

MYANMAR (BURMA): A GEOPOLITICAL STUDY

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Certified that the dissertation entitled, "**MYANMAR (BURMA): A GEOPOLITICAL STUDY**" submitted by **MR. K.VUNGZAMAWI** in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is a bonafide work to the best of my knowledge. This work has not been published or submitted to any other degree of this or any other university.

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


(Dr. Amitabh Mattoo)

Chairperson


(Dr. S.S. Deora)

Supervisor

DEDICATED
TO
MY LATE
ELDER BROTHER

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PREFACE

Geopolitics is a long established area of geographical enquiry which considers space to be important in understanding the constitution of international relations. It is concerned basically with the study of states in the context of global spatial phenomena in an attempt to understand both the bases of state power and the nature of state's interactions with one another. In brief, geopolitics can be regarded as the interaction of geography and politics, with particular attention to strategies associated with those interactions.

Although geopolitics acquired unsavory connotations through its usages during the Second World War for Hitler's expansionist policies, it remains a valid approach to regional analysis. The present study entitled, "*Myanmar (Burma): A Geopolitical Study*" is, therefore, an attempt to give regional interpretation of geopolitics with reference to Myanmar. The study focuses on the influences of geographical features on the socio-political and politico-economic conditions of Myanmar, beginning with the early history till date. The study is also an attempt to highlight the various contemporary issues, and analyse the geostrategic dimensions of Myanmar *vis-à-vis* the regional security concerns.

The geopolitical study of Myanmar is important because of the fact that:— it is located in the tri-junction of South Asia, Southeast Asia

and East Asia; it lies between the two most populated countries in the world with diverse ideologies, i.e. China, a Communist state and a democratic India; it belongs to the geographical area of rapid economic development in recent years (Southeast Asia); it is one of the longest military ruled countries in modern times, with one of the highest number of insurgent groups in the world.

In geographical analysis an awareness of its physical characteristics are essential for fuller understanding. The *first chapter*, therefore, gives an account of the various geographical features of Myanmar that helped shape the country's history, polity, economy, internal and external relationship. As an appreciation of the legacies of history is essential for both geography and politics, *the second chapter* presents a descriptive and analytical account of Burma's historical – geography. The focus of this chapter is on the role of ethnicity in nation building. It also looks at the changes in geographical bases of power in Myanmar. *The third chapter* deals with four contemporary geopolitical issues that are important for better understanding of the current international relations in the geopolitical setting of Myanmar. To substantiate the earlier discussions, *the fourth chapter* deals with geostrategic dimensions of Myanmar i.e. economic, political and military dimensions. And finally, the *concluding chapter* gives an overview and assessment of the preceding chapters.

The study is mainly based on secondary sources though primary sources are taken into consideration whenever accessible and relevant.

In regards to demographic information, the 1931 census was the last census in Burma with ethnic break up. The present population figures for each ethnic group is not clear. Whatever figures are given in the study are based on published books and journals, particularly the *UN's Demographic Year Book*, 1996 and a booklet, on *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*. Moreover, the old names and new names of the country, city, towns and states/divisions are used interchangeably throughout the study. This is because the new names like Myanmar, Yangoon, Magway Division, Rakhine State, etc. have been accepted by international agencies and governments and institutions in Southeast Asia but continue to be resisted by Western media, presumably for political reasons. The Burmese democracy movement also rejects these changes because, according to them, using the Burmese language name ignores the fact that Burma is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state, with a large minority for whom Burmese is a second or even third language.

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My parents, family members and relatives gave every support and encouragement during the period of my study. I also acknowledge the help and prayer supports of my friends.

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CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

A pre-requisite to the considerations of the geopolitics of a region is awareness of its physical characteristics. The geography of Myanmar, in particular, helped shape the country's history, polity, internal distribution of people and even their mode of agricultural production. It also influenced Myanmar's relations with its neighbours. Thus it is the geographical setting of Myanmar that one must first turn to before exploring its history and contemporary geopolitics.

