



A SHORT  
BIOGRAPHY OF

THE VENERABLE

**LEDI  
SAYĀDAW**

Aggamahāpaṇḍita, D. Litt.  
(1846–1923)

Venerable Ashin Nyanissara  
(SITAGU SAYĀDAW)

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The front cover background image is a photograph of a large Burmese monastery, possibly at Wuntho in Sagaing Division, taken by Philip Adolphe Klier (c.1845–1911) in the 1890s.

## THE VENERABLE LEDI SAYĀDAW (1846–1923)

- \* The most eminent and highly respected teacher of *Tipiṭaka*,
- \* The most gifted and summit scholar,
- \* The bravest and boldest author,
- \* The great pioneer of meditation master,
- \* The most excellent preacher of the Dhamma,
- \* The most admired and the brightest eye of the West.



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## An Appreciation

There are no words appropriate or adequate to express my feelings of deep gratitude towards my great-grand Dhamma teacher, the most reverend late Ledi Sayādawgyi. He was the most brilliant star in the galaxy of Dhamma teachers of this age, both in the fields of Pariyatti as well as Patipatti.

The present book on his life is written by Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaj Venerable U Nyanissara of Sagaing Sitagu monastery. He is one of the leading personalities in the present day Myanmar Saṅgha. It is all the more a pleasure to learn that this book was written while Venerable Sayādaw visited Dhammagiri, Igatpuri (India) to practise the Vipassana technique as taught by Ledi Sayādaw.

May the readers of this book get inspired to walk on the path of liberation and attain real peace.

Metta Cettena  
(U S. N. Goenka)



# A Short Biography of the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw

(Aggamahāpaṇḍita, D. Litt.)

Known to scholars around the world, the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw was born on Tuesday, the 13th Waxing of Nattaw, 1208 Burmese Era (1846 C.E.) at Saing-Pyin Kyee Village, Dipeyin Township, Shwebo District, Sagaing Division of Myanmar (Burma).

## Childhood

Ledi Sayādaw's parents were U Tun Tha and Daw Kyone. Their first child, a son, died when he was very young. A brilliant rainbow foretold the future of their second child on the day of his birth. This rainbow arose from a tamarind tree on his family's estate. Rising up to the firmament, it then descended into the house of his birth. Then, it ascended through the roof of the house into the sky with a brilliant radiance. Due to this auspicious event the child's parents and relatives awarded him the title of Tat Khaung. In Burmese, *tat* means to climb, rise, ascend, and *khaung* means the top, summit, culmination; so Tat Khaung means one who will climb to the top, who will become the summit or fore-most in every field of Buddhism. As a child, he was therefore known as Maung (young boy, master) Tat

Khaung, later to become Ledi Sayādaw (Leti Sayādaw), the most outstanding Buddhist figure of this age.

Maung Tat Khaung's first younger brother, Maung Tat Swā, passed his life as a pious layman; his second younger brother, Maung Tat Pwar, became a very eminent scholar-monk named Ledi U Kumāra, or Paṭhama Pyan U Kumāra (meaning the first and foremost among those taking the recitation examinations); his third younger brother, Maung Tat Twar, also became a learned and principled monk named Ledi U Kitti. As founder of Ledi Nikāya (the Leti Organization), Maung Tat Khaung became known as U Nyānadhaja (the most excellent and greatest sage, the great benefactor of scholars worldwide, the distinguished lighter of the lamp of meditation for the modern world, the extraordinary discoverer of the renascent age of meditation) = the Ledi Sayādaw (Leti Sayādaw), Aggamahāpaṇḍita, D. Litt.

## Explanation of terms

(1) Ledi = Leti

The actual term is *Leti* but it is pronounced *Ledi* in Burmese. *Ledi*, the name by which the Sayādaw, his monastery and his region is best known outside of Myanmar, will be used throughout this book.

Before Ledi Sayādaw's time, a short distance to the northeast of the city of Monywa in Upper Burma, the land was completely covered with a jungle of dense underbrush and tangled vegetation where many wild animals and birds lived. Farmers cleared parts of this jungle, and farms were created on this once wild land on the outskirts of the city. In Burmese *Le* = farms, *ti* =

invention, and *taw* = forest. Therefore, this area became known as the farms-invention forest, known in Burmese as *Letitaw*. Later, the Burmese people pronounced it *Ledi Tawya* (*ya* = place).

(2) Sayādaw = Sayāṭaw = Sayā + Taw

Sayā = teacher;

Taw = great, respectable

Sayādaw (Sayāṭaw) stayed in the midst of this jungle, practised meditation and established meditation and education monasteries. Taking the name of this place, Sayādaw and his monasteries became known as Ledi Sayādaw and Ledi Monastery.

(3) Dipeyin

(name of the township where he was born) Ledi Sayādaw in the conclusions of the *Paramatthadīpanī* and the *Niruttidīpanī* wrote of his birthplace:

*Nagare dīparaṅgamhi,  
Gāme “saing-pyin” ti nāmake;  
Aṭṭhasuññadvayekamhi,  
Sāke jātena yā mayā.*

In the township of Dīparaṅga,  
At the village named Saing Pyin:  
In 1208 B.E. (Burmese Era)  
I was born.

*Tattha nagare dīparaṅgamhīti dīpavāsimahājanam  
rañjetīti dīparaṅganti laddhanāme nagare.*

Dīpa = Globe.

Ranga = Attraction.

This town attracts people from all over the globe.

Therein, what does *nagare dīparaṅgamhi* mean? It means the town which will become renowned to people from all over the globe.

#### (4) Saing Pyin Kyee

In the following commentary, Ledi Sayādaw describes the village where he was born.

*Gāme Saing-pyinti nāmaketi rohitamiḡānaṃ  
nivāsabhūmitale patitṭhitattā evaṃnāmake mahāgāme.*

It states that long, long ago, in the areas surrounding his native village, there were many kinds of wild animals: bison, deer, barking deer, antelope, reindeer, hyena, wild beast, goat, etc. Primarily, bison (*rohitamiḡā*) dwelled all around the village.

