

STUDENTS' ROLE IN THE MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled " **Students Role in the Movement for Democracy in Myanmar**", submitted by **Shubhamitra Das** is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy of this university. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree to this University or any other University and this is her own work.

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

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PREFACE

Burma or Myanmar, as it is called today, is surrounded by big and powerful neighbours, India and China. Burma, after a brief period of parliamentary democracy during 1948-1962, had never known peace. The authoritarian military rule have brought the economy into shambles. It is only towards the end certain improvement were registered. Although it was the people whose life became miserable. The people are left with almost no peace. The 'Burmese way to socialism' and high degree of isolation that it generated devastated the country till the early party of 1988. When the SLORC was established under general Saw Maung. SLORC has, though, taken up the tasks of holding 'free and fair' elections, it continued to be reluctant to hand over power to the elected representatives of the people, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The students continuous agitation against the authoritarian rule reflected the miserable plight of the people, which they have been suffering for a long time. This made the students the most important factor in the calculation of both the oppressed and the oppressors. Their pains-taking efforts in the process of the struggle for democracy enabled them to mobilise all groups of people for this cause. Within the country, the students were helped by

the monks, the ethnic minorities and the people on the whole. Externally, they are still grappling with the outside world for mobilising the world public opinion regarding Human Rights violation in their country. Outside, they are still trying to make the international community to support the Human Rights violation in the country. The return of peace and democracy is yet to be achieved.

The work is done on an analysis of a historical perspective. It would help to have a broad view of the students role in the country.

For the purpose of analysis, the study relies mainly on the secondary sources. However primary sources have also been utilised for the purpose of study analysis.

The present work has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter is introduction about the students role in Burma all along. While the second chapter deals with the students role in the colonial period, the third chapter analyses, the difference of policies and the reaction of the students in the democratic and the military regimes. The pen-ultimate chapter probes into the pre and post election period, that took place under the aegis of SLORC and the way, SLORC has refused to transfer power. It also gives a brief explanation of how the SLORC was consolidating its power, through their policies's. The last chapter is the conclusion, it sums up the findings of the study.

At the time of selection of the topic for research, it was difficult to imagine that it would be so interesting. The credit for making me interested in the work goes to Dr. B.D. Arora, under whose supervision I have been able to accomplish the task. Dr Arora is a hard task-master and I may have failed to come up to his expectations at many stages during the course of research work. I am indebted to him for the personal care which he took of my work not only as a teacher but also as a friend. Working with him has been a new and rewarding experience for me.

I owe my deepest regards to my parents, brother and sister for their support. Mostly my twin-sister, Sanghamitra Sinha Roy inspiring me during the course of study.

I am much thankful for the constant help rendered by Gunjan Verma, during the work period. I am also thankful to Sudesh Kumar Verma, whose moral support and useful advice has kept me going all along. I will forever be obliged to Ms Seema Ranjan and Renu Kaul for making my job seem much easier.

I am indebted to the Jawaharlal Nehru Library staff, specially the paper - clipping section to help me with the available material. I also thank the Jawaharlal Nehru Menorial library the American Centre, ICWA, IDSA library and the Delhi University Library for the material of my work.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar has, since March 1962, been dominated by a highly centralised dictatorship of the military junta, based on its doctrine, 'The Burmese Way to Socialism'. Its ideology is basically of doctrinaire socialism, with a tinge of Buddhist concept of impermanence of things. The lack of development, ever since the military leaders led by General Ne win took over power, had frustrated the people. It was this frustration that resulted in demonstrations and revolts against the government. The movement for democracy was brutally crushed every time it was launched. Today, the people of Myanmar at present are one of the troubled peoples of the world, with their military government hankering helplessly for international support, for development of the country, on the one hand and brazenly violating human rights on the other.

The military junta that assumed the name of state law and order Restoration Council in 1988 perceived major threat from the students. Hence, they tried to crush the mushrooming influential students' movement. They had pursued this anti-student policy from the beginning, for instance, blowing up the student's union building at

Rangoon University in 1963 and seeking to suppress them. They provoked the people by oppressive military means. The education system was not improved since independence nor new universities were built. Besides, the universities were kept closed indefinitely, even at a slight disturbance. It automatically led to a decline in the education system. It needed not only to be revived but also to be renovated.

The students launched the movement for some kind of democracy since 1962 itself, but were kept in discipline by the ruthless military power. The climax for the students pro-democracy movement reached in May-June 1988 when General Ne Win resigned and Sein Lewin came to power. Fortunately, just after 1988, the students found a leader in Daw Aung San Suu kyι, the daughter of Bogyoke Aung San, the hero of Burmese struggle for freedom and independence. Though put under 'restricted residence' since 1989, she emerged to be the only hope for democracy in Myanmar. Despite strict regulations the students were able to slip to other parts of the world to spread information about human rights violations.

Under the authoritarian rule, the name of Burma was changed thrice. On September 18, 1989 the country was informally named as the Union of Burma and formally as

Myanmar, and also the name of Rangoon the capital, was changed to Yangon, under the rule of General Saw Maung. Interestingly, the name Union of Burma was used constitutionally by the U Nu government in 1948, when Burma got independence. There are two schools of thought with regard to the change of name from Burma to Myanmar. One school thinks that 'it is to enhance the golden period of the country's history and also to avoid too close an association with the dominant nationality'¹ i.e., the Burmans, who are Buddhists. The other school feels it just the opposite. According to it, 'the new name given to Burma i.e., Myanmar is wrong both phonetically and politically. Phonetically the correct spelling should be Myanmah... Apart from this technical error, the new name politically implies that the country is the land of the majority ethnic group, the Myanmah (in writing) or Bamah (in speaking). In the Burmese language, which is again the language of Myanmah, the technically correct name should be Myanmah Pyi (Pyi signifying country).'²

Myanmar, is surrounded by strong and influential neighbours like India, China, Bangladesh, Thailand and

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1. The Hindu, June 3, 1989.
 2. Mya Maung, "The Burma Road From the Union of Burma to Myanmar", Asian Survey, Vol. XXX, No.6, June 6, 1990, p.602.

also not influential like Laos. Its most significant geographical feature is the Irwamaddy river bisecting the country into eastern and western parts. Irrawaddy valley is the most populated area and is also a socio-cultural as well as politico-economic conglomeration of the country, culture Rangoon or Yangon is situated. Rangoon has been the nerve center of political activities ever since the British colonial rule.

The pre-colonial history could be seen from 1044 AD³ when king Anawartha founded Pagan dynasty with Pagan as its capital. He was the first king to politically unite Burma. He made Hinayana or Therawada Buddhism as the official religion.

The kingdom survived until the army of Kublai Khan ransacked the country in 1287. Until the British came in 1826, Myanmar was ruled by small royal principalities whose absolutism was checked only by custom.

Myanmar lost to the British in three stages. The first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) made Myanmar lose coastal parts of Tenasserim and Arakan to the British. The rest of lower Burma was occupied by the British in 1852, in the second Anglo-Burmese war. In 1885, the third Anglo-Burmese war led to the final overthrow of the

3. Asia Year Book, 1989. Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong, 1989).

Alungapaya's dynasty and the occupation of the whole of upper Burma. The colonial rule had brought certain results in the overall transformation of Burmese politico-cultural scenario. First, it was able to crush feudal rivalry, indirectly, however, it united feudal houses or lords against one common enemy, the British. Secondly, it brought modern politics into vogue. Thirdly, it produced a number of national heroes through the English system of education; and lastly, it produced great Burmese proletariat revolution.⁴

The path that led to independence was filled with difficulties. But the English educated Burmese youths did not move back. With the help of monks and Pongyis, who were already frustrated with the high handed attitude of the British towards Burmese culture, could effectively meet this challenge by nothing less than absolute independence. The reason for the students to come in the forefront lay in the very socio-cultural set-up. The Burmese are mostly Hinayana or Therawad Buddhist and their religious and cultural value system generally tended them to be away from worldly or material things. This was

4. Shme Lu Maung, "Burma : Nationalism and Ideology - An Analysis of Society, Culture and Politics", (Dhaka, 1989), p.19.

changed with the English language education. The youths, after getting educated in this new system, started understanding the socio-cultural milieu of Burmese society. Earlier they could not do so. They started coming out of the orthodox attitude of the family and viharas (monasteries) and grouped into educational institutions and organised unions. As education seemed to be the linch-pin for development, students tended to be the first to come into the forefront of economic, political and cultural life. They brought a slow revolution without changing the structure of religion, custom and tradition.

The national leader, General Aung San and his colleague U Nu, students in Law School of Rangoon University, Played the main role in the freedom struggle. Both became member of "Dobama Asi-ayone", a political party, and involved themselves in the mainstream of politics. The Rangoon University Students Union was formed and U Nu became the president followed by Aung San. With the formation of AFPFL⁵ (Anti Facist People's Freedom League) the freedom movement succeeded in broadening its mass base and also deepening the apex mass consciousness.

5. Hossein, Farzana, "Authoritarianism and Prsopect for Democracy in Myanmar", Bliss Journal, Vol.13, No.1, 1992. p.55.

By the export of all the important things like timber, rice, tobacco etc., the British rule had almost crippled the Burmese economy, and created miseries for the poor tillers of the soil. Simultaneously, in the social setting, the arrival of christian missionaries brought about forcible conversion creating a lot of discontent even among the commoners. It was in this deteriorating condition that the Japanese invaded Burma. With their retreat about the end of World War II, Burma got independence on January 4, 1948.⁶

Aung San and six of his colleagues were assassinated, just before independence for which he worked till the last of his breath. U Nu became the Prime Minister after Burma got independence and stood for the 7 point resolution of AFPFL.⁷ Through the resolution, Burma was to be recognised as an independent sovereign republic called the Union of Burma and according to which power would be ultimately vested among the people and the minorities would be granted safeguards. The army did not approve of the resolution dealing with the minorities. This strengthened the ethnic minorities resolve to reinforce

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6. Sharna, P., "Government and Politics of Burma", (New Delhi, 1983), p.6.
 7. U Maung Maung, "Burmese Nationalist Movement (1940-48)", (Scotland, 1989), p.88.

them insurgencies. A brief period of caretaker government under Ne Win been eventually led to the end of the democratic rule. In the early hours of March 2, 1962, the Burmese military seized power through a *coup d' et'at*, led by General Ne Win. It is interesting to note that both General Aung San and Ne Win had been among the "30 heroes" who were trained by the Japanese army.⁸

Within two months, the Revolutionary Council established by General Ne Win published certain documents, i.e., "The Burmese Way to Socialism" (BWS) and "The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment" (SCME).⁹ These were accepted because of the proposed unique, Burmese way for the country to establish a new mellenium for security and development of the country. The ideology of SCME 'blends moral pronouncements, abstract generalisations and utopian goals'.¹⁰ It rests on change, revolution and socialism.¹¹ These two models were new for the traditional people of Burma. A prominent author says that

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8. Dr. Ba Maw, "Breakthrough in Burma : Memories of a revolution, 1939-1946", (New Hawen, 1968), p.23.
 9. Silverstein, Joseph, "Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation", (Ithaca and London, 1977), p.77.
 10. Steinberg, David I., "Burma's Road towards Development: Growth and Ideology and Military Rule", (Colanada, 1981) p.9.
 11. "Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma", (Rangoon, 1974).

'the document expressed national individuality'.¹² The people remained perplexed for quite sometime, not able to realise the basic motives behind the dictatorial regime.

The first step was taken by the students, when the stringent hostel regulations were imposed. Concomitant to it was the gradual economic degeneration from 1962 onwards. The students' instant aversion against the military arose from the blowing up of the students Union building at Rangoon University, the symbol of national struggle from 1930's.¹³ The students as well as the common people including monks had a strong sentiment attached to the building. This provoked the masses to raise voice against the military regime. It was the start of a continuous, yet sustained movement against the government. This was despite the fact that the students lacked an organisation and a leader.

The movement for democracy started in full swing only after Daw Suu Kyi arrived on the scene. Earlier, the movement was just to induce the military junta to realise the fact that it was a government for the well-being of the people and not otherwise. In 1963, the students

12. Joseph Silverstine, n.9, p.78.

13. Ibid; n.9, p.78.

revolted against the governmental policies towards ethnic insurgents and other rebels¹⁴ and again with regard to the issue of South-east Asian Peninsular games. On both the occasions, the govt. acted brutally and closed down the Universities.

With the second phase of the military regime, beginning 1974, the students came out with banners and pamphlets, supporting the workers over the issue of food shortages and high prices.¹⁵ The frustration of the students reached the high watermark when the military junta showed reluctance to give U Thant, the third Secretary General of United Nations, 'the brightest son of Burma', an appropriate tribute and burial. The students snatched the body and gave a touching tribute to U Thant, once a student of Rangoon University.¹⁶ But the sudden attack of the army and digging out the body of the greatman and killing everyone who hindered their act, kept the people and the highly sentimental youths shocked for a long time. The authorities acted by declaring martial law and kept the Universities closed for an indefinite time.

14. Shme Lu Maung, n.4., p.50.

15. G.V.C.; Naidu "Burma at Cross Ropads, "Economic and Political Weekly, 24(41) October 8, 1988, p.2102.

16. Shme Lu Maung, n.4., p.50.

The students could not be kept at bay for long. So they emerged on the streets with regard to high cost of living and arrest of students involved in earlier movement¹⁷ in 1976. This movement was also crushed. The students vulnerability and their failure to sustain for long is 'not due to lack of determination but due to lack of organisational skill and leadership'.¹⁸ General Tin Oo and General Aung Gyi, once strong associates of Gen. Ne Win, gave up their association with Gen. Ne Win and started writing articles critical of the government. This covertly helped in making a strong and well organised student's Union.¹⁹

The early sparks of movement for democracy were visible in mid-1988 when the students in large strength came to the streets shouting anti-government slogans, singing the Burmese national song and waiving the national flag of the freedom struggle. The stories of rape, torture, shock treatment under the jailers horrified the very being of the students and the people.²⁰

17. Bertil Lintner, "Ominous Omission : Draft Elections Law Fails to Mention a government", Far Eastern Economic Review, Rev 142; March 23, 1989, p.28.