1.1. LOCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP:

The Union of Myanmar is situated in Southeast Asia and is bordered on the north and northeast by China, on the east and southeast by Laos and Thailand, and on the west by Bangladesh and India. In the south, it has a long coastline facing the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar is located between 92°10'E and 101° 11'E.¹ Much of the greater part of its territory, lying between latitude 28° 50' and 16° N, forms a compact unit surrounded on three sides by a great horseshoe of mountains and focussing on the triple river system of Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Sittang (Sittoung). In addition, Tenasserin (Tenin-tharji)

¹ *Basic facts on the Union of Myanmar*, (Yangon, September, 1996), p.1.

THE UNION OF MYANMAR STATES AND DIVISIONS

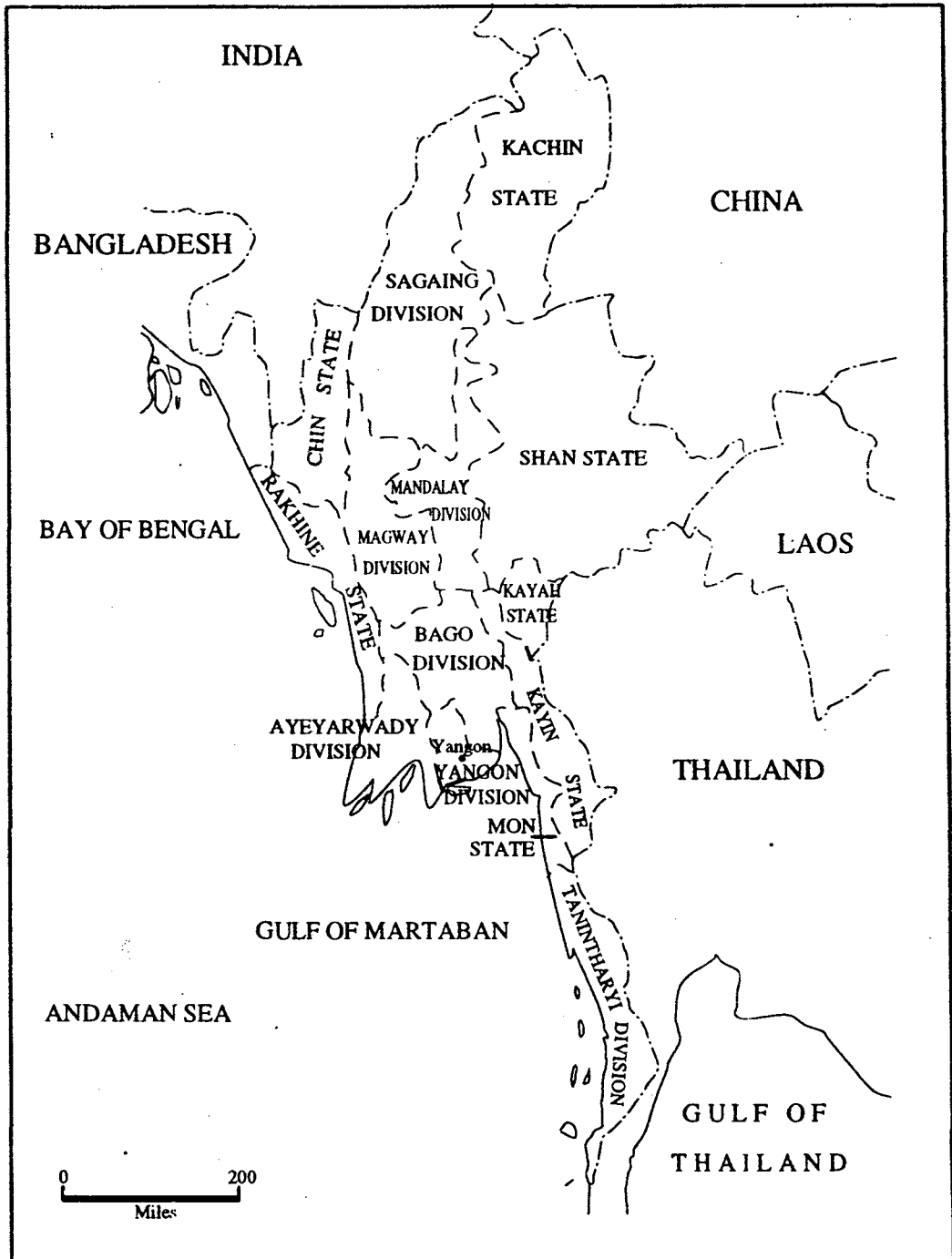


FIG-1

Source: Political Situation of Myanmar and its Role in the Region, p.25.

consisting of a narrow coastal zone backed by steep mountains, extends south from the Gulf of Martaban to Victoria point, 10°N of the Equator.