Saing = Bison

Pyin = Many-Scattering

Gāma = Village

Therefore, it was called the Saing Pyin Village.

## Early Monkhood (1218–1228 B.E.)

At ten years of age, Maung Tat Khaung was sent by his parents to the monastery of Sayādaw U Nanda, who lived in Kyaung Ma Taik, the principle monastery of Saing Pyin Kyi Village. Maung Tat Kaung learned the Burmese language and began the study of the foundations of the Pāli language. He learned by heart the *Lokaṇīti*, the *Dhammaṇīti*, 11 *paritta suttas*, etc. At the age of fifteen, he was ordained as *samaṇera* (novice) under the guidance of his preceptor, Sayādaw U Nanda, at Kyaung Ma Taik, in Saing Pyin Kyi Village and thus fulfilling the expectations of his parents. Sayādaw U Nanda gave him

the name *Nyānadhaja*, which means possessor of the wisdom-banner.

By age eighteen, he had mastered the Vedas under Sayādaw U Gandhamā, a Veda expert, in Ye Thwet Village near Saing Pyin Kyi. Meanwhile, Shin Nyānadhaja wrote many poems in Burmese and Pāli, verses concerned with ordination, Jātaka stories, and a Pāli-Burmese grammar.

When he turned twenty years of age, in 1228 B.E. (April 20, 1866). Shin Nyānadhaja was ordained as *Upasampada* (taking higher ordination) under the instruction of his preceptor, Sayādaw U Nanda, in the Sima (ordination hall) named *Sāsana Vuddhi Sāsana Vepulla Sāsana Sobhini* of Myin Tin Monastery, Saing Pyin Kyi Village, Dipeyin Township. As a student, U Nyānadhaja had read all of the books housed in the collections of five monasteries of two Saing Pyin villages (Saing Pyin Kyee and Saing Pyin Kalay = Greater Saing Pyin and Lesser Saing Pyin).

In 1229 B.E. U Nyānadhaja went to Mangalā Sankyaung Taik in the northern part of the city of Mandalay.

## History of Sankyaung Taik

When King Mindon established his new capital and palace in Mandalay, he moved his former palace, San Nan Taw, from the old capital of Amarapūra to the new capital of Mandalay. Here he had it reconstructed and donated as a monastery for the benefit of the *Sāsana* donated to Sayādaw titled *Sudassanavara Mahadhammasāmi Rajadhirājadguru* and *Sudassanadhaja Atuladhipati Siripavara Mahadhammarājādhirājadguru*. It was named Sankyaung Taik (*Mahājotikārāma* in Pāli).

King Mindon established over 400 monasteries surrounding his new capital in Mandalay with over 2,000 monks living in each monastery. This was a period of great patronage of and participation in Buddhist study and practice, truly a Golden Age for Buddhism. When U Nyānadhaja learned the Pāli *piṭakas* in Sankyaung Taik, there numbered over 80,000 monks in Mandalay. According to the regulations of Sankyaung Taik (a *kyaung taik* is a scholastic center), every student-monk (*bhikkhu*) must learn the *Pātimokkha* (227 rules of conduct) by heart and recite them every evening at the time of homage to the Buddha. U Nyānadhaja would take his place behind all the student monks and recite with them the 227 rules in a loud voice that was sweet and clear. He thus became a leader in chanting ceremonies. U Nyānadhaja stayed at Sankyaung Taik in Mandalay for 10 years. During this period he learned all of the *Piṭakas* including the *Aṭṭhakathā* and *Tikās* (Commentaries and Subcommentaries) completely and expertly.

## **The Fifth Great Saṅgha Council (1233 B.E.) (*Pañcama Saṅgāyana*)**

According to the Burmese Era, in the year of 1233 B.E. (1871 C.E.), on the full moon day of May, the Fifth Great Saṅgha Council (*Pañcama Saṅgāyana*), supported by King Mindon, was held in the Royal Palace of Mandalay. This great Council was headed by Bhaddanta Jāgara (Phayargyi Sayādaw), Bhaddanta Narinda (Sibani Sayādaw) and Bhaddanta Sumaṅgala (Myinwon Sayādaw). Over 600 selected monks participated.

In the Fifth Saṅgha Council, monks recited the entire *Tipiṭika*. From Thit Saint Kyaung Taik the monks

participated by reciting the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, monks from Salin Kyaung Taik participated by reciting the *Sutta Piṭaka*, and monks from Sankyaung Taik participated by reciting the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. In this great Saṅgha reciting assembly, held in the Golden Royal Palace, U Nyānadhaja recited orally, without any aides, the *Kathāvatthu Abhidhamma*, the fifth book of the seven which comprise the *Abhidhamma*. He was cheered and greatly honored by the Kings, Saṅgha and laymen. Based on this assembly of oral recitation, the great, pious, and righteous King (Mahādhammarājā) had the entire *Tipiṭaka* inscribed onto 729 slabs of marble and housed in the Kuthodaw Pagoda below Mandalay Hill. Collected into one big heap like a book, the collection would surely be the largest book in the world!

## **Becoming Ledi Sayādaw (1229–1244 B.E.)**

During his stay at Sankyaung Taik, U Nyānadhaja continued to study and learn the *Tipiṭaka* texts, commentaries and subcommentaries under the guidance and teaching of Sankyaung Sayādaw, Makutārāma Sayādaw, Salin Sayādaw and other eminent scholar-monks in Mandalay. He also gave lectures on the *Tipiṭaka* to the 2,000 student monks at Sankyaung Taik. He was considered most skillful in teaching the *Abhidhamma* and Pāli grammar. After *Saṅgāyana* (The Fifth Saṅgha Council), in the tenth year of his monkhood (1239 B.E., 1877 C.E.), his great skill at lecturing was recognized by the King, who awarded him the title of *Pathama Sācha* (First Great Lecturer).

