

**INDIAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE NATIONALIST
MOVEMENT IN BURMA (1919-1948)**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SANJEEV KUMAR



**SOUTH EAST ASIAN STUDIES DIVISION
CENTER FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND
SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
2006**



CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTHEAST ASIAN & SOUTH WEST PACIFIC STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110 067

Phone : 26704350
Fax : 91-11-2671 7586
91-11-2671 7603

Dated: July 28, 2006

DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation “Indian Immigrants and the Nationalist Movement in Burma (1919-1948)” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university and is my own work.

Signature of the student

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that the dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Mahendra P. Lama
(Chairperson)

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for South, Central, South East
Asian and South West Pacific Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Dr. Man Mohini Kaul
(Supervisor)

SUPERVISOR
Centre for South, Central, South East
Asian and South West Pacific Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

*Dedicated to.....
Maa & Papa*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This dissertation could see the light of the day only as a result of enormous amount of help I received from many ingenious and enterprising individuals. Foremost of these names is that of my mentor and supervisor Mrs. Manmohini Kaul whose valuable intellectual inputs, affectionate guidance and infinite patience made this work possible. A constant friend, philosopher and guide to me since I joined the centre, she has been the fountain of knowledge and inspiration who constantly encouraged me to strive for academic perfection. I shall remain ever grateful to her for being the ideal teacher that she is and feel honored to have had a chance to do research under her care and hope for more such opportunities.

I express humble gratefulness to Mr. Ganganath Jha and Ms.. Shankri Sunderraman for their insightful ideas, thoughts and criticisms that were put across to me most honestly and affectionately. I also thank them for being extremely cooperative with reading material and their contacts when ever I needed any.

I owe special thanks to Usha ji, Asha ji and Dheer Singh ji and rest of the staff members of the centers who were most cooperative with any assistance that was sought. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude towards, Teen Murti library, the National Archive and its library, the IDSA library, the library of the Ministry of External Affairs and the central secretariat library for making reading and research material readily available whenever requested.

Last but not the least I wish to express my profoundest gratitude to all my friends who supported me through out this endeavor with all the resources they could put at my disposal. I especially wish to mention the names of Ranjak Katara, Madhu, Sarah, Abhay Kumar, Abhishek Kishore, Dharamjeet Dhartiputra, Devanand, Arunji, Prabhat,, Naval, Sailesh, Mohit, Arvind, Samvit Rath and Aditya Swaroop Pasi . A big thanks to all of you.

Date: July 26, 2006

Place: New Delhi.

Sanjeev Kumar
Sanjeev Kumar

PREFACE

The problem faced by Indian immigrants in Burma, perhaps more than in any other place, provide a very learning experience of the problems of socio-economic complexities rising out of relocations in the colonial times. More than just purely socio-cultural, the problem of Indians in Burma is peculiar because of its own economic and political reasons. It was only in Burma that Indians were not just looked at as the competitors in the job market but also as the collaborators to the colonial powers. They not only helped British to occupy the land but also helped them to run the whole political economic exploitative colonial machinery. It had a shock-value and was seen as 'treachery' because Indian sepoys and money lenders were not white colonial alien from across the seven seas but there own immediate neighbours with whom they had centuries old cordial contacts. It has been witnessed in the history of colonial experiences that whenever such distrust arises between two groups of people who are not ethnically and culturally removed from each other, the bitterness tends to last for a fairly long time. A subjugated people tend to get over the antipathy towards their colonial masters comparatively soon. But the animosity towards those who they see as the collaborators, who were 'one of us, takes generations to wash off.

The first and the introductory chapter begin with an attempt to document the different ethnic groups in Burma. It also gives a brief history of Burma and its relation with its western neighbour India. This chapter tries to outline the golden period of Burma-India relations in late nineteenth century, after which the relations between the two countries started to deteriorate.

The second chapter tries to capture the gradual but dramatic changes in ethnic relations between the indigenous Burmese population and Indian immigrants. These ethnic tensions deeply impacted the perspective of local community towards the Indians living in Burma. It also tries to lay a framework to investigate the reasons behind anti-Indian sentiment in Burma during this period. An Attempt has been made to gauge the

contribution of anti-Indian sentiments towards the development of the Burmese Nationalist Movement in terms of its radical character and ethnocentric overtones.

The third chapter has tried to bring an academic perspective to the impact that the anti-colonial movement (particularly those led by the Indian National Congress) in India had on the anti-British struggle in Burma during the same period. It further delves into similarities between the anti-British struggles in both the countries. An attempt has also been made to evaluate the extent to which the Burmese leaders were influenced by nature of anti-colonial struggle in India. It also traces the similarities and divergences between the Indian immigrants and Indian anti-colonialist nationalists.

The fourth chapter would outline and analyze the implications of the Government of India Act 1919 and 1935 on the interests of the Indian community in Burma. It would focus on the constantly changing socio-political milieu impacted the nationalist demands, which was to determine the future of Indian immigrants in Burma.

The next chapter deals with the mellifluous and protracted changes that were wrought upon Burma by Japanese occupation and the impact it was going to have not just on the history of Burma but also the future of Indo-Burmese relations. It was the Japanese occupation which transformed the Burmese elite and provided the stage for a kind of political and social churning within the Burmese society. This included both the Ethnic Burmese and the Indian immigrants.

The final chapter would conclude and analyze the findings of the entire account and sum up the various arguments brought out during the course of the research. It also reflects on the continuing struggle of the Indian community in Burma to integrate with the Burmese society and be equal stakeholders in the political system of the country.

CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Burma, politico-geographically speaking is situated at the junction of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Historically it has been affected and influenced by Southeast Asian politics. It shares its boundaries with five countries, China (in the north), India and Bangladesh (to South Asian countries on the west) and Thailand and Laos (to Southeast Asian countries). With India it shares the Indian Ocean which lies to its south. It has mountains on its three sides and a long coastline with the fertile Irravaddy delta in between and the plateau to the east of the central valley. Because of such topographical situation, it is inhabited by many different cultural groups, making it an 'anthropological paradise'.

Its population is mainly derived from three racial stocks namely Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burmese and Thai-Shans. The history of Burma begins with the coming of the Mon people from Central Asia in circa 2500-1500 BC. They settled in the parts of Thailand, along the Tenasserim and on the Irrawaddy delta. They were influenced by both Hinduism as well as Buddhism. Their kingdoms in Pegu and Thaton were known to have been Buddhist.¹ They were followed by Tibeto-Burmas. They were the builders of the ancient Pyu city. Built in the beginning of the Christian era, it showcases a well-developed civilization. They had also founded the city of Pagan in around AD 850. Its famous king Anawartha, who ascended the throne in 1044 established Burmese rule all over the country. Under him Theravada Buddhism got ample state patronage. Thai-Shans were the third main racial group in Burma. They were racially closer to Indo-China. Between the end of the thirteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth century, they dominated central Burma. Rulers of Ava were Shan. Even there Burmese influence was strong.²

¹ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings* (London, 1992), p. 45.

² *Ibid*, p. 49.

Out of these main racial stocks, there emerged many different ethnic groups. Notable among these today are —Burmans, Shans, Karens, Kachins, Karennis or Kayahs, Mons, Chins and Arakanese or Rakhins. Today these ethnic groups, nationalities, or national races are each identified with the state of Union within which they constitute the majority. Among them the Burmese are in the majority and hence are more dominant, and are of the majority Tibeto-Burman stock (of the Tibeto Burmans 9/10th are actually Burmans). They occupy the lowlands on either side of the Irrawaddy in Upper, Central and Lower Burma. They also predominate in Arakan. According to the 1931 census, in a population of around 14.65 million they constituted 65.7% of total population of Burma (though Rakhins have also been wrongly included in the Burman ethnic group) whereas other indigenous groups totalled to 24.6%. Among them the Karens are just over 9%, the Shah at 7 percent, the Chin and Mon some 3 percent and others are a percent each.³

Shans, inhabited the valley areas of the Upper Irrawaddy basin and the plateau country to the east of the central valley of Upper Burma. Shan princes had themselves rule upper Burma for several centuries prior to the rise of the Burman Toungoo dynasty in the mid sixteenth century. The surviving nineteenth-century Sawbwa princelings of the Shan States acknowledged tributary relationship with the Burmese Court in return of Burmese noninterference in Shan affairs. After the British eliminated the Burmese Court in 1885, the Shan States retained their autonomous tributary status with the British Burma.

The second important minority group, the Talaings, or Mons,⁴ who inhabited the northern Tenasserim coastal area and the lower Sittang and Irrawaddy valleys, had contributed much to Burma's historic culture but were traditional enemies of the Burmans. The Talaings made a final desperate effort to re-establish their supremacy in the mid eighteenth century and actually captured Ava, only to suffer conclusive and ignominious defeat from the aroused Burmans under the leadership of the newly emergent Konbaung dynasty. British arrival in 1824 brought no immediate respite to Lower Burma. The

³ Census of India, 1931, Vol.11, Burma, pp. 175-7, 202-4

⁴ For the story of the Mon entry into Burma via Siam, see. C. M. Enriquez, "Story of the Migrations", Journal of Burmese Research Society, XIII (1923), 77-81

remnant of the Talaing population in the delta area actively assisted the British invaders in the 1824-1825.

The people of the coastal kingdom of Arakan had long enjoyed political independence. Relations with nearby Bengal were usually unhappy, and conditions for several decades after 1690 were anarchic, because of chronic rebellion. After Arakan fell to the invading Burman army in 1784, many Arakanese took to the hills and jungles, formed tribal robber bands, and carried on vexatious depredations against Burma authorities and into neighbouring Chittagong for many years thereafter.⁵

Another sizable minority group in Lower Burma, alien in both language and culture to the Burmans were the Karens. They were divided into three principal linguistic groups. The Sgwas, or Burmese Karens, lived mainly in the Irrawaddy delta and areas peripheral to it. The Pwos, or Talaing Karens, were concentrated near the coast around Bassein, Thaton and Moulmein. The third group or Bwe Karens were more closely akin to the Sgaws than to the Pwos. They inhabited the rugged hill terrain between the Sittang and the lower Salween rivers.

The Karens generally were unimportant politically, for they were a backward animistic folk caught helplessly between the upper and nether millstones of the interminable Talaing-Burma feud. They were too cowed to resist. The Karens were inveterately rural. During the early 1800's they carried on a major part of the agriculture of Lower Burma, maintaining a kind of wandering existence in semi permanent villages in the midst of the jungle waste. They were governed locally by their own chiefs and traditions and, as already explained, owed no public services to the Burma king as did the Burmans.

There is no conclusive proof that the Karens were systematically enslaved by the Burmans, as is often alleged, but they were forced to perform onerous services from time to time. It might be possible because social as well as political cohesion among the

⁵ Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava* (n.p,n.d),pp.104-117.

Karens was lacking.⁶ Karen affairs were handled by specially appointed *Wuns*, operating outside the regular administrative system.

The primitive Chin people belong to Tibeto-Burman racial group. They inhabited the hill areas between Upper Burma and India, north of Arakan and had reasons to fear their Burman overlords. They were frequently robbed of their animals, and, and even womenfolk by Burman neighbours. In some parts of Chin Hills, the women tattoo their faces. In old days all of them were spirit worshippers. But now some have adopted Christianity and Buddhism.

The wild Jingpaw or Kachin tribesmen, who lived in the hill country on both sides of the upper Irrawaddy Valley and across the China border, were alone among the minority races in offering strenuous resistance to Burmese control. The vigorous Kachins for generations defied the efforts of both Burmese and the Chinese to tame them. They infested the hill areas and lived mainly by robbery and extoriton, except in scattered areas where a modus vivendi was arranged with Shan neighbors.

In between the Shans and the Karens there are Kayah people. They are also knowns as Karennis or Red Karens because of their red colour costumes. Padaung among them make their women wear thick brass sings in their neck. This is done to stretch up their neck by putting row upon row of it from the time they are about ten.

A Brief History:

The political history of Burma goes much beyond the Pagan times. But “authentic” history can safely be said to have begun with the beginning of Pagan period form the middle of the eleventh century. The subsequent history is full of struggle between three main racial groups—Burmans, Mons and Shans. The struggle started between Burmans and Mons when the former, under king Anawratha conquered the Mon kingdom of Thaton and brought lower Burma under his control. Thaton, which was a traditional Buddhist centre influenced the victors and Buddhims was introduced in Anawratha’s court in Pagan

⁶ D.M. Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma* (London, 1887), pp. 153-157

Under the leadership of Wareru, the Mons won back their freedom. He established his kingdom of Pegu which lasted for two and a half centuries. They were responsible for building of the famous Shwe Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon. However Burman ruler Tabinshweti of Tounggoo, unified upper and lower Burma by conquering Pegu in 1541. Subsequent Mon rebellion was quelled by Burmans. Rebellion of the Mons had reached its peak when the dynasty's seat at Ava was captured in 1552. But it was the great Alaungpaya who rose to the occasion to crush the rebellion immediately. He captured Pagan from the Mons in 1755 renamed it "Rangoon" which meant 'the end of strife'. However, the rebellion was finally crushed only in 1757. It was their animosity with the Mons which was used by the British against them when they invaded lower Burma in 1824.

From Shans, they had to face tougher resistance. When Pagan fell to Mongol army in 1287, Shans rose to power in upper Burma. In 1299 they sacked Pagan. In 1365 Thodominbya founded the kingdom of Ava which gained control over most of Upper Burma and kept it for the next 200 years. However in 1527, the kingdom of Ava broke up into many principalities. In 1555, the successor of Tabinshweti, Bayinnaung, annexed Ava and from then on Shan stayed under the domination of the Burmans.

The great Burman king Alaungpaya founded Konbaung dynasty. Burma under his rule was united for the third time in its history. He expanded his kingdom by raising wars with the weak neighbours like Siam, Assam and Manipur. Later, King Bodawpaya (1782-1819), with the objective to further consolidate the empire, opened the war against the Arakan and conquered it. It was during his time that the clashes with the British-Indian empire began which ended in the extinction of Burmese kingdom. It was the conquest of Arakan, a strategic frontier on Indo-Burmese side, which brought Burma for the first time into the direct contact with Chittagong. It is a coastal area of Bengal, then administered by British-India.

The conquest of Arakan by the Burmese king created some minor border tensions between British-India and Burma. But this did not escalate into a major crisis because i) the Burmese king's military ambitions were more directed towards Siam than India and ii) India was faced with internal political crisis and instability caused by the fall of

Mughal Empire. It was not until the end of 18th century and the beginning of 19th century that British supremacy was established in India. It was only then that the British thought in terms of colonizing Burma. The inexperienced grandson of Bodawpaya, Bogyidaw (1819-38) failed to deal with the British on the boundary issues which led to the first Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. The Treaty of Yandabo which followed led to some loss of territory. Towards the end of his rule British gained enough of hostility and intense ill-feelings from Burmese.⁷ In 1852, second Anglo Burmese war resulted in the loss of lower Burma. The last king, Thibaw, was equally weak and incapable. He was a reluctant king under the influence of Queen Supayalata. His government got involved in a serious dispute with the British which occasioned the Third Anglo-Burmese war in 1885. King Thibaw was sent in exile to India and Burma was annexed on 1st January, 1886.

Burma and India:

Although Burma seems relatively insulated, (thanks to its surrounding mountains and the sea acting as barriers) it has century old contact with the outside world. In the above section we saw how different racial groups came trickling down to the Burma, making it an 'anthropological paradise'. With India it not just shares hundreds of kilometers of boundaries, it is also face-to-face with it across the "common lake" of the Bay of Bengal. Naturally, their relations are centuries old. Reaching Burma thorough both land and sea route, Indian cultural influences had the greatest effect on it. It also emerged as the door to the Southeast Asia because trade routes between India, Indo-China and China were carried through Burma.⁸ Through this door passed the embassy of a Roman Caesar to the Emperor of China and it was through this that Tatar armies came in. This passageway was the bone of contention between France and England in the 19th century which finally led to the fall of the Burmese kingdom to the English. Even the Japanese army in 1941 came marching to close this door. And as even the sea lanes followed coastal areas more closely, Burmese coasts also remained in economic and cultural contacts with India.⁹

⁷ D.R. Sardesai, *Southeast Asia: Past and Present* (New Delhi), p.163.

⁸ Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York, 1967), p. 3

⁹ Ibid.

Among all ethnic groups, the Mons and Arakanese were closest to Indians in their ethnic origin. As for Mons, it is argued that as the Burmese word for them is “Talaing”, they might have come from Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. This belief is not wholly unfounded because by the beginning of first century AD there was a great expansion of trade relation between India and Burma. It is said because of trade with India the Mon, Pyu and Arakanese kingdoms reached their full prosperity. Professor G.Coeds opines that it was because of the prohibition of the gold export by Roman emperor Vespasian (AD 69-79) to India, it turned to Southeast Asia, especially Burma. It were the vibrant trade contact that had led to the development of many settlements of south Indians in the Irrawaddy delta and the adjoining coasts of Burma, including Tenasserim. Their settlements were collectively called as Rammannadese (the country of the devotees of Rama).