Myanmar's location to the north of the traditional monsoon-influenced maritime trade routes from southern India across the Bay of Bengal to the Isthmus of Kra and the Straits of Malacca, kept central Myanmar relatively isolated from major international trade before Western expansion. Mountainous borders often splitted ethnic groups and created diverse political allegiance; thus, there was limited Myanmar control overland with neighbours. However, the national barriers did not prevent invasions of Myanmar or Myanmarese's attempts at expansion, nor did they discourage British efforts in the 19th century to exploit new trade routes.² This is why Myanmar presents an interesting geopolitical study: geographically isolated yet, experienced in forces of Western expansions throughout her history.

At present, it is Myanmar's strategic location as a bridge between India, China, and other nations of Southeast Asia that makes it central to the peace and prosperity of this region, comprising China's province of Tibet, Yunan and Sichuan, Indian states in the North-Eastern region, and also much of Bangladesh, Thailand and Bhutan. In fact, Myanmar forms the axis where most railroad highways, waterways, gas and pipelines cross each other. For example, the Malacca Strait which lies

² David I. Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia* (Colorado: 1982), p.2.

MYANMAR : PHYSIOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE

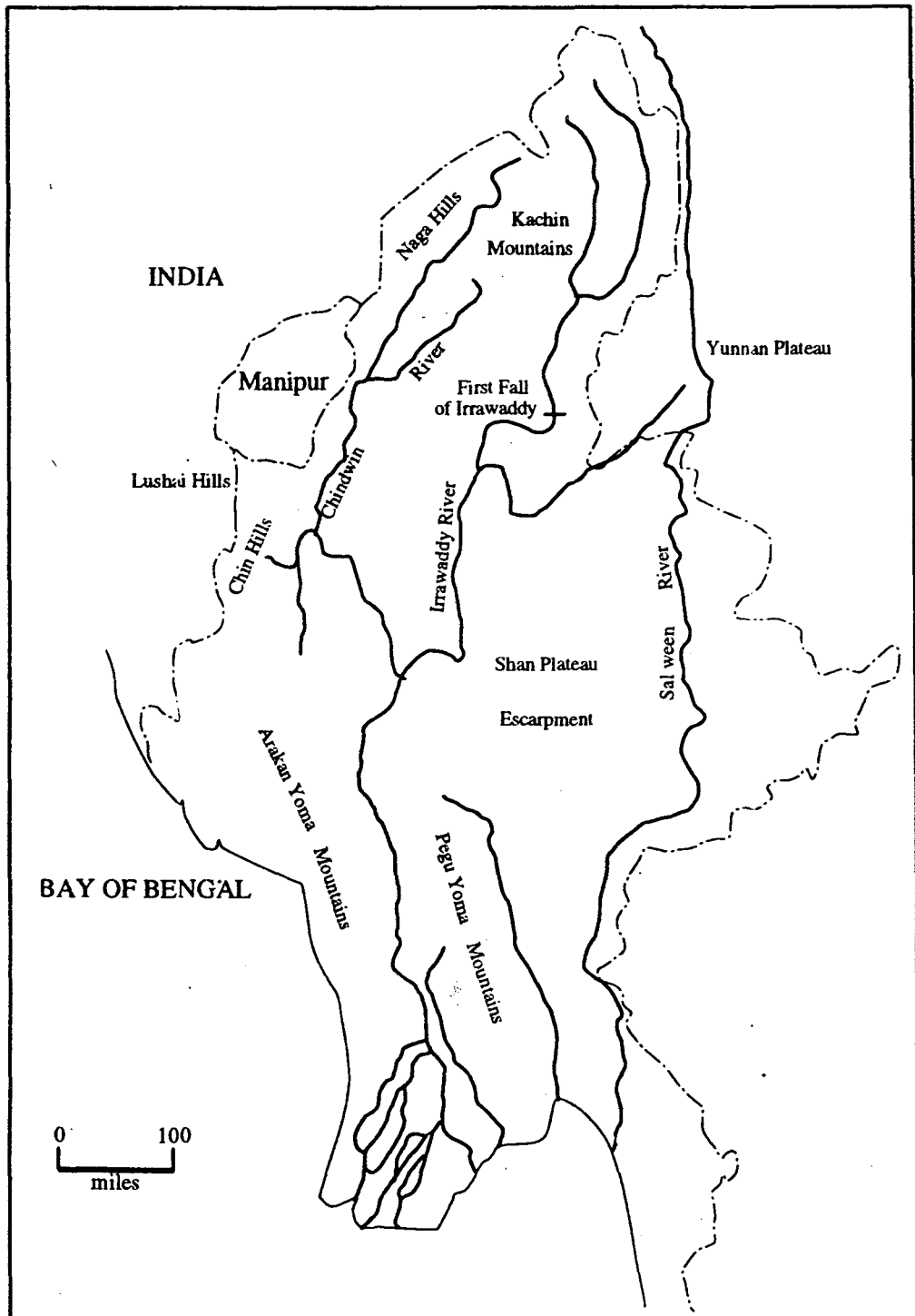


FIG- 2

Source: Cady, John, F, *The United States and Burma* (1976), p.5.

south of Myanmar's tide-waters forms an important axis through which shipping destined for East Asia must pass. This provides Yangon an easy access to this important choke point between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. For centuries Myanmar had offered southern China a trade outlet on the Indian Ocean. It also worked as a springboard for the spread of Indian culture amongst East Asian nations in ancient times. In modern times, 'the country obtained global significance, which was first evidenced during the Second World War when both the Axis and the Allied powers used Myanmar to consolidate or defend their positions in Southern Asian regions and expand into the larger Indian Ocean region'.³ General political analysis, however, entails attention to the entire Southeast Asian region, including the seas, archipelagoes, and neighbouring countries.