When he had been 14 years in the monkhood, U Nyānadhaja was teaching *Tipiṭaka* students at Sankyaung

Taik. When Sankyaung Sayādaw set out twenty questions in Pāli about *pāramis* (perfections) of Buddha, Pacceka Buddha (Independently Enlightened One) and *Sāvakās* (Noble Disciples). Among the 2,000 student monks, no one could answer these questions satisfactorily except U Nyānadhaja. So excellent were his answers that they were collected and arranged to be published in his first book, called *Pāramīdīpanī* (The Manual of Perfection).

On every sabbath day (*Uposatha*) U Nyānadhaja used to visit the Duke of the Yo region, Minister U Hlaing. U Hlaing was a gifted and learned person in many fields with a keen intellect, and he had written many books. U Nyānadhaja spent long hours with him in discussions of both mundane (*lokiya*) and supramundane (*lokuttarā*) aspects of reality. From these discussions he mastered the comparative study of discourses, verses, proverbs, poems, etc.

Later, Shwe Yay Saung Sayādaw instructed Man Aung Sayādaw to translate the *Nigamagāthā* (conclusion stanzas) of *Maṇisāramañjūsātīkā* from Pali into the Burmese language. Man Aung Sayādaw turned this task over to Sankyaung Sayādaw, who assigned the task to U Nyānadhaja. The stanzas were very deep and very complicated to understand properly. U Nyānadhaja was able to render an excellent translation, which highly satisfied the Sayādaws.

During this period Burmese students and teachers of *Abhidhamma* relied heavily on a Sinhalese commentary, the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvanīṭīkā*, written by the Venerable Summangalasāmi of ancient Ceylon (Sri Lanka). U Nyānadhaja heard a discussion among Sinhalese (Sri Lankan) scholar-monks who were visiting Mandalay at the time. They said, “Burmese monks do not understand



*Abhidhamma* and Pali grammar correctly because they are studying and teaching the *Abhidhammathavibhāvanītikā* in which there are many mistakes in both theory and grammar. Have they not discovered and realized these mistakes?" So U Nyānadhaja firmly resolved to some day write a new *Abhidhamma Tikā* and new Pali grammar texts.

U Nyānadhaja had arrived in Sankyaung Taik (*Mahajotikārāma*) in Mandalay in 1229 B.E. Ten years later, in 1239 B.E., he was honored as first Great Lecturer (*Pathama Sācha*). One year later, King Mindon passed away. In 1240 B. E., Thibaw, the son of Mindon, became King. Then, in 1244 B. E., in the fourth year of the reign of King Thibaw, the whole capital of Mandalay was ravaged by fire, including many parts of the palace and Sankyaung Taik. U Nyānadhaja lost many books, notes, references, quotations, etc., in the fire. He had spent sixteen years in Sankyaung Taik in Mandalay: nine years as a student and seven years as a teacher. As long as he dwelled there, he buried his life in the service of the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha*. He always cleaned the whole monastery and compound. He washed all the toilets in the morning and daily fetched drinking water, bathing water and toilet water for all the monks during those 16 years. In 1244 B.E. after the great fire, U Nyānadhaja paid homage to Sankyaung Sayādaw and left the gutted palace and monastery in the capital. He went to Monywa. Three years later, in 1247 B.E., the British occupation forces arrested King Thibaw and sent him into exile at Ratanagiri, near Bombay, India.

## Retreat to Ledi Forest (1248 B.E.)

In Monywa (Town) U Nyānadhaja stayed at Shweseikhon Kyaung near Shweseikhon Pagoda for a short period of time and then returned to Saing Pyin Kyi Village where he was born. In 1245 B.E., he spent his rainy retreat (Buddhist Lent or *vassa*) at a bamboo vihara near Mārajina Pagoda, near Monywa. During the rainy retreats of 1246–48 B.E., U Nyānadhaja stayed at U Wine Monastery, donated by Thangyo U Wine, a merchant from Monywa. At the end of the rainy retreat in 1248 B.E. (1887 C.E.), Sayādaw withdrew into Ledi jungle (mentioned before). Sayādaw's disciples searched for him for many days. Finally, they found him sitting alone under a huge tamarind tree with only three robes and one black bowl in the middle of a thick jungle, called Ledi, to the northeast of Monywa. This marks the beginning of the era of Ledi Sayādaw and of his monastery called Ledi Kyaung Taik.

Around this time Sayādaw started preaching not to eat oxen and cattle. He preached that oxen correspond to fathers, who plow the land and give food to the whole family. Cows resemble mothers, who feed milk to children. Human beings should not eat the meat of oxen and cows, so similar are they to parents. Sayādaw wrote many open letters at that time urging people to abstain from eating beef (“The Letter of Fervent Love for Cattle”, or *Gomettasa* [in Burmese], an admonitory letter for the abstention from eating beef).

In those days, in the Ledi jungle, various ogres, ghosts, giants, spirits, etc., were threatening and frightening the people who came there. These creatures were frightening even to the Sayādaw as he meditated alone in the forest. In response, he developed deep *mettā*-

*bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation) toward them. This bound the creatures to him with a spirit of love and kindness. They immediately became the Sayādaw's friends and attendants and never frightened the people again. Because of this, Sayādaw's fame and high esteem spread among the people, and he became known as "Ledi Sayādaw". Soon after, three young monks who had been Sayādaw's students, came to him in his forest *vihara* in order to attend him, care for all his needs and learn the *Tipiṭaka* from him. As the students and monks attending him gradually increased, Sayādaw's devoted and pious laypeople extended the accommodations at his monastery. When learned monks from many places began coming to Ledi Sayādaw to study scriptures and meditation, the pious laypeople built many residential monasteries, dining halls, teaching halls, preaching halls, shrine halls, meditation halls, secluded huts, stupas, Buddha images, water wells, water tanks, etc. Sayādaw consecrated ground to build an ordination hall. He designated the Ledi Monastery as *Sādhujanapāsādikārāma* (meaning "the monastery for the gladdening of good people") and named the ordination hall *Sāsanasobhinisīmā* (meaning the consecration for the courtesy of dispensation). These names were insignificant in the legend of Ledi Sayādaw. The monastery and the Sayādaw became renown throughout the world as Ledi, the name taken from the forest near his birthplace.