18. Shme Lu Maung, n.4., p.50.

19. Ibid.

20. Bertil Linter, "New Camouflage : Army Maintains Fight Controls Depsite Elections Pledge", Far Eastern Economic Review, Rev..144, May 11, 1989, p.32.

General Ne Win, under heavy pressure though giving the impression of a sudden development, resigned and handed over power to Gen. Sein Lwin, righthand man of Ne Win and the man responsible for the ill-treatment of the students in the March 1988 revolt.²¹ A large number of students gathered at the holy shrine, Shwe Dagon Pagoda, on July 23, 1988.²² Thousand of them were reported arrested and many killed. Unfortunately for the country and the people, the cry for democracy went unheard within and outside the state.

On their part, the students formed an organisation named All Burma Students Democratic Association (ABSDA). Min Zayya, a brilliant student became its chief. He had to go underground in order to carry on the movement against the autocratic government. It formed a well armed Patriotic Liberation Army,²³ for times of need.

Daw Suu kyi, an Oxford educated and the daughter of Bogyoke Aung San came to the political scene in August, 1988. She was aided by a self-made brilliant zoology student Min Ko Naing,²⁴ during the campaign before the

21. Bentil Lintner, Series of Articles in FEER, November 11, 1989, p.504.

22. Lintner, FEER, May 11, 1989, p.35.

23. G.V.G., Naidu, p.2039.

24. Shme Lu Maung, p.79.

election. The elections were announced by Gen Saw Maung for May 29, 1990.²⁵

Once again a large number of people gathered at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda for the burial of Daw Suu Kyi's mother, Daw Khin Kyi on August 25, 1988. Students shouted anti-government slogans waiving the national flag, with the sign of the fighting peacock, the symbol of Pre-independence struggle.²⁶ It aroused the sentiment of the masses, who fed and lodged the students well at the Pagoda's monastries.

The preparations for elections were in full swing, until Daw Suu Kyi was disqualified from participating in election and before which she was kept under house arrest in June 1989. *U Nu and Tin Oo were also arrested and kept under house arrest and three years of hard labour respectively.* The elections were coming closer. In the end, 93 parties were registered for 492 seats, whereas 2,457 candidates filed their nomination papers.²⁷ The election was held and as expected, Daw Suu Kyi's Party National League for Democracy (NLD) won with a thumping majority of 392 Seats. The National Unity Party (NUP)

25. U Maung Maung, p.108.

26. Europa World Year Book, 1993, Vol.11, Europa Pub. Ltd.

27. Times (London), January 14, 1991.

i.e., the BSPP in disguise,²⁸ was virtually routed, with just 10 seats. Notwithstanding the fact that the people rejected the NUP and hence the army leadership, the army under Saw Maung continued its rule under the name of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).²⁹

The post-1990 election developments in Myanmar showed that the military was reluctant to handover power to the NLD. They had shown this by ignoring several requests of the different countries to release Daw Suu Kyi from detention and also intensifying their operations against the opposition. Keeping this in view, it was hard to see the prospects of change in Myanmar. In this connection, there are several factors to be taken under consideration. First, there was the question of the ethnic minorities and their integration into the mainstream of Burma. The minorities were many and also divided among themselves. This made it difficult to come to any amicable solution. Secondly, when in other countries the movement for democracy was supported by the major powers, both regional and global, it is not yet seen to play that important a role in Myanmar.³⁰ Initially and quite paradoxically, the

28. The Statesman's Year Book, Ed. B Brian Hunter, 1992, p.226.

29. Hossein, Farzana, n.5, p.63.

30. Ibid.

economic embargos were imposed and then removed by accepting the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime in Yangon. Japan and the USA seemed to be in perpetual dilemma on this issue while the ASEAN countries did not even want to recognise Daw Suu Kyi as a Nobel Laurate. A Singaporean diplomat even went to the extent of describing it as a 'non-event'.³¹ Thirdly, the major obstacle to achieve democracy in Myanmar had been the nature of relationship between the armed forces and the people. In order to establish rapport with the people, the military urged all political parties to join them. Only NUP (National Unity Party), joined BSPP, although the membership was opened to all citizens. Those who worked for it were the privileged class in Myanmar society. They were given respect and all sort of anemities by the government, and were also given a status symbol by the junta for associating themselves with the military rule and supporting it. In order to improve the relations with the neighbouring countries and the western powers, it had chosen *Ohn Gyaw*, a civilian to head as foreign minister.³² It also started taking certain steps towards

31. Mauseen Aung, The win, "Burmese Days", Foreign Affairs, 68 (2), Spring 1989, p.145.

32. Hossein; Farzana, n.5., p.69.

liberalising its economy to get foreign trade and aid. As a matter of fact, no matter how much the military junta tried to pacify the people in and out of the country, its illegitimacy and brutality could not be overlooked or forgotten.

Chapter - 2

STUDENTS ROLE IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Sense of Nationalism, as it is seen, is not a new phenomenon among the Burmese people. From the 11th century, Burma had a monarchical rule, with one national religion i.e. Buddhism, one national language and one national system of education prevalent in the monasteries in a Buddhist style. During the British rule, from 1826 to the beginning of 1948, apart from the brief rule under the Japanese during the world war II, the heaviest blow to the Burmese culture was felt by the people. The dissatisfaction was first seen in the monk community, the next largest group were the students, who had emerged very prominent due to their education, and which made them look eye to eye with the British, who were threatened by the rising Japanese power. The Buddhist culture and its pre-scientific traditional lore¹ was further undermined by the English system of education. Since the last Buddhist ruler Thibaw's overthrow, in 1885, 'dharmaantarayas' (dangers to

1. Sudrendra Prasad Singh; "Growth of Nationalism in Burma : 1900 - 1942", (Calcutta, 1980), P 25.

religion) had increased. Buddhism lost the status of state religion. Moreover, the monks felt that any system of education which was not controlled by them would weaken the religious beliefs². Thus the aversion against the British grew among the monks.

The renaissance of Burmese cultural tradition started after 1895. The change owed more to exposure to the elements of westernisation. In 1890, an educated Burmese minority began to sponsor a western type of curriculum modeled on that of the Christian missionary schools. The movement of revitalisation from within, as it seems, came to the peak with the formation of Young Mens Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1906. It was a non-political body looking after peoples religious, educational and social needs. It was, in fact, concerned with refashioning valuable elements of the Buddhist tradition into an articulate movement in the context of western concepts and learning³. Initially, YMBA was a students affair, denoted to the discussion of religion and related subjects like the revival of Burmese art and literature. But the fast developing situation all around kept pressing on it and it mushroomed into a full-fledged national

2. Ibid; p. 126.

3. John F. Cady; "History of Modern Burma", (Incatha & London), 1989), p. 179.

organisation. The new character also gave a new name to it, i.e. General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA). The membership of the entire monk community joined it along with non-Buddhists, who were nationalist. Students, too took active interest. The members of the GCBA were called 'Wunthanus', the racially faithful ones.

Spreading the words of race, religion language and learning, U Ottama, a Buddhist monk, captivated the people's heart. Others like U Ba Pe, U Pu, U thein Maung, Sir M.A. Maung Gyi, etc., the products of the new education also played a significant role in stirring the masses against the covetious intentions of the British colonial rulers. Among them, the most well known was U thein Maung, whose leadership in the 'anti-footwear campaign'⁴ had moved the British government, first after the world war I. It was to make the high-handed Englishmen realise that every country had its own distinct culture. After this agitation, the British accepted not to put footwear while entering a pagoda or the palace. As a matter of fact, 'historically, it was the first movement which culminated in a victory, by means of mass protest and mass action in Burma'⁵. The leaders of this movement

4. Ibid; p. 192

5. Ibid; p. 193

paved the way towards national education. It helped in creating national school which was a positive breakthrough.

The movement towards social revival, produced another leader, a young patriot with 'magnetic personality', Tun Shein,⁶ though his activities were centered in the urban areas, his sentiments 'urging the people to restore the Old Burmese values by being Burmese in enemy way'⁷ had reached many villages. Po kya was another man who followed the same line of action. Their oratorical skill had a mystifying effect on the people.

Emergence of Students Power : 1920

In the early part of 20th century, the leadership of the movement changed hands. The monks didn't however, recede in importance of their role played during and after the world war II, till independence. Rather, their importance in the Burmese life would never recede. Nevertheless the students became very sensitive to the

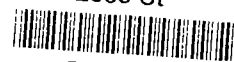
6. S.K. Ghosh, "The students Challenge Round the World", (Calcutta 1969), p. 126.

7. Ibid.

political changes around them. The authoritarianism of the colonial rule had exhibited itself within the University's administration (in miniature) i.e. the strict-hostel regulations, rigid admission policy, etc. The reason for the students participation could be seen in two dimensions. First, the western education, which made them to understand the true meaning of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' and secondly, due to University's 'location of Rangoon, the political nerve center of Burma'⁸. Moreover, the knowledge of being dubbed as inferiors, in their own country, had no bounds of frustration as far as the educated youths were concerned. The University Act of 1920, caused the first misunderstanding among 'the students and the nationalists of Burma', on the one hand, and 'the British colonial government'⁹ on the other. The University Committee proposed a proper standard and a rigid system of entrance examination, for the high school final and college. It was an attempt to remove political influence from the University. The Act also provided for a unitary residential University in preference to the federated one, in which the teaching colleges would be

8. Cited in John F. Cady, n.3, p.192.
9. Ibid; p. 213

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mainly concentrating as the examination body. Consequently, the examination boards in spring 1920 showed a decrease of passed candidates from 68% to 40% among B.A students and 74% to 45% among B.Sc. students,¹⁰ decreasing further the number of University degree holders, which was less than four hundred students. To counter this Act, there took place on August 1, 1920, a meeting among the YMBA members, including the 'Pongyis'. The members raised the issue of not taking the consent of the Burmese, while proposing the Act in the Legislative Council. They condemned the humiliating remark, made by the Governor Reginald Craddock, that Burmese had such a less number of University graduates that it would be difficult for them to govern themselves¹¹. They also disregarded the proposal made by Mark Hunter of establishing a residential University, which automatically meant, taking small number of students. Also the probationary year for the students was rejected point-blank. They also talked over the issue of a very small representation of Burmans in the complaining body of the Council. The meeting was concluded with the demand for the dismissal of Mark Hunter and also of the restrictions he had imposed on the students and

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid; p. 214

teachers to attend public meetings and to read newspapers in the campus. This demand notwithstanding, the bill was passed on August 28, 1920 and it was declared that Governor Craddock would make the formal opening of the University in December.

On December 4, 1920, the students picketed near the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, three days after the new University was originally scheduled for its official opening and two days before Governor Craddock was to preside over its formal dedication. As it could be seen, he was a politically unfortunate choice¹². Within a few days, the strike became absolutely effective. The reform of 'slave education'¹³ and the grave national issues occupied the striking students. They were given shelter by the monks at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, in their vacated rooms and the food packets were given by the people, who witnessed them with awe. The strike spread to all other schools including a number of American Baptist Missions within the following year.¹⁴ The newspaper editors and monks proposed

12. Ibid; p. 215

13. The British education has helped the students only to get a better position than a landless labourer. He is good only to be a clerk and perpetual slave to the colonial rule. this is the reason why the colonial educations is usually said to be 'slave education', cited in Maung Maung, "Burma and Gen Ne Win", Publishing House; (India; 1975), p. 47.

14. John F. Cady; n. 3, p. 218

indigenous schooling system of the Post. Meanwhile, MBA was replaced by GCBA to include all nationalists and also the students. The students conviction of being treated as second class citizens on the basis of small number of Universities degree holders, became so strong that they literally took an oath of never entering civil services.¹⁵

The students urged their demand for an increase in the number of Burmese in the Council to assist the Lieutenant Governor, under the government of India Act 1915. The enlarged council was to have Lieutenant General, as the President and 28 ordinary members, out of which one would be elected from Rangoon Traders Association and one from Burma Chamber of Commerce. The rest were to be nominated by the president on the advice of governor-general. It also urged *that more than twelve of the total would be official, and the rest non-officials*¹⁶. Apart from this, they also urged that all military units should be evacuated from the area of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda. They were also against all the new regulations adopted by the Governments. Rice Control Board which had assumed temporarily a monopoly of all rice exports¹⁷.

15. Ibid; p. 219.

16. Surendra Prasad Singh : n.1, p. 50.

17. Ibid; p. 51.

On account of this movement, the proposed national university never started. The effect of the movement was broad based. First, this movement gave birth to revolutionary nationalism. Secondly, it led to the pattern of using the universities and schools as instruments of political opposition. Thirdly, it included the pougyis in the movement,¹⁸ unlike earlier times. Lastly, the national fervour had reached to all the corners of the country and growth of political awareness was an instant result.

This movement had given the students a new faith, a new purpose and also a sense of belonging to the community. Their belief in a better future made them more inclined to learn about the political games played by the British colonial rulers. Moreover being their own sons and daughters, the student were loved and respected by the people. Undoubtedly, the students emerged as the strongest force against the colonial government. As a matter of fact, the students were no where in the political scene till 1920. It might be ascribed to their cultural milieu.

18. John F. Cady; n. 3, p. 219.

Neither the students in their campus nor the people did ever discuss issues with regard to politics. Moreover, "their political behaviour was based on their emotional and religious grounds."¹⁹ They day of the movement on December 4th, was declared as a national Day, the British government trying to play against it made it all the more important. It made the students to believe that they could topple the colonial government anytime.