The active maritime contact with India brought Buddhism as well Hindu beliefs, customs, literature, legends, grammar and theories of jurisprudence to Burma. Burma adopted not only the hierarchical form of government, concept of divine origin of kings but also the traditional Hindu code of Manu as the prime source of law and other of socio-religious practises and ceremonies of various kinds.

One of the earliest historical records of Indo-Burmese contact comes through the Jataka tales. They refer to the Indian merchants sailing to Shvrnabhumi (“the land of Gold”. It also says that Buddhism was first introduced in Burma by the two missionaries Sona and Uttara who were sent by the great Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in the third century B.C.¹⁰ Many Inhabitations in recorded century bore Sanskrit names and the Brahmi script is also discovered from there.¹¹ A third century Buddhist inscription was also discovered at Annan coast in South China Sea which suggests the extension of influence of Indian civilization in the Southeast Asia.¹²

¹⁰ For details on Buddhism in Burma see Winston King, *A Thousand Lives Away: Buddhism in Contemporary Burma* (Berkeley, 1964)

¹¹ R.C. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonisation in South-East Asia* (Baroda, 1955), p.24.

¹² G.E Harvey, *The British Rule in Burma, 1824-1942* (London, 1945), p.1

It was not until early century A.D. that, as the result of urbanization at places like Sri Ksetra and all along the coast, Buddhism made an entry into the valley. This included all the contemporary variants prevalent in Buddhism at that time which included the conservative Staviravadins and later followed by the Theravadins. The first millennium A.D. witnessed the emergence of the tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism. In the Irrawaddy basin, these religious developments were mirrored in new towns all along the coast and in the interiors as Buddhist and Hindu ideas and practices gradually fanned out. It can be ascertained with some conviction that the intensity of the penetration of these new ideas was more marked in the coastal areas which were more strongly connected to South India due to trade and travel and came to be especially attached to the great Buddhist centers at Amravati and Nagarjunakonda on the banks of the Krishna River. The interiors, on the other hand including the early pagans was more culturally inclined towards Bengal largely due to over-land contacts. These interacted with Tibet and Yunnan as well. Beside these areas were strongholds of Mahayana or Tantric Buddhism. The Nalanda University in Bengal occupying the pride of place among its contacts, was the greatest contemporary center in the world of Buddhist learning.

The worship of Nat was the most important constituent element in the dominant religion in the Irrawaddy valley apart from Buddhism.¹³ Nat was a generic expression for any spirit. It was a relatively smooth incorporation of the Indian deities into Nat worship. The Indian panorama of gods and goddesses were 'Burmanised' and as a result Saraswati became 'Thaye Thadi', Shiva assumed the name of 'Paramizwa' and 'Withano' was the Burman variant of Vishnu, Thagyamin was the Burmese name of 'Indra' who was incorporated as the chief of all the Nats.

The Burmese royal lineage can be traced back to the quasi legendary founder of the Pagan dynasty, Pyuminhti. Mythology has it that he was the progeny of a union between one Sun's spirits and a Naga princess. The genealogists of Alungpaya had already dexterously concocted an appropriate royal pedigree for their new king by inventing his linkage with the 'Sakyans' who were the members of the Sakya clan to which Gautam

¹³ For details over Nat worship, see Htin Aung, "The Thirty-Seven Lords", *Journal of Burmese Research Society*, 39(1956), p.81-101.

Buddha belonged. Strong reason for this genealogical jugglery was the fact that the Burmese kings wanted to claim the Kshatriya status and as they were Buddhists, they looked at the Ganges valley- the home of Buddhism, as their place of origin. This was hoped to give them enhanced legitimacy.

The influence of Indian religious traditions further grew when by the turn of the nineteenth century. Ava could claim a series of spectacular military successes. There was a considerable amount of social and cultural churning in the areas occupied by the Burmese in the course of their western campaigns. Bengali Vaishnavism continued its triumphant march in Manipur even in the 19th century, rendering the court Brahmins especially influential in the affairs of the state and their word carried weight in the general running of the society.

As a consequence of the annexation of Manipur and Arakan, many foreign ritualists, astronomers and other learned men flocked in droves to the Ava court. Many of these were incorporated into the Burmese social order and integrated with the Ponna.

The next to join the privileged ritualist class were the Brahmins from Benaras. These new arrivals commanded tremendous respect in the society by the virtue of the high place accorded to Banaras in the society's religious consciousness, as a city associated with Gautam Buddha. This is demonstrated by the fact that a royal order was passed making them exempt from prostrating before ministers and princess. Formerly this privilege was only accorded to the members of the 'Sangha'.

A wide range of Sanskrit and Indian vernacular texts were imported, further enriching the already renowned library at Amarapura. Such was the influence of the new Brahmins from Banaras that they managed in 1813, to have a royal order passed for reviewing and confirming the Varna positions of each and every resident of the capital and ordering the census to gradually cover all of the empire.

The Burmese legal literature also borrowed heavily from Indian traditions.¹⁴ They sanction a distinct four-fold demarcation of the society. At the top of the hierarchy was

¹⁴ Maung Maung, *Burma in the Family of Nations*(Amsterdam,1956), p.957.

the Min-myo, the ruling class. Next was the Ponna-myo who presided over the rituals and were 'learned in the Vedas'. Further down were the Thuhtay-myo who were the commercial classes engaged in banking and trade. At the bottom were the Sinyetha-myo the 'poor people' or the commoners. These reflect the degree of Indian cultural diffusion and were roughly equivalent to the Varna system which by then had found its way into the Burmese society and in which the descent groups were classed as Kshatriya, Brahamans, Vaishyas and Shudras. In the Burmese terminology the word 'myo' came to denote both the Indian concept of Zati (Jati) and Wunna or Varna. Indeed there was a clear linkage of each of the four-fold class division to one of the four Varnas. But the discrepancies that accompany a diffused culture were seen in the addition particularly those in the legal literature of numerous other categories and sub-categories which probably was an attempt to assist in the cultural incorporation.

For instance a demarcation was sought to be made between the ruling class and the nobility or the official class. The former was used to categories chiefly the royal family including occasionally very senior ministers, generals and other 'exalted persons'. The nobility or the Amat-myo denoted the families of office holders which included not only hereditary local officials but also those office holders who were nominated by the king even though just in the name. The first group was ranked above the Ponna while on the other hand the nominated section of the nobility was situated below the Ponna. Apart from this reference is also made by the legal literature to the Konthe-myo or the trading class which ranked roughly half way between the great merchant bankers who were fabulously rich and the ordinary poor people or the Sinyetha-myo. There also came a sub-class graded 'poor people'

We find reference to Muslim Persian speaking communities all along the Yunnan-Burma border in the accounts of Chinese travelers as early as 860 A.D. The arrival of fire arms and artillery during the Restorda Tungoo phase was accompanied by the importation of Muslim soldiers chiefly from the Deccan and Myedu and Yamethian were the chief zones of settlement of these men and their families.

By the inception of 19th century Amrapura was already home to a large Muslim populace. This naturally was to lead to the foundation of many religious places of worship for not only Muslims of foreign descent but also a growing community of Zirabadi who were presumably a mixed branch of Muslims owing their origins to foreign and Burmese amalgamation.

Islam soon became the second religion of the Burmese empire so much so that it caught the attention, even though for a while, of the most religious minded of all the early Konbaung Kings-Bodawpaya. This was also roughly the same time as the arrival of a Nashakbandi Sufi named Abhisha Husseini to Ava. Hussaini hailed from Aurangabad in western India.

Thus we see that a great deal of close and dynamic cultural contacts between these two countries throughout their history. But things began to change with the coming of the British in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. As Burma was being colonized in stages, Indian influx saw an upward trend. They came with the British as soldiers and later as traders, merchants, administrative employees etc. As a result the Burmese started looking at them as collaborators of the colonial master. Their contempt grew when there was an influx of Indian laborers when the rice trade grew tremendously after the opening of the Suez Canal. This changed the overall Burmese perception towards the Indians in Burma. My following chapter will try to trace the genesis of anti Indian sentiments, which finally fuelled the Burmese nationalist movement.

CHAPTER-2

THE GENESIS OF ANTI-INDIAN SENTIMENTS IN BURMA

India and Burma have had centuries old relations which have been a theme much dealt with, by various scholar. The most obvious reason for such old history was the geographical proximity and the consequent economic and cultural exchanges. These exchanges, though mainly unilateral, with India being the dominant culture¹, yet Burma had selectively adopted and metamorphosed them in its unique ways. The relation between the two was over all cordial except for some minor confrontations. However with the political annexation of Burma with the help of Indians and the subsequent pouring of Indians created complex socio-economic problems which made Indians most hated figures in modern Burma. The anti-Indian sentiments surged so high and wide that it caused all Burma to unite and fight for their independence. They fought not only British occupation but also the "overwhelming" Indian presence and their "dominance" in socio-economic arena.

The trade relations between India and Burma developed from ancient times. Burma has a claim to be identified as Suvarna Bhoomi (in Sanskrit) or Sonapranta (in Pali) which means the golden country. From the 1st century A.D. a trade route from India to China crossed North Central Burma down to the Chindwin valley then up to the Irrawaddy to Burma and to the border of China.² Another route connected Monywa in central Burma in the lower Chindwin valley. This route passed through Assam and Manipur. Yet another route connected Bengal, Arakan, Taungup, and Prome, which was on the bank of Irrawaddy in central Burma.

The existence of these trade routes speaks of the thriving land trade between the two countries. However due to difficult terrain the sea route was given more importance. The Bay of Bengal enabled Burma to establish sea trade with not just coastal India but also Ceylon and other Southeast Asian countries.

¹ R.C Majumdar, one of the doyens of ancient Indian History, called it cultural colonisation by India (through today this term needs to be used cautiously). See his *Ancient Indian Colonization in Southeast Asia*, (Baroda, 1955); also see his article in his "History of the Hindu Colonisation and Hindu Culture in Southeast Asia."

² B.R. Pearn, *The Indians in Burma*, (ledbury , 1946), p.1.

By 50 A.D., evidence points out at the existence of permanent settlements of Indian traders along coastal Burma.³ Historical records are not available of such permanent settlements before that time. Neither do we have any estimates of the number of such settlers. But it can safely be said that this went on for at least two thousands years and their settlements hardly had any reasons to invite the rage of the Burmese people. It was neither in the form of invasion nor could cause the alarm of influx. Also, there had been no invasion by any rulers of India over Burma.

But their perception of Indians changed drastically in the last two centuries because of certain political developments. British colonialism emerged as a third and most powerful player in the subcontinent. Now a new relation was emerging where India and Indians had no say in the changing relations between Burma and Britain in India. The emergence of the British in India and their pursuit of own interests in Burma led to many changes in their bilateral relations. The result of British and Burmese conflicts and the subsequent occupation of Burma transformed the relations between India and Indians with the Burma for ever.

The conflict between Burma and British authorities erupted during the first decade of 19th century when British desired to safeguard their far-eastern trade and guard against challenge to its territorial sovereignty by Burma's claim over Assam, Manipur and Arakan which failed to be settled on the negotiating table. The first Anglo-Burma war was fought in 1824-26. This followed second and third Anglo-Burma war in 1852 and 1853-6 which finally resulted in annexation of Burma to British India. The relentless advance of British forces in these stages was excellent exemplification of British greed. And it was British Indian force which was mainly used in the annexation!

Politico-culturally speaking, it was a blow to the people of Burma that their sovereignty was destroyed by a colonial power with the help of its own neighbour with which they had centuries of cultural ties. Whether as soldiers, sailors, civil servants or common labourers Indian were the camp followers of the British, acting as occupation forces, enforcing law and order, and setting up a foreign system of administration.⁴

³ G.E. Harvey, *The British Rule in Burma, 1824-1942* (London, 1945), p.11

⁴ N.R. Chakaravarty, *The Indian Minority in Burma, The rise and Decline of an Immigrants Community* (London, 1971), p.6.

This served as the main background to the anti-Indian sentiments in Burma. It was further accentuated by various socio-economic situations which worsened the position of Indians (vis-à-vis Burmese) in an already politically skewed position in which they were placed.

Right from the very beginning Indians, employed in all kinds of useful and often lowly services, earned the eternal contempt of the Burmans. Their entering into Burma thereafter, in ever increasing numbers, were considered as the instrument of foreign domination and certainly not as the torch bearer of a common civilian.⁵

It was not before 1852 that the number of Indian immigrants increased appreciably. It was the year when lower Burma was annexed and a large number of Indians were required for not only just clearing the woods and jungles but also for administrative and military purposes. The large population of Indian living in perpetual penury formed the cheap labour market. And the early association of Indians with Britain and their familiarity with the western administrative system made them a natural choice for any military and administrative jobs in Burma.

It was just a matter of time that hitherto, one of the most sparsely populated waste land of Burma, became one of the most fertile cultivated lands of the world. Irrawaddy delta very soon become the heart of the world's rice production and the most richly populated and prosperous part of Burma. Michael Adas writes that British knew that in deltaic lower Burma where hold of custom was less restrictive, they could experiment. Hence, Rice, hitherto, cultivated by private agriculturists and consumed locally, now under the British initiative came to be cultivated intensively on industrial scale for European market.

Rangoon, its centre, which was literally built up by Indians⁶ rose to become a major port. Slowly and gradually, even before the total annexation of Burma, the expansion of trade as consequences of the penetration of Burma and its subsequent living up with the global trade brought prosperity to the whole of Burma. Later its prosperity and economic and strategic location made it the capital of British Burma.

⁵ Ibid, p.6.

⁶ Usha Majmudar, *Role of Indian in Burma and Malaya Minority* (Bombay, 1960), p.5.

It received a further boost when Suez Canal was opened in 1869, which “permanently linked Burma with the wider world of Europe”. India, with its enormous population and geographical proximity, provided under-populated Burma, a natural source of cheap labor. Gradually the movement of Indian immigrants started from mere trickle to a continuous flow. Naturally, the movement of immigrants from India was sought to be systematized.

With the booming rice trade, the shipping industry became prominent. Even for this adequate supply of labour in dockyards was provided by Indian labours (especially after 1896). Also, the timber industry absorbed a large number of Indians. Indians built Burmese railways and were also engaged in oil wells, mines, rice mills, timber mills and constructing ports and building.

Slowly, as the news of employment opportunities spread in India, there was no need of government assistance for transport of labor. In 1886 when the famine commission advocated the transport of Indians from congested areas to develop waste lands in Burma, it was decided that this should be left to private enterprises. From a brief period the government of Burma even started a policy to lease large areas to private enterprises for the development of agriculture.⁷

Hence with the coming of Indians, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled and also capital and materials, Burma made tremendous progress in the beginning of 20th century. The data below speaks for itself.

TABLE-1⁸

	1901	1928
Factories	172	1,073
Employees	25,000	102,000
Joint Stock Companies	25	295
Total paid-up capital	Rs. 6,000,000	260,000,000

⁷ Mr. Mylne was given 27,506 acres in Pegu and one Indian Jai Prakash Lal got 15,000 acres of land in Toungoo district. Cited in Chakravarti, n.5, p.9

⁸ Report of the Burma Banking Enquiry Committee 1929-30 (Rangoon, Govt. Press, 1930), p-31.

Sea-borne Trade	Rs. 400,000,000	1,100,000,000
Road Miles	6,344	9,298
Railway Miles	1,124	1,908
Railway passengers	11,000,000	37,100,000
Railway goods (tons)	1,500,000	5,700,000
Schools (other than monastic)	18,284	25,572
Pupils (other than monastic)	316,000	750,000
Hospitals	119	303

The census commission for 1911 census, Sir Charles Morgan Webb, rightly commented that "the existence of the Burmese as a powerful and wide-spread race is due to Indian immigration"⁹

However, Indian immigrants, no matter how indispensable they were for the development of Burma, were not accepted in good spirit by the indigenous communities. Especially, the unrestricted influx was the actual cause of alarm. The following data from Rangoon gives a little glimpse at the matter.

TABLE-2¹⁰

BURMESE AND INDIAN IN RANGOON

	Indians in Rangoon	Percentage of total	Burmese in Rangoon	Percentage of total
1872	16000	16	70000	70
1881	66000	44	67000	50
1891	87000	48	73000	40
1901	165000	48	81000	33

⁹ Cited in E.J.L. Andrew, *Indian Labour in Rangoon* (London, 1933), p.29

¹⁰ W.S. Desai, *India and Burma*, (Calcutta, 1954), p.31

1911	165000	56	90000	31
1921	187000	55	105000	31
1931	212000	53	128000	32

But the table given above is highly misleading as it can not in be generalized for the whole of Burma. It was only Rangoon that Indians outnumbered the indigenous people.

Therefore, the quantum of immigrants might have been one of the reasons in Rangoon where an anomalous population composition had emerged i.e. it was only there that the majority indigenous community had become a minority in their own country.

Scholars like N. R. Chakraverty¹¹ have gone into the details of the population composition of Burma. He argued that as against the general contention of nationalist political agitators of Burma, that large number of Indians were glutting the job markets, Indians in Burma were never more than 5 or 6% of the total population.

