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Profile of U Ba Than

Born 1930, Mandalay. High School education at St. Peter's English School, Mandalay. Two-year Intermediate Class at Mandalay, University College 1947-49; B.A. Yangon University 1951. Bachelor of Law 1955. Post-graduate studies at Harvard and Williams College, Mass., USA (1961-62). M.A. in Development Economics 1962.

Served for three years as tutor in English, Mandalay and Yangon Universities (1951-54). Selected into the Civil Service through Public Service Commission's open recruitment 1954. Served in responsible positions in District Administration and in various ministries as Assistant and Deputy Secretary, in Yangon Secretariat. Served in the Customs Department as Assistant Commissioner for 12 years, then transferred to Public Services Department.

Appointed Director-General 1988 and retired in 1991. Extensive overseas travels to USA, India, Indonesia, Singapore.

Memorable research and publications include co-author

and editor of four-volume 1000 page treatise on History of Recruitment in Myanmar Public Service in Myanmar, Translator's Reference, a four-volume work in Myanmar, and a coffee table book Myanmar—a land of courtesy and opportunity in English.

Contributed articles and translations in Myanmar and English. Sarpay Beikman Award Winner (Translation category) 1990.

Married to Daw Khin Mi Mi, M.Sc., retired Lecturer in Zoology, three children. Residence: 119 Thit Yar Pin Road, Thuwunna.

Foreword

Myanmar is known to the world by many endearing names: land of the golden pagodas, land of rubies and jade, land of beautiful damsels and smiling peoples. Glimpses into the literary gems written by reputable pens of distinguished visitors: Michael Symes, Marco Polo, Manucci, Kipling, Scott (Shwe Yoe), Maurice Collis, Luce and many others had long proved that Myanmar was a tourist haven since the earliest days of its glowing history.

Then there was a long long spell when the focus of attention as a tourist spot was somehow lost on this fascinating country: 'A land where time has stopped,' quipped one; '(a country) where the door is closed to the outside world of tourism,' interjected the others.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, heralding the new millennium 2000, the world has come to witness a new flowering of travel, the dawn of the Golden Age. Growing affluence of the middle class in Europe, the Americas and Asia has spurred the search for new frontiers of travel, to discover the unexpected, something mystic

and magical, somewhere off the beaten track seldom frequented, and enjoy in ecstasy the unfolding panorama of thrills and excitement, all of these phenomena signalling the prospective tourist boom in the years ahead. The World Trade Organization has projected the tourist traffic to soar to 1.6 billion beyond the year 2000.

The climate of change is visible and vibrant in Myanmar. Its modest debut of 'Visit Myanmar Year 1996' and concomitant improvement of infrastructure, tourist-friendly facilities highlighting what is truly unique to Myanmar, has attracted more tourists to visit this once little-known land that had 'slept peacefully'. Visitors converge to this serene land with new sights to marvel at, new souvenirs to treasure: from pigeon-blood rubies, blue sapphires and lush green imperial jade to exquisite tapestries, lacquerware, teak handicrafts and a wide variety of exotic ethnic and national food to savour.

A new surge of interest in Myanmar is on the upbeat, generating demand by the reading public for updated books on Myanmar. Private media is quick to capitalize on the opportunity and in no time many books, journals and magazines now stock the bookstalls at home and abroad.

It was in this propitious scenario that a quality English magazine 'Myanmar Perspectives' made its debut in August 1995. Its objective is to present Myanmar from a multi-dimensional kaleidoscope to the world that knows yet so little about this South-east Asian country. Many articles, essays and poems were contributed by well-known

writers from all calling, well versed in the English language and literature, i.e. academicians, medical practitioners, historians, economists, lawyers and professionals from all areas of expertise. Almost all of them are natives of Myanmar, rendering at first-hand the wealth of their knowledge, experience and proficiency. The author is a regular writer for this magazine.

This small compilation consists of 30 essays, grouped into two sections: one peering through the social fabric, i.e. festivals, beliefs, traditions, customs, legends, tourist spots, etc. tantalizing the readers to a fascinating perspective. Thingyan water festival is one gala extravaganza which one and all can freely enjoy without discrimination as to race, colour or creed, the so called weaker gender most hilariously receptive. The scintillating festival of lights and the balloon competition at Taunggyi is an anecdote you will never forget. Legends, and the realm of spirits will hypnotise you to an enthralling phenomenon that will linger on in the midst of the sphere of pragmatism.

The second section touches on a richly diversified array of appetizing popular snacks, both national and ethnic, readily available, well worth a try. Certain similarities may be sensed due to the ethnic affinity among the Orientals, but there is uniqueness intrinsic to Myanmar in all its presentations, like Mohingar, lephet, tofoo, glutinous rice, etc.

The essays are designed for light reading, light in form but not in content. The tempo thus has to be light, jaunty

with a liberal sprinkling of wit and humour, to enable the readers to sense and feel what is Myanmar and leave with fond memories. These were in fact written over a period spanning a decade, and so some of the given facts current at the time of writing might have changed somewhat during the intervening years by the time this book goes to print. But the underlying theme is still relevant to the social spectrum of Myanmar. Furthermore the content of essay read in each individual issue may well have purveyed the message intended by the author. However, when compiled into book form such as this, certain repetition could not be avoided nor could it be amended at the expense of disrupting the style of the text. The author could only submit his profound apology for such inconvenience.

Finally the author sincerely wishes that this small presentation will give you a moment of enjoyable reading. If by any chance these episodes may have succeeded in warming a heart or two or better if more, then he shall deem that heartbeat to be a fitting reward for all his endeavours