1.2. PHYSICAL SETTINGS

The locational relationship of Myanmar shows that the country is, geographically, transitional between the soaring mountains of Tibet and Yunan, the Southeast Asian Archipelagos and the Indian sub-continent covering an area of 677,000 Sq.Km, or about the size of Texas state in U.S.A. Myanmar extends over 936 Kms from east to west and 2051 Kms from the northern Himalayan peak to Hkakabo on

³ Swaran Singh, "Myanmar: The "Strategic Hub" of the 21st Century Asia". *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, (Delhi), Vol. CXXVIII, No. 532 (April-June, 1988), pp.245-55.

the border of eastern Tibet to the Tropical mangrove swamps of the lower Tenasserin region on the Thai frontier.

Myanmar's borders are cartographical, not ethnic or economic.⁴ The 6159 Kms contiguous frontier is rimmed in the north, east and west by mountain ranges forming a giant horseshoe like shape encircling the central valley. The coastline from the mouth of Naaf river to Kawthaung is 2228 Kms.⁵

Considering the north-south extension of mountain ranges and valleys, the country is geographically divided by some authors into - Upper Myanmar, Lower Myanmar and Tenasserin Coastal region. However, structurally the topography of Myanmar has three well-marked divisions:-

1. The Western Mountain Ranges
2. The Eastern Mountain Ranges
3. The Central Irrawaddy-Sittang Valley.

(i) The Western Mountain Ranges:- This comprises the mid-tertiary fold mountains, swinging in a great arc from the Hukwang valley to Cape Negrais. These ranges are the southward continuation of the

⁴ Steinberg, n.2, pp.2-3.

⁵ *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*, No.1, p.1.

eastern Himalayan series and are known successively as the Patkai, Naga, Chin Hills, and the Arakan Yoma. The heights of the summits gradually decrease towards the south – they exceed 3650 m in the case of Patkai range whereas they are 900-1500m only in the Arakan Yoma region. The Arakan Yoma, therefore, is made up of relatively low mountains, covered by dense jungles and sparsely populated. It is one of the three parallel watersheds in lower Myanmar, apart from Pegu Yoma and Eastern Yoma on the edge of the Shan plateau.