TABLE- 3¹²

GRADUAL GROWTH OF INDIAN POPULATION, 1881-1941

Year	Total population	Indian population	Indian%
1881	3736771	243123	6.5
1891	8098014	420830	5.1
1901	10490624	568263	5.4
1911	12115217	743288	6.1
1921	13212192	887077	6.7
1931	14667146	1017825	6.9

¹¹ Chakravarty, n.5, pp.13-27

¹² *Burma Handbook* (Shimla, 1943), p.04

1941	16823798	918000	5.4
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Moreover, a large population of them (nearly 3-4 %) were migratory population and only about 2% i.e. population not exceeding 30, 0000 could be considered as permanent residents of Burma.

Hence it seems that it was not actually the influx of large number of Indians which might have sounded an alarm to the Burmese. This logically brings us to examine the occupational structure of Indians in Burma.

Indian immigrants could be roughly categorize into five groups.¹³ The first category was of those who directly represented the British administration. These were civil servants, judges, teachers or other high officials. But they were very few because most of those top positions were occupied by the British themselves.

Second category was that of service holders in various public sectors. Those sectors were banks, insurance companies, postal services, police force and prison management. Indians clearly out numbered the indigenous Burmese in this category. They were the main urban class.

Indian businessmen were another category. They were richer traders and businessmen who invested in the development of Burma. Their presence in Burma was there even before the advent of the British. However a large number of them came only after the coming of the British.¹⁴

Chettiars, who were the moneylenders, can be categorized into another separate class. They came from South India and shared a strong ethnic bond among themselves. Originally, they had long traditions of trade and business. But with the decline of trade in the nineteenth century due to the competition from the west, their trade took a downhill turn, they turned to banking. They were one of the most hated communities by the Burmese. They had an important role (which will be dealt a little later) in the deterioration of Indian and Burmese relations in Burma.

¹³ Swapna Bhattacharya , "Indian Diaspora in Myanmar" in Sarwa Daman Singh,ed., *Indians Abroad* (Kolkata,2003), P.178

¹⁴ Ibid,p.178.

And the last category of the immigrant was the skilled and semiskilled labourers. They were employed on a large scale in the development of Burma. They worked in all kinds of industries – from saw mills, internal working, ceramic and chemical industry to railways and oil industry. They also dominated in other sectors like food industry, hostel restaurants and cafes.¹⁵

In this way we see that Indians were present in every kind of work and every class. They were dominant economically and demographically in urban middle class. And even in service class and labouring class they had outnumbered the indigenous populace. All of them, indeed, contributed physically and financially to the modernization of Burma. NR Chakravarty gives a very sympathetic account of their role. In fact it is worth description that the lot of the labour class was despicable. Their ordeal used to start even before they landed at the port of Burma.

In Rangoon or where ever they had to work, they were lodged in inhuman conditions. Their houses were very tiny with every small windows and doors. In one room of 18 & 14 feet there used to as many as 23 inmates.¹⁶

Naturally, the death rate of Indians in Burma was high. It was as high as 37 and 32 per 1000 persons for Hindus and Muslims.¹⁷ The difference between in coming and outgoing Indians was estimated at between 30,000 and 40,000 persons per year.¹⁸ When 10,678 Indian collies were medically examined between June 1926 and December 1927, 10,678 Indian collies were found physically unfit. Of them 1,154 had heart problems, 202 had Tuberculosis and 144 had various other diseases.¹⁹

Despite such a poor state of labourers their sub-human standard of living and exploitative working conditions, many labourers were willing to return to Burma as many of them were seasonal workers. This speaks of their condition of utter poverty and dire need of any employment.

Resultantly Indian labours were willing to work in any subhuman squalid conditions for very paltry wages. The industrialists and traders could have asked for nothing

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.178.

¹⁶ Report on the Municipal Administration, Rangoon 1878-9 (Rangoon, 1880).

¹⁷ Report of Public Health Officer, Rangoon (Rangoon, 1925), p.24.

¹⁸ Andrew, n.10, p.25.

¹⁹ Burma, Legislative Council, Proceedings, vol. xi, 1928, pp.8-10.

more and that too when they, coming from a far off land and tied to the *maistry's* terms and conditions were very docile.

And it was actually this reason and not solely the “flooding” of Indians labours which was one of the reasons for the genesis of anti-Indian feelings among the Burmese. Burmese were never willing to do menial works, which they considered as below their dignity. Hence, Indian sweeper class was at the end of unrestrained contempt.²⁰ The squalid living conditions of labouring class smelled of bad hygiene and immoral characters, hardly something which could gain Burmese respect²¹ and most importantly their willingness to work for scanty wages had weakened the bargaining power of the Burmese labour. It was this reason, which became the main plank of attack of Burmese nationalists in 1920 onwards.

Besides these labouring classes, other categories of Indians were not free from the irk of Burmese. Being considered as the instruments of foreign dominance, which has already been dealt with in this chapter, they were never considered good for Burmese economy. Everybody, from invaders and servicemen to moneylenders, all were seen as alien and exploitative. Their attitude for them was that of fear which slowly with the gathering of their nationalist sentiments turned into that of hatred.

The dominance of Indians in Burmese economy can be seen as the second issue. Rice, which then accounted for about 50% of Burmese export was controlled by British firms. But if we look at the medium sized rice mills, a substantial number of them were owned by Indians.²² In teak and hardwood also Indians dominated in medium sized saw mills (51 out of 113 saw mills belonged to Indians. Some of the Indian firms e.g. AV Joseph & Co., J.C Dutt & Co. Ibrahim & Co., and several others were also granted forest leases and participated in the export trade in timber²³.

In shipping also, Indians predominated in the freight trade in Burma. Most of the shipments with India were shared by B.I.S.N (British India Steam Navigation) and S.S.N.C (Scindia Steam Navigation Company). Latter was an Indian owned shipping company. About 1/3rd of total volume of trade with India was carried by Indian

²⁰ In fact all poor Indians in Burma were contemptuously called *Kala*.

²¹ Majumdar, n.7, p.32.

²² Chakaravarty, n.5 p.72. 190 out of 600 rice mills in Burma had Indian ownership.

²³ *ibid.* p.72

ships.²⁴ In inland water transport too, Indians had their presence in Rangoon Basin, Akyab, Tenasserim, Irrwaddy and Arakan.²⁵ Besides, majority of the motor vehicles and other means of transports were owned by Indians.²⁶ Most of the taxis in urban areas and rickshaws on roads were run by Indians.²⁷

In banking and insurance, practically all the large Indian banks and insurance companies had branches in Burma. 57% of those engaged in big business were Indians.²⁸ Besides, Indian investments in industry were very large and probably followed closely the heavy investments made by British concerns for the industrial and mineral development of Burma. The table below shows this clearly:

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²⁴ Ibid, p.85

²⁵ RK Pal and Co. IN Rangoon, Malakars in Bassins, Chandharis in Akyab, to name a few .

²⁶ Chakaravarty, n.5.p.86

²⁷ Ibid, p.34.

²⁸ Annual report on the working of the factories act (1934) for the year 1939-40 (Rangoon , 1940)

Table -4²⁹

FACTORIES OCCUPIED BY VARIOUS COMMUNITIES IN BURMA, 1939-1940

Owners	Engineering			Sawmills		Rice mills		Vegetable		Others		Cotton		Other	
	Total	No.	Persons employed	No.	Persons employed	No.	Persons employed	No.	Persons employed	No.	Persons employed	No.	Persons employed	No.	Persons employed
Government	27	18	4208	2	85	-	-	-	-	6	1908	1	64	-	-
European	119	31	5216	6	4294	311	11585	14	443	6	494	15	656	-	-
Burman	381	-	-	35	1681	311	11585	14	443	6	494	15	656	-	-
Indian	303	7	406	51	3587	190	10760	3	133	26	4459	24	1423	2	986
Chinese	197	-	-	19	1197	164	9198	7	262	6	438	1	44	-	-
Japanese	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	160	2	380	-	-

²⁹ Annual Report on the Working of the factory Act (1934) for the year 1939-40(Rangoon,1940)

In the urban real estates Indians owned much valuable lands and residential buildings. In 1931, 21% of Indians in Burma lived in Rangoon. They constituted about 53% of the city's population and it can be safely assumed that at least 60% of the real estate of Rangoon was owned by Indians.³⁰ A number of rubber plantations were also owned by Indians.

Even in the business of moneylending, something which in itself is a thankless job, Multanis, Sindhis, Bhatiyas, Hindustanis and above all the Chettiars were the dominant Indian communities. Chettiars, who were organized and experienced money lenders had greatly financed the rice plantations.³¹ Even shopkeepers, who were very enterprising and reached to the farthest corners of Burma, used to lend money.

In this way we can see how important the Indians were in the development of Burma in modern times. However what we forget is that given all the sympathy for the entrepreneurs, risk takers or the labourers living in squatters, what we tend to overlook is the share they had in the colonial economy. Whatever might have been the reason, whether by virtue of being colonized first and having been marched into Burma as a occupiers force or because of having learnt British language and practices before the Burmese, their presence in Burma was suffocating for the Burmese. Though they were not the colonial masters themselves, yet there can be no denying the fact, going by the preceding details of the economic hold enjoyed by Indians, that they had their share in the "leaks" of the drain of wealth to the Great Britain.

As the financing and exploitation of mineral was carried on by British and Indians, the trade balances were naturally subjected to heavy remittances to meet the service charges on loan capital profits, over heads, taxes freights insurance etc. as many of these sectors were dominated by Indians (of course only after the British), the remittances to India were particularly heavy.³²

³⁰ Chakravarty, n.5, p.91

³¹ Report of Banking Enquiry Committee,(Rangoon,1929-30),p.201

³² Charkravarty, n.5, p.75

Burmese also faced their own problems of lack of contacts or exposure. This became evident when we look at the number of industries in the ownership of Burmese (see table). NR Chakravarty argues that contrary to general belief that the Burmans were less enterprising, they owned a large number of factories which catered to the domestic trade. The reason he cited for their lagging behind the Indians is the lack of contact with the foreign traders.³³ Here it can be said for the Indian traders in Burma that they were convenient to deal with because (ironically) they enjoyed the advantages that came with early colonisations and subsequent linkage to international trade; meaning thereby, Indians and British, by the time Burma was fully colonised, had centuries of experience of dealing with each other and hence they continued to be ostracized by the Burmese.

Dominance of Indians in the economy was not just a matter of a minority dominating the economy. It was a little more complex because it was the minority from a foreign land who had usurped whatever little opportunities a colonial economy lends to the compradors. The mother country of the minority was in close proximity, which had prevented them from getting assimilated in their new land of residence.

This brings us to the socio-cultural factor which gave rise to the anti-Indian feelings. Indians in Burma remained an isolated entity because of both economic and socio-cultural factors. Economic reason behind the anti-Indian feelings could have been diluted if Indians in Burma has just forgotten their mother land as a "legendry home"³⁴

The Indians and Burmese communities grew separately. Mentalities of Indians who were divided among themselves persisted even in foreign land. They not only maintained their relative separateness on the basis of religion, regions, language etc. they did not even mix with the majority communities in Burma. Burmese, who were Buddhists, and knew no social divisions, took this bitterly.

There were separate schools for different communities; migrants from different linguistic areas established their own schools to impart their own languages. In 1898-99 there were 45 schools for Telugus and Tamils.³⁵ Burmese languages were not even compulsory until

³³ *ibid.* p.89

³⁴ Majumdar, n.7, p.xxi

³⁵ Report of the Director of Public Instruction, Rangoon, 1898-99

the 1920. Burmese had to learn Hindustani and English to find work. Also, there were provision of separate government aid and separate inspectorate. These emphasis on special rights actually come from Indians and other minority groups, further embittering the Burmese. This came as a shock to them because they themselves were a multicultural country yet the differences among them were not so glaring.³⁶ And now, they in their own country were feeling isolated and marginalized.

Another sensitive issue was the marriage between Indians and Burmese. Muslims traders married more freely and their off springs were contemptuously called the *Zerabadis*. Generally, Burmese women who used to marry Muslims were converted to Islam. On purely religious grounds Burmese were not hostile to Islam but as the growing nationalism assumed the form of cultural and religious renaissance they showed less tolerance to such developments.³⁷

A common slogan which became popular at this time was *Amyotha Kwe Ko Mauukya Pa Net, Myanmar Meinma Dway* (Do not take foreigners, oh ye Burmese women).³⁸

In many cases high caste orthodox Hindus did not treat their Burmese wife as equals. Same cases of desertion were also found. Inter-religion marriage also brought many complications because of their conflicting laws. Buddhist law being very liberal towards women came in conflict with more conservative Hindu and Muslim laws. This had brought much suffering to Burmese women who married Muslims or Hindus. No wonder the Burmese nationalist indignation culminated in the stringent Buddhist women's marriage Act of 1938.³⁹

Hence we see that the influx of Indians with the colonial subjugation and their instrumentality in maintaining the colonial state⁴⁰ together with their presence in Burma as second rank exploiters of its economy and the general socio-cultural problems which arise due to relocation of any Diaspora were the reasons behind the anti-Indian

³⁶ Majumdar, n.7, p.31

³⁷ Ibid, p.29.

³⁸ Slogan and its translation is taken from NR Chakravarty, n.5, p.11.

³⁹ Majumdar, n.7, p.30.

⁴⁰ As late as 1931 census, 41% of Army personnel and 46% of Police force in Burma were Indians. Chakravarty, n.5, and p.39.

sentiments within the Burmese. These politico-economic and socio-cultural reasons were very much interlinked and were made more complex under the colonial setting. These anti-Indian feelings were growing, yet they came out in the open when it was given a political colour by the Burmese nationalists. In the next chapter I would delve into how Indians who themselves were colonized and subjugated in their country were comfortable with their position within the Burmese socio-economic landscape. And why the Burmese nationalists, who were initially inspired by Indian nationalist movement, came to rake up this issue and generated such a frenzy that did not settle even a few years after their independence.

CHAPTER-3

INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND THE INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN BURMA

The Indian nationalist could not have just silently looked on while the British imperialism a ravaging the neighboring country of Burma. They had always insisted on India being a part of larger Asian identity. They had formulated the 'Drain of Wealth Theory' by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They had developed a clear analysis of the mechanisms of colonial exploitation. As most of the Asian countries were in the clutches of Western Imperialism, the Indians looked upon them as 'comrades in bondage'. In 1885 when Burma was attacked, defeated, and finally annexed, the Indian leaders came out with harsh criticism of the British. In fact, in the very first session of the INC, which happened to be in the same year, Phiroz Shah Mehta called this annexation "unjust, immoral and unwise"

The nationalist leaders in India would make out the intricate mechanisms of imperialism and colonial. They could understand its global inter-linkages. And they figured India's pivotal position in British Empire. They saw that to free all colonial dominations India needs to be freed. The following statement of Mahatma Gandhi summarizes it — "India was the key to the exploitation of the Asiatic and other non-European races of the Earth. She is held under bondage not merely for the sake of her own exploitation but that of her neighbors near and distant. India's freedom would be the first death blow to the insolent exploitation of the nations of Asia and Africa".¹

He further added that his ambition was much higher than independence. Through the deliverance of India, he sought to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of western exploitation.²

¹ Birendra Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia* (Delhi, 1979), p. 25.

² *ibid*, p. 25.

Mahatma Gandhi assumption of India's importance was not unfounded. India had a historic-political, cultural, geographical and strategic linkage to the Asia in general, south, and Southeast Asia in particular. About the strategic and geographical significance of India, Lord Cruzan had observed:

India is like a fortress with the vast moat of the sea on two of her faces and with mountains for her walls on the remainder; but beyond these walls, which are sometimes by no means of insuperable height and admit of being easily penetrated, extends a glacis of varying breadth and dimension. We do not want to occupy it, but we also can not afford to see it occupied by our foes. We are quite content to let it remain in the hands of our allies and friends, but if rival and unfriendly influences creep into it and lodge themselves right under our walls, we are compelled to intervene because a danger would thereby grow up that would one day menace our security. That is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and as far eastwards as Siam. he would be a short-sighted commander who merely manned his ramparts in India and did not look beyond."⁴

British India became the main base of sustained British Imperialism in India. It not just served as the base of military operations for colonization and suppressing nationalist movements, but also provided them the recruitment ground.

Besides, in the whole economy of British colonialism India figured as one of the most important and indispensable colony. In the second phase of colonialism, i.e. India was the important player in Opium trade triangle. Late in the phase of financial colonialism so much investments were made in India, e.g. in Railways, etc. that it could never become dispensable.

Politically and historically too the nature and working of the imperialist government in all the colonial countries had unified the subject population for achieving national freedom under same colonial dominance, their ruthless suppression and economic exploitations and political disempowerment, they found a common reason to strike a camaraderie.