The Students Organisation Vs. Government Forces

The second phase of the freedom struggle, begins in 1930's, when the students got overtly active against the colonial rule. This manifested in their forming organisations in order to fight the repressive government. The All Burma Students Organisation, grew at the Rangoon University and extended to the leading vernacular preparatory schools. It emerged as a potential power.²⁰ The Rangoon University Students Union Building was financed by the privately contributed funds. It was to have discussions and debates. But after 1928, it became a students' activity centre. It has a latent function also,

19. Ibid; p. 193.

20. Kumar Badri Narain Singh; "Freedom struggle in Burma", (New Delhi, 1989) p. 14.

most of the leaders are *alma mator* of the Rangoon University, who came here from all over the country. Another reason advanced by a well-known expert on Burma, Josef Silverstein, in this connection, is that "the anti - Chinese and the anti Indian riots cajoled (sic) with the peasants fight against the British rule in 1930's followed by a political movement, which united the University students, the nation's youths and the radicals."²¹

The formation of a new society called "DOBAMA" (we Burmans) by a few students and their friends, gradually took the form of an elite students national group. They were able to feel the pulse of the people and be aware of their changing conditions and standard of living. Another organisation, the youth league, in which the members came from humble back-ground, were able to reach the hearts of the people. In 1935, the Dobama society and the youth league merged into one and called it as 'Dobama Asiayon' or Thakin party.' It was formed on the line of Irish Sinn-Fein movement, which was like the social movements to internally revitalise their own cultural heritage. Thakin movement was the only non-religious and

21. / S.K. Ghosh; n. 6, p. 128.

non-racial movement that ever existed in Burma.²² They were communists at heart and extremists in India. It was something like the Swadeshi movement in India, during the early part of 19th century. The members of the 'Dobama Asiayon', first aimed at the revival of the national school organisation, started in the early 1920's and to extend contacts into non-national (Christian missioneries) high schools, both vernacular and non-vernacular.²³

In upper Burma, the word 'Thakin' was customarily used to address the Britishers, which means 'master'. As it reached the Rangoon University, the students started addressing one another as 'Thakin'. They felt they were just equal to their rulers. It soon became a 'symbol of youthful defiance and national credo',²⁴. The Dobama song was composed by a co-student, Thakin Tin and it is today's national anthem in Burma. Thus, all their energy was centered on one goal; i.e; opposition to British colonialism.

22. John F.Cady; n.3, p. 373.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

Meanwhile, in 1936, besides being a debating club, Rangoon University Students Union building was changed into a centre of students politics on campus. Then, Thakin Nu, a law student of the university made provocative speeches against the government. It was against a lecturer whose unmoral conduct, prompted them to ask for his dismissal. Principal Sloss did not hear them and in the name of maintaining discipline expelled Thakin Nu from the University. The matter was revealed when the Journal of the Students Union printed an article "Hell Hound at Large" denouncing the authoritarian attitude of the principal. When Thakin Aung San, the editor of the journal didn't reveal the name of the author who had written it, as he used a pen name, Thakin Aung Sen was also expelled.

This was followed by a strike, which rapidly spread to the high schools in the urban areas. Political Leaders gave a helping hand to their cause. The All Burma Students' movement has been very active of which Thakin Aung San was the President. The strike was timed to coincide with the final week of the legislative council session.²⁵ Nearly 80% of the male residents in the

25. Shme Lu Maung, "Burma : Nationalism and Ideology: An Analysis of Society, Culture and Politics", (Dhaka, 1989). p.23.

University college dormitories and more than 20% of the Judson college Students, who were not known for their patriotism had also vacated their quarters and moved to the slopes of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda hill. While some selected students stayed at the Rangoon University on Picketing duty, they succeeded in persuading students of nearly thirty-two schools to join the strike. Their achievement virtually transformed the students movement into political event with province-wide impact, which the students movement and Thakins shared together. The strike was called off when the government made concessions permitting students representation on the University Council²⁶

From 1936-1939, the Students motive towards the struggle witnessed a slight change toward radical nationalim. Their marxist indoctrination made strong impact on the Thakins.²⁷ They turned their efforts to organising Burman Labour groups, mill workers, oil company employees, etc., Though "Dobama Asiayone" had a socialist tinge, it was a Burmese national party.

In 1936, Some Thakins, Lay Maung, Ba Swe and Ba Hein organised the workers of the Barmah Oil Company to go for

26. Kumar Badri Narain Singh, N.20, p.29.

27. U Nu, "Saturday's Son", (New Haven & London, 1975), p.113.

strike, as their living condition were absolutely at a low ebb. But this strike was not very effective, as there was a continuous flow of cheap labour force from India. When the strikers marched towards Rangoon, Ba Swe and Ba Hein were arrested. Tension rose among the youths. It was followed by a series of strikes in schools on December 12. Many schools were closed down on account of this 'hysteria'²⁸ On December 20, the students under the leadership of Ko Hla Shwe²⁹ marched to the secretariat and posted their pickets. A tense atmosphere persisted in the air, with the students sitting and eying the policeman beyond the gates with anxiety, while the police was eying them with hostility. Neither of them made the first move. In the evening when the students were leaving, a mischief monger, threw a stone towards the police. As a result, the police marched on horseback and started beating the students including female students. In the middle of this hubbub a young student of 22 years who was severely beaten up, died with the injuries in the hospital. His name was Maung Aung Gyaw. His death was mourned all over the

28. John, F. Cady, n.8, p.401.

29. Ko Hla Shme was a brilliant and equally an arrogant student, who was named by his friends and comrades as Arnarshin, meaning the Dictator cited in Maung Mamji, "Burma & Gen Ne Win", n.13.

marking his martyrdom³⁰. His crew-cut hair style also had become popular among the students and Thakins. Interestingly, this movement had shown that there was a close relationship between the activities of the youthful Thankins and All Burma Students Movements

After these strikes, specially the one in 1936, Ko Nu Ko Thn Ohn, Ko Hla Pe and some others left school. It is rightly said that 'Politics, the irresistible mistress, claimed them for their own.'³¹ But Ko Aung San went back to school for a year to serve as president of RUSU and All Burma Students Union, which was born out of the strike. Being averse to continuing in the University he also left after some time. He was missing his freinds, and, ofcourse, wanting desperately to join politics in order to see Burma Independent.

Meanwhile, the political situation of Burma from the early 1930's had been in total dissary. The economic condidtions also deteriorated considerably. The rebellion tendency got intensified in many places of Burma like the

30. John, F. Cady; n.3., p.405.

31. Dr. Ba Maw, "Break through in Burma : Mamories a revolution; 1932-46", (New Haven & London; 1968), p.11.

Saya san rebellion with regard to Capitation tax. It spread to Tharrawaddy, Insein and Pyapon districts. The Saya san rebellion had caused a lot of disturbance for the British administrators. It prompted them to become a little flexible with regard to their demands. In 1932-35, the government of India Act 1935 was proposed, which seperated Burma from India. Though Burma wanted to be independent of anything foreign, which even included India, the freedom fighters of Burma felt this to be a calculated move on the part of the British government to slow the process towards independence for the Burmese. By 1937, Burma was totally seperated. Now Burma was able to taste self-government in the real sense.³²

At this time of turmoil and anxiety, the students took the initiative in forming political parties like 'Dobama Asiayone'. It was able to bring together the two groups of people, i.e, the western-educated or the constitutionalists, whose policy was 'a yard a day, where will Pagan go away' and the monks led wunthanus who wanted all or substantially all or nothing, together³³, It

32. Surendra Prasad Singh, n.1, p.29.

33. Kumar Badri Narain Singh, n.20, p.29.

was during this period of 1930-38, which marked the consolidation of the Burmese nationalist movement to face Burma from foreign domination.³⁴

Political Developments during and after war

From 1937-42, Burma had four ministries i.e., of Dr. Ba Maw of Synyetha party U Pu of People's party, which was for a short period and U Saw, who found Myochit Party and Sir Paw Tun, member of Patriotic Party appointed in succession U Saw. On the eve of the world war II, the different political parties were still trying to understand the situation the war had created. They all along knew that the war and independence were the issues which might destroy an administration. The organisations having mass base politics like the Dobama Asiayone, All Burma Students Movement, Synyatha or Proletarian Party and the Myochit Party, didn't want to waste time. A war-time united front was formed by the three organisations, namely The Synetha Dobama Asiayone and the students organisation and called it the 'forward Block'.

The original politically active university students', which had gone severely anti-British had gone

34. Ibid.

underground. The rising and growing tide of nationalism found expression in the young Thakins and students under the banner of the Burma Revolutionary Party.³⁵ They devised ways and means of getting arms as well as military assistance from outside countries to bring an end to the British rule. As it became intolerable for the colonial power, it came up with the Defence of Burma Act in 1940. It declared the movement of Thakins as illegal. Many Thakins leaders were failed, They held the view that "Our mothers brought us forth, the jails brings us up, the living is indeed easy."³⁶

Obviously nothing much could be done without foreign help. At this time the Japanese slogan of 'Asia for Asians' seemed to have a strong appeal for them on their part, the Japanese seemed to offer help. They had their own considerations. When Thakin Aung San was marooned at Amoy, the Thakins decided in favour of Japanese help Colonel Suzuki proposed to make a new Burmese Army. He wanted a limited number of Burmese youths representing various nationalities, within Burma, to form such a nucleus. His idea was give them an intense and short-term

35. Dr. Ba Maw, n.31, p.135.

36. Ibid, p.139.

training. Thakin Aung San came back to Burma and took along with him some Thakins and students and their friends numbering thirty. In 1941, the training began. These men, the 'thirty-heroes' were given vigorous training at Hainan and Famosa. It was almost completed by September 1941, when only six comrades were first sent to Burma border, named Bo Let Ya, Bo Man Naing, Bo La Young, Bo Ze Ya, Bo Min Swe, and Bo Mo.³⁷ It is they who helped to organise the internal revolt. All the comrades, after returning became officers of varying ranks. Bo Aung San or Bo Te Za became the major general, Mitsuru Sugii, a colonel. Thus emerged the Burma Independent Army (BIA) under their leadership.

In 1942, the Japanese started their occupation campaign in Burma. They conquered Burma with the help of BIA and many Thakins BIA became the national army and grew in the safety provided under the Japanese protection.³⁸ Slowly BIA began to capture civil power and also increased its numbers by recruiting in it several students and Thakins. BIA was able to drive the last white man, after the Battle of Shwedaung on March 29, 1942.

37. Ibid, p.145.

38. U Maung Maung, "Burmese Nationalist Movement 1940-48", (Scotland 1989), p.179.

However, it did not take much time to know the Japanese motivations as well.

The first announcement of an agreement between the two sides to create a government appeared, in an order proclaimed by Col. Suzuki. It was called the Burma Baho government. In reality, however, what the Japanese were intending to give was not independence. The BIA was also not free, though it was wholly made of Burmese, and under Aung San, the Commander-in-chief. The Japanese Officers were strongly attached to it. The Japanese brought in many people and trained them to include them in BIA. The foundation of this new army was firmly laid and so was the name changed from BIA to Burma Defence Army or Burma National Army, on August 26, 1942.

The disenchantment with the Japanese had already started growing. It developed within the BIA from the anti-British underground in 1942 to anti-Japanese underground.³⁹ There was no formal organisation and so a group of compatriots like Thakin Nu, Ko Kyaw Nyein, Tet Phongyi Thein Pe, Thakin Soe met at a village and agreed to let Thakin Soe, hard-core communist and Thakin De and Mya Thuin to go for Chinese help. From China, Thein Pe

39. Ibid.

came to India and Thakin Soe went back to Burma, after unpleasant experiences in China. Thakin Soe went underground to organise the communist party and anti-Japanese calls.⁴⁰ It was a form of resistance movement, as the Burmese being denied the genuine independence which the Japanese had promised. The resistance became overt after Mountbatten took command of the South-east Asian Command (SEAC) in 1943. On August 1, 1944, the Thakin party along with the others had merged in the national front of the resistance. The three parallel organisations, i.e., of Thein Pe from India, Thakin Soe of communist underground and anti-Japanese cells and Thakin Nu and the others who were left over were merged together by General Aung San, who then formed Anti-Facist People's Freedom League (AFPEL). The underground organisation soon started getting above the ground popularity as it also drew some "symbolic participation" from Karens and certain other members of the pre-war political groups and parties.⁴¹

Post-War Burma and Independence

A revolt in March 1945 helped the British forces to

40. Ibid., p.181.

41. S.K. Ghosh, n.6., p.129.

reoccupy Burma in stages. The AFPFC opened its cells in every town. They formed Burma Socialist Party and called a party meeting on August 19, 1945. Never before was there a meeting of this intensity. General Aung San became very vocal at this juncture. The whole of Rangoon was there, with markets closed and ponys and buses giving voluntary services. Many organisations arranged processions carrying however and flags with the fighting peacock, a national symbol of the students which later became the national symbol, on it. The unity among them and the sense of national consciousness was at its peak. General Aung San became the acknowledged leader. They passed three resolutions. First, to form a strong army as a nucleus within BNA, which is fully armed, disciplined and battle tested. Secondly, to set up an all party representative, provincial government, which would organise elections with Universal adult suffrage, for a national constituent assembly, and thirdly, it called for unity among all political parties and the people to achieve these ends.⁴²

In 1945, General Aung San and BNA sided with the British. However, from October 1945 to August 1946, there

42. U. Maung Maung, n.38, p.93.

was widespread disagreement between the British and the Burmese. In this duration, the British did not want to discuss any matter with the Burmese nationalists about self-government or dominion status. However, the importance of Aung San and AFPFL grew strong, particularly during the post-war freedom struggle.⁴³ The Supreme Council of AFPFL was broadened to include more nationalists.