To the west of Arakan Yoma and along the Bay of Bengal coast lies the province of Arakan, which for many centuries constituted a political entity separate from Myanmar proper until 1784. The Arakan Yoma, therefore, has both structural and historical significance. The Arakans's coast are exposed to the full impact of the seasonal monsoon rains which are generated in the Bay of Bengal whereas the Arakan Yoma intercepts the moisture-laden monsoon winds, thus creating an oval-shaped rain-shadow region (some 160 miles long), centering near the ancient Burmese capital of Pagan. Moreover, the region was important throughout most of its history as a buffer area to the neighbouring Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh.

(ii) The Eastern Mountain Ranges: The second structural unit consist of the eastern mountain ranges which are believed to be of Mesozoic or earlier origin. It begins in the north-eastern corner of Kachin state as a continuation of the Yuannan plateau of China. It extend thence through

MYANMAR : RAINFALL DISTRIBUTION

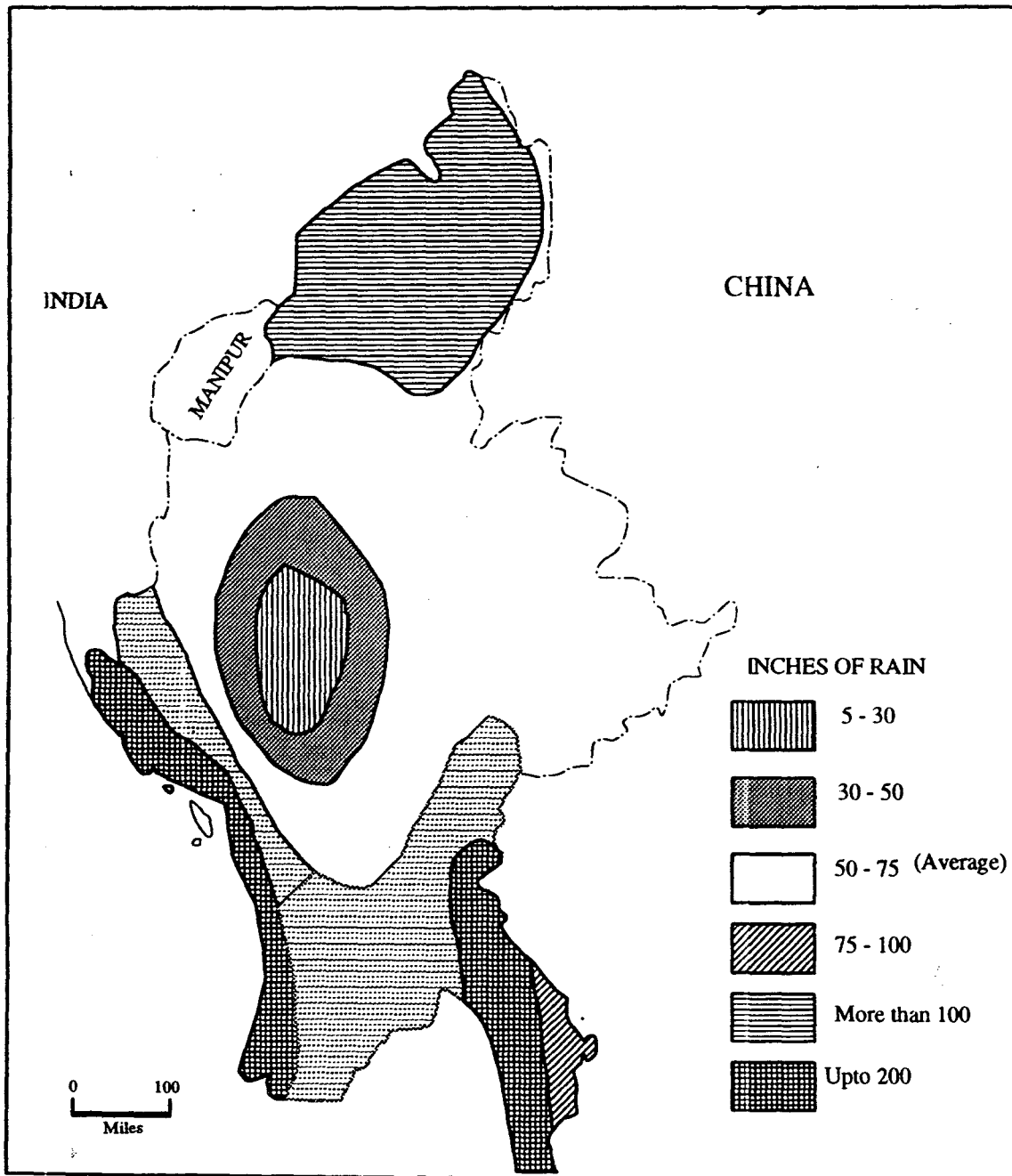


FIG-3

Source: Cady, John, F, *The United States and Burma* (1976), p.5.

the Shan and Karenni Plateau into more subdued but still rugged upland, which forms the divide between Tamintharyi and Peninsular Thailand. A narrow southward extension of the Shan plateau mountains constitute Myanmar's modern borders with Thailand, covering about 2107 Kms. This Peninsular region of Myanmar was occupied in early historic times by non-Burmese Mon and Karen ethnic groups who were completely out of Myanmar's control until the 1760's. Today the region is infested with various insurgents group and is globally known for its narcotic trades.

Like the Western mountain ranges, the eastern mountain ranges also decrease in altitudes towards the south. The two structural divisions meet at Kachin highlands of upper Myanmar region, forming an important source of the principal river system, the Irrawaddy and its tributary Chindwin. Bordering the Kachin highlands on the east lie the Yunan mountains, which constitute the watershed separating it from the narrow Salween river system.