Many attempts were made to recover the cultural commonality that Asian shared. Even though Asianism became a marked feature of the Indian Nationalist Movement in 20th century, some attempts were made even in 19th century before the formation of Indian National Congress. Keshav Chandra Sen, a Brahma Samaj leader of 19th century Indian Hindu Renaissance, 'spoke of Asia and impressed upon people to India they must get into the habit of looking India as a part of the wide Asian World.'³ He proudly proclaimed in 1883 that:

“I am a child of Asia. Her sorrows are my sorrow, her joys are my joys. From one end of Asia to another, I boast of a vast home a wide nationality, an extended kinship. To me the dust of Asia is far more precious than gold and silver.”⁴

As a part of his Asian consciousness, his love for China made him appeal to the British government in 1870 to “abolish that iniquitous opium trade which kills thousands of the poor Chinese people.”⁵ Similarly, Rabindra Nath Tagore, moved by the same spirit of Asian consciousness, in an article “Death Traffic in China” (1881), decried the export of Opium from India to China. Even newspaper like The Amrit Bazar Patrika in 1874 published an article titled “The Chinese and the English” in which details of the injuries done to Chinese by the English is mentioned.⁶

Another great representative of Indian Renaissance and an ardent nationalist, Vivekanand, visited Japan in 1893 and advised Indians to visit Japan and learn lessons of their perjurers and of their nationalism. He, like the Japanese artist Okakwu Kakuzo proclaimed the spiritual unity of Asia.⁷ Such travels by many nationalists were undertaken for various reasons, but they never lacked political significance, and eventually the political motive became the most frequent and permanent.⁸

³ *ibid*, p. 27.

⁴ Keshab Chandra Sen, *Lectures in India* (1904), p. 53.

⁵ Keshab Chandra Sen in *England*, Vol. I, p. 135.

⁶ Cited in *Friends of India*, May 1, 1874.

⁷ Warner Levcz, *Free India via Asia*, (1954), p. 19.

⁸ *ibid*, p. 19.

The reason for such a feelings of common bindings was Geographical too. Geographically India was the meeting point of whole of Asia. Jawaharlal Nehru realized this when he wrote:

“It is fitting that India should play her role in this new phase of Asian development. Apart from the fact that India herself is emerging into freedom and independence, she is the natural centre and focal point of the many forces at work in Asia. Geography is a compelling factor, and geographically she is so situated as to be the meeting point of Western and Northern and Eastern and South-East Asia. Because of this, the history of India is long history of her relations with the other countries of Asia”.

On another occasion he observed:

“India is very curiously placed in Asia and her history has been governed a great deal by the geographical factor plus other factors. Whichever problem in Asia you may take up, some-how or other India comes into the picture. Whether you think in terms of China or the Middle East of South East Asia, India immediately comes into the picture”.

This geographical privilege which India alone enjoyed in Asia actuated the Indian leaders to look to the fellow Asian countries. Hence if we see that India constituted the centre of Asia, it was also the cultural pivote of east and the west Asia. If Indian Muslims had cultural affinity with the West Asia, Indian Hindus and Buddhist were culturally close with the countries lying to the east of the continent. This cultural uniqueness was pointed out by Dr. M.A. Ansari in his presidential Address to the Indian National Congress in 1927 which according to him made Indian leaders the champion of Asian interests and persuaded them to have chose contacts with the Asian nations.⁹

With the revival of Pan-Islamism in the last quarter of 19th century under Abdul Hamid II, the sultan of Turkey, Muslims of India were drawn closer to Turkey and looked at him as the religious and spiritual head. When there was, a hostility between Serbia and Turkey in 1876, Abdul Latif convened a meeting of Muslims at the Townhall in Calcutta and desired means to raise funds for wounded Turkey. They also submitted

⁹ Report of the Fortieth Indian National Congress, p. 22.

memorandum/memorial on behalf of Muslims to Queen Victoria requesting her to extend her help to the sultan of Turkey. The Turkish authority in its turn, regarded Abdul Latif as the recognized representative of Islam in India.

Similarly, during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, both Indian Hindus and Muslims of India united to express their sympathy for Turkey. The Hindu newspapers declared that the sympathy of Hindus in favour of Turkey is because was an Asian Power.¹⁰

Similar kinds of a developing Pan-Islamism was seen in the colonial times when Pro-Greek attitude of Britain in 1897 Turks-Greek war enraged the Indian Muslims. They sent many letters to sultan of Turkey congratulating him for the victory over Greece.¹¹

Exactly the same reaction was seen during the Khilafat movement when promise of generous treatment of Turkey after the World War I was belied by British. Ali brothers and Gandhiji started Non-cooperation Movement, which was given a new energy when congress adopted the same.¹²

No, wonder these developments had perturbed the secretary of state, Lord Hamilton who wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Elgin on July 30, 1897.

We have however, a new element of intrigue and commotion introduced into India by the pan-Islamic Council in Constantinople and the close convention which is being established between the sultan and Indian Mohammedans¹³

The Indian Muslims interest in Turkish affairs were no doubt because of the common loose religious bond but it cannot be desired that this was also because of a "latent feeling

¹⁰ Hind Patriot, August 23, 1877, Editorial in Indian Daily News, August 31, 1877

¹¹ On the Id-ul-Fitr of 1898, a large number of Muslims assembled at the Mosque in Regent's Park in Delhi and after prayers Professor Ishak said "in no part of the Moslem world and in no annals of Islamic victory were the faithful ever gifted with such an enlightened sovereign as the present one, who upholds the peace of Europe and universal Moslem unity. Proceedings No. 165, April, 1898, Foreign Department. Government of India.

¹² Bipan Chandra, et.al, *India's struggle for Independence 1857-1947* (Delhi, 1989), p. 187

¹³ R.C Majumdar, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, p. 421

of oneness and fellowship with an Asian country facing a perpetual danger of dismemberment by western power.”¹⁴

In this way we see that Indian's National Congress was not selfishly inward looking. Right from the beginning of Hindu or Muslim renaissance, which led to the cultural nationalism to the ideological developments of the leaders of Indian National Congress, there has been a constant effort to see the Indian condition linked to the overall global developments. They tried to understand the global system of Imperialism and colonialism and realized the importance of India in its sustenance (especially that of British Empire). Their effort guided to forge a common cause with rest of Asia, which was facing the similar situation.

In their broad concerns with the hole of Asia, Burma also figured prominent. This was also because Burma with whom we had centuries of old economic and cultural contracts was our immediately neighbor under the same colonial master. As pointed out earlier, the Indian National Congress, who spearheaded Indian National Movement, in its very first session in 1885 passed a resolution in which it deprecated the annexation of Upper Burma.¹⁵ Phiroz Shah Mehta regarded the annexation as unjust, immoral and unwise.¹⁶ In 1891, in the seventh session of Indian National Congress, Dinshaw Wacha referred to the forcible seizure of annexation as the 'year of calamity' for India.¹⁷

The All India congress Committee at its meeting at Vijayavada on March 31, 1921 Congratulated Burmese people and sympathized with them. The special session of the Congress at Delhi in 1923 expressed sympathy for the flood-victims of Burma.¹⁸ The all India Congress Committee expressing sympathy with the Burmese people advised the Indian living in Burma not to ask for special privileges at the cost of the indigenous population as it would lead to fiction and misunderstanding.¹⁹

¹⁴ Birendra Prasad, n.1, p. 31.

¹⁵ P. Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol.I, Madras, Published by Congress Committee, 1935, p. 68.

¹⁶ Proceedings of the first-Indian National Congress, 1885, (1905), pp. 74-75.

¹⁷ Report of the seventh Indian National Congress, p. 31.

¹⁸ P. Sitaramayya, n. 15, p. 260.

¹⁹ The Indian National Congress, 1924, Allahabad, The All India Congress Committee, 1925, p. 34

Burma was so dear to Gandhi that he desired her to be free, free in her own territory and from the anomalous position of being just an appendage of the British India Empire. On March 10, 1927 Gandhi wrote:

“I have no doubt in my mind that Burma can not form part of India under Swaraj.....Free India will be an organic whole and will include those only who desire to remain as its free citizens. Therefore, Free India will have its geographical, ethnic and cultural limits. A free India will, therefore, recognise the differences in race and culture of the Burmese and while it will extend the hand of fellowship and help to the Burmese nation, it will recognise its right to complete independence and help it to regain and retain it in so far as it lies in India’s power....”

The main thing Gandhi emphasised was that Burma should be an independent nation having absolute right to shape her destiny because Gandhiji had for Burma the same solicitude as he had for India.

The efforts of Indian nationalist did not go waste. Burmese nationalism, though started a little late, grew with the constant ideological inspiration from Indian nationalists. As any nationalist movement in the colonized world begin with the socio-cultural awakening, the literature played a great role in it. One of the most important writer of Burmese resurgence was Thakin Kodaw Hmaing. Also known as “The Rabindra Nathh Tagore of Burma”²⁰ he inspired thousands of Burmese through his writings called “Tikas”. He ‘Boh Tika’ written on Europeans, in 1913, reflected the problems created by colonization and the desire to protect traditional Burmese values.

Hmaing brilliantly captured the agrarian changes in the colonial Burma; of a couple falling into debt and being forced to sell their beloved pair of oxen as well as a plot of land to the onslaught of irresistible new economic forces.²¹ This story can find its

²⁰ E. Sarkisyanz, *The Buddhist background of the Burmese Nationalist Revolution*, (The Hague, 1965), p. 126.

²¹ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear and other writings* (London, 1991), p. 149.

paralleled in Munshi Premchand 'Godan' where a farmer 'Hori' was forced to sell his cow and land to the new class of moneylenders produced by the colonial economy.²²

Hmaing was closer to Rabindranath Tagore in being primarily a man of thought but nearer to Gandhi in his political nationalism.²³ He gave an ideological foundation to the Burmese nationalism, which was based on Gandhian boycott methods. He embedded this canonical Vinaya code of Buddhist monastic regulation that monks were not to accept anything from evil people.²⁴

Yet another prolific writer and one of the foremost nationalist leader, Aung San's thought and action was to a great extent influenced by the Gandhian philosophy. He wrote that "we are fully prepared to follow men who are able and willing to be leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru and Tilak of India... let anybody appear who can be such a leader, who dares to be like such leader. We are waiting."²⁵

Similarly one of the most powerful protagonist of Buddhist revivalism and the leader of the Burmese Nationalism, U Ottama, also had the influence of Gandhian Technique. His political actions popularized him as a Gandhi of Burma, although some compared him with Subhash Chandra Bose.²⁶ In sync with Mahatma Gandhi, philosophy and technique, the GCBA (General Council of Buddhist Association), under him, adopted "Home Rule" idea and Non-cooperation method of Indian National Congress. Under his leadership, GCBA popularized the Gandhian idea of Keddah (handloom fabrics) and the use of Burmese cotton 'Pinni' across the country. At the Eighth Conference of YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association) at Prome on 29-31 October 1920, when the YMBA became GCBA, U Ottama tried to pass a resolution to effect the boycott of foreign goods. British manufactured items such as cigarettes, toiletry, these materials and imported textile were boycotted immediately.²⁷

²² Prem Chand, *Godan*, Allahabad, 1981.

²³ Aung San suu Kyi, n.21, p. 117.

²⁴ E. Sarkisyanz, n. 20, p. 133.

²⁵ Aung San Suu Kyi, n.21, p. 128.

²⁶ V Maung Maung, *From Sangha to Laity-Nationalist of Burma (1920-190)* (Canberra, 1979), p. 14

²⁷ V Maung Maung, n., p. 20

While in his stays in India, Ottama was a member of Indian National Congress and also a well known member of Hindu Mahasabha. But he managed to surmount the contradictions of Hindu Mahasabha and the Gandhian Philosophy.²⁸ He was well connected with Bal Gangadhar Tilak who had linked the political demands of the Indian National Congress with the contemporary Hindu revivalism, thereby preparing the ground for widening India's independence movement into a man struggle against oppressive colonial rule.²⁹ Inspired by this Ottama in the same way aspired for the self-government of the Burmese province of British India with roots in the traditional folk of Buddhism.³⁰

Gandhian tactics of boycott can also be seen in the strike in Rangoon College in December 1920. It was in opposition to the Rangoon University Act under which the control of the University was to be in the foreign hands. This followed the launching of a Burmese National Education Organization by leaders like U Ba Pe, U Thein Maung and V Ba Hlwin. The organization over saw the foundation of national schools where the medium of instruction was Burmese. This was exactly what congress was doing in India.

Another example of the relations between Indian National Congress and the Burmese General council thinks and acts along the similar principle, it is to be placed on record that the GCBA will give all support to Congress organizations in India and Burma."³¹

Some Burmese who had represented Burma in the Indian legislative Assembly had closely observed Indian politics and built contracts with some politicians like Motilal Nehru and CR Das. IN 1925, U To Gyi, called Motilal Nehru to Burma and U Ni formed the Swaraj Party of Burma. In alliance with the Provincial Congress Committee, the Burmese Swarajists secured sixth seats during the 1925 elections.³²

In this way, we see that there was some cooperation existing between Burma and Indian nationalism. It might have been a distant, loose and only a little more than-ideological

²⁸ Ba Maw, *Break through in Burma: Memairs of a Revolution* (1939-1946), London, 1968, p. 8

²⁹ E. Sarkisyanz, n.24, p. 126

³⁰ J.F. Cady, *A History of modern Burma*, (New York, 1958), p.232.

³¹ U Maum Maung, n 27, p, 36

³² Usha Mahajani, *Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya* (Bombay, 1960), p. 38

relations. But it can not be denied that many leaders, especially of the initial phase of Burmese nationalism i.e. till early 1920s, had direct influence of the Nationalist movements of India. They implied the ideologies and techniques of Indian National movements. And whenever time arose they deliberated a support for each other.

Indians supported the anti-colonial movements elsewhere, the Burmese nationalists responded similarly. They even borrowed or get inspired by the ideology and techniques of anti-colonialist struggle of India. But what striking we see in that there was “a certain dichotomy in the attitude of the Burmese educates elite towards Indians in general”³³ they were of course in awe with Indian Nationalists but had little cordial relations with the Indian immigrants in Burma.

It is true that U Chit Hlaing, who was the mentor of Burmese nationalists, was greatly influenced by him. He along with U Thien Maung was also the member of the Congress; and until 1917, the leaders of the YMBA and the Provincial Congress Committee were in close contact with each other. But what is striking is that all this failed to effect a merger of YMBA and Burma Provincial Congress Committee. It becomes more pertinent when the Indian question to problems related to Indian immigrants and separation issue became an important issue in the radicalized nationalist movement in 20 and 30's.

This brings us to examine the third player in the triangular relation between Indian and Burmese nationalist movements and Indian immigrants. It becomes important to analyze the status of Indian immigrants in Burma, their relation with Indian anti-colonial movements and their position in the Burmese national movement.

We have already analyzed in our preceding chapter that there was a little disgruntlement among Burmese people for the Indians in Burma. The permanent settlers had monopolized whatever middle level job that was available in the colonial system. They also had monopoly in the Burmese economy. And they were most exposed to any grievances of the populace because many of them were moneylenders and traders and the

³³Ibid. p. 34

“job-snatcher” labourers. On the top of all they were looked at as instrumental in the perpetuation of colonial rule.

These factors, as dealt with in great details, had already embittered the mass. The discontentment was indiscernible in the undercurrent when the movements on constitutional issues started; anti-Indian feelings gave an effective means to fire up the whole mass.

What is overlooked while analyzing the relation of Burmese nationalist movement, India and the Indian immigrants is that 1920 was not the total vault-pass of Burmese nationalist. They were no doubt inspired by Indian nationalism but the trigger was originated from within. The Indian National Congress did not effect a nationalist awakening of the Burmese but “only moulded the latter’s transient manifestation in a manner analogous to that of mass agitation in India.”³⁴ Whenever they emulated congress, they never lost sight of their national interest. When they established national schools they made Burmese the medium of instruction there. Also, their leadership always rested in Burmese hands.³⁵ When S.A.S Tyabji was momentarily elevated to a position of leadership, it was not because of his association with Congress, but because of his individual association with Burmese nationalist.³⁶

We will see in the next chapter that how the peculiar feature of Burmese nationalism which was anti-foreignism directed against not only the British but also against the immigrants from India, served the background for the separation from India. What calls here for discussion is the reason why Indians in Burma were considered as unwanted foreigners. Why Indian immigrants were not liked by the same Burmese who had all respects for Indian Nationalists in Burma.