The AFPFL claimed itself to be a national government⁴⁴ and not a political party. Mountbatten's support to it strengthened its position. He also gave the final decision on March 27, 1945 to grant allied status to Aung San's BNA, which was not liked by Governor General Dorman Smith's government at Simla. When he came back to Rangoon, a conference was called. It was attended by Aung San, Thakin Than Tun, Sir Paw Tun, U Tin Tut, U Pu, U Ba Pe, U Ba Thau, Sydney Loo-Nee, Aye and U Set. The proposal put forth by Aung San and AFPFL was not given much importance. Even recognition was denied to AFPFL. Aung San asked the members to be ready to fight against

43. Ibid, p.109.

44. Josef Silverstein, "Burma", in Roger M. Smith ed., "South east Asia : Documents of Political Development and Change", (Ithaca and London, 1974), p.91.

the British when necessary. He changed BNA to Burma Patriotic Force (BPF)

Meanwhile, the war-time British Prime Minister, Churchill was defeated and Atlee became the Prime Minister after the general elections in July 1945. Civil administration started in Burma and Dorman-Smith came to Rangoon. There was an element of suspicion bothering the AFPFC leaders. Aung Sam offered cooperations of Burma to the British as an independent nation. The offer was rejected by Dorman Smith. The tug-of-war kept continuing as well as the clash of personalities of Aung San and Dorman Smith.⁴⁵ In January 1946, AFPFL convened its first nation-wide rally at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the first great assembly of people. Thakin Soe, a communist leaders created a rift in this party, when he openly challenged the idea of achieving freedom by peaceful means. But many communists didn't cooperate with Soe, as they did not want to spoil the nationalist front at this critical moment. Peaceful and orderly demonstrations took place all over Burma.

Dorman Smith resigned due to ill-health and was replaced by Sir Herbert Rance on August 30, 1946. He

45. Dr. Ba Maw, n.31, p.140.

witnessed the strikes all over and so accepted the formation of a coalition government, as proposed by AFPFL. The Aung San Artee Agreement was signed on January 27, 1947, a new era of Anglo-Burmese friendship and cooperation had started.⁴⁶

Meanwhile Thakin Nu and Aung San had done an extensive tour of the frontier areas and urged the formation of a supreme council of the United Hill People (SCOUHP) consisting of Ching, Kachins and Shans and the elected president was Sao Shwe Thaike. Later Panglong agreement was signed on February 12, 1947. It gave equal status to all ten people of Burma, regarding of their ethnicity.⁴⁷ Still it was not helpful in solving the minority problem, regarding the future status of some Karen inhabited areas. On the elections which were held in 1947, AFPFL won 170 out of 180 contested seats while the communists got only 7 out of 29 contested seats.⁴⁸

Aung San opened a historic constituent Assembly on June 16, 1947 by Presenting a 7-point resolution drawn up by AFPEL. It was this resolution as approved by the

46. Silverstein, Joseph, n.44, p.99.

47. Ibid., p.102.

48. Furnivall, J.S., "The Government of Modern Burma", (New York, 1958), p.105.

members that became the basics on which the constitution of Burma was framed. While Aung San was presiding over a meeting of the executive council, he along with six other members of AFPFL were gunned down by some having personal grouse. Thus Aung San, the father of the nation, was no more. He could not even see independence before his death.

Thakin Nu was called by Sir Hubert Rance to head the new government. The interim government was changed into a provisional government and U Nu became its prime minister. The third and final session of the Constituent Assembly which met under the leadership of Thakin Nu from September 15 to 25, 1947 completed its work.⁴⁹ Nu-Atlee Agreement was signed on October 17, 1947 at London. It was decided that Burma would become a sovereign independent republic outside the commonwealth. The Burma Independence Act in December was passed. The transfer of power took place on January 4, 1948 at 4.20 AM an auspicious time chosen by the Burmese astrologers.

49. Scott, J.G., "Burma a Hand book of Practical Information", (London, 1906).

Chapter 3

DEMOCRACY AND MILITARY RULE

Following the achievement of independence on January 4, 1948 and with the British Colonial experience in mind, the leaders of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) launched the country as a parliamentary democracy. U Nu became the Prime Minister and a Shan Chief Sao Shwe Thaik, the President. Obviously, the dream of achieving national unity through democratic means was high on the agenda of the rulers. But democracy in a highly ethnically diversified society is rather tough to achieve. Both the tensions within the ruling party and disturbances resulting from ethnic minorities and insurgencies almost led the country to a state of anarchy. In a sense, these became the reason for the ending of the democratic rule. It paved way to military rule.

From a historical point of view, the period following the achievement of independence could be divided into two phases - 'Pyidawtha' from 1948-58, the period of experimentation with parliamentary democracy and democratic socialism. The second phase, 'Pyidaweha' from 1962-88, the period of experimentation with monolithic socialism and the Sino-Soviet model of a polity by the

military regime of Ne Win in the framework of "the Burmese Way to Socialism".¹ The dominant ideology of civilian and military leadership during the Post-independence period, was characterised by traditionalism, nationalism, anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism.

Students had been in the scene all along. But their participation in politics varied in intensity during U Nu's and Ne Win's rule. Initially, they restricted themselves to particular issues and problem which affected them immediately. During the period of democracy, students were given freedom of expressing their opinion as well as participating in the active politics. The situation changed when Ne Win staged the Coup and took over power in March 1962. It curtailed all democratic freedoms of the people. The authoritarian nature of the military junta brought the students instantly in the forefront since 1962 itself. As per the tradition, students were able to get mass support very easily and demonstrated against the government's repressive policies. However, contradictory to the tradition, the military always acted by using force and closing down the

1. Mya Maung, "The Burma Road From the Union of Burma To Myanwar". Asian Survey, Vo91. XXX, No.6, June 1990, p.603.

universities indefinitely, due to which education suffered. Neither did they bother to build new universities. The students participation in demonstrations against the military government, was quite active but in the movements of 1974 and 1988, it grew unbelievably strong. The intensity of these demonstrations put the military on the defensive. Nevertheless, it made it all the more arbitrary and oppressive. It was this, perhaps which enabled many inside and outside the country to think that the military would not remain in power for long.

The Era of Democracy

U Nu came to power and had many promises to keep and goals to achieve. He needed a strong party and the support of all the groups-the minorities, the army, the students, officials and workers. The government tried to put up with all their reasonable demands, especially of the minorities. But as time passed on, the problems kept on increasing, straining the entire democratic system. A change in the political system seemed to be inherent in the logic of things. The people generally were hopeful that the leaders would be able to solve the country's problems. There was a degree of realization that no system was better than democracy, though it had certain faults.

The democratic rule had brought a constitution giving equal status to all the people, irrespective of diversities. They stuck to the ideals of socialism as these were motivated by state ownership and control. It was a response to pre and post war conditions.² The government extended its activities into new fields through the National Planning Board. Meanwhile, in the field of foreign policy as well as in domestic policy, the Marxist tinge was quite observant³. On the domestic side, they sought to establish a welfare state based on both Marxist and Buddhist principles. But one could, however find that Burma dealt with its problems democratically rather than in a communist fashion⁴

The difficulties faced by the leaders ever since independence had come from many angles. These were related to the ethnic minorities, communists, army and even within the ruling party the AFPFL. The ethnic minorities created the gravest problem. This was through open rebellion by various groups, most powerful being the Karens. The

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2. Dr. P. Sharan, Government and Politics of Burma, Metropolitan (New Delhi, 1983, p.51.
 3. Ibid., p.53.
 4. Farzana Hossein, "Authoritarianism and Prospect for Democracy in Myanmar", Bliss Journal, Vol.13, No.1., Jan 1992, p.56.

activities of the Shans, Mons, Arakanese, Kachins, Chins etc., also had been quite disturbing for peace. The non-ethnic factious were the communists-the White Flags (Stalinists and Red Flags (Trotskyites)⁵, who had not only defied the central government while fomenting disturbances. Another segment of the Wartime underground was the people's Volunteer Organisation (PVO) ⁶

Side by side with the ethnic and communist insurgency, a challenge had come from the army, which had been sent to suppress it. The army in these areas tended to target the civilian officers who were against the ruling party; thus undermining the AFPFL's influence and importance. This in a sense created a strain in relations between the army and the ruling party. The last challenge to the government came from the split within the ruling party in 1958. By then, the situation had deteriorated gravely. That explains why the army was asked to take over in order to handle the situation properly.

Since the transfer of power by the British, the AFPFL had won the elections in 1951-52. It was attributed to a

5. Dr. P. Sarhan, n.2, p.53.

6. Shme Lu Maung, "Burma : National and Ideology - An Analysis of Society, Culture and Politics", (Dhaka, 1989), p.25.

weak opposition. The AFPFL's pre-dominance made it arrogant and its popularity started to decrease. In the next elections in 1956, AFPFL had to make an alliance with the National United Front (NUF). The NUF was communist inspired⁷ and so the army which was fighting the insurgents as well as the communists in the forests got confused. In 1956, U Nu resigned in order to help 'clean up' the AFPFL and strengthen the party⁸. The party suffered a serious setback in June 1958, when it split into two, the 'stable' AFPFL under U Ba Swe, former Prime Minister and leader of the Trade Union Congress, along with Kyaw Nyein, a leader of the Socialist Party and the 'Clean AFPFL' under U Nu and Kyaw Tun, head of All Burma Peasants Association. This split seemed to be suicidal both for the party as well as for the state. This disturbance caused many ministers to resign on June 4, 1958⁹. This made U Nu to depend upon NUF for support.

Now, to be successful, a democracy needed to have dedicated and educated people. A lack of it created lot of problems. Moreover, the quantum of liberty given

7. NUF is an alliance of the Burmese workers and Peasants Party and other splinter groups and Justice party.

8. Dr. P. Sharan, n.2, p.55.

9. Ibid., p.58.

under democracy was bound to make the people slackened towards their work. As a result, corruption started seeping into the vitals of society. It was at this juncture when Burma was already facing many problems. Sometime before the split in the AFPFL in June 1958, U Nu had started taking advise from General Ne Win.

It was on U Nu's invitation that Ne Win was given the responsibility of becoming a Caretaker government in October 1958. In this connection Ne Win made Seven Commitments, (1) to establish conditions for free and fair elections, (2) to exclude from government the active leaders of the political parties, (3) to keep the army away from interfering in political matters, (4) to control and punish acts of violence and lawlessness by military personnel, (5) to act to suppress crime as far as possible, (6) to strive for internal peace, and (7) to maintain Burma's foreign policy of neutrality.¹⁰ In April 1958, Ne Win was made the Prime Minister. On his part he assured the people that he would create favourable conditions for holding elections. He remained the head of the caretaker government for 18 months, until the elections were held in February 1960.

10. Ibid., p.58.

The caretaker government under Ne Win had done quite a good job. In this not-so-long duration, the army was able to impose on black marketeers, hoarders and also with regard to internal security.¹¹ It also amended the constitution to prevent the feudal chiefs in the Shan & Kayah states from holding their seats in the Chamber of Nationalities. The Upper House of Parliament, while at the same time it paid them large sums of money to surrender their political rights to the state. 'Through these actions, the army did produce results but did not gain popularity'.¹²

In February 1960, elections were held and U Nu's 'clean' AFPFL won with a great majority. The 'Clean' AFPFL renamed itself as Pyidaungsu or Union Party and U Nu became the Prime Minister.¹³ The army withdrew while the civilians came to power once again. The coming back of the constitutional government encouraged the masses to hope that the problems of the country, in the fields of economy, society, politics and ethnic insurgency would be removed. But the proposal made by U Nu to make Buddhism the state religion led to widespread protests among the

11. Maung Maung, "Burma and Gen. Ne Win", (Bombay (1969), p.255.

12. Ibid., p.304.

13. Naidu, G.V.C., "Burma at Crossroads", Economic and Political Weekly, 23(41) Oct. 8, 1988. p.2100.

non-Buddhists. Moreover, this U Nu's government in February 1960, was not an improvement on the previous one. The leaders were showing "their incapability to avert national distinegration". According to Josef Silverstein, "The Cabinet seemed to be neither loyal nor united, corruption led to scandals, a national crisis was provoked due to the issue of state religion and regional disaffection posed the threat of insecurity".¹⁴

The question of promoting harmony among the people of Burma, specifically the Shans, Karens and Burmans, the government expressed its trust and confidence in the minority leaders by keeping them in their cabinet posts and other positions of authority. The government called a federal seminar in February 1962, where all the leaders from Burma would air their views.¹⁵ It was in this meeting the newly elected democracy government would decide its fate over the most pressing ethnic minorities issue. But on the night of March 2, 1962, The army under General Ne Win overthrew the constitutional government, through *coup d'etat*'. They arrested almost all the

14. Josef Siluerstein, "Burma", in Roger M. Smith, ed "South East Asia : Documents of Political Development and change". (Ithaca and London, 1992) p.90.

15. Ibid, p.86.

important leaders including those of minorities. Thus, came the end of all the hopes for democracy, at least for a temporary period. How long the 'temporary period' would last could not be easily guessed then.

