nats in different ways. Some people offer different offerings to the various Nats in accordance with their belief, because they believe that certain Nats accept and love such and such offerings. If one offers something which is not accepted or liked by the Nats, he or she is disliked by the Nats and it is believed that the unpleasant things, conditions, or ill-luck may follow him or her as punishment from the Nats. Some people worship the Nats at home; some – especially farmers – worship their Nats in the fields; and some go to shrines to worship Nats. Nats are also worshipped at Nat-festivals or
Nat-kanas in Myanmar. Some Nat-believers hold Nat-kana at their home when they have succeeded in particular endeavours. This Nat-kana is also held in village or regional level, but these usually once a year.

With regard to Deva-worship, the people worship Upapattidevas by sharing merits, which have been done, with the Nats. It is usually done after donation ceremonies, giving Dhamma-talk, reciting some Buddhist texts, listening to the Dhamma, or merit-making. Indeed, this kind of worship to this type of Deva is a daily routine for a Buddhist in Myanmar. However, for the Upapattidevas, there is no particular festival and no particular offerings as well. In terms of the number of Upapattidevas, Buddhist texts do not provide an exact number. Thikyamin (Sakka) and four Nat-mingyis (the four chief devas of Cātumahārājikadevas) are very important for Buddhists in particular. It is because Thikyamin is very concerned about Buddhism, and the four chief devas are not only concerned about Buddhism but also they are chiefs and leaders of Cātumahārājikadevas who are particularly in touch with people. The Devas, (who live in human realm such as Forest Nats, mountain Nats, the Nats near villages and so forth), are under the category of Cātumahārājika. Therefore, people worship, respect, or recognize the four chief Devas particularly in order to have assistance and protection from danger and suffering if the lower ranked Devas threaten them.

Sammutidevas and Visuddhidevas are also worshiped by the people, but when the people worship these Devas, people do not consider them as Nats. Instead of using these terms – Sammutidevas and Visuddhidevas – they consider the formal use or the simple way
of using terms as Triple Gems, teachers, parents, kings, and queens and so on. Accordingly, they worship Triple Gems and pay respect to parents, teachers and so forth for instance.

The researcher came to know that the concept of Nat-worship among Burmese Buddhists is different from one to another because the understanding of the worshipers, regarding their worshipped objects, differs from each others. Some have little knowledge of their Nats; some have more, but not enough knowledge; and some even do not have any knowledge of their Nats, they just follow and practice Nat-worship as a tradition. Therefore the researcher draws the following conclusion regarding the degree of understanding on Nats and Nat-worship:

1. They do not understand local Nats well;
2. They do not know about Devas well;
3. They do not figure out some Buddhist texts which explain devas, human, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in hell, and their differences. They do not clearly understand the core teachings of Buddhism such as Kamma (cause and effect), Paticcasamuppāda (dependent origination), and so on.

To make it clear, (1) local Nats are different from one another in various aspects. Their background stories also differ with regard to the following: where they lived in previous lives; what their situations, status in previous lives were; what happened to them; how they died and became Nats; why the people think and believe that they became Nats. As mentioned in Chapter II, they had similar facts which earned the admiration of people before their deaths: famous persons; heroes for some people; death by accident or force,
and so on. The Nat-worshipers do not know well the facts mentioned above even though they worship the Nats.

(2) Within the three kinds of Devas — Sammutidevas, Upapattidevas, and Visuddhdevas — Upapattidevas are many sub-types. There are many types of devas who live in the six celestial worlds, in terms of realm, which are away from human. These Devas do not usually want to come the human realm, because they feel that the smell of humans is so strong (or bad) for them. It seems that they could not stand with the smell of humans. Therefore, they do not usually come to the human realm in the day time. If there is a case for them to come to the human realm, for example to see the Buddha and listen to the Dhamma from the Buddha, they come to this world at night. Then they see and listen to the Buddha by standing up in a suitable place without sitting. However Catumahārājikadevas can be seen in two places: one in their own realm and another in human realm. Particularly the Nats in human realm have little concerns about or contact with human and the rest do not have it. Nat-worshipers do not understand this well.

(3) In Buddhist texts, there are five destinations after death: Devas, human, animal, hell, and hungry ghost. The texts not only mention the destinations, but also explain their life, value, differences in status, and the reasons why they go to different lives and why they are different from one another even in the same realm. The Nat-worshipers do not understand this either as well.