The incapability of the Indian National Congress to inspire and influence Indian settlers in Burma is equally to be blamed for. The Burma Provincial Congress Committee was formed in 1908. This was long after the formation of the Congress in 1885. The reason

³⁴ Ushe Mahajani, n, p. 37

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 37

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 37

could be the Congress protest against the annexation and incorporation of Province in the first place. P.J. Mehta took the lead with the support of Indians in Burma. However, until 1919, it only functioned in name. Its strength was mainly middle and upper classes. It was not before 1920 that district branches were formed. However, only the urban areas and Rangoon in particular remained the name centre of Congress activities in Burma.³⁷

Mahatma Gandhi when visited Burma third time in 1929 (previous two occasions were in 1901 and 1915), it was a politically significant visit. He was welcomed by Rangoon Municipal Corporation and General Council of the All-Burmese Association. He was also given a very warm welcome by Phoongyis in swhe Degon manastry. He was even called by General Council of the All-Burmese Association to advice a 'Boycott Method'³⁸

Though the Provincial Congress Committee was formed with a view to harness Burmese and Indian nationalist sentiments for a common cause, they failed to enlist the active membership of the Burmese masses. There was no large-scale concerted propaganda. Since majority of them were merchants, they did not go to Burmese for the funds. Hence, 99% of its members were Indians.³⁹

Part of the reason behind failure of Burma provincial Congress Committee would have been the lack of political will on the part of its leaders and also because accepting Congress as a political guide, Burmese never lost sight of their own interest. By the time provincial congress was set up in 1908, Burmese already started mobilizing under Young Men Buddhist Association (YMBA) which was formed in 1906 (though, initially it primarily concerned itself with socio religious problems). Even before the formation of YMBA a few organizations like 'Buddha Sasana Naggaha Athin (Mission Association), founded in 6th July 1897, had worked for the similar goal.

And above all, the reason behind indifference of Burmese towards initiatives of Indian Immigrants would have been also because of non-participation of the latter in any Burmese movements. As mentioned earlier, the emphasis of Indian Immigrants was

³⁷ Ibid. p. 34

³⁸ D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma-life of Mahandas Karamchand Gandhi*, vol. II (1920-1929) (Bombay, 1951), p. 461

³⁹ Ibid, p. 35

always on maintenance of difference (mixed with sense of superiority) with the majority indigenous population. Issues which were primarily of Burmese consensus hardly found any Indian support. When Rangoon universally was boycotted in 1920, Most of Indian students attended the class.⁴⁰

Burmese were also paved with the Indians who usually took British side. The Secretary of the GCBA complained to Gandhi that Indian Capitalists were helping the European exploitation and that the Indians were indifferent to the Burmese movement for emancipation. To this, Gandhi said that even India was not free from black legs. He armed them that even if entire local Indian community adopted an unjust attitude towards Burma, India would never countenance it.⁴¹

Various nationalist leaders in India advised Indians in Burma to join hands with Burmese and fight for common emancipation. Gandhi in his address to Indian Community in Rangoon on 10th March 1929 reminded that he received complaint regarding Indians not sharing Burmese tot. He said that same things he had heard about Indians in Ceylon and South Africa. He appealed,

‘I must ask you to have due regard for the people of the country, which enables you to earn bread and more than that to a mass wealth. There is an additional reason for the Hindus to do so, they are Indians and follow Buddhism, which is an offshoot of Hinduism. So you should feel sorry, when they are unhappy and rejoice in their welfare. Your conduct should be such that you would not feel sorry for it before God. It should be such that the Burmese would not mind if you stayed on in Burma. That many people have come here from India would be a good thing if you mingle freely with the Burmese. Try to understand this view-point and help them where you should. From my forty years of experience, I tell you that nothing will be lost if we deal with the world in this way. saint and you cannot do what I can. I don't claim to be a saint, I too have to feed myself, I have my wife, children and relatives... There are many who line by honest labour, doing daily work, with God as their witness.’⁴²

⁴⁰ N.C. Sen, *A Peep into Burmese Politics* (Allahabad, 1945), p. 10

⁴¹ D.G. Tendulkar, n.38, p. 456

⁴² The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XL, February-May 1929, n., pp. 116-117

He again underlined the same concern while addressing Gujarati community. He advised them that,

“Burma was not a part of India at all... since you have come here as foreigners, you should become one with the people here as sugar dissolves in milk. Your loves should be noble and no action should offend anyone.”⁴³

However, the appeals of Indian Nationalist fell in deaf ears. No efforts were made by Indian immigrants to harness the reverence and influence that Indian Nationalist commanded among Burmese leaders. These remained a consistency in their dealings with the Burmese. For this, they had to pay their price when Burmese nationalists rose the separation issue and anti-Indian riots were perpetrated in 1930 and 1939. This brings us to the Indian immigrants and Burmese Constitutional demands.

⁴³ *ibid*, pp. 112-113

CHAPTER-4

BURMESE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACTS 1919 AND 1935

The Burmese Nationalist movement had largely indigenous roots, it was to some extent influenced by the Indian nationalist movement but the issues it brought up were primarily Burmese. The Indian immigrants were of all the classes and religious groups, the most peculiar in Burma because of which their role and participation in the Burmese national movement demands a separate study. Nationalists in Burma were opposed to not just the British but also the Indians. The anti-Indian sentiment provided the means to expand and radicalize the anti-colonial movement.

No doubt the early nationalists struggle in Burma borrowed the methods of Indian Nationalist Congress and looked up to it for support and guidance. However, the very fact that they never solely an Indian concern speaks of their own grievances. There is no denying the fact that the organized nationalist Movement in Burma started only as late as in last few years of second decade of 20th century. Albert D. Moscotti writes.

“If Burma had been politically isolated from India, its progress towards self-rule would have been slow and more uncertain”¹

If we look at the cause of their organized Nationalist Movement we would find a stark contrast with which they suddenly awoke in 1917 when talks of constitutional changes was in the air. Hitherto it was considered to be a peaceful and docile colony. The Lt. Governor of Burma Sir Regional Craddock had expressed satisfaction that,

“...there has been no extremist party among young Burmese; there has been no unbridled and defamatory press; there has been, thank God, no signs of unrest among Burmese students and not even the slightest suspicion of anarchy.”²

¹ Albert D. Mascotti, *British Policy and the Nationalist Movement in Burma: 1917-1937* (Hawaii, 1974), p. 20

² Ames, Carlton C., “Impact of British Rule on Burma, 1901-1948”, Doctoral thesis, p. 26, quoted from Usha Mahajani, *The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya* (Bombay, 1960.), p. 36

However what is overlooked is that nothing comes out of nothing. A sudden Burmese nationalist awakening must have had predecessors, through not necessarily organized ones. Burma's loss of sovereignty to an alien nation was never something to be reconciled with. Naturally, Burmese were enraged by the presence of the alien. Hearing the King's surrender, the women and men, in the villages, wept and broke out in lamentations."³

Resistance to the British rule started ever since. Initially, though it were the peasants and individual Monks who led the struggle. The monk known as "the Pongyi of Mayanchung" was publically hanged by the English.⁴ There were daily shootings of 'decoits' after the occupation of Mandalay, as was observed by Russian Ideologist Manayeff who happened to in Burma at the time of the British occupation.⁵ The British Commissioner Grosthwaite rightly noted "that a considerable minority of the population, to say the least, did not want us."⁶ The resistance and its brutal suppression became so frequent that questions were asked in the British parliament.

Though these resistances were dubbed as "law and order problem" by the British, there can be no doubt that they were not satisfied with their loss of sovereignty. Though these were sporadic, spontaneous and unorganized struggle, they can be said to bear seeds of Nationalism of later years.

If politically they were still immature, there had been some activities in the socio-educational field. As British education was neither deep rooted no wide spread and as the education was monopolized by Buddhist monks, the Pongyis, "Buddhism became the cynosure of all the nebulous Burmese nationalist forces."⁷ In 1904 the students of Rangoon University formed a Buddhist Association in 1906, a few western educated Burmese U Ba Pe, Manny Maung Gyi, Maung Hla Pe founded Yong Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA)

³ Grattan Geary, *Burma after the Conquest: viewed in its political, social and economic aspects from Mandlay* (London, 1886) p. 294

⁴ James G. Scott, *Gazetter of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, part I, vol. II (Rangoon, 1900) pp. 7-8

⁵ E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Background to the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague, 1965), p. 102

⁶ Charles, Crosthwaite, *The pacification of Burma* (London, 1957), p. 14

⁷ Mahajani, n.2, p. 33.

YMBA was actually the first explicit and successful expression of Burmese Nationalist feelings. It, however, concerned itself with the socio-religious purposes. Its objective was to 'refashion valuable elements of Buddhist tradition in the context of the best western learning and standards.'⁸ It had its parallel in India where the early 19th century cultural awakening had led to the nationalist movements. The cultural nationalism always precedes the political nationalism. YMBA, did the similar things. To begin with, they started establishing many Buddhist schools in Burma. Maung Htin Aung writes,

The establishment of the Buddhist schools coincided with the rapid growth of the nationalist movement for freedom in India and the government of British India rather foolishly exiled some of the Indian Political leaders to Burma, thus making it possible for the more enthusiastic members of the YMBA to make contact with those Indian politicians.⁹

In this phase of incipient nationalism there was a cordial relation existing between INC and YMBA. BPCC's head Dr. P.J Mehta commanded some influence on some members of YMBA (Particularly U Chit Hlaing, V thein Maung etc). They even attended each other's meetings and discussed problems of common concerns. Some of the BPCC members even spoke about amalgamation with YMBA. However, the objectives of the two bodies were different from the very beginning BPCC was a purely political organization, supported by a small section of upper and middle class Indians who, in the eyes of Burmas, were generally associated with business monopolies, money-lenders, and bureaucrats. YMBA was still non-political and unaffected by the Indian method of resistance initiated by the INC.

Political agitations did not stand up till the end of first world war. As Khilafat and Rowlett Act had generated much wave in India, Burma remained in 'placid state'.¹⁰ However when Rangoon University Act in 1920 sought to put the control of the University under foreign hands, the student's led protests kicked up the mass unrest. It provided the proverbial first spark to the discontented mass. The student strike spread the

⁸ John Cady, *A History of Modern Burma* (New York, 1958), p. 403

⁹ Quoted from Sung San Suu kyi, *Freedom from fear and other writings* (London, 1992), p. 279

¹⁰ G.E Harvey, *British Rule in Burma: 1824-1942* (London, 1946), p. 28

boycott movement to the schools. It was supported by all leaders Indians & Burmese. This was the time when Indians had started the non-cooperation movement. It seemed that the whole of British India was up against the Colonial master. In 1922, when the crown Prince visited India, there was a nationwide boycott of his visit. A local Indian Burmese S.A.S Tyabji addressed a meeting composed of Indians and Burmese. For this he was arrested along with other Burmese leaders. That was the high time of the cooperation between Indian immigrants and the Burmese National Movement.

But this could not bridge the problematic “side by side” existence of two communities in the colonial situation. The status of Indian Immigrants in Burma as a ‘exploiting’ minority was seemingly at odds with Burmese interests. Indians were aliens, grafted from their own country to the other colony of their common colonial master. And as they somehow, as discussed in previous chapter, came to have an edge over indigenous population, they became subjects of envy and hence a natural target. So, when the constitutional developments were discussed and once the separation issue became a existentialist demand, Indians in Burma became a rallying issue. The discontentment had soared so high that anti-Indian feeling was no less than anti-British feeling. One Burmese remarked “I do not love the British but I have two enemies, one armed with a revolver (British), other with a stone(Indians); we have a stone. Should we throw it at the revolver man or the stone man?”¹¹

In fact, Burmese mass enthusiasm for Indian visitors had begun to cool down as early as 1924.¹² By then the politically apathetic Burmese had awoken to participate in their own political future. In 1918 YMBA along with other 20 parties of various sorts formed the General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA) to work for Burma’s freedom.

The cause of this development was the announcement in Parliament by the Secretary of State for India, Lord Montague, that “The policy of Her Majesty” Government... is the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to progressive realization

¹¹ Mahajani, n.2, p. 64. Additions in the Brackets are mine.

¹² Ibid, p. 38

of responsible government in India”¹³ The announcement made no mention of “Burma” or the “Burmese”. Burma was thought not yet ready for such consideration. Montague had no plan to visit this province to gather public opinion. They explicitly wrote “We have not included Burma in our survey except in so far as, while that province remains part of the Indian polity, as far as military reasons it must, it is necessary to provide for its representation in the central Government. Our reasons are that Burma is not India. Its people belong to another race in another stage of political development, and its problems are altogether different for instance, the application to Burma of the general principles of throwing open the public services more widely to Indians would only mean the replacement of one alien bureaucracy by another. The desire for elective institutions have not developed in Burma, the provincial legislative council as constituted by Morley-Minto scheme, has no Burmese elected element, and the way is open for a different line of development... We therefore set aside the problem of Burma’s political evolution for separate and future considerations.”¹⁴

This alarmed Burmese and they were forced to wake up for their cause. They thought that they will continue to be neglected if they exist as a part of large British-India.¹⁵ Therefore they sent delegation to meet Montague and Chelmsford for extension of diarchal reforms to Burma and also its separation from India.

In 1919-20 two member delegation led by U Pu was sent by GCBA (which had come to the existence by them) to London to appeal to the Select Committee appointed to examine the Montague- Chelmsford report. U Pu claimed that “Burma does not ask for wider concession or greater Powers. She only asks to be treated with the same generosity as that meted out to the other provinces.”¹⁶ Even the Craddock scheme was also rejected by the Burmese leaders. It provided for the Executive Board which was to be responsible to the Governor. This was obviously inadequate as under diarchic governance in India, the Executive Council with transferred portfolios were responsible to the legislature. At

¹³ John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma* (New York, 1958), p. 200

¹⁴ Parl. Papers, 1919, Vol. IV, Clause 41, Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill, 1919, p. 63

¹⁵ Moscotti, n.1, p. 25

¹⁶ Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill, 1919, p. 203

last, under mass agitations Britain agreed to extend Diarchy to Burma. The GCBA did not press for the immediate separation for Burma because their primary object was to see that Burma was not left behind India in Political reforms.¹⁷

These developments had a lot of significance for the Indian minority in Burma. Burma realized that in separation lies their salvation. British, on their part, played their time tested policy of "Divide and Rule." Though Burma had become Indian province, they never seized to highlight the differences. This was highlighted in the remark of Montague-Chelmsford quoted above. The Joint select committee the report on it also stressed, "Burma is only by accident a part of the responsibility of the Governor-General of India. The Burmese are as distinct from Indians in race and language as they are from the British."¹⁸ Similarly Lord Lytton, Under Secretary of State for India in the House Lords said:

"There is very strong feeling in Burma that this Bill (to extend Diarchy to Burma) in some way or the other should mark the fact that Burma is geographically separate and distinct from India ... We are anxious, if possible, to meet the Burmese sentiment on this point. And we shall ask the standing joint committee whether any means could be found for making the distinction which is required."¹⁹

The desire to keep Burma separate from India was also guided by British apprehension of Indian influence on Burma's politics. Police surveillance of Indian agitators begun in 1918-19.²⁰

This was part of this policy only that the administration did not develop any form of overland communications between the two countries, particularly the Railways and kept them at a safe distance of over 700 miles by sea.²¹

¹⁷ N.R. Chakarvarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community* (London, 1971), p. 104

¹⁸ Parl Papers, 1919, Vol. IV, Clause 41, Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill 1919, and also see, Major Christian, *Burma and the Japanese Invaders* (Bombay, 1945), p. 62

¹⁹ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol. 44, pp. 349-75, quoted from N.R. Chakravarti, p. 105

²⁰ Report of the Administration of Burma 1918-19, p. 40.

²¹ N.R. Chakravarti, n.17, p. 10

For Indians in Burma, the 1920 agitations gave them a new feeling of insecurity. It was just the beginning of the feeling against Indians in Burma and the demand for the separation from India continued to grow. The cry of separation had created some unease and alarm amongst Indians who were in Burma or had trade and business there. They had only nominally participated in Burmese movements. Actually Indian response was justified to some extent. It was only then that they had felt like a minority community in an alien land. Driven by this insecurity they demanded communal Representation — something which Nationalists in India abhorred. Naturally all Burmese opposed the doctrine of communal representations.* When the first election was held in 1922 and Burma entered the phase of formal politics, the differences between the majority and minority came out in open in the legislature. The representational politics in Democratic set up (howsoever limited that might have been) openly showed the opposite interests the two communities had. Burmese resentment was mainly aggravated by two bills namely sea passenger's Tax Bill and the Expulsion of offender's Bill. The former was to impose a tax of Rs. 5 on persons entering Burma by sea. It was directed against Indian workers who allegedly moved from place to place to evade payment of capitation and other taxes. As Burmese could not evade, they welcomed the move. But Indians like J.K. Munshi and M.M. Rafi criticized the 'true aim' of the move which was unjust. Narayan Rao went to the extent of questioning the authority of Burmese legislature to interfere with the rights of "British Indians".²²

The second bill regarding the expulsion of non-Burmese who had been convicted of criminal offences or ordered to furnish security for good behaviour.²³ This could have had greater implications because of its misuse in sending nationalist leaders. Criticizing this bill Narayan Rao said that Indians and Burmese were British subjects so the latter have no right to pass any bill which could be anti-Indian.

Because of strong Indian opposition the first bill was vetoed by the Governor and the second one was amended. These two bills clearly exposed the diverging interests of the

* For details see Proceedings of Burma Reforms Committee, Vol. I, Rangoon.

²² Proceedings of Legislative Council (Rangoon, 1925), p. 42.