The Military take over and its Authoritarianism

With the coup on March 2, 1962 the army leaders announced the formation of a 17 member Revolutionary Council (RC) under Ne Win's chairmanship. The RC's immediate action was to abolish Parliament, political parties and unions of every kind.¹⁶ The political power structure of the military was centralised in Rangoon, in the well-protected and fortified palace of Ne Win and the Villas of his close subordinates. Brigadier Aung Gyi, one of Ne Win's close associates had stated that "we had economic, religious and political crisis within the issue of federalism, as the most important reason for the Coup".¹⁷

Ne Win had promised after the coup that he would try

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16. J. Stephen Hoadley, "The Military in the Politics of South East Asia : "A comparative perspective." (Cambridge 1975) p.36.
 17. Josef Silnerstein, "Burma : Military Rules & the politics of Stagnation". (Ithaca & London 1977), p.30.

to bring down the high cost of living and take legal action against the black marketeers and the racketeers. Brig Tin Pe and Col. (later Brig) Aung Gyi were his close associates. On April 1, 1963, a general amnesty was proclaimed and Ne Win asked the inmates of the Rangoon central jail not to repeat any crimes and help the government in "nation-building".¹⁸

Although it was a different matter with the people, the coup leaders themselves never doubted the legitimacy of their actions. The publications and speeches delivered by them at that time clearly demonstrated the fact that military had the right to intervene in the governmental methods during a period of national crisis.¹⁹ A high esteem earned by the military from the time of World War II and the active participation of the '30 Heroes' in the freedom struggle through Burma Independent Army (BIA) had given an aura of respectability to their action, among the masses. The coup leaders expressed their determination to unite the people of Burma and also intended to lead a revolution with the help of a new ideology, which came out

18. Maung Maung; n.11, p.309.

19. Smith Jr, Charles; B. "The Burmese Communist-Party in the 1980's". Regional Strategies Studies Programme. ISEAS - p.112.

in two documents i.e. "Burmese Way to Socialism" (BWS) and the "System of Correlation of Man and His Environment" (SCME). In BWS, the military's social theorists altered these priorities by declaring that both the economic and political system must be altered before the country's other problems could be tackled.²⁰ The SCME ideology rested on three basic principles, change, revolution and socialism.²¹ As a matter of fact, the ideas of the two documents are drawn from a number of contradicting values like the Burmese Buddhist tradition, marxism, socialsim, humanism and pragmatism.²² The Coup leaders seemed to believe that 'democratic socialism' and individual freedom' when combined could produce a progressive and prosperous society.²³

Last but not the least, the military, in order to deal with the chaotic situation prevailing at the time launched a party called the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), with Ne Win as its chairman. In fact, the military wanted to fill in all the important offices. But finding it necessary to co-opt civilians to carry out various duties, they created and controlled the

20. Farzana Hossein, n.4, p.59

21. Ibid; p.59

22. Josef Siluerstein; n.17, p.81

23. Ibid.

organisation called BSPP, hierarchy of peoples peasants and People's workers council, and the security and administration council²⁴ (SAC). Civilians were admitted very carefully. The BSPP was made a cadre based party in order to win the masses, by creating a 'democratic facade'.²⁵ Secondly the RC took certain measures to build a self-sufficient economy i.e., by nationalising virtually everything²⁶, starting from banks and then imports and exports, productions and distribution. Without proper preparations, trained personnel and specific goals, it made a shambles of the economy. The widespread shortage of rice in the country, once considered, a rice bowl of Asia, of cooking oil and other basic items on the urban areas gave rise to black marketing and many other illegal trading activities which led to people's disenchantment with the military leaders. Moreover, its foreign policy was attuned to help in promoting economic developments. So it steadfastly maintained stable relations with its neighbours especially with China, India and Thailand. But it was more inclined towards China while making decisions

24. Donald G. McCloud, Systems and Process in South East Asia : The evolution of a Region, (London 1986), p.231

25. Mya Maung, n.1, p.60.

26. Maung Maung, n.11, p.218.

within and outside the country.²⁷

In a major effort to improve its economy the military rulers depended upon the peasants and so they started appeasing them. They were encouraged to farm and market their produce, cooperatively. The title and ownership of the land was given to the farmers. They were also encouraged with cheap loans, and also to produce what they liked.²⁸ But in reality, the military had to go a long way before it could have a stronghold in the villages where the local, ethnic and religious affiliations were still strong.

Thirdly, the army went to redefine ethnicity.²⁹ This card was actually played to undermine the position of separatist minority groups. In fact, the right of every one to preach and practice religion was said to be the fundamental goal of Ne Win's regime.³⁰

The military junta had tried, from all possible grounds to strengthen the bonds between the dominant

27. Donald G. McCloud, n.24, p.231.

28. Smith Jr., Charles B., n.19, p.115.

29. Farzana Hossein, n.4, p.60.

30. Trevor Ling, "Buddhism, Imperialism & War : Burma and Thailand in Modern History", (London, 1979), p.75.

Burmans and the minority people, the major hurdle since independence and also the major threat of the insurgents became negligent after 1975, with the victory of the army over the Burma Communist Party.³¹

By 1971, the BSPP was called upon to prepare a new constitution, under the leadership of General Sen Yu, (the second most powerful man in the Revolutionary Council) Early in 1974, elections were held, the army filled in all the seats, changed their army titles and uniforms and assumed the form of civilian rulers. Thus, started a new phase of the military rule. Their rule had not changed, the economy was moving very fast towards bankruptcy. Herbert Feith characterised the new ruling elites as 'repressive developmentalists'.³² The biggest casualty of this rule had been the parliamentary institutions and attendant essentials of democracy³³ human rights, education, free press, multiparty system, independence of judiciary *et al.*

In 1987, after 25 years of his military rule, Ne Win realised that the country's economic policies would be

31. Silverstein, Josef., n.17, p.35.

32. Suryananayan, V., "South and Southeast Asia in the 1990's : Indian and Australia Perspective", (New Delhi, 1992), p.90.

33. Ibid.

changed from state-owned to private trading, especially in the domestic field. Unfortunately, for the military leadership, however, the crisis deepened and Ne Win had to resign. On July 1988, Ne Win was succeeded by Gen Sein Lwin, who was again forced to resign due to public outcry at his mass killing of students in demonstrations on various occasions. In August 1988, Maung Maung came to power. In a few days, on September 18, 1988, one Gen Saw Maung, Minister of Defence, staged a coup and took over power. It was he who formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

Students' Reaction vis-a-vis the military regime

The efforts towards the restoration of democracy had been there since long. These were reinforced when the atrocities by the ruling junta had become overt and deliberate. The students, as earlier, took the lead and were overwhelmingly supported by the huge mass of people. The repulsive attitude of the military junta and their way of dealing with problems had made the whole country anxious that a deadened could reach anytime. The movement towards democracy had stirred feelings even in the neighbouring countries.

The students' power though it was in libernation for

quite sometime, had risen quite vigorously. The liberalism shown by U Nu's government towards the students was spurned by Ne Win's regime. The sudden change of priorities of the military junta made the students as well as the public perplexed for quite sometime. But not for so long, they realised the fact that the military junta was going to be very autocratic. It was found out by the students from the most simple things like strict hostel regulation, refutable admission policy, etc. Slowly, the people came to know that the policies of the government in economic, political, social and cultural fields were leading the country towards decline rather than towards realising the goals of development. Within almost two decades and a half of the military regime, Myanmar was given the status of one of the least developed countries and had sought aid as such from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.³⁴

The student's activism grew since Ne Win staged a coup in March 1962. Only for short time, the closure of educational universities put a damper on their activities. The time the universities opened, their agitation was

34. Arora, B.D., "Military Junta Versus Democracy", World Focus, 13 (1), January 91, p.5.

reviewed. This was particularly so in May and July 1962 when they started protesting. They were easily suppressed by the Army, Killing nearly 10 to 16 students. When the students protested against the strict hostel regulations as well as the universities change of policies, the revolutionary council resorted to direct and violent action against them. As a result, a couple of students were gunned down. Then junta's action ended with the blowing up of the Rangoon University Students' Union building, a national monument from the time of the freedom struggle, and finally by closing down the universities. It hurt the sentiment of the people and they strongly turned against the ruling junta. In the summer of 1963, the students came back on the streets with fresh demands and also in support of the opposition. This happened when the ruling junta was in the process of negotiating with the minorities. The policy of the government towards the insurgency had led to the strike in November 1963.³⁵ The army once again took repressive action against the students, some hundreds of them were jailed and universities were closed down. When the universities opened, the army witnessed occasional outburst of the

35. Naidu, G.V.G., n.13, p.2009.

students anger during the anti-Chinese riots in 1967, and then in 1970 riot against officials for not providing enough tickets to the regional sports meetings.³⁶ But these riots failed to stir tie the government. It was quite well known that the students greatly lacked 'stable leadership' and also 'organisational skill.

The second phase of military rule saw a change in the attitude of the students. They were earing up (for action) which the army was unlikely like to reconcile with. The students were emerging stronger and in mid-1974, though they did not initiate the protest against food shortages and high cost of living, they participated in it.³⁷ The government once again responded by closing down the universities. The movement that followed in December 1974, made a mark in the history of students' revolt in Myanmar. The protest was when U Thant the then Secretary-General of UNO, on his death, was not given a proper tribute and burial by the government of Burma. U Thant was considered the 'brightest son' of Myanmar. He was active in politics during his college days at Rangoon University. The lack of respect shown by the ruling junta prompted the students "to take the lead as a challenge at the government's insensitiveness and unwillingness to give

36. Silverstein, Josef, n.17, p.49.

37. Benetil Leinter, FEER.

U Thant, a fitting tribute and burial when his body was returned to Burma.³⁸

'The Students organised through different associations of faculties went to Kyai Kasan Stadium, where U Thant's body was lying in a coffin. It looked like black marble, which was covered and the UN Flag was spread over the body. The body was to be buried at Kyandaw Cemetery, a common burial site. Many diplomatic missions and international and national organisations laid wreaths as final tribute. The turn came for the universities. Teachers of various organisations and associations laid the wreath first. Finally, a group of students laid the wreath which was decorated with a fighting peacock flag, the historical official flag of the now banned Students Union.³⁹ This display of sentiment made the crowd emotional and they started weeping. At this moment, a monk and a lady seized the microphone and said "why should the distinguished, nobel U Thant's body be laid at the Kyandaw Cemetery by the side of notorious Khine Mya Than, (Bo Ne Win's first wife) ? It is a shame to the nation !" There was a harsh in the curved, people

38. Shwe Lu Maung, n.6, p.50.

39. U Thant was a students union leader at Rangoon University, when he studied there.

were agitated and angry. Students brought the body to the Rangoon University's convocation Hall. Donations was taken to build a mansoleum; many diplomats also donated money. Students Union ground was the place where they buried the body. This was intolerable to the army leaders. The next day morning, the army came with tanks and bull-dozed the university gates, arrested everybody on the way and filled the military trucks. When they started to dig the body, some students tried to stop them. The shooting started. As the body was raised, it was a tug-of-war over the body. All those students who rushed to hold back the body were shot dead along with many ladies. The UN Flag was stained with innocent blood. Nearly 50 students died. Every house having a university student was searched'.⁴⁰ The intensity with which the students revolted and severity of military action against them became a dark spot in the history of independent Burma. Never before was Ne Win's government shaken that much inside as well as outside the country.

For more than a decade, the students became quiet for sometime, mostly because of lack of leadership and also a proper organisations. But in 1987, when the government

40. Shwe Lu Maung, n.6, p.51.

decided to demonetise 75, 35 and 28 Kyat notes which made almost 80 percent of the total money in circulation⁴¹ had raised a lot of agitation among the people. Obviously, the students took the lead. Military acted in the same brutal manner. After this students started organising themselves, they were by now convinced of the brutal nature of the army regime and had become dedicated to act for restoring democracy. This was first felt in 1988, the whole country was swept over by the new wave of emotional and nostalgic ideals.

The Students' holocaust of 1988

The series of agitations which took place in 1988, were broadly termed as 'pro-democracy movement'. The demonstrators had been from all walks of life. The demonstrations became spontaneous and widespread within a very short period of time. 'The world caught the glimpse of the deep cleavages rending this remarkable long-suffering Buddhist society.'⁴² It was like the 'Quit India Movement' of 1942 in India. The demand made by the demonstrators was to regain democracy. For this they used resignation of military government with the dissolution of

41. Mya Maung, n.1, p.614.

42. Maureen Aung - Thwin, "Burmese Days" Foreign Affairs, 68(2) Spring 1989, p.143.

BSPP, and the formation of a neutral interim government to oversee the election and transition to democracy.⁴³

The violent demonstrations were due to the degrading conditions of the economy under the military government. The demonetisation of Kyat and the humiliating status of the least developed country in the Asia. Pacific region,⁴⁴ in 1987 had been the two major causes. The fire was ignited with a tea-stall brawl on March 12, 1988, by the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) students and neighbourhood youngsters, north to downtown Rangoon.⁴⁵ A RIT student's death by gunshot, and its reason not being known, made the students highly agitated. But the anti-government rallyists came on the streets, from Rangoon University and the University of Arts and Science on March 17. It was due to the fact that the road towards RIT was filled with troops on March 14. The last thing to be done by the army was bringing out the troops and world war II tanks and attacking the unarmed demonstrators and taking them in nearby trucks to Insein jail.⁴⁶ In this demonstration, the general masses also participated.

43. Farzana Hossien, n.4, p.62.

44. Donal G. McCloud, n.24, p.233.

45. Bertil Lintner, "Resentment boils over", Far Eastern Economic Review, March 31, 1988, p.34.

46. Bangkok Post, March 19, 1988.

The resentment was mainly towards Gen. Sein Lwin, who was in charge of dealing with the unrest, who did it with absolute brute force.

The army had surrounded the Shwe Dogen Pagoda, the violent shrine where the students were picketing on June 23. In their pamphlets and posters, the students denounced the rule of Ne Win describing it as the "Burmese Nazi government".⁴⁷ The students and people showed their aversion to the army openly. On his part to deflect the wrath of the people from the army, Ne Win called a party congress of the BSPP, the political arm of the Tatmadaw (Armed forces), on July 23. Ne Win submitted his resignation, along with him four members of BSPP also submitted their resignation.⁴⁸ The successor of Ne Win was, Sein Lwin, widely known as the "butcher of Burmese people".⁴⁹ Students gathered at Shwe Dagon Pagoda and raised anti-government slogans denouncing the Ne Win's successor. On August 8, 1988, thousands of students demonstrated shouting "Democracy and Human Rights, that

47. International Herald Tribune (Perth), 24 June 1988.

48. Bertil Litner, "New Commouflage : Army maintains tight controls despite elections pledge", Far Eastern Economic Review, 144, May 11, 1989, p.33.

49. Deccan Herald (Bangalore), July 31, 1988.

means no Sein Lwin".⁵⁰ Army took action, in which hundres were arrested and many killed.

By seeing the depths of resentment shown in protests arranged by the people and the increasing monopoly of the vernacular press and the formation of an opposition organisation, Democracy and Peace (Interim) league (DPIL)⁵¹, Sein Lwin resigned after August 8, 1988. A comparatively moderate man Maung Maung took up the reins of administration. On September 18, 1988 Gen. Saw Maung, Army Chief of Staff and defence minister, and an associate of Gen. Ne Win came to power through a coup.⁵² Saw Maung formed a 19 member, State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Under the chairmanship of Gen Khin Nyunt. Saw Maung announced that the September 1988 Coup was necessary to stop the deteriorating conditions of the state for the good of the people. The Saw Maung regime announced ban on demonstrations and grouping more than four or five persons along with a dusk to dawn curfew.⁵³

50. Bertil Lintner, "Running for cover : Students flee cities in wake of army suppression". Far Eastern Economic Review, 145, September, 1989, p.26.