Sayādaw U Nyānadhaja established Ledi Monastery and Ledi Organization at the age of forty, in 1248 B.E. (1886 C.E.). From the establishment of Ledi Monastery until 1257 B.E., for twelve years, he taught the *Tipiṭaka* to student-monks who came from various places. Everyday, Sayādaw swept the shrine halls, terraces, open spaces and stairways of Sutaung Pyae and Shwesikhon Pagodas in Monywa.

He swept the whole campus of the monastery, cleaned all the toilets, filled all the water pots with fresh water, attended and nursed sick monks and gave his holy services to all monks.

Amongst his many activities and obligations, Ledi Sayādaw was also able to accomplish a task he had set for himself many years before at Sankyaung Taik in Mandalay. Remembering the Sinhalese commentary on the *Abhidhamma*, the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvanīṭikā*, Ledi Sayādaw discovered and corrected over 230 errors in it. From his studies and lectures, he compiled a new commentary on the *Abhidhamma* in 1259 B. E., entitled the *Paramatthadīpanīṭikā*.

In spite of his renown, over twenty different monks criticized and denigrated this work and wrote twenty *Tikās* of their own to contradict the *Paramatthadīpanīṭikā*. However, most of those deprecating commentaries are hardly remembered among scholars and students today. Only two became even slightly famous in Burma. These were the *Paramatthavisodhaniṭikā* by Khyaung Oo Sayādaw U Dīpa and the *Aṅkuraṭṭikā* by Talinelone Sayādaw U Vimala. The *Paramatthadīpanīṭikā*, on the other hand, has become a standard reference on the *Abhidhamma* among teachers, students and scholars around the world.

(Meanwhile, Ledi Sayādaw translated his Pāli *Tikā* into Burmese.) He wrote the following works at Ledi Monastery in 1256 B.E. *Lakkhaṇadīpanī* (Manual of Characteristics); *Puṇṇovādakammathan* (the meditation taught for *Puṇṇa*); and *Uposathasīlavinicchaya* (a decisive talk on sabbath virtue).

In 1257 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw travelled to Bodhagaya, India, the holiest of Buddhist places, and from there he vis-

ited other Buddhist holy places including Sarnath, Rajagaha, Sāvatti, Lumbini, etc. As he travelled, first by train to Rangoon, then by ship to Calcutta, and while he visited these holy places in India, Ledi Sayādaw wrote thirteen verses *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (thirteen verses of Dependent Origination). On arrival back in Rangoon, Sayādaw compiled a book entitled *Paṭiccasamuppādādīpanī* (A Manual of Dependent Origination). The publication of many works in the following years occurred in this way as Ledi Sayādaw travelled continuously up and down Burma, spending his rainy retreats writing manuals in answer to the questions of his many disciples and lay-followers and meditating continuously.

In 1258 B.E., when he was fifty years old, Sayādaw entered the Sapagan Tawtankyi Forest, Twante Township, Hansāvati District, and stayed at Sapagan Forest Monastery. Here he retreated to practise *kaṣiṇa* meditation and attained the fourth *jhāna*. Then, Sayādaw began *ānāpāna* meditation. He consequently wrote “The Lion’s Roar”, a poem which he gave to his senior disciple and well-known dhamma-preacher, Ledi Vaṇṇita. In this poem Ledi Sayādaw mentioned that he had attained the fourth *jhāna* and that he would surely be reborn in the Brahma world.

During 1259 an 1260 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw spent his rainy retreats at Ledi Monastery, wrote the *Lakkhaṇādīpanī* (Manual of Characteristics) the *Puṇṇovādādīpanī*, and the *Vijjāmaggadīpanī*. At the end of his rainy retreat in 1260 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw went to Thit Khya Taung Tawya (Oak Tree Mountain Forest Monastery) in Kyaik Hto Township, in Mon State (Burma), at the invitation of U Tiloka, a forest-dwelling monk, who was one of his senior disciples and author of *Paṇḍitavedaniyādīpanī*, which was Ledi Sayādaw's favorite book.

## Marvellous Events

In the Oak Mountain Forest Monastery, Ledi Sayādaw taught meditation privately to his disciples: U Tiloka, U Nandamala, U Visuddha, U Javana, U Sobhana and U Candara. He meditated diligently along with them day and night. One evening, Kappiya (his attendant) Maung Sa Mon went to Ledi Sayādaw's meditation cottage to bring him a drink, stood at the door and saw Ledi Sayādaw sitting in the air three feet off the ground. Maung Sa Mon stared in amazement at his Sayādaw and told the other monks about this wonderful event. U Tiloka, U Nandamala, U Visuddha, U Javana, U Sobhana and U Candara, who were all senior disciples, came to witness this marvellous event. They paid their respects to their great teacher for his excellent qualities and agreed not to tell anyone about what they had seen.

From Oak Tree Mountain Monastery, Sayādaw visited Kusinaron Pagoda of Bi Lin Township. There he met many hermits who wanted him to teach them about magical science (*vijjā*) and those who possess magical power (*vijjādhara*). Ledi Sayādaw explained to them about real *vijjā* (wisdom) and real *vijjādhara* (possessors of wisdom). The hermits implored Ledi Sayādaw to write a book about *vijjā*. This book, called *Vijjāmaggaḍipani*, was completed in Thit Khya Taung Tawya, Kyaik Hto Township. When Sayādaw went to visit Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda, which was in a mountain forest, a herd of wild elephants came running toward Sayādaw and his followers. The group of disciples ran away and scampered up trees to get out of the way, but Sayādaw stood firm, sending *mettā*. As he did this, the wild elephants slowed their stampede and approached Sayādaw in a gentle manner, paid their respects to him

and quietly departed. This incident was reminiscence of when the Buddha with his *mettā* tamed the rampaging elephant which Devadatta had sent to kill him. This further increased Ledi Sayādaw's renown.