(iii) The Central Irrawaddy- Sittang Valley: Between the two main mountain systems lies the third major structural unit called the vast longitudinal trough of Central Myanmar, containing the great alluvial lowlands which form the cultural and economic heart of the country. Throughout the length of these lowlands, the Irrawaddy and its tributaries provide drainage as well as communication. The river drains a total area of some 400,000 Sq.Km and its large delta supports one of the greatest '*rice bowls*' of the world.

The Central heartland of Myanmar is composed of two river valley systems: the Irrawaddy and its tributaries to the West and shorter Sittang to the east. These valleys are split by a range of hills called the Pegu Yoma.

(a) The Sittang River: It rises in Central Myanmar south of Mandalay. It is fed by runoff water from the Shan plateau to the east and the Pegu Yoma to the west. It flows south to the gulf of Martaban.

(b) The Irrawaddy River Valley: The bigger and more important river in the Central plain is the Irrawaddy river - the main artery of Myanmar. Originating at Myanmar's northern most frontier on the borders of eastern Tibet, it flows south through the Kachin state. It is joined southwest of Mandalay by its major tributary, the Chindwin. The Irrawaddy effectively bifurcates Myanmar and is bridged at only one site, Ava-Sagaing. It has been the major inland water transportation avenue in Myanmar and is navigable for 1450 kms in the dry season from the sea to Myit Kyna, the capital of the Kachin state in upper Myanmar. The Chindwin is navigable for 610 kms north from its confluence with the Irrawaddy.

1.3. CLIMATE:

The climate of a region is influenced by its location, size and shape, vegetation and physical structure. Except for the highest uplands in the far north of the country, the climate of Myanmar may be classified as tropical monsoon, although important regional variations occur within

that overall category. As a whole, the location and topography of Myanmar generate a diversity of climatic conditions. Seasonal changes in the monsoon wind directions create the three climatic seasons: summer, rainy and winter seasons. Extremes of temperature are, however, rare and thus, overall climate is pleasant. The direction of winds and depression bring rain, and although it is always heavy in coastal areas during monsoon season, it seldom creates hardship.

The Summer Season begins towards the end of February and continues till the early May. The highest temperature during March and April in Central Myanmar is above 43.3°C while in north Myanmar it is about 36.1° C and in the Shan Plateau it is between 29.4° C to 35° C only.