51. Tragar, Frunk. N. and Swelly L. William, "The need to create continuity and dynamism of leadership", Asian Survey, Vol.17, 1977, p.830.

52. Bertil Lintner, "Echoing voices : Anti-government protests evoke 1988's violent clashes", Far Eastern Economic Review, 145, July 20, 1989, p.26.

53. Bangladesh Observer, June 29, 1988.

That night, a bloody mark in the history of Burma, thousands of demonstrators defied the curfew and protested the military take over. They were massacred. Among them innumerable students died and people were taken to jails. A Burmese remarked that "the Burmese army had become a national disgrace".⁵⁴

The drastic changes that took place in the politics of Burma, brought the students to realise their drawbacks. Brig Aung Gyi, once a strongman of Ne Win, who resigned due to differences with him in regard to the nationalisation of business, became vocal against Ne Win's regime.⁵⁵ He made the students realise, through his articles and papers that a strong organisation was needed to topple the military regime. The students of most of the universities and major high schools met at the Institute of Medicine in Rangoon and formed a 114-member committee, calling it All Burma Students Democratic Association (ABSDA). The Chief of ABSDA, Min Zay Ya, who had gone underground due to the intense activity just before the takeover of Saw Maung. This underground organisation, headed by more than twenty leaders, also set up a

54. Bertil Lintner, n.50., p.27.

55. Tragar & Swelly, n.51, p.835.

Patriotic Liberation Army, on the Thai border and accepted funding from foreign countries through the North American Oil Company⁵⁶ and also from the ethnic insurgents, whose help they denied earlier, thinking their voices would be heard. The students in hundreds and thousands fled to all the border areas, near Thailand, Bangladesh, China, India etc. The Karen National Union gave them food, shelter and military training in guerrilla tactics. Min Zay Ya once stated that "We have stopped using our mouths to protest... There is no honour greater than the willingness to sacrifice for the freedom of the motherland."⁵⁷

The militancy among the students increased along with their obsession to restore democracy by hook or by crook. The students who fled to the malaria infested forests had no end to their sufferings. Vigorous military training and malaria were inevitable hazards to their health. Students had to share the mosquito nets. Those who got malaria were hard to take care of, due to lack of doctors and also due to the fear of going to hospitals, the virtual death-trap. Many died of Malaria in forests. Those who went back to the cities were captured. They

56. New Strait Times (Kualalumpur), August 30, 1988.

57. Bertil Lentil, FEER, September 7, 1989, p.27.

were tortured mercilessly and through summary executions and regular looting, rape, electric shocks, the killing of villagers became the worst known news about genocide of the students and of the general public towards the military regime increased. The students gave up mass demonstrations and took up to "civil disobedience, go slow action and sabotage".⁵⁸

The students who were hiding in the neighbouring countries were called back by the government authorities and those who would not return would be treated as insurgents.⁵⁹ When most of the students returned just after a couple of days, they were arrested and executed. Many were killed in the military camps without undergoing any judicial procedures. Students were deliberately harassed. It left no other option for the students than hiding in the forests or running away to other countries. The able-bodied men were sent as porters for the army fighting ethnic guerillas in the border areas, until they died of hunger or disease or torture.⁶⁰

After a long gap, a mass rally led by Oxford Educated Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the nationalist hero

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58. Deccan Herald (Bangalore), August 13, 1988.
 59. Bangkok Post, March, 19, 1988.
 60. Times of India, (New Delhi), Oct 30, 1992.

Bo Aung San, along with thousands of people and students, came on the streets, shouting anti-government slogans and waiving the flag of the nationalist movement, the fighting peacock.⁶¹ Suu Kyi was going to bury her dead mother, Daw Khin Kyi, on August 25, 1988, at the northern side of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda.⁶² The students shouted : "We won't forget our colleagues who have fallen in the fight for democracy", another group started shouting "we will continue our struggle", and "we won't kneel to oppression", Suu Kyi came to Burma in mid 1988 to meet her sick mother and stayed back to do something for the long suffering and ailing people of Burma. The students and the people found a leader in the lady, with a strong personality.⁶³ Moreover, they took the chance on August 25, 1988, the day of the burial of Daw Khin Kyi, as an opportune moment to display their strong aversion to the authoritarian regime. She became the leader of the people to provide the direction that they lacked.

Under the increasing pressure of Suu Kyi's oratorical skill in mobilising the long opined masses. On March 10, 1989, the government promised that the elections would be

61. Times (London), August 29, 1988.

62. The observer (London) October 9, 1988.

63. Kijang (c), "Burma Today", Fronteir, 23 (23), January 19, 1990, p.9.

held the next year, and asked the people to make suggestions.⁶⁴ Suu Kyi said, "Only the departure of Ne Win, and the installation of a caretaker government would guarantee honest elections and will also pacify the people".⁶⁵ She made the first bid to organise and strengthen the opposition through the establishment of a new party called National League for Democracy (NLD). Suu Kyi's speeches were video-taped and sold like hot cakes in the black-markets. Once in her speech she observed "My father did not build up the Burmese army in order to oppose the people, once he even said, 'Don't start oppressing the people just because you have weapons, you are to serve the country. You are for the country, the country is not for you'.⁶⁶ Though she has a British husband and never stayed in Burma, she is a Burmese and is fighting for her people. But the Xenophobic military regime is dead set against her and wanted to discredit her. Once when they tried saying that she was a communist, she turned the tables on them saying they were ex-communists.⁶⁷ In an interview, Tin Oo, NLD chairman

64. Josef Silnerstein, "Aung San Suu Kyi : Is she Burma's women of destiny?" Asian Survey, 30(10) October 1990, p.1007.

65. Ibid., p.1008.

66. Bangkok Post, February 14, 1989.

67. International Herald Tribune (London), January 5, 1989.

minister said, "Now she is the catalyst for democracy, although she may not be an unstoppable force. She gains experience day-by-day. If she doesn't understand something, she listens".⁶⁸ She had very soon become a household name in Myanmar. The people of Myanmar and all over the world knew she could be the only person, so strong willed that could topple the government sooner than later.

68. Times (London), September 14, 1988.

Chapter 4

ELECTIONS AND AFTERMATH

The pro-democracy movement in Myanmar rose to a pitch during June-September 1988, and demonstrated a high water mark in mass discontent. As a result, there were fast changes in leadership from Ne Win and finally to Saw Maung. The military junta tried to placate the masses first by trying to bring in a moderate. Leader and then showing a facade of eagerness to bring the oppressive style of governance nearer to democracy. But the mass frustration had risen to a point where nothing but restoration of democracy would satisfy them. The plight and untold suffering of the students under the authoritarian regime of General Saw Maung and the problems they were facing in the malarial forests had yet to fructify into tangible results.

In all the previous movements against the military government, since 1962 there was no sustainable leadership, nor even an organisation, through which they student activist could fight. But, the pro-democracy movement, though impulsive, had not lacked a goal. In March 1988 and then in June 1988 their uprising was on a massive scale. After coming from London Daw Suu Kyi in the

middle of 1988, to nurse her ailing mother at Rangoon, had changed the political scene to a considerable extent. After seeing the atrocities of the military government upon its own people, Suu Kyi had joined in the movement for democracy. Joining the burial ceremony of her mother, the students and the masses took it as an opportune movement and had come out on the streets. In a subtle way, the mourning ceremony took the form of a movement and they had come out on the streets. In a subtle way, the mourning ceremony took the form of a movement for democracy. Having become an embodiment of the mass struggle, Suu Kyi was able to move the masses by her speech. It was she who for the first time ever had rebuked the government so openly. Wherever she went she was able to gather thousands of people. At last, the people of Burma were able to find a leader in Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi's popularity was increasing side by side with the rising curve of public discontent with regard to the xenophobic authoritarian military regime. Seeing the situation going out of control, President Saw Maung declared that elections would be held in May, 1990, which would be "free and fair"¹. People were quite sceptic

1. Patriot (New Delhi), October 28, 1989.

about it. They had been suffering immensely under the repressive regime ever known in the history of Myanmar. That explains why they had been totally disgusted with the Military junta. Suu Kyi was able to ignite the spirit of the people and provide direction they had lacked earlier.² Also the students had tried to fight back the authorities with all their efforts. Their dedication to the cause of democracy was yet to bear fruit. The dictatorial government had in a way, had increased the popularity of Suu Kyi³

SLORC and Pre-Election Moments

Saw Maung's declaration about holding the elections on May 27, 1990 could be attributed to two reasons. First it meant to pacify the students, and secondly, to prevent further imposition of sanctions by the western countries and Japan.⁴ In fact, Myanmar government was more keen to get foreign support than to transform the authoritarian

2. International Herald Tribune (London), March 16, 1989.

3. Farzana Hossein, "Authoritarianism and Prospect for Democracy in Myanmar", Bliss Journal, vol 13, No 1, 1992, pp 62

4. Holiday (Dacea), January 19, 1990

political system into democracy. In spite of this fact known among the people, they took up the challenge of making Myanmar a democracy, against all odds. On their part, the Military junta used repressive and other measures to change the political scene, in the country in their favour. This happened about a year before the elections. The major opponents of the Junta were the students, the minorities, and three opposition leaders - Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo and U Nu. The ruling Junta became still severe with all these groups and individual leaders in one way or the other. Still none of them had lost the vigour to fight back.

The illegitimate military government tried to prevent the charismatic leader Suu Kyi to be the nucleus of the pro-democracy movement. So they had arrested her on July 20, 1989 and confined her in her own house, besides the Inky Lake, a leafy suburb of Rangoon, (renamed Yangon), along the University Road.⁵ U Tin Oo, a soldier turned lawyer and later politician was also arrested. Tin Oo was given a three-year turn with hard labour on December 22, 1989 for his alleged attempts to split the

5. The Statesman (Calcutta), April 23, 1992.

military, disintegrate national unity and discredit the government.⁶ In December, 1989, U Nu was also put under house arrest on refusal to break the 11th Govt., which he formed in September 1988.⁷ Apart from these leaders, many leaders of the popular democratic party, National League for Democracy, and also of other parties were arrested or detained and those who were not detained were often harrassed.⁸ With the political leaders under arrest the outcome of the so-called elections declared by Saw Maung meant to be a mere farce.

The students were also harrassed by the ruling junta. Being in the forefront of the struggle for democracy, the universities were kept closed until the elections were over. Random detention, torture or extra judicial execution was indulged in through the government soldiers.⁹ The former detainees said the way they were tortured, i.e., prolonged periods of solitary confinement, beatings and other forms of abuses were used to force confessions.¹⁰ Most of them were beaten, given electric

6. Holiday, January 19, 1990.

7. Bangkok Post, Januray 19, 1990.

8. Ibid.

9. Indian Express (New Delhi), November 8, 1990

10. Bangkok Post, February 3, 1992.

shocks and were forced to side motorcycle. Standing with arms outstretched and legs bent for long periods.¹¹ Sometimes torture led to death. There atrocities were committed simultaneously with forced labour asporters for the army fighting the minority insurgents and also in building roads, guarding railways and operating rubber plantations confiscated by the military.¹² The able bodied villagers along with students were forced to labour without pay for the army.

Simultaneously, the military junta had been rather severe with the minority insurgents since the time of independence. The heaviest government offensive against the minorities came in 1984. It could be attributed to the new found unity between those fighting for democracy and the minorities seeking autonomy.¹³ On the sides the dissidents realised that the armed struggle against the government was inevitable. The students, Burman dissidents and exiles from abroad had gone to Karen Territory to mobilise and organise opposition to the military regime. A new group called the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB)

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11. Times of India (New Delhi), October 30, 1992
 12. Times (London) April 26, 1992.
 13. Deccan Herald (Bangladesh), March 6, 1989.

was formed in November 1988, to bring together the minorities, students and many other groups including Buddhist monks and Burmese Muslims.¹⁴

The announcement for filing of nominations by parties, with the last date fixed for February 28, 1990, came by the Election Commission, headed by Sayar Chai.¹⁵ When the deadline of registration came there were 233 parties which came to 93 in the end. Many of them had withdrawn due to fear of opposing the ruling junta. It would consequently bring them into limelight and subject them to the army's harrassment. The most influential and strongest of the opposition parties was formed by Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo and Aung Gyi.¹⁶ The party thus formed was called the National League for Democracy (NLD). Daw Suu Kyi wanted to have open dialogue with the SLORC with regard to the decisions for the coming elections.¹⁷ She signed the nomination papers, as per the decision taken by the NLD members, for the coming elections, in order to show respect for the leagues 'democratic decision' to help

14. Ibid.

15. Bangladesh Observer (Deca), 27 June 1989.

16. Bangkok Post, January 6, 1990.

17. Aung Gyi had later left and formed his own party, which was almost inclined towards showing 'Yes-manship' to the ruling junta.

fulfil as far as possible the just aspirations of the people and to honour the zeal and courage of the prodemocracy masses. When she was free, (before house arrest) her speeches against the Ne Win's regime hadn't just guaranteed support, but it had "greatly united the peasant populations against military regime".¹⁸ The whole affair of elections had made the people very excited, despite the fact that the people doubted the janta's promise for "free and fair elections". In the month of August 1989, a ballon with a note attached to it floated down near the golden spire of a Pagoda. It read, "release Suu Kyi"; also written in big letters was 'remember 8-8-88',¹⁹ a day the people of Myanmar would never forget. It is the day of government sponsored brutality in 41 years of Burma's independence.