In 1261 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw spent his rainy retreat at Dhammānanda Monastery, in Le Sin Village, Monywa Township. During his stay there he wrote the *Nibbānadīpanī*. This was used as a reference in the famous work written later by the great scholar, Mahāvisuddhārāma Sayādaw. His work, which referred to the *Nibbānadīpanī*, is the great *Abhidhamma* book, *Paramatthasarūpabhedāni*. Sayādaw Mahāvisuddhārāma urged Ledi Sayādaw to write about his personal method of teaching and learning the *Tiṭṭaka*. Ledi Sayādaw completed this work in 1261 B.E., naming it *Mahāsayanadīpanī*.

In 1262 B.E., Sayādaw authored the *Uttamapurisadīpanī*. He then took his rainy season retreat at Maha Myaing forest north of Dipevin Township, where he joined his disciple, U Indaka, the Kyaung Pan Sayādaw, who had dwelled there for nine years. Teacher and disciple lived together, and Ledi Sayādaw taught U Indaka his meditation method. They practised diligently and continuously without sleep, day and night. The cold weather, dense jungle environment and wild animals, snakes, birds and insects provided little comfort to the Sayādaws. After some time U Indaka fell ill and Ledi Sayādaw went begging for alms and offered the food he received to his sick disciple. At the end of Lent, Ledi Sayādaw also fell ill and returned to Ledi Forest, where he passed the time reading, writing, teaching, preaching, and meditating day to night and night to day. He sent two of his disciples, Ledi Paṇḍi and Ledi Kittī to Mahavissuddhāyāma Sayādaw in Mandalay to learn the *Tiṭṭaka*.

During the years 1263-64 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw moved to Shwe Taung U Mountain on the bank of the Chindwin (Sallāvati) River near Alon Town, and resided in a stone cave. At that time he wrote three books: (1) the *Āhārādīpanī*, (2) the *Anattadīpanī*, and (3) the *Dhammadīpanī*. Sayādaw grew seriously ill during his stay at the mountain monastery. One day, a very old and peculiar white person appeared to pay his respects to Sayādaw and gave him some strange medicine for his illness, which Sayādaw took. His illness immediately disappeared. This strange white person was believed by many people as a Celestial being.

In 1265 B. E., Ledi Sayādaw moved to Latpantaung Mountain, on the north bank of the Chindwin River, three miles to the west of Monywa. Here, Sayādaw meditated with strong determination and also wrote the following five books:

- (1) *Sammādiṭṭhidīpanī* (Manual of Right Understanding)
- (2) *Catusaccadīpanī* (Manual of the Four Noble Truths)
- (2) *Kammaṭṭhānadīpanī* (Manual of Meditation)
- (3) *Paramatthasāṅkhepa* (stanzas in Burmese)
- (4) *Niruttidīpanī* (in Pāli)

The *Niruttidīpanī* was a commentary on the *Mogallānavyākaraṇa*, a famous classical Pāli grammar. Sayādaw inserted the essence of other ancient Pāli grammars into the *Niruttidīpanī*, commenting on the *Kaccāyana*, the *Ruppasidhi* and the *Saddanīti*, and presenting many examples from the *Tipiṭaka*. Ledi Sayādaw was highly esteemed and honored for his writings in Pāli (his commentaries on the *Abhidhamma* and his Pāli grammar) by the world's scholars.



## Striking the Dhamma Drum

Near the end of 1265 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw wrote a long verse called “Profound Poem” and had it sent to Kinwonminkyi U Kaung, the former prime minister of King Mindon and subsequently King Thibaw. U Kaung was very impressed upon reading this poem, and he invited Sayādaw to come to Mandalay and stay at his residence in the old palace compound. Both Kings had been avid students and supporters of the Dhamma. Since the British annexation of Burma and the exile of the monarchy, there had been a “teaching vacuum” felt among the remaining echelons of court society. Ledi Sayādaw was destined to fill that vacuum by delivering Dhamma lectures at night and in the daytime by answering the many questions that arose among the royal family and the educated audiences who heard his discourses. On certain days he taught *ānāpāna* meditation to these same audiences and authored a book on this technique, the *Ānāpānadīpanī*, while staying at U Kaung’s house in the Old Royal Palace. During his sojourn at the Mandalay Palace, Ledi Sayādaw’s Dhamma preaching became widely celebrated throughout the capital city, and his fame spread. This began the striking of the Ledi Dhamma drum throughout the country. When people heard the deep, resonant sound of this kettle drum of Dhamma, they began to invite Ledi Sayādaw to travel all over Burma to teach this excellent Dhamma.

For many years, Sayādaw had been teaching and expounding the complex metaphysical analysis contained in the seven volumes of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, one of the three main divisions, or “baskets”, of the Theravada Buddhist Cannon. These seven volumes include:

- (1) *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* - Classification of Dhamma
- (2) *Vibhaṅga* - Analysis of Dhamma
- (3) *Dhātukathā* - Discussion with Reference to Elements
- (4) *Puggalapaññatti* - Designation of Individuals
- (5) *Kathāvatthu* - Points of Controversy
- (6) *Yamaka* - Pairs of Dhamma
- (7) *Paṭṭhāna* - Causal Relation of Dhamma

At this time, in the world of classical Pali literature, one of the most popular *Abhidhamma* manuals was the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, known to scholars as “An Outline of Buddhist Philosophy”. *Abhi* means great, excellent, sublime; *Dhamma* means doctrine, teaching, truth; *Attha* means nature or thing; and *Saṅgaha* means a collection, compendium or outline. Therefore, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* is an outline of the nature of the great, sublime teaching, i.e., an outline of Buddhist philosophy. Although this book was widely read among scholars, its language was much too complex to be understood by the ordinary layperson. To rectify the need for a simple manual for laypeople to study the Dhamma, Ledi Sayādaw compiled the *Paramatthasaṅkhepa* (*Paramatthasaṅkhitta*), as a digest or summation of the ultimate truth. This was written in beautiful and expressive poetical stanzas in the Burmese language, making it easy for the average person to recite and understand. Now that the *Abhidhamma* teachings were in a shorter, more easily understandable form, Ledi Sayādaw could urge the entire nation to take up the study of this deep and sublime aspect of the Dhamma.