²³ Ibid, p. 63..

two communities. However these bills had also given an opportunity to negotiate the common interests. But both the communities failed to do that.

The matter was further worsened by the economic depression when peasants lost their lands to money lenders. This increased the competition with the Indian labourers in the urban area. In one incident in 1930, the dockyard labourers in Rangoon struck for higher wages. The employers replaced them with Burmese labour. But later on when a deal was struck, Indian labourers were called on to return. This led to Indo-Burmese riots in May 1930. In the riots about a hundred persons were killed and a thousand injured. They were exclusively Indians.²⁴ Hence 'nationalism expressed itself in hostility towards the Indian minority as well as towards the government.'²⁵

This coincided with the agrarian nationalist rebellion in December 1930. It was led by Saya Sen and was initially directed against the government. But due to the overall collapse of law and order in rural areas Burmese villagers gave vent to their 'antagonism against the Indians'²⁶. As their cause of misery was moneylenders, Indians being the dominant among them, the prime targets were other Indians. To make matter worse Indians in police were responsible for its suppression. Though this rebellion could not make any significant effect on the development of a new political arrangement in Burma, yet it entered the National Pantheon as an event of critical importance.

The first legislative council (1922-25) under diarchy ended creating a sharp cleavage between Burmese Indians and Burmese. In the second legislative council (1925-28) the Nationalist Party regained majority and hence Indian bashing continued. The chief bone of contention was the financial arrangement under which, especially after the extension of diarchy which came with additional responsibilities, Burma was always in financial constraints.²⁷ This further helped in keeping the issue of separation from India, alive.

In the third legislative council the Governor sought to call moderate, pro-government groups to form the Ministry. The Nationalist Party, though once again the single largest

²⁴ N.C. Sen, *A Peep into Burma Politics* (Allahabad, 1945), pp. 40.

²⁵ Moscotti, n.1, p. 55

²⁶ W.S. Desai, *A Pageant of Burmese History* (Calcutta, 1961), p. 157.

²⁷ N.R Chakravarti, n.7, p. 122.

party, had to be content with playing the role of opposition. The ministers were supported by a coalition of Independents, nominated officials and non-officials and minority representatives including Indian members. Needless to say, this had further enraged the Burmans.

As the issue of separation was constantly aimed at Indians, be it through “anti-Indian bills” or through direct lashing out at Indian’s exploitative and “anti Burma” practices, British government never missed a chance to approve of such possibility. Right in April 1920, Craddock had advised the Burmans in his speech in Burma Legislative Council that “the ultimate separation will be the probable outcome of political developments”²⁸ They thought that Burmese would be more convenient to handle when separated from India.²⁹ If British government fanned separation, their businessmen and other capitalists were no less. In 1932, W.J.C. Richards, Chairman, Burma Chamber of Commerce remarked that upon a trade agreement between Burma and India “as an early opportunity of removing at least some of the disabilities with which the trade of Burma is burdened on the account of its link with India”. For this he even offered the Burmese friends facts and figures and statistics.³⁰

Indian response was obviously born out of the sense of insecurity. In 1930, Burma-Indian Association formed by leaders like S.A.S. Tyabji, M.M. Rafi, Adam Haji Dawood, J.K. Munshi etc. Their aim was to safeguard interests of local Indians.³¹ Indian National Congress, however, preferred to maintain neutrality and adopted a line that the question of separation was one for Burma to decide. The All-Party Conference in India, 1928, convened to draw an outline of constitution of India, also accepted this in principle. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Mohammad Ali, both on their visit in 1929, confirmed the Indian desire that separation should be a matter for Burma to decide.

²⁸ Speeches by Reginald Craddock (1917-22) (Rangoon, Government Press, 1924), pp. 250.

²⁹ Desai, n.26, p. 253.

³⁰ Legislative Council Proceedings, December 1932, Vol. XXIII, p.135, quoted from Usha Mahajani, n.7, p.51.

³¹ The Association continued to exist and work with Burma Provincial Committee of Congress after the ban on the later was lifted in 1931. However, the leaders of the Provincial Congress Committee showed increasingly cooler interests in nationalism in India and Burma. It was, therefore, revived only in as late as 1934. as for the Burma-Indian Association, it never received any recognition from anybody as representing the views of Indians in Burma.

Their disinterestedness to the matters concerning Burma is proved by the fact that all efforts of Dadachanji, the representative of Burma in the All India Congress Committee from 1934 till 1937, to move any resolution on political and economic reforms for Burma, were elbowed out.³²

All these factors forced the already bad situation go worse. Simon Commission which was constituted in 1927, recommended separation to be effected “as early as possible”³³. All predictable reasons were given –that Burma was an entirely different country from India and that Burmese customs, manners and the way of life were entirely different from those of Indians.

Indian Round Table Conference held from 12th November 1930 to 19th January 1931, formed the Burma Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee favoured the separation of Burma. Here it needs to be mentioned that Indians in Burma asked for separate representation in Indian Round Table Conference to voice their interests, but they were not allowed. However, they had a fair chance in Burma Round Table Conference, which was held in London from 27th November 1931 to 12th January 1932. As the members representing included all communities, the Conference clearly brought out their differing interests. Burman delegates, apart from dominion status, demanded early separation on the ground that i) unregulated immigration of Indian labour had lowered the standard of living of Burmese labour, ii) marriage of Buddhist women and foreigners was creating complications, and iii) Burma’s desire to maintain a separate army³⁴

Indian delegates like the Europeans, asked for communal representation. They underlined their contributions in the making of “modern” Burma and asked for their fair representation in the government. Some of them even tried not to seem incongruous with their nationalists in India, when for example, Cowsjee said “the communal electoral

³² Mahajani, n.7, p.55.

³³ Report of the Statutory Commission for India, Vol. II, 1930, pp.181-192.

³⁴ Burma Round Table Conference, 27th Nov. 1931-12th Jan 1932, Proceedings, London, pp.31, 55-56, 83-89.

system ...should be continued until such time as the minority communities feel that they have sufficient confidence in the majority.”³⁵In his statement, there is some element of acceptance that the communal representation was basically not a positive thing to ask for.

In the meantime in Nov. 1932, the elections were held. The anti-separatist block of U. Chit Hlaing and Ba Maw won largest seats. However, U. Ba Pe charged them of foul play because Ba Maw had influenced Pongyis support by rumours that with the separation the entire Buddhist Church and the hierarchy of monks would pass under the authority of a Buddhist foreign governor. It was also believed that anti-separatists were under the influence of Indian businessmen and traders.

Resultantly, the post-election period became more vicious with anti-Indian sentiments spreading. The question of dominion status was sidetracked. The British government passed the Govt. of Burma Act in 1935, which effected separation in 1937. The issue of dominion status was kept for the future and communal representation was given to the minorities in both the chambers of legislature.³⁶ The parliament recognised Indians as the most important minority in Burma as they were given the largest number of minority seats (i.e. 13 out of 36). This arrangement ensured the continued majority-minority altercations in the legislature. During the five years that followed from 1937, just one general election was held. Under the new constitution, Burma saw four governments under four different Prime Ministers. In this phase, as Burma saw political uncertainty that power politics brings, the lives of the Indians became even more insecure and miserable. Many legislations was brought up, which were aimed at curbing their economic hold. The process of Burmanisation was pursued with more vigour through bills like the Burma Domicile Bill (1937), and they could foresee that their days in Burma were numbered when they were physically threatened once again in the 1938 riot.

³⁵ Ibid. pp.155-156.

³⁶ Upper chamber consisted of 36 members, out of which 18 were elected and 18 were to be nominated by the governor to give representation to the minorities. In the lower chamber, there were 132 seats, out of which Indians got 13, Karens 12, Europeans 9, and anglo-burmans 2.

Actually this phase can be categorised as the phase of assertive nationalism in Burma.³⁷ The Burma Domicile Bill introduced in 1937, was aimed at defining domicile in Burma. Indians, however, scuttled this effort of the Burmese to exercise their sovereign rights. Matters also came to loggerheads when in the same year Rangoon Corporation Bill was sought to be amended wherein the Burmese asked for an increase in their seats in the Corporation from one-third to a half.³⁸

Bills introduced to curb Indian economic interests were –the Distribution of Lands Bill (1937) and the Paddy Rents Control Bill (1937). The former sought to declare the whole land as the state land and distribute among the tenants. The latter was aimed at fixing the rent at one-fourth of the produce. However, both bills could not be passed as both Indian and Burmese landlords opposed it.

In the backdrop of the heightened flare up toward ‘Burmanisation’ and the motto of ‘Burma for Burmans’, the riot of 1938 occurred. The primary cause behind the riot was religious.³⁹ Soon the communal clash between the Burmese Buddhists and Burmese Muslims turned into a clash between India and Burma. Many Indians were killed in this riot. Most of the victims were rickshaw pullers and the laborer class. The Riot Enquiry Committee held various news papers like “The Sun” responsible for engaging in a campaign against the ‘menace’ of the Indian immigration. It said that they continuously, if intermittently, sought to use them (the “the menace of Indian immigration”) for the political purpose of driving a wedge of prejudice and ill feelings between the Burmese and Indian populations in Burma.”⁴⁰

The Enquiry Committee also condemned the Thakins (masters) of the Dobame Asiayone (We the Burmese association)⁴¹. It needs to be put in parenthesis that Dobame Asiayone was formed in 1935 by the amalgamation of All Burma Youth League (1931) and the

³⁷ Mahajani, n.2, p.65.

³⁸ In 1940, the bill was passed, which gave the Burmese 50% representation

³⁹ A Burmese Muslim Maung Shwe Hpi had written a few derogatory remarks about Buddhism in his book. Though it had been published in 1928, it had gone unnoticed till 1938.

⁴⁰ Interim Report of the Riot Enquiry Committee, 1938, p.37.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.47.

Dobama Society (1930). The League, headed by Maung Ba Thaung , was started with the objective of reviving the national school organization of the early 1920s and to also establish its contacts with vernacular and the Anglo-vernacular schools. The Dobama Society was actually organized by the Rangoon university students. Their amalgamation was potentially one very significant development of the 1930s. They developed a cadre of followers in all important high schools. They were outward looking and read varied literature ranging from Karl Marx to Nietzsche. Though they had communist leanings, yet they were always strongly nationalist⁴².

However, it seems very unlikely that the Thakin leadership would have anything to do with the communal riots of 1938. The leaders were ideologically committed bunch of nationalists. Those who might have participated in the riots might have been the misguided “youth who were swayed by the Thakin slogans but were not initiated into the ideology”⁴³. This was quite like what the Indian historian Shahid Amin writes, that the district or the local workers of the Indian National Congress quite often resorted to violence and coercive measures to enlist the support for their movement like picketing etc.⁴⁴

What became clear from the riots of 1938 was that the issue of Indian immigration had to be addressed immediately. The riot of 1930 had, for the first time, drawn attention to the problem of the Indian laborers. However not much was done after that as the issue of separation dominated the political scene (though the issue of immigration was the broad theme under which was the Separation was demanded). In 1939, the Baxter commission was appointed to look into 1) the validity Burmese claim that Indians were displacing the Barman 2) the volume of Indian immigration 3) whether that was seasonal or transient 5) in what occupation they were employed etc.

The commission refuted the Burmese claims that the Indians were displacing the Burmese and said that “domiciled Indians i.e. those born in Burma had increased to 40% in recent years. It also said that perhaps with the exception of Rangoon, there was no

⁴² J.F.Cady, n. , pp.375-78.

⁴³ Usha Mahajani, n.7, p.847

⁴⁴ Shahid Amin, *Event, metaphor, memory: Chauri-Chaura 1922-1992* (Berkeley, 1995).

evidence of excess Indian labour over the requirement.⁴⁵ However, the commission endorsed the Burmese claims as an independent country to determine the composition of its population and regulate immigration. It urged the governments of India and Burma to negotiate the immigration agreement. As a result, U Saw - Bajpai agreement, also called the 'Indo-Burmese agreement of 1941' was signed. However, the agreement invited severe criticism from all quarters. The chief cause of the objections was the clause which stated that the Indians willing to enter Burma needed financial guarantees and literary qualifications. However due to incessant protests over the agreement the governments of India and Burma had to resume further negotiations. But due to the pressure of the war and the ineffective exile government of Burma at Simla, the new tentative agreement was of little interest to the public.

⁴⁵ James Baxter, Report on Indian Immigration (Rangoon , 1941) , pp.104-10

CHAPTER-5

JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF BURMA AND INDIA IMMIGRANTS

Burma fell under Japanese occupation for three years between 1942 and 1945. It was during this time that it tasted 'independence' if only, just for two years, recognized by Japan and its allies. The experience of independence may not have been quite ideally, what the Burmese had looked forward to but it certainly hastened the fall of colonialism in Burma. This period is also significant because it was then that the Burmese elite had the primary experience of politics and the art of administration. As for the Indian immigrants, the Japanese occupation, in tandem with the presence of Azad Hind Fauz, presented the dilemma, which was hard to resolve and continued to bewilder them.

Burmese Nationalist Movement during the World War:

The British made a strategic blunder in their defense preparedness in Southeast Asia. Japan caught the British on the wrong foot. The latter had anticipated the danger of Burma falling to the Japanese. It had used all its energy to strengthen naval security in Singapore. Japan chose to invade the French Indo-China and Siam first. This gave them an opportunity to attack Singapore through the back door. When Singapore fell, they turned to Burma. In only about five months the Japanese occupied a country larger than France.¹ This they achieved with merely four divisions of their army. Britain was forced to retreat about one thousand miles.

The southern most part of Burma, Victoria Point fell to the Japanese in December 1941. By the end of January, they had occupied Tenasserim and air fields of Tavoy, Megui and Moulmein. Rangoon was occupied on 8th March and Mandalay was captured on 1st May 1942. By the end of May 1942, the whole of Burma was under the complete control of Japanese forces. Evidently, British preparedness for the defense of Burma was quite inadequate. There were scant forces in Burma. Government of Rangoon House of

¹ J.L. Christian, *Burma and Japanese Invader* (Bombay, 1945), p.348.

Representative had stated in 1938 that the Burmese Army consisted of only 159 Burmans, 340 other indigenous races, 1423 Indian and 1587 British soldiers.²

Besides, the control of Burmese army was divided between different authorities separated by miles of geographical distances. When Burma, after the separation from India was given the full responsibility of its own army, it was placed under the British Chief of Staff for operational purposes (September 1939). However, Burmese government held its finance and administration. When in November 1940, operational control was placed under the Far Eastern command in Singapore; the administrative responsibility was divided between the Burmese government and the war office in London.³

Hence, when Japanese army made a swift penetration, British Burma laid prostrate. Indeed, it was quick and well planned invasion specially if we see that attacks on Burma came only few days after they declared war in the far east on 8th December, 1941.

However, Japanese victory was not just a victory won by its military in five months of operations. Their plan to utilize anti-British nationalist sentiments had already begun with various propaganda and with the direct agents of Minami Kikan.⁴ In Burma, Agent Suzuki (alias Bo Mogye) was sent in 1940 to establish contacts with such nationalist who wanted to drive away the colonial power. It was their effort (Suzuki and the Thakins) that enabled Japan to enlist the support of Burmese. Their objective was to stir disturbances throughout Burma in order to hamper the enemy operations and to induce the Burmese to wholeheartedly cooperate with them.⁵

Even before the operation of Colonel Suzuki, there were efforts on both sides to reach out to each other. The 'inner circle' of the Dobama Asiaone group, even before starting its main underground activities for a revolt, began searching for contacts abroad to get arms. Thakin Nu had failed to get the arms from the Chinese because of latter's dependence on

² Frank, N Trager ed., *Burma: Japanese Military Administration, Selected Documents, 1941-45 Historical Notes* (Philadelphia, 1971). P.10

³ William, Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (London, 1956), p.11

⁴ It was a Secret Service of Japan under colonel Minami. Their members were sent to foreign countries, disguised as business, scholars, makes correspondent etc. to gather information. Trager, ed., n2., p.6

⁵ Document no.1 , "Plan for the Burma Conquest", In Trager ed., n2, p.27

British goodwill.⁶ However, the fact that they did not give up is evident from what Aung San said “if dacoits could get arms, why should not we”.⁷

Another leader U Saw, who went to Japan in 1935, made sound contacts there. On his return he managed to get a major share in the newspaper, “The Sun”. Until 1938, it served the Japanese sponsored propaganda, which can be regarded as a part of the Japanese preparation for the coming operation. Again, Thien Maung’s visit to Japan in 1939 and the Pro-Japanese tone of his newspaper, “New Burma” indicated the same effort by Japanese to rope in Burma.