In the process of registration, Saw Maung had made it clear that once the party was registered it could not back off or would have to face legal action.²⁰ Saw Maung, had promised that five months before the due date, for elections i.e., May 27, 1990, full democratic rights would be given to the people.²¹ The people of Myanmar,

18. Times, July 29, 1989.

19. International Herald Tribune, August 4, 1989.

20. Holiday, January 19, 1990.

21. Ibid.

took this year to be a year of hope and change for the better. Than Than Nu, daughter of U Nu, observed: "The people of Burma want a change and they will vote for a change. But the question is wheather this military junta would allow the people to vote."²²

Quite shrewdly the ruling junta targetted their opposition, mostly on Suu Kyi. so they barred her from taking part in the election making baseless allegations against her. The reason for disqualification, given by the junga was quite rediculous, i.e; " she had fortified her right to run for Parliament by marrying a Briton and staying in his country for a long time."²³ Besides this she was denounced before she was arrested for bringing in Western Values and was also accused of being a patroness of the left wing. When the announcement of her disqualification in the ensuing elections was to be made, the whole capital was guarded by soldiers, in every nook and corner, fearing it might be a precursor of a major upheavnal. Her disqualification gave another pointed angle of concern to the world that the ruling junta deny her of Myanmarese citizenship.²⁴ Daw Sun Kyi once pointed out what Martin Luther king had said "I have a dream", to this

22. Daily News (Colombo), 18 January, 1990.

23. Deccan Herald, January 20, 1990.

24. Ibid.

and said that" well, it is the same with us. We just want to bring our dreams to reality."²⁵ Suu Kyi was an anti-thesis of Ne Win ²⁶, the only person being able to challenge and discard his rule, by saying that he (Ne Win) is a 'fascist'. ²⁷ She was the only person with guts to refute Ne Win in public meetings, before her arrest.

The promise of the junta to give five months of democratic rights to the people before the elections were to be held, was not followed. The army became more repressive than ever. Each candidate contesting election had to obtain permission for addressing meetings. Permission was given only for three hours.²⁸ If the authorities suspected that there would be violence in case anti-government slogans were raised, the meetings would be called off and the party banned for the elections.²⁹ There was no campaigning all over the country. A "free and fair elections" at this stage seemed to be a mere farce, a means to hoodwind the world public opinion.

25. New Straits Times (Kualalumpur) May 25, 1990.

26. Indian Express (Madras), February 23, 1989.

27. Ibid.

28. Bangladesh Observer (Dacca), June 5, 1990.

29. Sunday Times (London) April 19, 1990

The Myanmarese Government had even sought military help from Thailand and China³⁰ and indirectly from Japan's resumption of aid and trade.³¹ Moreover, the Election Commissioner had announced that election in Burma was its internal matter and so there would not be any foreigners to witness it.³² The SLORC had said that it was ready for a legal and systematic transfer of power", "on the basis of a constitution"³³. Saw Maung had given the option to the winner of the elections (whoever it would be) to adopt either Pre-Coup (1948) or Post-Coup (1974) constitution. If the party didn't agree to any of these two constitutions it would draft a new constitution and after its completion, the power would be handed over to the makers of the constitution.³⁴

Paradoxically, however, the elections which were intended to improve Myanmar's international image, took place in an atmosphere of fear and secrecy. Voters would go to polling under martial law and a night curfew.³⁵ The foreign diplomats felt that the elections were a cynical exercise by heavy-handed military rulers. But certain

30. Ibid.

31. The Hindustan Times (New Delhi), April 16, 1990.

32. The Hindustan Times, April 17, 1990.

33. Sunday Times, January 20, 1990.

34. Holiday, January 19, 1990.

35. Sunday Times, April 19, 1990.

analysts believed that it would create a form of party politics that might evolve slowly towards democracy.³⁶ The situation became so grave that the opposition Alliance for Democratic Solidarity had called for a boycott of the election, for, in its opinion the event would be "manipulated by a handful of power maniacs."³⁷ Still elections took place under strict control of the ruling junta. Everyone became sure that the fear which had lurked behind their minds for such a long time was going to be true, i.e. the military supported National Unity Party (NUP) would come to power.

The military junta seemed to be calculative just before the elections. They had strewn the capital with barbed wires to control the much expected anti-government crowds. New footbridges above mainroads had been constructed to allow troops to rush at the high vantage points, if any demonstration erupted.³⁸ Nearly a lakh or two of people were evicted from those neighbourhood areas, where anti-government sentiment was strong, namely in Rangoon, Mandalay and Tanngyi,³⁹ the largest cities of

36. Times, May 24, 1990.

37. New straits times (Kualalumpur) May 25, 1990.

38. Hindu (Madras), January 23, 1990.

39. Hindu (Madras) May, 1, 1990.

Burma. This forced exodus was supposed to be a well planned strategy of the junta. It seemed to be that the happiest day (May 27) was going to change into a Doomsday, with three opposition leaders locked up. Thousands of people evicted from anti-government areas and detained and arrested political leaders. It also demonstrated the fact that the polls were being kept hidden from the international verification.

Elections and Its Repercussions

The D-day had arrived, the people quietly went and gave their votes, under the strict scrutiny of the soldiers on the streets. There were 492 seats in the National Assembly. 93 parties entered the elections with 457 candidates contesting. The most important parties were the NLD (Suu Kyi's party), League for Democracy and Peace (U Nu's party), Union National Democracy Party of Aung Gyi and National Unity Party, a party from the barracks, an appendage of BSPP.⁴⁰ The army felt sure of their success, but people did not want to lose the only opportunity of

40. Miss Than Thau Nu, said that BSPP had changed its name to National Unity party, as they became aware that people started hating the word socialism to a reporter of the Times (London) in 1990.

projecting their views. So they voted and with a vengeance, against the oppressors.

On May 28, 1990 some of the results were announced from Rangoon's different constituencies namely Seikkan township, Bahan township, etc. In these two places NLD won. Since the night of May 27, 53 result had been officially declared in which 48 seats were won by NLD, NUP won none. Still, the people felt the election results might be manipulated. But the junta couldn't do it since it was too late. Also it might create an uproar among the people, both in and out of the country. The results were ultimately declared. NLD winning over 2/3rd's majority in 100 of Myanmais 485 courtituencies. The ruling junta's NUP ended up getting only 10 seats while NLD won over with 392 seats.⁴¹ Bahan, a committee member of the NLD said "it is an excellent day for Burma. we are making a new history, this."⁴² The NLD victory was viewed by supporters as an indication of a mass pro-democracy drive which had survived the coup in September 1988 and the subsequent crack down since then.⁴³

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41. Indian Express (New Delhi) May 29, 1990.
 42. Farzana Hossein, Bliss Journal, pp 63.
 43. Patriot (New Delhi) May 29, 1990.

The students who had played a significant role in the process of mobilising the people in favour of NLD, called for the release of all political detainees.⁴⁴ The students praised the election as marking a 'historical change' which must be followed up by the generals handing over power to a civilian government. There were nearly 3,000 political prisoners including the students union leader, Min Ko Naing. The acting chief of the students union Ko Ko Gyi expressed the students' choice for change through non-violent means.⁴⁵ Even the NLD leaders felt that there must be negotiations between the SLORC and the victors, with regard to the transfer of powers and about the way the problems of Myanmar economy had to be tackled.

When the NLD thought of having a federal system of government, Saw Maung, in a meeting said "we will always be loyal to the three national causes-non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of National solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty.....if these causes are adversely affected, we cannot ignore it."⁴⁶ conditions were being imposed before the power could be transferred to the elected representatives.

44. Patriot, May 28, 1990.

45. Bangladesh Observers, June 5, 1990.

46. Times of India, March 23, 1992.

It reinforced people's scepticism about the motivations of the military leaders. The people and also the foreign diplomats felt that the military won't be giving up its power and privileges without enforcing conditions and ensuring guarantees for its power position.⁴⁷ Obviously, the military was left with only two options, either to negotiate with NCD or to continue with its authoritarian rule. It could be seen that they were reluctant to opt for the former and were almost doing the latter. It was like a "shadow dance between the NLD and SLORC. SLORC is scrambling to figure out how it can surrender the appearance of power while clinging to the substance."⁴⁸ In the meanwhile a 21 - *nationalities Party front* Union Nationalities Party front (known as Union Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD) called upon the military junta, NLD and other parties to come together and have an open talk to solve the National political crises. In its letter to Saw Maung, the UNLD noted that though there seemed to be difference of opinion and views on the process of changing the country's political system, it should not lead to 'confrontations and violence' as it would create a tremendous "national loss."⁴⁹

47. Daily News (Colombo), June 30, 1990.

48. Ibid.

49. Times, January 14, 1990.

NLD urged for a transfer of power, which would enable the emergence of a democratic government under a temporary constitution and that this caretaker government would tackle the time consuming process of drafting a new constitution. But the army as usual did not pay any heed to any of the suggestions. Also while coming to power, the NLD would have to deal with many problems, economic, social, ethnic, constitutional, political. It would also need the help of the west and its powerful neighbours, China, India, Bangladesh, Thailand etc. In this context an important event took place encouraging the NLD leaders to go ahead with their suggestions Daw Suu Kyi's praise, the world over led to the award of Nobel Peace Prize to her in 1991. This encouraged the NLD leaders to believe that their country's problems would be easy to manage.

The military junta, however, had different things up their sleeves. They had as usual refused to pay any heed to the pleadings and suggestions for a peaceful handing over of power to the mandatories of the people. Also not only had they brushed aside the pleas for the release of Daw Suu Kyi (in house arrest since July 1989), but also refused to allow her to get Nobel Peace Prize award in person. The junta wanted to make sure that Daw Suu Kyi would be released only when she promised to quite both

politics and the country.⁵⁰ In February 1993, Information minister Gen. Thant stated that the government would reconsider her case only after she had spent five years under house arrest, because the law allowed detention without trial for five years.⁵¹ The fear of releasing Daw Suu Kyi by the ruling junta was quite understood by the people. For them she was the only catalyst of change. To make matters worse, the junta said that the first year of Suu Kyi's confinement was only the "arrest period and not part of the five-year sentence."⁵² That meant she would be kept in prison up to July 1995.

The Nobel Laureates were highly concerned about Sun Kyi's continued long detentions. They wanted to meet in Rangoon on February 16, 1993, to focus attention on the treatment being netted out to her, but their visas were refused by the authorities⁵³ in Rangoon. So they met in Thailand to discuss about the factors which would leave the junta with no other choice but to transfer power and release Daw Suu Kyi. But the Myanmarese government had criticised their act. The intelligence chief Major General Khin Nyunt said that the Nobel Laureates would not be

50. Holiday, October 19, 1990.

51. Bangkok Post, February 17, 1993.

52. The statesman, June 27, 199.

53. The Pioneer, March 2, 1994.

allowed to visit their country to spread discontent.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Myanmarese government had been denying all the charges of Human Rights violations made by different organisations including Amnesty International. The Human Rights violation was nothing but a blatant truth when the tortured and haggard students crossed the country's borders and went to various countries and strong democracies to spread the message of ill-treatment being meted out by the government of Myanmar to its own people.

Though election results had made everyone happy, it was not that easy to convince the military to transfer powers. No matter which country was trying to persuade, the scuttle was the same. The SLORC government was dead-set to result the mandate of the people. The students, scribes and all others in opposition were either being killed or tortured. The students had run away to the jungles and the ethnic insurgents to their own safe areas. The students who ran away to the jungles formed a parallel government along with some nationalists, this parallel government was named by them as the "National coalition government of the Union of Burma" (NCGUB)⁵⁵. Its strategy was to give a

54. Bangkok Post, February 17, 1993.

55. Ibid.

fight to the ruling junta and also showing the significance of its role like that of the AFPFL in the struggle for freedom and independence. But the SLORC government's authoritarian attitude belied all the hopes that democracy would be restored in Myanmar. Only external pressures could work effectively in this direction.

Post-Elections & Liberalisation Policy of Military Junta

The expectations generated by the 1962 coup that the military rule would prove to be beneficent to Burma, had turned into an illusion in the same year. The Ne Win's regime had failed to provide a good government with the students revolting against the military in 1963, the relations between the government and all the other pressure groups had strained. The intensity of repression by the government had kept on increasing with the passage of time. The continuing anti people policies of the military government compounded the miseries of the people when the country's economy reached a low ebb in about the middle of 1980's. All the while, the military government was aided and helped by countries like China and Thailand. These countries even started sending arms and ammunition to the Burmese military government in disregard of any kind of internal opposition to the socialist military government. Initially, even Australia and other western

countries including the ASEAN countries seemed to have been putting their economic interest over and above the democratic consensus and the plight of thousands of students and the mass of people.⁵⁶ Though the US government decided to cut off aid to Myanmar in 1985, American Corporation continued to trade with the country. According to Daw Suu Kyi, it had helped the dictatorship. Myanmar's neighbours seemed to be anxious to profit from the 'virgin market'.⁵⁷ This made them readily plead for the junta's token concession's to liberalisation as the reason for their establishing closer economic relation.