To further facilitate the dissemination of the Dhamma to the people, Ledi Sayādaw organized and established

*Paramatthasaṅkhit Associations*, or Digest Associations. These associations became so widespread that they brought *Abhidhamma* study to all levels of Burmese society, whereas before it had been the domain of scholars only. Later, a commentary called *Paramatthasaṅkhepaṭīkā* was composed by Ledi Paṇḍita to further aid in the spread of this wonderful teaching. It is this combination of great erudition and deep compassion for the education of the common person that makes Ledi Sayādaw so important to the spread of the Dhamma.

In 1266 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw resided at In Kyin Myaing Tawya, to the north of Pyinmanar Town, and during his rainy retreat, he authored the following books: *Bhāvānādīpanī*, *Bodhipakkhiyadīpanī* and *Saddasaṅkhepa* (*Saddasaṅkhitta*).

In 1267 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw spent his next rainy season retreat at Yekangyitawya (Great Lake Forest Monastery) in Myingyan Town. At this place he helped to establish and organize a Paṭīccasamuppāda Association, a Paramatthasaṅkhit Association, a Vipassanā Association and the Association for Refraining from Eating Beef, among others. As was his habit, the solitary act of writing books was balanced by Ledi Sayādaw's social outreach to form public organizations which encouraged the study and practice of many different aspects of the Dhamma.

At times, Ledi Sayādaw travelled continuously throughout the country to teach meditation and Dhamma study to all levels of society. He not only travelled to drought areas, but also to plague-infested areas and to feuding villages. Sayādaw's visits to these places were known to bring rain to dry places, the cessation of disease to plague areas and peace to feuding villages.

In 1268 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw spent his vassa at a Vipassanā meditation center near the ancient capital of Prome, the Vipassanakone Tawya. He also returned to Mandalay for a visit. Travel, during this period of Burmese history, was slow and difficult thus making the extent of his travels all the more remarkable. While in Mandalay, he stayed at Masoeyein Kyaung Taik and delivered Dhamma talks on Vipassanā and other meditation techniques in many parts of the city.

In 1270 B.E., Sayādaw spent his vassa at Mawla Myaing. During the years of 1270–1272 B.E., the plague spread throughout the country, and many people died. A book called *Rogantaradīpanī* was published by Ledi Sayādaw in which he instructed people how to protect themselves from disease.

In 1276, while Sayādaw stayed at Ratanāsiri Monastery, he wrote the *Vipassanādīpanī* (The Manual of Insight Meditation) during the annual meeting of the Society for Propagating Buddhism in Foreign Countries. The *Vipassanādīpanī* was dedicated as an “Outline of the Exercises of Insight for the Buddhists of Europe” and was written as a compendium of Buddhist doctrine for those in Europe who wanted to practise Vipassana meditation.

## The Ledi Legacy

Ledi Sayādaw was simultaneously a great teacher to his monks and lay disciples, a great Dhamma preacher to large segments of the Burmese population, a founder and organizer of many Buddhist lay organizations, a famous teacher and popularizer of meditation practice, especially Ānāpāna and Vipassanā, and a classical scholar-monk and author of classical works. To say that his accomplishments were prodigious would be an understatement. He established many well-known monasteries throughout Burma, some of which were located in Monywa, Mandalay, Myinkhyan (Myingyan), Sagaing, Pyinmanar, Taungngu, Yangon, Mawlamyaing, Hinthata, Pathein, Kyaiktho and Thaton. He set up three kinds of monasteries: education centers, meditation centers and secluded forest retreats. Among the many associations which Sayādaw organized throughout Burma in villages, towns and cities were: the Saṅkhitta Associations, Abhidhamma Associations, Vipassanā Associations, Paṭicasamuppāda Associations, the Association for Refraining from Eating Beef, the Pāli Translation Society and the World Buddhist Missionary Association. The Pāli Translation Association, headed by his senior disciple, Sayādaw U Nyana, compiled a Pāli English dictionary.

Possibly one of Ledi Sayādaw's most significant legacies can be found in the large number of his disciples and students who themselves made significant contributions to the propagation of the Dhamma. U Nyana, the Masoeyin Sayādaw, was very learned in Pāli language and literature, and in the *Tipiṭaka*. Sayādaw U Nyana translated some of Ledi Sayādaw's manuals from Pāli into Burmese and English. Ledi Paṇḍita (M.

A., Saya U Maung Kyee) was a master of Pāli, Sanskrit, the *Tipiṭaka*, Dhamma preaching and an author. Among Ledi Sayādaw's disciples notable for their skills as teachers, preachers and authors in the Ledi Organization (Ledi Nikāya) include Ledi Vaṇṇita, Ledi U Kumāra, Ledi U Mahinda, Ledi U Indaka (Kyaung Pan Sayādaw), Ledi U Paduma, Ledi U Paññāsīha, Ledi U Kitti, Ledi U Vāyama (Aggamahāpaṇḍita Saya Myo), Ledi U Nandiya (The Phyu Sayādaw), Ledi U Sumana (Aggamahāpaṇḍita Moehnyin Sayadawgyi), Yangon U Dhammacārī, Thit Khya Taung U Tiloka, Ledi Saya Thetgyi, Ledi U Nandiya (Amarapura), Ledi U Kheminda (Moe Kot), Ledi U Vāyama (Monywa) and Ledi U Kevala (Thapye pintawya).