The researcher also found misunderstanding of Nat-worshipers on some Buddhist texts such as “Devatābali” mentioned in chapter IV. They also try to apply their
misunderstanding to some Buddhist texts as if some Buddhist texts are relevant to Nat-worship. Devatābali means nothing more than to pay proper respect — giving goods, clothes, flowers or sharing merits that have been done — to Upapattidevas as people do proper respect to their relatives, visitors, kings and queen, those who have passed away, or government officers. Besides, some Nat-worshippers misunderstand that even the Buddha suggested people to worship the Nat (Local Nats) with the term 'Devatābli'. Some of Nat-worshippers believe that the local Nats will help them succeed in all they need in the present and the Kusala (merits) or Buddhism helps them be happy in the next life. They say that the local Nats do not help the next life, and Buddhism does not give anything to the present life. These misunderstandings affect them physically and mentally for their way of life and of thought.

There are positive and negative impacts of Nat-worship on some Burmese Buddhists. Negative aspects of Nat-worship include the facts that people become fearful and anxious over unreasonable things. Therefore, they cannot ponder whether their Nats, beliefs, and rituals are reasonable or unreasonable. Their way of thinking is never against the Nats, if necessary to think about the Nats. These beliefs breed laziness in Nat-worshippers and greediness. They long for wealth without exerting proper effort. They want things easily. Therefore, they find easy ways to material gains which may be illegal. For example, gambling is popular among Nat-worshippers. They believe that their Nats will make them lucky in gambling, even if they win or lose bets.

As to positive aspects which can be found in Nat-worship, people came to understand the Nats in Buddhist texts (Devas), Rukkha-soe Nats, Bumma-soe nats, six
celestial realms even though they are not usually seen with their eyes. Nat-worship also
gives a positive impact on some environmental issues. People in some places do not dare to
cut off certain kinds of trees, because they believe that such kinds of trees are possessed by
certain Nats.

There are three main factors as to why Nat-worshipers cannot disregard worshiping
Nats, practicing Nat-rituals, and performing Nat-festivals. The three facts are: extreme fear,
extreme greed, and extreme self-indulgence. Other facts such as finding refuge in one of
thirty-seven Nats or any other local Nat and hesitating to abandon their unwanted
traditional beliefs are the consequences of these three main factors.

Some Nat-worshippers are extremely fearful of punishment from the Nats. They do
not want the Nats to be angry. They do not dare to miss regular offerings or annual
ceremony to their Nats. Some believe that if they forget regular offerings, the Nats get
angry and make their business fail and the Nats make their family members sick. Some
people worship Nats through greed or selfishness. They worship Nats for the sake of their
wealth, business, gambling, and job promotion without making enough effort to achieve
such successes. Some Nat-worshippers are extremely self-indulgent and are fond of
dancing and singing. These people find the dancing and music in the Nat-Pwe very
attractive. For the sake of self-indulgence, they perform rituals to dance and sing in the Nat-
Pwe and to attract crowds, and sometimes the audiences are allowed to participate in it.

Belief or worship should not be due to fear, greed, self-indulgence, attachment or
anything unreasonable. Such belief or worship should not be suggested or encouraged.
Belief or worship should be based on knowledge and wisdom which are capable of knowing or understanding what is right or wrong and what is reasonable or unreasonable. Wise, praiseworthy, and honorable people never would do and suggest any belief or worship without understanding. Therefore, true knowledge and understanding should be applied to any belief and worship. Then according to the knowledge and understanding, one should decide whether he or she should accept and practice the belief and worship.

5.2 Further research

Further research in the field of Nat-worship in Myanmar regarding Buddhist kammic, psychological, and phenomenological aspects can be carried out. It would be interesting to do research if Buddhist Kamma theory supports or denies the concept of Nat-worship and if psychology impacts Nat-believers who practice Nat-worship. Therefore, the following research areas are recommended for those who are interested in the area of Nat-worship in Myanmar and who would like to study it further.

1. A critical study of Nat-worship in Myanmar from Buddhist kammic perspective
2. Nat-worship, psychology, and their relation
3. The concept of Devas in Buddhism
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