After the election, the ruling junta became reluctant to transfer power to the democratically elected party, (NLD), and carried on a Policy of intimidation and harrassment against the various opposition groups. This made the powerful democratic countries to become serious about their resolve and to think afresh about the developments in Myanmar. On the other hand, as the military had slowly ad steadily moved to invalidate the electoral mandate, the people got agitated. They urged the UN to take certain measures like (1) Prompting the multi-national companies to stop funding the military projects,

56. Deccan Herald, August 13, 1990.

57. International Herald Tribune, July 21, 1991.

(2) The US taking a hardline on the military's suspected involvement in the heroin trade, (3) The UN as a whole speaking of Human Rights violations and ending bilateral and multi-lateral assistance.⁵⁸ These were put forth by U Thant Myint, the grandson of U Thant and a fellow of International Center for Development Policy. Another international forum urged the international community to put more pressure on SLORC to (1) remove Myanmar's membership from the World Bank and the IMF until the transfer of power of the legitimate government, (2) Immediate supervision of all UN programmes in Myanmar, (3) Re-evaluation of Myanmar's status as the Least Developed Country because the government might have deliberately changed the income figures, (4) Recognition of refugee status for all Myanmarese fugitives in Thailand by the Thai government.⁵⁹

The European community had also urged the UNO to remove Myanmar from the confidential procedure applied to most alleged Human Rights violators.⁶⁰ The Nobel Laureates when they met in Bangkok and decided to urge

58. International Herald Tribune, (Washington) October 12, 1990.

59. Bangkok Post, October 18, 1991.

60. The Statesman (New Delhi), April 1992.

imposition of arms embargo, initially and if the response was not promptly forthcoming, then an economic embargo was to be thought of by all the countries of the world.⁶¹

With the pressures in place, no country could think of cold shouldering the opinion in the rest of the world. Bertil Lintner, well known expert on Myanmar, had written in his latest study to say: "It is a shame that while nations after nations has awakened to freedom in 1990, Burma remains enslaved by a corrupt and unachieving tyranny ".⁶² The sooner the Myanmarese government realised the hatred shown by the masses the better it would be. The military government had undoubtedly started with an "open-door" policy towards the west and its neighbours and begun to liberalise its economy by allowing foreign companies to invest in the country. By announcing the elections it had also succeeded in placating the Japanese government's ruffled feelings. It had even followed additional measures of liberalisation in order to appease the other powerful countries, specifically, the United States. Obviously, the military leaders in Yangon could not ignore the US President Bill Clinton's letter to

61. Bangkok Post, February 17, 1993.

62. The Statesman (New Delhi), April 1992.

Suu Kyi promising that "US will continue to support the struggle to promote freedom in Myanmar."⁶³

As regards the South-East Asian neighbouring states were concerned, the Association of South-East Asian Nation (ASEAN) countries were expected to include Myanmar in its memberships along with vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong said that Myanmar would be a future member" in one of the speeches in the last ASFAN meet that was held on January 1992 at Singapore. A Singapore can firm has built estate of the 12 million international business center at Yangon and would be staying there until the locals acquired enough expertise.⁶⁴ It shows that the foreign countries and the nighbours did not mind the military government to carry on if it brought in certain degree of literalisation in various feilds. Myanmar had resumed negotiations over Myarmar's 270,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled to Bangladesh. It is cooperating with us and Thailand to check Ner cotics trafficking. In the economic front, they started improving the ravaged country by building roads,

63. Bangkok Post, February 17, 1993.

64. A Review article of Bertil Linter's book "Outrange. Burma's struggle for Democracy". in Indian Express (New Delhi) October 28, 1990.

bridges and sinking tube wells. Agricultural exports of oil, gas and power had increased by more than hundred times."⁶⁵

The national convention of senior military judicial and administrative officials, in Myanmar had also been grappling, since January 1993, with the task of laying down the foundations of a federal union. The countries military junta, in last september 1993 had drawn up the 'basic principle' of a genuine multiparty democracy with a bicameral parliament simultaneously with an executive President and a special position for the military. The armed forces would enjoy complete autonomy. The Commander-in-Chief who would also be Myanmars Supreame Commander, would have the statutory right to assume state power in a national emergency. The military would nominate some of its officers in the parliament as well as to executive positions in the parliament as well as to executive positions in the administration, right down to the district level.⁶⁶ All this might be considered only partially right, because the human rights violations have, continued abatedly and the military remains disciplined to go to the barracks.

65. Pioneer, March 2, 1994.

66. Ibid.

The Saw Maung's regime, though liberalising today, could not undo what it had done to demean the people. The stories of torture and detaining are still leaking out from Yangoon. The Human Rights violation have not lessened. The major world powers were still urging the military junta to withdraw and transfer power to the NLD. A compromise situation would have to be worked out by the ruling junta and other parties of the country that the military could assume its rightful role in the Burmese Society, like national defence, while the elected politicians would take charge of other important state affairs. ⁶⁷ If only the junta started realising the advantage of sharing and eventually transferring power. There along lies the hope for a better and peaceful future for the people of Myanmar.

67. Ibid.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Students generally play a significant role in the development process of a country's cultural, social, political and economic life. ~~But~~ Burma is no exception. ~~Their role~~ increases in an un-democratic form of government. In the prime of their youth, the students in any society are very active. Their general behaviour is characterised by power, human compassion, inquisitiveness and the sense of unity. It is these qualities that go for the making of a student's personality. With the dawn of the 20th century, the line separating politics and students has grown thinner. Today's society takes students views seriously. Being the intellectual body, the people and the government pay due attention to their views due to their inclination towards logico - rational analysis". The students in general are loved and respected in the community due to their vitality and youthful vigour and their optimistic view that most of them hold "to see a better future". Students could make a result of small group beset with particular problem, transferred into a mass demonstration and could involve the whole society, due to the fact that students have fewer differences among

themselves and virtually no status fights. The entire students community has one status and that is the students. This makes it easier for them to reach to any class of people and make them understand the crux of the problem. Students, therefore, are more articulate and shrewd, to generate mass support than any other pressure group working against or for the government. They also help in the 'decision-making process'. Today, all over the world, one form of democracy or the other is prevalent. Whichever government becomes dictatorial and tries to curb the democratic rights and privileges of their countrymen, it's denounced by them. UNO acts as the main forum for the grievances of all people on earth. [In Burma, students] ^{Para} ^{change} became active about early part of the 20th Century during the British regime. The reason for the students to participate in politics at that time was due to the western education, which taught the meaning of 'Liberty, fraternity and equality' and also due to the location of the university, at Rangoon, the hubbub of political activities. The students had become vocal with the implementation of universities Act in 1920, after which, they created the RUSU and started debating issues regarding the backlog of Burmese economic development. Most of them soon became associated with the political

parties like 'Dobama Asiyaone' and started active politics, which was not possible inside the Rangoon University due to numerous restrictions. When World War II took place and Japanese troops started attacking all the plans in Asia, under the banner of 'Asia for Asians', many Burmese nationalist leaders took up military training to give an armed fight to the British. AFPFL was formed but it soon got estranged with Japanese rule and shifted towards British support. With the independence of India in 1947, Burma was also given independence in January 1948, as it was of no further use to the British and also because there were international pressures.

When independence came a parliamentary form of government was formed under AFPFL led by U Nu. This democratically elected government tried its best to solve the economic as well as political problems of the country, inspite of the split in the party. But it was not able to carry on for a long time due to increasing ethnic problems. Hence, a caretaker government was formed, under General Ne Win, who was given permission by Prime Minister U Nu to solve the minorities problems and hold elections. After the 1960 election, U Nu once again came to power. But the government was not able to hold itself for a long. General Ne Win staged a coup in early March

1962.

During the brief democratic phase, the students were given due importance in carrying their views to the government. But, with the military coup, students rights in politics were crushed. The basic reasons for the failure of democracy was due to certain basic faith, which were wholly or partly ignored. They were first, the people had little understanding of multi-party system, its ideals and institutions, due to which the party system was not able to ensure stability necessary for development. Secondly, and the most pressing reason was due to its inability to solve the ethnic minority problems. The ethnic minority groups were many like Kachins, Karen, Shans, etc., Within these ethnic groups, there were many sub-groups, seeking to promote their own distinctive identity. When they were so much divided among themselves, the government, even by trying, would not be able to come to the negotiating table, lest the minorities shed their own differences and come together among themselves.

The coup that took place in March 1962, gave the reason, to the leaders, for its failure to solve the minority question. But, apart from solving, it had compounded the problems of the insurgents and also the people in the plains. The whole country had since then

been under the heels of the authoritarian and Xenophobic regime.

A situation of theoretical paradox conjures here, when an authoritarian rule could give, stability and discipline, which are the basic ingredients for development of a country. It was not so. Since, may be "Power corrupts and Absolute Power corrupts absolutely". The situation of Burma today is no less similar to the countries of Somalia, Rwanda, etc., or for that matter Cambodia before 1993 elections.

The military regime had also plunged into devastating its economy. The Myanmarese economy is today, on the verge of bankruptcy, though in recent years it has been able to increase its GDP to almost 8% through trade and aid, but it doesn't mean that people were benefited by it. Its agriculture, industry, education system, infrastructure need serious and immediate reconstruction. But, the government was busy restoring its power, by force as it had been doing since 1962, and trying to legitimise its authority vis-a-vis the foreign governments. Moreover, the two documents brought about by Gen Ne Win's government, the "Burmese way to Socialism" and "The System of correlation of Man and His Environment", had failed miserably, due to faulty vision and had implementation

policies resulting in the country's isolation from the international community.

The foreign policy of the military was also not appreciable. In a world of interdependence, when a country makes a 'closed-door policy', then it is the sole country which tends to lose. Its isolationist policy had further degenerated its macro-economic structure. It refused to join the commonwealth and also had walked out of the non-aligned movement. It doesn't even seek a place in the South Asian Association for Regional Corporation (SARRC). The domestic policy along with the foreign policy had led the country from being one of the richest countries in Asia to the status of one of the nine least developed countries in the world.

The military regime, from the starting of its rule in 1962 faced the students disapproval. They showed it through mass protests, demonstrations etc. In their fight against the authoritarian regime they included the workers groups apart from the monks and the people in general. With every act of the government starting from the hostel regulations, to the sports to demonetisation of Kyats, the students showed their discontent. The military junta tried all the means at their disposal, to crush the students power. As a matter of fact, the students are

like the rubber ball, the more one forced it down, the more forcefully it would bounce back.

To the dismay of the junta, the students could not be disciplined without additional doses of military power. This was proved with the June/September, 1988 mass upsurge of the students. This forced the Ne Win government to resign. The brief (3 months) period of Sein Lwin's rule was replaced by Maung Maung's rule until September 18, 1988 when a coup was staged and Saw Maung came to power under the SLORC. The curve of students discontent rose still further and the pressure of international community on the pressure of international community on the military junta to normalise the situation, eventually forced the SLORC to announce the elections.

With the coming of Suu kyi, the anxiety of junta increased. She proved to be the major threat to the military, so they kept her in house arrest and did not allow her to file nominations through her party, NLD. They simultaneously launched a campaign of calumny against her. In order to defame her, they started describing her as a foreigner who had brought western ideals of democracy along. The xenophobic regime had been quite frank in denouncing her Burmese citizenship as she had married a Britisher and stayed in his country for a long time.

Along with Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, U Nu and many students leaders were kept under detention. Students suffered the most under the junta, random detention, torture, extra-judicial execution, prolonged periods of solitary confinement, forced labour to work as porters to the military, etc. made students run away to forest areas and the neighbouring countries.

With the holding of elections in May 1990. The junta once again received a rude shock. The massive mandate the people gave to the NLD, with its leaders especially Suu Kyi still in prison, was a total rejection of the authoritarian ideas and policies of the military government and its earlier outfit, the NUP (which was in replacement of the BSPP). The winning of NLD with overwhelming majority in spite of the the military's strict control just showed that the people were absolutely dejected with the rulers. The junta's denial of transferring power and the major Human Rights violations within the country was obnoxious and no longer acceptable to the people. The students in the forest had formed a parallel government called "National coalition Government of the Union of Burma" (NCGUB). It also had a strong military within it to give a fight to the military junta. The students had started taking foreign help in military

armaments and equipments and also refuse with training in arms and from the minority insurgents in the border areas. This help was denied by the students earlier when they had started protesting against the junta in the mid 1960s onwards.

The continuation of military regime is the negation of the popular mandate. The possibility of opposition to the illegitimate military government could come through two major factors - students and ethnic minority, and by the international community. But, we find that neither of them were also to make the military yield to the mandate of the people. The students did produce results during the pre-independence period. Still something very serious was missing in their movement for democracy. Their movement was not that effective as compared to students movements in other countries like Thailand and Bangladesh, which bore immediate result such as the establishment of a multi-party political structure and return to democracy. The students effect was less in Burma because of two reasons. First, there was restriction in education under the junta's rule. The number of universities did not increase since 1962. This resulted in students being deprived of higher education. Lack of proper education led to ignorance about rights and privilages and also led

to organisational skill and sustained leadership with set directions. It was only with the coming of Suu Kyi in August 1988 that the things changed. Secondly, the question of shortage of rice; 'The rice bowl of Asia', as Burma was once called, had to import rice quite often. But the condition of pauperisation of Burma gratefully differed from that in India or in any other developing countries of South Africa and Latin America, where people literally died of starvation. The pauperisation is ^{due} to lack of consumer goods. The Myanmarese did not starve. This tended to make people slackened and ignorant. Apart from these two factors, even the strategy adopted by the students to fight the junta was quite wrong. The students got training from the minority insurgents like Karens in Guerrilla tactics which may be successful in the forests but not in the urban areas. It makes them an easy prey to the well trained soliders. Lastly, the only leader Sun Kyi considered as the messiah of the people, being in house arrest, the students lacked direction of the time of their dire need. Though Suu Kyi has been the lady with strong determination and vigour to fight, she too had some drawbacks, the most important being ~~she~~ married to a foreigner. This cannot be a criteria for a person who will be the leader of a country, which was for a long time

Xenophobic.

The international community will be having an upper hand, if it tries to put pressure on the Burmese government to step down from power. The most influential countries like US, EC countries, Japan and also ASEAN need to think afresh and start dealing severely against the government in Yangon. The UNO must no longer use persuasion, atleast at this advanced stage. If the UN doesn't take a decision faster and implement it, the people all over the world will lose hope on it. In order to be more relevant than it is, the UN must prove itself to be a good 'shock-absorber', at least in the situation like Myanmar. Feeling the international pressure, the Myanmar government had started softening the rules regarding entry of foreigners. and also by liberalising its economy. It can also be a possibility that while Myanmar has started changing its isolationist policy and have started liberalising it may lead to political reform and might also to a change of government. It is not easy for the military junta to step down as they know what could be the reaction of the people when democracy returns. They might probably be stoned to death. As Prof. Robert H. Taylor puts it "Socialism was not imposed by any giant neighbours nor was the abandonment of socialism.

They were the consequences of social and political form arising from the country's history and conditions. These can't be changed as rapidly as an occupying force can be withdrawn". This leaves Burma with two choices, to have a dialogue with the victors of the elections or to continue the rule, until the international pressure becomes too much to bear.

Suu Kyi's position cannot be under-estimated in the history of Burma. She is the only person who was able to act as a catalyst for resistance to the Ne Win's government. She was the succour to the people at a time of utter desperation. She was able to get the confidence of the people due to her strength and also due to the fact that she is Aung San's daughter. She acted as a penance for the sufferings of the students in the forest with no food available. The international community and world public opinion might eventually release her from house arrest. The UN's role in this case might be quite important.

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