One of these disciples who was to have a far-reaching influence in the spread of Ledi Sayādaw's meditation techniques was the layman, Saya Thetgyi. Today, in Myanmar, the International Meditation Center (of U Ba Khin), the Hansawati Meditation Center, the Ledi Mu Meditation Center - all in Yangon, and the Mahā Bodi Meditation Center in Mandalay, follow in the tradition of Saya Thetgyi. Saya Thetgyi studied meditation under Ledi Sayādaw and dwelt in the forest for ten years before accepting students who wanted to learn how to meditate from him.

In 1275 B.E., Ledi Sayādaw founded the "World Buddhist Missionary Association" in Mandalay. Subsequently, twenty-four sub-associations were organized in the larger cities throughout Burma. This association worked closely with the Pali Text Society of England in answering many questions and translating these answers and many commentaries and Dīpanīs into English for the Pali Text Society. The World Buddhist Missionary Association (W.B.M.A.) also published a newspaper, the Ledi Tayar Tha Tinsar, or the Ledi Dhamma Newspaper.

In 1273 B.E. (1912 C.E.), due to his great reputation and tireless effort on behalf of the Burmese people, Ledi Sayādaw became the first person awarded the title of Aggamahāpandita by the British government since the annexation of Burma as a British colony. Ledi Sayādaw declined the invitation to accept this award and did not attend his award ceremony. However, three of his disciples attended the ceremony and accepted the seal of Aggamahāpandita on his behalf. In 1276 B.E. (1915 C.E.), Mahavisuddhārāma Sayādaw was the second Sayādaw to receive this highest honor, followed by Manle Sayādaw, who received the third subsequent award presented in 1277 B.E. (1916 C.E.).

Later, Ledi Sayādaw was awarded the title of Doctor of Literature (D. Litt) by the British Government in 1283 B.E. (1922 C.E.) at the grand opening ceremony of Rangoon University. Again, Ledi Sayādaw declined to accept this distinguished title. The Chancellor of Rangoon University went to Ledi Sankyaung near Zetawan Pagoda in Sagaing Hills and presented the title of D. Litt. to Ledi Sayādaw's disciples.

During the last two years of his life, Ledi Sayādaw dwelled at Ledi Sankyaung in Pyinmanar. When he was 77 years old (in the fifty-seventh year of his monkhood), he expired on the full-moon day of Waso (July), 1285 B.E. (1923 C.E.). The great teacher of the world passed away. The Lamp of Dhamma was extinguished. Ledi Sayādaw, the sun that enlightened the world, was no more.

## Summary of Lent Series (1248–1257 B.E.)

Ledi Sayādaw founded Ledi Monastery, Monywa, in 1248 B.E. (1887 C.E.), after twenty years of monkhood. He consequently spent the next nine rainy season retreats at Ledi Monastery. During those nine years Sayādaw taught *Tipiṭaka* to student-monks who came to him from many places. He preached the Dhamma to laypeople, wrote many books, answered many questions and practised Vipassanā continuously.

After 1257 B.E. Sayādaw travelled continuously to different parts of Burma as a Dhamma messenger. Sayādaw returned and stayed at Ledi Monastery for *vassa* during the years 1259, 1260, 1272 and 1279 B.E.

The following is a list of monasteries where Ledi Sayādaw spent his rainy season retreats (*vassa* or Buddhist Lent):

- \* 1 Lent, at Saing Pyin Kye Village (his birth place), Dipeyin Township.
- \* 15 Lents, at Mahājotikārāma Sankyaung Mandalay (as student and teacher)
- \* 1 Lent, at a small monastery near Lokamārajina, Monywa
- \* 3 Lents, U Wine Monastery, Monywa
- \* 13 Lents, Ledi Forest Monastery, Monywa
- \* 1 Lent, Sapagan Forest, Dala Township
- \* 1 Lent, Mahāmyaing Forest, Dipeyin Township
- \* 1 Lent, LeSin Village; Monywa Township
- \* 2 Lents, Shwetaung U Forest, Ah Lon Township
- \* 1 Lent, Lapantaung Mountain, Monywa
- \* 2 Lents, In Kyin Myaing Forest, Pyinmana



- \* 1 Lent, Myingyan Town
- \* 2 Lents, Bhavanakon Mountain, Prome (Pyi Myo)
- \* 1 Lent, Phat Tan Forest Monastery, Min Hla Town
- \* 1 Lent, Kyaiksanlan Pagoda, Mawlamyaing
- \* 1 Lent, Thapaung Town (near Pathein)
- \* 1 Lent, Nyaungkon Monastery, Rangoon
- \* 2 Lents, Leti Sankyaung, Sagaing Hills
- \* 3 Lents, Leti Sankyaung, Mandalay
- \* 1 Lent, Myit Thar Town
- \* 1 Lent, Kyauk Wine Monastery, Rangoon
- \* 1 Lent, Ka Tun Monastery
- \* 2 Lents, Ledisankyaung, Pyinmanar.

### So Ledi Sayādaw spent

- \* 17 Lents learning & teaching in Mandalay
- \* 19 Lents teaching, preaching & writing in Villages and Towns
- \* 21 Lents, teaching, preaching, writing & practising Vipassanā in the Forest
- \* 57 Lents, in total.

### The Books Written By Ledi Sayādaw

Below are some of the commentaries (*tīkā*), manuals (*dīpanī*), essays, letters, poems, verses and answers to questions written by the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw.