However, there were no organized contacts between any section of the Burmese people and Japan for the overthrow of Burmese rule in Burma prior to 1940. Colonel Suzuki came to Rangoon in July 1940 with the aim to gain the armed support of the Burmese in case of Japanese invasion of the country. He made contacts with the Burmese leaders through Japanese Buddhist monks.⁸ In November 1940, he along with Aung San and twenty-nine⁹ others left Burma. These ‘thirty heroes’ (as they came to be known later) received secret training in Japanese occupied Hainan Island in anticipation of war with the British. Led by Aung San, the Burmese independence Army followed the invading Japanese from Thailand to Burma, adding recruits as it advanced. This army remained essentially Burmese in membership and orientation. As and when the status of Burma changed, the army changed its name from “independence army” to “Defense Army” in late 1942 and to “National Army” in 1943 (when Burma got nominal independence from the Japanese)¹⁰

The nucleus of the Burmese Nationalist Army (BIA) was introduced into Burma in late December 1941. As an independent military organization, it marched and fought in their

⁶ Maung, Maung, *From Sangha to Liety: Nationalists Movements of Burma 1920-1940* (Canberra, 1979), p.215

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Trager, ed. , n2. p.6

⁹ Thakin San Hlaing, Aung San, Thakn Tun Lwin, Thakin Tin Aye, Ko Saung, Koshwe, Thakin Ba Gyan, Thakin Hla Pe, Thakin Hla Pe, Thakin tun Shwe, Thakin Saw Lwin, Ko Hla, Thakin aye Maung, Thakin Than Tin, Thakin Soe, Thakin Tum Khin, Thakin Shu Maung, Thakin Maung Maung, Thakin, Ngwe, Thakin Thit, Thakin Aung Than, Thakin Khin Maung U, Thakin San Mya, Thakin Than Tin, Tun Oke, Thakin Hla Myaing, Ko Tun Shein, Thakin Aung Thein, Ko Hla Maung, Thakin Than Nyunt.

¹⁰ Josef Silvestien, *Burma : Military Rule and the epolitics of Stagnation* (Ethence, 1977), pp.16-17

own way in Burma. The underground political support of the BIA in Burma did all the organizing, recruiting and other preparation for their arrival. Their mission was to reach Rangoon before the arrival of the main Japanese force there. Other contingents participated in the victories in the Tenasserim cities and countryside.

The Japanese did not supply arms to the BIA except 1000 rifles and 100 army pistols in the beginning.¹¹ They were usually discouraged from participating in direct war. They were mainly engaged for interpretations, guiding, arson, sabotaging, gathering intelligence etc. On their way many Burmese soldiers of British Burma Rifles joined them. The maximum strength of BIA was around 30,000.

As Burma was falling under another foreign invasion, most of the Burmese offered no resistance.¹² However, only a minority of the Burmese were actively pro-Japanese. Japanese propaganda had worked subtly and effectively. Japan was looked upon as the champion of the Asiatic races and the liberator of Burma from western dominance. The slogan of "Asia for Asians" had caught up with the masses. The air was full of legends—"The Japanese are our great friends", "When a Japanese meets a Burmese he greets him with our own way cry", "The Japanese will die for the Burman's freedom.", "A Burma Prince is coming as a leader in the Japanese army."¹³ Japanese could sell their 'participation in Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere' will with the Burmese.

However, the bonhomie between Burmese Nationalists and Japan ended when the time for actual implementations of the Japanese promises came. Thakun Tun Oke, one of the Thirty comrades, was appointed as Chief Administrator of Burma Baho government. He headed the government from April to early June 1942. Soon the Nipponese Commoder in Chief Iide realized its incompetence in maintaining law and order. Consequently, Ba Maw replaced Tun Oke in August and remained at the helm when Burma was granted independence one year later on 1st August 1943. In the Independent Burma, he was the head of the State or Adipati.

¹¹ M. Thein Pe, *What Happened in Burma* (Allahabad, 1943), p.31.

¹² N.C., Sen, *A Peep into Burmese Politics (1917-1942)* (Allahabad, 1945) p.84.

¹³ U Nu, *Burma under the Japanese; Pictures and Potrait* (London, 1954), p.20.

Japanese intention was to gain the favour of Burmese people and therefore they wanted the administration of Burma to run smoothly. That explains their brief military administration from early June, when Tun Oke was replaced with Ba Maw. However, their interests and aspirations of Burmese nationalists did not coincide. Therefore, no concrete decision came out of the meeting, after the fall of Burma Baho government, when Burmese Nationalists wanted proclamation of their independence and Japanese military administration declined to allow any thing more than an authority to facilitate pacification.¹⁴ In the tenure of Bam Maw as the chief executives officer, the budget and Defense, portfolios were reserved for the Japanese. All actions of the government were subject to acceptance and rejection by the Japanese Commander in Chief. At the time of appointing this government, the Japanese Commander in Chief said, the new government will work in collaboration with the Japanese Military Administration and supreme power will be held by the Japanese Commander-in-Chief.¹⁵ Besides, the freedom of the press was also abolished. The parliament ceased to exist. Above all, the Japanese Military Administration decided the portfolios to be allotted to Burmese.¹⁶

Even after Ba Maw became the Adipadi of independent Burma and the Japanese Military Administration was dissolved, Japan, continued to maintain its dominance. The day Burma was granted independence; it entered into a secret Military Agreement. It ensured that Burmese government complies with all matters essential to the conduct of the war.¹⁷

Besides, Japanese advisers were present at all important civilian offices in Burma. All important decisions were taken in consultation with them. Both political and economic spheres of Burma were under the control of Japanese.¹⁸ Even the Supreme Court was subordinate to Japanese military courts in all matters affecting Japanese personnel and general security.¹⁹ The Burmese Press and Radio were censored by the Japanese.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁵ Government of India, External Affairs Department, file no, 28x(p) (secret), 1942.

¹⁶ For details see, Document no.30, Military Order, no.21 in Trager ed, n.2, p.122.

¹⁷ Ibid.p.153. Article 1 gave Japan the freedom in respect to military operations in Burma. Article 2 is the pledge of government of Burma to place Burmese forces under the command of the supreme commander of the Japanese occupation forces in Burma. See Document No.39 Japan-Burma Secret Military Agreement

¹⁸ J.F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma* (New York, 1958), p. 461.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Naturally, all this angered the Burmese Nationalist. Ba Maw repeatedly raised objections to the interference. Ba Maw repeatedly raised objections to the interference of the Japanese army in Burma's political matters and establishing Japanese business firms as an economic monopoly. Few authors may call him "an opportunist, (but) he was also a dedicated nationalist and no puppet of Japan."²⁰ In his booklet "Burma's New Order Plan", first published in 1943 and revised in 1944, he pointed out four minimum essentials for Burmese Japanese cooperation.

Firstly, non-interference of the Japanese in Burma's political affairs was demanded. The second condition asked the Japanese not to take opinion polls. Thirdly, Burmese government servants were to be given some equal ranks with officers in the Japanese army. The last condition was concerned with the reduction of friction between the Japanese army and business firms and the people with the help of Burmese liaison officers.²¹

Though Ba Maw could not do anything in this regard, yet his relationship with Japanese provided a cover for Thakins to work against Japanese. Also, he knew about the anti-Japanese Plans of the "Inner-circle" of Thakins but he never divulged them. He did his best in resisting Japanese Pretensions.²²

Barring a limited circle of Burmans connected with the government, who knew about Ba Maw's efforts to shield his countrymen from Japanese exploitation and punishments, sizeable number of Burmese hated him and looked at him with distrust.²³

An anti-Japanese resistance movement arose under the same Thakins who are collaborated with the Japanese. Organized in 1944, main leaders were Aung san and Than Tun. It was helped by the All Burma youth league (ABYL) which was the rechristened form of East Asia Youth League.

²⁰ R. Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Stanford, 1963), p. 39 For his oppositions to the Japanese interference, on 17th February 1944, an attempt on his life was made by the agents of General Isamura.

²¹ Dr. Ba Maw, *Burma's New Order Plan* (Rangoon, 1943/44), pp. 32-56. quoted from J.F Cady, n.18, p. 469.

²² From N. Trager, *Burma from Kingdom to Republic* (n.p,1966), p. 61.

²³ U Nu, n. 13, pp. 32-34, 49-51.

East Asia Youth League was an apolitical Japanese-sponsored organization. Its popularity was due to the fact that its leaders Ko Ba Gyan, Hla Maung, and Ba Shin were Judson College graduates who were familiar with the rural reconstruction programmes of social service. The league was purely indigenous rather than Japanese undertaking. It included Indians, Koreans, Mons, Shans as well as Burmans. However, in late 1944 it got affiliated with Thakin's resistance efforts and thereby contributed an important element of popular support to the building of AFPFL.²⁴ Around the same time in 1944, the Maha Bama (Greater Burma) Party was launched. Its aim was to unite all the people of Burma under the Burmese rule with "One language" and "one country". In the meantime, realizing the importance of Koreans, Aung San And Thakin Than Tun acted energetically to reconcile the difference with them.

There was a conference of the Resistance leaders on 1st August 1944. The Anti Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was born out of that conference. It was a people's front which consisted of Burma Communist Party (BCP), BRP, various trade unions, etc. Most significant among those were Burma National Army (BNA). Aung San was the leader of the Party. The manifesto of the party asked for armed resistance against the Fascist Japan.

Aung San, trying vainly to get in touch with the British since 1943, succeeded towards the end of 1944. In March 27th, 1945, Aung san and the BNA deserted Japan and went over the side of the British. By that time Mandalay was already overran by British. On 5th May, 1945 when Rangoon fell to the British forces, Ba Maw government was long gone (first to Thailand and then Tokyo).

Japanese Occupation and the Indians in Burma

Just as in Burma, Japanese planned to utilize anti-British nationalist sentiments in India. Indians in Burma responded differently. There was *enmass* exodus. Those left behind went through a fast changing relations vis-à-vis Burmese in the wake of over all Japanese occupation and the security provided by the promises made to the Azad Hind Fauj

²⁴Ibid, pp. 86-87.

(Indian National Army) under Subhas Chandra Bose. But before we go through the details of the dilemma of Indians, it is important to shed some light on the emergent Indian nationalism in Southeast Asia.

As we know there were many Indians settled or working in Southeast Asia especially in Malaysia, Burma, Singapore, Thailand etc. They became the audience of the Indian Nationalists who had to leave their motherland to escape British persecution. Notable among them in Southeast Asia were Anand Mohan Sahay, Rash Bihari Ghose, Maulana Mohammad Barkatullah, Pritam Singh etc. They, through newspapers and pamphlets, kept the feeling of Indian nationalism alive among the Indian emigrants. Anand Mohan Sahay published a monthly journal "Voice of India" in English with Japanese translation side by side for publicizing the Congress struggle in India. Similarly, Barkatulla brought out "The Islamic Fraternity" and "El-Islam" from Tokyo. He played a prominent role in Ghadro movement in San Francisco when he took over Urdu edition of the newspaper of that name.

Thailand, being the only independent country in the region allowed Indian revolutionaries to organize and conduct their activities in a fairly open manner. The situation became all the more conducive especially after a nationalist regime came in Bangkok in 1932. In 1936 the Indian Congress Party was formed there. The organization, headed by likes of Satyananda Puri and Gaiin Pritam Singh, was aimed at spearheading anti-British Propaganda and to collaborate with Japanese in the case of war. Here it needs to be mentioned that ever since Japanese had defeated Russian in 1905, they had caught the imagination of Indians. For the colonial Asia the victory was a matter of "collective Pride", "an Asian reply to the West". Hence to a section of Indians (especially overseas Indians), the Japanese help to drive away British, would appeal.

However, India was not figured in the Japanese Dai Tao Kyoeiken (the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. The diplomatic negotiation carried out by Japan with Germany and Russia before the outbreak of the Pacific war (8th September 1941) did not intend to include India within her empire. For the purpose of negotiating with Germany, it was decided that the Greater East Asia co-Prosperity sphere would include "the region

from Burma eastward and North Caledonia northward".²⁵ In 1941, the Japanese Consular General to India, Soreiji, repeatedly requested the Japanese foreign minister that large quantity of arms and funds be made available to the forward Bloc which would lead anti-British struggle. However, Japan was more keen to let Russia expand towards Persia and India in lieu of letting Japan and Germany establish transcontinental connection through its territory.²⁶

But as on the eve of the Pacific War, India remained beyond the sphere of the Greater East Asia, they got interested in the India community in the countries of the southeast and East Asia. Major Fujiwara on 18th September 1941, was entrusted with the responsibility to contact the Independent league of India and anti-British organization of Malaysia and China. On arrival in Bangkok in October 1941, Fujiwara came in contact with Pritam Singh who was already engaged in anti British propaganda among British Indians in the army posted in Malay-Thai border. Later on Rash Bihari Bose, who had formed India Independence league in Thailand was also brought under this subversive Japanese scheme. They along with Captain Mohan Singh- a surrendered British army officer organized Indian National Army under over all Japanese direction in Singapore. However, because of the unwillingness of Japan to recognize the absolute Independence of India prior to any active engagement of Indian National Army, General Mohan Singh²⁷ refused to cooperate. Resultantly INA was dissolved and he, along with other sympathetic officers was jailed in December 1942.

After this fiasco of 1942. INA was only revived, this time with more vigour and enthusiasm, when Subhas Chandra Bose arrived at Penang in June 1943. He met Adipati Ba Maw at Singapore in July 1943 and the two instantly struck a warm chord. He was invited by Ba Maw as a guest to Rangoon on August 1, 1943. Because of Bose's persuasion and the Japanese need to enlist Indian support, the provisional government of Free India (Azad hind) was established on October 21, 1943. Its base was at Singapore

²⁵ A. Toynbee and V.M. Toynbee, ed., *The Initial Triumph of the Axis* (London, 1958), p.592.

²⁶ M.A Aziz, *Japan's Colonialism and Indonesia* (The Hague, 1955), pp 80.

²⁷ He was made the General of the INA.

and Subhas Bose was its head. On his request, Ba Maw gave consent for shifting the head quarter of Azad Hind to Rangoon on January 7, 1944.²⁸

It was because of Japanese occupation of all of Southeast Asia that brought nearly three million Indians living in that region together. Because of this and the incessant nationalist activities of overseas Indian leaders, the idea of organizing an anti-British Army was made possible. The headquarter of IIL shifted between Malaya and Burma. The latter's contiguity with India heightened its strategic importance for Indian National Army. Moreover, Burma had the largest number of Indian immigrants in Southeast Asia.

However, as happens in any war, the general mood of the people was 'safety first'. Hence, there was no resistance by either Burmese or any Indians. There was hardly any question of resisting them, as the mighty British authority was itself on the run. The entire British governmental machinery under Governor Dorman-Smith was shifted to Simla in India. Burma was left to itself. Civilians were urged to flee to other destinations.

Indians too started moving out of Burma. Indian councilors of the Rangoon Municipal Corporation tried to guide and assist evacuation of Indians. Many refugees were packed off to India in ships and planes. Seventy to eighty thousand Indians were repatriated to India by sea.²⁹ By March, some 4,025 Indians were evacuated by air.³⁰ A large number of these Indians who reached by sea were from the Western provinces of Burma. Sea transport was provided to clear the arrivals at Akyab, Kyaukpadung and Taungupa for these refugees.

Those who could not pay for the exorbitantly high price for tickets or even the unfortunate middle class who could not get a seat in the scuffle of the war situation, had no option but to trek through the rigorous inhospitable mountainous terrain into Manipur. Many died in the journey and had to face the lootings and plunders by the anti social bunch.³¹ A considerable number of Indians had to take refuge in the heavily Indian

²⁸ Cady, n18, p. 476-7.

²⁹ C.Kondapi, *Indians Overseas 1838-1949* (New Delhi, 1951), p. 166.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For detail see Stephen Brookers, *Through the Jungle of Death* (London, John Murray Limited, 200).

populated Zeyawaddy area in the upper Sittang Valley.³² It was the area, which was given by British to Indian soldiers, majority of whom had helped British conquer Burma. During the British retreat, however, even they had to suffer greatly at the hands of Burmese.³³

The Burma Refugee Organization was established in March 1942 with Major General Wood as Administrator General. Camps were arranged at the Asian Border to assist the refugees with food and transport. According to Kondapi, from November 1942 to June 1943, the number of Arakanese Muslims alone had reached 23,000.³⁴

As British evacuated Burma, the whole administration crumbled. The law of the jungle prevailed. The condition was worsened as prior to departure they opened the lunatic asylum and criminals in the prison. Countryside was not at all safe. The attackers on Indians might have been these outlaws, Pearn opines. He says that, on the whole Burmese showed no hatred towards Indians. The area worse affected was Arakan where a large Muslim community had to face communal civil war. But even there it was the early breakdown of civil. But even there it was the early breakdown of civil administration which precipitated the conflict.³⁵

However, it cannot be denied that Burma noticed the departure of Indians and their colonial master, leaving them behind to face the music. Lieutenant Mulkar records such remark by Maung Syne of the Merchant Street: "The Indians are running away; but this is our homeland—where are we to go?"³⁶ Certainly, for Indians there seemed to be a place where they could escape from all that was going on in Burma. The Indian attitude at that time is summarized by Nathubhai who was friend of Liet. Mulkar: "Englishmen too are running away. I had the opportunity to leave for home." Here 'home' obviously was

³² Burma Intelligence Bureau, *Burma during the Japanese occupation-I*, pp. 23-24.

³³ Peter Wand Fay, *The forgotten Army: India's Armed struggle for Independence 1942-1945* (New Delhi, 1994), p.445.

³⁴ Kondapi, n.29, p. 160.

³⁵ B.R. Pearn, *The Indians in Burma* (Ludbwy, 1946), p. 32.

³⁶ Lieut. M.G. Mulkar B.A., *An INA soldier's diary* (Calcutta, n.d) p. 21, Dated: 20th February, 1942.

India. He could because "... all my money is blocked up here and it is not possible to leave everything behind...who could anticipate that it would come to such a pass!"³⁷

Going by the accounts of the Diary of Lieut. Mulkar, Usha Mahajani notes, it seems from the way Indians were rushing to the motherland, the average Indian in Burma was not well informed about the IIL.³⁸

These Indian immigrants in Burma who stayed back resigned to their fate were those, who, having no material interest or relatives in India, resigned themselves to "come-what-may" (2) Those with Burmese relatives who were not willing to flee to a strange land and (3) those whose money was blocked in Burma.³⁹

Because of cordial and amicable relation between Ba Maw and Subhas Chandra Bose and the fact that both had signed treaties of friendship with Japan, Indians in Burma remained like a free citizen. However, there were certain cases of maltreatment but those incidents happened during the interrogation of Indians in the British Government service. But on the whole, the Indians who were initially in dilemma - whether to leave Burma and how - were no more a minority fighting the majority, but a citizen of the Provisional Government. After the declaration of Azad Hind in October 21st, in December Bulletin of Azad Hind Fauj it was announced that: "Indians in East Asia today are no more citizen of an alien power. They are Brand citizen of the Provincial Government of Azad Hind. To bring this to the mind of every Indian in Malaya and to rouse our community to a full realization of the responsibilities of the new status, it has been decided to ask each member of the Indian Independence league to take the oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government of Azad Hind."⁴⁰

Legally, now they were a citizen of a government; a status which since 1937, was constantly in danger. The Burmanization policy which was being applied in labour and government was aimed at branding them as "outriders". For the first time, the Provisional Government clearly and decisively made them a citizen of an Independent entity. All it

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸ Usha Mahajani, *Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya* (Bombay, 1960), p. 145.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Mulkar, n.36, p. 101-102.

asked for, in return, was their allegiance. After all it had also protected them from arbitrary arrests from the Japanese and possible discrimination by the Burmese.

But to rich Indians the “cost” of this might have been unwelcome. To those reluctant rich people Bose appealed, —

“Legally speaking, there is no private property when a country is in a state of war. The Government has absolute right over the lives and properties. We too are a free people with a free Government.

“If you think that your wealth and possessions are your own, you are living in a delusion. Every life and every property belongs to the nation when it is involved in a war, your lives and your properties do not now belong to you: they belong to India and India alone.

...If you do not want to realize this simple truth then you have another path clearly chalked out for you. If you do not want to shoulder duties as a free Indian living under a free government, if you do not want independence and if you are not ready to pay the price of independence, you have only one course before you. But remember this: when the war is over and India is independent, you shall have no room in free India. If the Indian Government condescends to take pity on you, the highest act of mercy which the Free Indian Government can do is to provide you with third class tickets to leave the holy soil of India and to go to England.”

“I have heard that some of the rich Indians in Malaya are murmuring that I am harassing them. I want to have a straight talk with them so that they can take a straight path hereafter. I have heard that some rich Indians are thinking of changing their nationality to save themselves from making contributions towards the cause of Indian Independence. I have also heard that some are thinking of handing over their properties to the custodians and of claiming them back after the war is over.

“Then again I have heard of people who are thinking of adopting a ruse of promising, say a lakh of rupees, and trying to gain time by paying that amount in small installments hoping that sooner or later we will be going away to Burma.⁴¹

Apart from collecting cash and jewelry at the end of speeches, there was regular tax-collecting machinery with the branch committee in each district. The chairperson of the committee was usually a local businessman who was authorized to assess the property

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 82-83.

and expropriate 10% of it as a tax. To receive payment on the behalf of the government, a National Bank of Azad Hind Fauj was opened in Burma.

The citizenship of the Provisional Government, however, came as a relief to the poor. Medical and food relief was offered to them. A large plot to settle a few Indian agriculturists was acquired in Malaya. In Burma, they were even provided with some shelters.

While providing relief measures, the Burmese view of the legal status of the Indian tallied with that of the provisional Government of India — which indeed reflects the warm relation the two shared — there were some problems over the property of Indians who during the war had left for their motherland. Actually, Burmese government in the backdrop of monopolizing Japanese traders and the occupation soldiers passed 3 regulations:

- i) Only a Burman could own immovable property in Burma.
- ii) No company could be formed in Burma, unless 60% capital was Burmese and
- iii) When a Burmese women married a foreigner, the Buddhist law as to be applied on both side.⁴²

In effect these laws affected Indians. Especially the issue of immovable property was bound to become a matter of concern to IIL. It was in need of the property of evacuated Indians to fund their Army and governing machinery. Special territorial committees were formed to safeguard Indian land investments. Burmese government was equally in need of funds. So even they laid claims on it. They argued that those Indians were Burmese. And, if they were foreigners then their immovable property could be expropriated. However the Japanese government intervened and took over the property. Later it gave some back to the IIL and retained the rest.⁴³ This had the potential to spoil the relation between the two (Indian and Burmese) authorities. But due to Japanese overall presence

⁴² Thakin Nu, "Burmese Under the Japanese", edited and translated by J.S. Furnivall (London, 1954) p. 94.

⁴³ Usha Mahajani, n.38, p. 155.

and the close friendship of Ba Maw and Subhas Chandra Bose, the matter could not boil down to that.⁴⁴

When in June 1944, the Burmese Nationalism arose to resist Japan and in March 1945 Thakin Than Tun and Aung San joined the British force, Japan thought it wise to beat a retreat. As it has already been dealt in this chapter, Subhash Chandra Bose also retreated and died in an air crash shortly afterward. With his departure from Rangoon the Indian nationalist fervour died too. But it needs to be mentioned that long after Japanese left Burma (April 23, 1945), the INA - broken and beaten - kept on fighting in small pockets of Burma. They knew their incapability to make any military headway, yet they showed great courage and conviction in resisting the colonial power.

Burma, after the War:

In October 1945, the British-Burmese government returned from Simla after more than 3 years of exile. Governor Reginald H. Dorman-Smith suspended the 1935 constitution on the plea of post-war economic and political condition and announced that election could be held only after three years. This was unacceptable to AFPFL on the ground that British program was regressive and its goals too distant and uncertain. Because of Dorman Smith's failure to win the support, he was replaced by Hubert Rance. A mass strike followed. On September 26th, Rance was forced to announce the formation of a new executive council that included 6 members from the AFPFL and three independents, with Aung San serving as Chief Councilor.

On December 20, 1946, Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced in Parliament the plan to invite Burmese representatives to discuss the Transfer of Power. London meeting in January 1947 decided to hold elections in April. Frontier areas were given choice whether or not to join Burma. At Panglong, in the Shan States, Frontier peoples met. While Shans, Kachins and Chins agreed to join, other minorities did not commit even though they were given to understand that autonomy was not an issue. Under David Rees Williams, British Parliament created an Enquiry Committee to gauge their sentiments. It recommended that

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 155-6.

they be represented in the constituent Assembly; that their delegates be chosen indirectly; and that they have a veto over all decisions relating to their areas and upon all questions of the future federal union.⁴⁵

In the April Elections, Aung San's AFPFL won with thumping majority. It won 172 out of the 182 non-communal seats. The constitutional committee was formed. But on July 19, 1947, Aung San and six member of the Executive council were assassinated by the hired men of U Saw. Governor Rance immediately called upon Thakin Nu to succeed Aung San as Chief Councilor. When the constitution was drawn up, U Nu and Attlee signed a final settlement on October 7, 1947. After the British Parliament ratified the agreement in December, Burma became Independent on January 4, 1948.

INDIANS IN POST-WAR BURMA

After the Second World War when normalcy returned, Burma under Aung San clamored for freedom. There was a parallel effort to carve out a united Burma. A conference of indigenous minorities was held at Panglong where more or less all showed their willingness for it. However, Indian minority was not represented. When Burmese constitution was made, Indians were not recognized as a minority. It recognized only the indigenous chamber of nationalities on the basis of geographical and territorial divisions. Also, as the constitution recognized single citizenship, Indians were left with a choice to either retain Indian citizenship and live in Burma as an alien or become a Burmese.

Those who chose to retain their Indian nationality were affected by the Foreigner's Registration Act. Under this act, foreigners were required to get a registration certificate by paying an annual fee of Rs. 50. The constitutional amendment of 1958 brought uncertainty even for the citizens. It allowed the Government to revoke citizenship any time. Even the remittance regulations and the foreign exchange rules were made stringent. This certainly discouraged the Indian laborers and other employers. The land owning moneylenders, Chettiyan also had their share of problems. There was a spate of legislations to dislodge them from their position. The Tenancy Standard Rent Act of 1947

⁴⁵ Burma, Frontier Areas committee of enquiry (Rangoon, 1948), pp. 22-32.

fixed the land rent at twice the amount of land revenue paid by the land lord to the Government. The Disposal of Tenancy Act of 1948 empowered the Government to lease agricultural lands in the possession of any person to any tenant who could pay the prescribed rent. And then came the land Nationalization Act of 1948 which was meant to liquidate Indian landed interests in a sweeping manner.

No doubt that these measures were to affect both Indian as well as Burmese land owning class but the fact that Indian Chettyars were the largest group among them, it affected them the most.

In this way we see that through many Governmental measures, Indians in Burma were given the hint that they were not welcome in Burma. Resultantly, there was a sharp decline in the number of Indians in Burma. The decrease in the curve of Indian population was marked ever since the World War broke out.

The subsequent legislations and finally the Communist uprising in 1948 further dwindled the figure of the numbers of Indians in Burma. The Independent government of both India and Burma chose not to discuss this issue, as it was becoming a matter of contention. Both Nehru and U Nu tried to keep it away from the negotiating table. Dade Chanjee in his work writes about the great expectations that were held by the Indians from Nehru.

Thus we see how in the decade of the forties, Indians in Burma went through various ups and downs. For most of them who chose to leave Burma in the wake of Japanese aggression, the chapter was closed. But those who stayed back could enjoy a brief "independence" under Japanese Ba Maw administration only to get back to their previous status of unwanted outsiders. Ever since then it has continued to decline.

CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSION

The history of indo-Burmese relations goes back to the beginning of the Christian era. Geographical proximity and the consequent thriving commercial activities have led to the development of strong cultural ties. Throughout the history, both have shared independent existence till king of Konbaung dynasty, attacked the northeastern parts of India. The following events led to the annexation of Burma by the British. The colonial experience not just changed the entire socio-political and economic situations in Burma, but also altered the cordial relations existing between the two countries. Indians became such hated figures that the nationalist movement in Burma was as much anti-colonial as anti-Indian.

The relation of India and Burma survived centuries of ups and downs. Though there were hardly any so called purely political relations, the cultural imports from India have been tremendous. This perhaps has strongly cemented our relationship. The cultural exchange is actually spearheaded by Buddhism which spread to Burma just before the beginning of the Christian era. Subsequently the relation was strengthened by various monks and Brahmins who were 'imported' from India throughout history. The vibrant Indian trade with Southeast Asia and including Burma helped in maintenance of the cordial economic and cultural exchanges.

Needless to say, Burmese adopted the cultural imports selectively. They, though allowed the 'cultural penetration', nevertheless, they reshaped and evolved their own particular cultural variants. If nearly no ethnic group is untouched by the Theravada Buddhism (the popular Buddhist sect in Burma), there also remains traces of pre-Buddhist practices of Nat Worship. Also, unlike India, there society was largely egalitarian.

But when the British colonialism raised its head, the system of the whole of south and Southeast Asia was altered. Burma and India were joined together by the British. This time the relation became 'too close'. The political unification under the common colonial

master had generated some complexity. The India with whom they had shared 'friendship of equals' had now come hand in gloves (with the colonial master), to take away their freedom.

Actually, India was the first to be colonized in this part of Asian continent. Their army, recruited mainly Indians at the lower ranks. Hence, when British army entered Burma (which was actually British-Indian army), the Indians were noticed instantly. Indians became the figure of the trampers of the Burmese sovereignty.

Moreover, Indians were also hated because of their position at the middle rank of the colonial administration. As it is the lower officials who actually deal with the public and it is they who have to take their wrath, Indians as a whole had to take the brunt. It is the lower and middle level jobs which was practically open for the colonized subjects. Indian, by 'virtue' of getting colonized first and having got educated and experience in the British system, were naturally preferred over the Burmese.

Consequently, Indian wielded some power and prestige in the colonial administration. This led to their dominance in socio-economic life of Burma. Indian merchants and traders had a hold on Burmese economy which was quite disproportionate to their population. The moneylenders, notably Chettyars from south India, came to become the biggest and one of the most influential land owners of Burma. This all happened at the cost of the Burmese. To top it all, the labor market was also dominated by imported labor from India. This was specially so in the chief town of Rangoon.

While Indians were seen as the unwanted outsiders they did little to mix with the Burmese. They lived in total segregation with their separate school, personal laws and the separate representation. Even Burmese language was not compulsory for Indian students until 1920s.

The British government on its part played its policy of 'Divide and Rule' well. The same Indian, who helped British to conquer Burma and helped in making it prosperous were

left to their own when Burmese nationalist started open criticism of Indian presence. The role of Governor Craddock and its successor Harcourt Butler in fomenting separation is the case in the point. When the Burmese Nationalist Movement started, it was both anti-Indian and anti-British. The grievances of Burmese were with all classes of Indians present in Burma. If the uncontrolled influx of labor was resented (evidenced most markedly from riots of 1930 and also 1938), the Chettyars and businessmen too were not left uncriticised. Therefore, in order to take control of their country, Burmese strove for separation from India.

What might seem paradoxical was that Burmese, while hated Indians in Burma, looked up at Indian nationalist in India for guidance and inspiration. Many Burmese nationalist had strong inclination towards Gandhi and his methods of resistance. Some of them even drew inspirations from Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. But they were equally critical when it came to exploitative Indians in Burma. Indian nationalist leaders too reciprocated the Burmese aspirations. The Pan-Asiatic vision of top leaders of INC had space for independence existence of all struggling colonies. Almost all top Indian nationalists who visited Burma were encouraging towards Burmese nationalist movement and criticized unbecoming attitude of Indians there.

However, Indian leaders of Burma did not pay heed to the warnings. Their attitude towards Burmese remained as usual. In keeping with their previous 'unconcerned' and segregation attitude, they did not engage constructively with the Burmese leader even in the post-1920 Burma. The real reason for Burmese demand for Separation was never appreciated. In stead, they argued for their own immediate interest. The reason was that their own economic interests were being threatened.

When the constitutional government was elected under Diarchy, the legislature presented them a chance to sort out the differences. But, alas, they made it their battleground. The Indians tried scuttling the passage of the bills which seemed antagonistic to their interest. When the anti separationist won the election in 1932, the separationist headed by U S aw blamed the influential rich Indian of playing a role in it.

After the act of 1935, when Burma was separated from India, it went through four unstable governments. This gave Indians some breathing space. The bills that sought to cut their economic monopoly were postponed by the Governor. The World War came as a respite to them when the government in Burma went in exile in Simla.

However, during the World War the Indians in Burma had a brief taste of Independence when Subhas Chandra Bose came with his 'Azad Hind government'. Because the British colonial master was on exile in Simla, the Indians in Burma had little option to choose from. The situation of war time was very difficult, so, understandably Subhas Chandra Bose could little afford to address any of their problems in Burma. The Japanese, though did little to promote independent existence of the Azad Hind Government and the Burmese government in Rangoon, Indians were recognized as a valid citizen of an independent nation. They were no longer a minority in Burma. They for a very brief time could once again live with the security and confidence which they had known before the anti- Indian frenzy engulfed the Burmese society.

As the War came to an end with the decisive defeat of the Japanese, the Azad Hind government too retreated, and Burma went back to British control. But by now it was clear that the English rule would have to fold up due to the weakness of the British and the steam of Burmese radicalism had taken an irreversible course, which was to only culminate in independence in 1948. Unfortunately this was a time of great tribulations for the Indians as they were coping to come to terms with a political existence and a system in which they would always be 'unwanted outsiders' bereft of even a minority status.

Thus it clearly brings out the curious phenomenon of how two communities tied by seemingly cooperative social matrix, were permanently estranged from each other due to communal complexities which were thrown up by the logic of imperialism. The colonial experience of Burma among other things is a tale of the plight of a minority who was in part responsible for its state due to its shortsightedness brought about by immediate

economic gains. Even in the years to follow, their refusal to integrate fully with the Burmese spirit which was yearning for political independence and expression was to cost them dearly. The political future of the immigrants was to confound the Indo-Burmese relations for a long time to come.

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