In Pāli :

1. *Paramatthadīpanīṭīkā* (Manual of Ultimate Truths)
2. *Paramatthaanudīpanī*

3. *Niruttidīpanī* or *Vuttimoggallānaṭīkā*
4. *Vibhatyatthaṭīkā*
5. *Vaccavācakaṭīkā*
6. *Paṭṭhānuddesadīpanī* (*Buddhist Philosophy of Relations*)
7. *Sammādiṭṭhidīpanī* (*Manual of Right Views*)
8. *Sāsanasampattidīpanī*
9. *Sāsanavipattidīpanī*
10. *Niyāmadīpanī* (*Manual of Cosmic Order*)
11. *Vipassanādīpanī* (*Manual of Insight*)
12. *Yamakaṭṭhāvisajjanā*
13. *Anattavibhāvanī*
14. *Gāravavinicchaya*
15. *Pañcaṅgadīpanī*
16. *Upasampadadvandakammavācā*
17. *Parivāsakammavācā*
18. *London Pāli Devi* (*Answers to Mrs. Rhys Davids' questions*)
19. *Exposition of Buddhism for the West*
20. *Niyāmadīpanīṭīkā*
21. *Mūlapariyāyasuttaṭīkā*
22. *Padhānasuttanissaya*

### **In Burmese:**

1. *Lakkhaṇadīpanī* (*Manual of Characteristics of Existence*)
2. *Mahāsayanadīpanī* (*Manual of Great Lying Down*)

3. *Vijjāmaggadīpanī* (Manual of the Way to the Holy-Path-Knowledge)
4. *Dal'hīkammadīpanī*
5. *Bodhipakkhiyadīpanī* (Manual of the Factors Leading to Enlightenment)
6. *Anattadīpanī* (Manual of Impersonality)
7. *Somanassupekkhādīpanī* (Manual of Joy and Equanimity)
8. *Sammādiṭṭhidīpanī*
9. *Āhāradīpanī* (Manual of Nutritive Essence)
10. *Bhayavināśakadīpanī*
11. *Ālokadīpanī*
12. *Kammaṭṭhānadīpanī* (Manual of Meditation - Subjects)
13. *Anattānisaṃsadīpanī*
14. *Sukumāramaggadīpanī*
15. *Gambhīradīpanī*
16. *Rūpadīpanī* (Manual of Material Characteristics)
17. *Saccatthadīpanī*
18. *Ānāpānadīpanī* (Manual of Exhaling and Inhaling)
19. *Bhāvanādīpanī* (Manual of Mental Concentration)
20. *Maggaṅgadīpanī* (Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path)
21. *Nibbānadīpanī* (Manual of Nibbāna)
22. *Uttamapurisadīpanī* (Manual of the Real Superman)
23. *Dānadīpanī*
24. *Paṭiccasamuppādadīpanī* (Manual of Dependent Origination)

25. *Pāramīdīpanī* (Manual of Perfections)
26. *Niyāmadīpanī*
27. *Catusaccadīpanī* (Manual of the Four Noble Truths)
28. *Vipassanādīpanī*
29. *Sāsanasampattidīpanī*
30. *Sāsanavipattidīpanī*
31. *Sāsanadāyajjadīpanī*
32. *Gonasurādīpanī*
33. *Rogantaradīpanī*
34. *Dhātukammaṭṭhānadīpanī*
35. *Sāsanavisodhanī*
36. *Dhammadīpanī*
37. *Paramatthadīpanīnissaya*
38. *Niruttidīpanīnissaya*
39. *Āveṇikaguṇavinicchaya*
40. *Anudīpanīnissaya*
41. *Asaṅkhārasasaṅkhāravinnicchayadīpanī*
42. *Sikkhāgahaṇavinicchayadīpanī*
43. *Cetiyaṅganavinicchayadīpanī*
44. *Upasampadavinicchayadīpanī*
45. *Nibbānavinnicchaya(vissajjanā)dīpanī*
46. *Sotāpannavinnicchaya(vissajjanā)dīpanī*
47. *Puṇṇovadakammaṭṭhānadīpanī*
48. *Maṅgalasuttadīpanī*
49. *Ṇaparibhogavinicchayadīpanī*
50. *Viratisīlavinnicchayadīpanī*
51. *Dīghāsānavinnicchayadīpanī*

52. *Saraṇagamanavinicchayadīpanī*
53. *Anattavibhāvanā*
54. *Mahāsaraṇagamana*
55. *Aṭṭhaviṣabuddhacakkaparitta*
56. *Khandāyatanadhātusaccāāloka*
57. *Paramatthasaṅkhepa*
58. *Vinayasaṅkhepa*
59. *Saddasaṅkhepa*
60. *Anattadīpanī (second)*
61. *“Alphabets” Saṅkhepa*
62. *Prosody Saṅkhepa*
63. *Alankā Saṅkhepa*
64. *Spelling Saṅkhepa*
65. *Rūpaparicchedaṅkhepa*
66. *Vassavāsikavinicchayadīpanī*
67. *Samphappalāpavinicchayadīpanī*
68. *Gambhīrakabyā-kyan (Manual of Profound Verses)*
69. *Open Letter for Abstention from Taking Beef*
70. *Epic on Alarm (Saṃvegakabyā)*
71. *Ājīvaṭṭhamakasīlavinicchaya*
72. *Answers for Questions on Christianity*
73. *Answers for Questions of Pāli Devi*
74. *Answers for Questions on Hinduism*
75. *Answers for Questions on Heaven*
76. *Answers for Questions on Nibbāna*
77. *Answers for Questions on the Idea of the Soul*
78. *Answers for Questions of the London Pāli (Devi)*

## In English :

1. *The Vipassanā Dīpanī (The Manual of Insight)*
2. *The Patthānuddesa Dīpanī (The Buddhist Philosophy of Relations)*
3. *Sammādiṭṭhi Dīpanī (The Manual of Right Views)*
4. *Niyāma Dīpanī (The Manual of Cosmic Order)*
5. *The Catusacca Dīpanī (The Manual of the Four Noble Truths)*
6. *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī (The Manual of the Factors Leading to Enlightenment)*
7. *Maggāṅga Dīpanī (The Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path)*
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May the Dhamma prevail in every corner of the world.  
May all beings be happy and peaceful forever.  
May all beings know the Dhamma properly.  
May all beings be liberated from their misery.

With mettā,  
Venerable Sitagu Sayādaw  
Thegon Ashin Nyānissara





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