Rainy Season (mid-May to mid-October) coincides with the onset of S-West monsoon in Myanmar. In all the parts of the country major rainfall occurs during this period. The Western coastal areas, particularly Rakhine (or Arakan) and Terintharji, receives some of the heaviest rainfall in the world. The annual rainfall recorded in Akyab is 204 inches and in Kyai Kkami (or Amherst) is 196 inches. This is because the areas face the prevailing winds and are backed by steep and high ranges like the Arakam Yoma. Moreover, even the flat and low-lying Irrawaddy delta receives an annual rainfall of about 98 inches.

The Arakam Yoma range intercepts the moisture-laden monsoon

winds, thus creating rain-shadow region, some 160 miles long, in the interior of the Central lowland. Here, the total annual precipitation is less than 40 inches. In some places it is even below 25 inches. Apart from the Arakam Yoma range preventing the incoming monsoon rains, the spectacular difference in total amount of rainfall in this area is also reflected in a major change of vegetation - from the heavy tropical monsoon forest prevailing elsewhere, to a much more open cover or mere thorny scrub in other places.

In the eastern plateau, rainfall is higher than that of the dry zone but much lesser than those along the western coastal margins. The temperatures is also 6°-8°C below those of the torrid plains. Therefore, the Shan plateau has the most equable climate as compared to any other part of the country.

The Winter Season starts from November and lasts till the end of February. During this season temperature in the hilly areas (i.e over 3000 feet in the northern region) drops below 0°C while in the rest of the country winter is not severe.

1.4. VEGETATION: The tropical monsoon, and the mountainous ranges and valleys help in endowing Myanmar with extensive forests. 'Burmese/Myanmarese records list forests as covering about 57% of the country. The accuracy of this is, however, doubted 'as it has remained

unchanged for four decades.⁶ Steinberg's comment on the forest cover may be true because the density of population (persons per sq.kms) has increased from 40 in 1970 to 70 in 1996, resulting in more pressure on the land particularly in the mountainous regions where the tribes practiced slash-burn (Swidden) agriculture.

The types of forests in Myanmar may be classified on the basis of altitudes. Some parts of the northern mountains including Kachin Mountain, Naga Hills and China Hills where the altitude is above 1500 metres (4900 feet), coniferous forest is predominant. In such areas the dominant trees are spruce, fir, cedar, pine and birch. The lowland areas have mixed jungles. The dry zone in Central Myanmar have very poor vegetation cover, only thorny scrubs and bushes are found in some parts. In some coastal regions there are tropical rain forest of dense bamboo. Individual teak trees occur in mixed growth in about one-quarter of all forest. Besides forests, Myanmar has over a thousand varieties of orchids, some of which flower in pine trees in the China Hills at higher elevations.

Myanmar is also endowed with a rich density of flora and fauna arising largely from its unusual ecological diversity. It is home to nearly 300 known mammal species, 300 reptiles, about 100 bird species, and a heaven for about 7000 species of plant life.⁷ The important fauna include elephant, tiger, leopard, and the mithun/sial, a

⁶ Steinberg, No.4, p.4.

⁷ *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*, No.5, p.2.

type of wild buffalo used for ceremonial purposes among some tribes like the Chin, Naga, Kuki etc. The Arakam Yoma is one of the last remaining homes of the Asian rhinoceros.

1.5. ECONOMY

In relation to the other parts of the world, Myanmar is among the United Nations' Least Developed Countries (LDC), although the country is most favourably endowed with natural resources among the nations of Southern Asia. It has the most advantageous ratio of population to arable land in the region. As per the land utilisation (1994-95) provisional figures, the net area sown was 21.533 million acres, and the reserve forests covers 25.474 million acres.⁸ During the British colonial rule from the 1820's to 1948, some basic infrastructure were built to tap Myanmar's rich resources. As a result, the country became one of the world's leading rice exporter. A period of steady growth was followed by military- dominated regime since the armed *coup d'etat* in 1962. This crippled the economic growth as the military junta pursued the isolationist policy, "Burmese way to Socialism", for over a quarter of a century.

However, in 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)⁹, induced a series of changes in the economic policy of

⁸ Ibid., p.20.

⁹ SLORC was renamed as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November 1997.

MYANMAR : DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

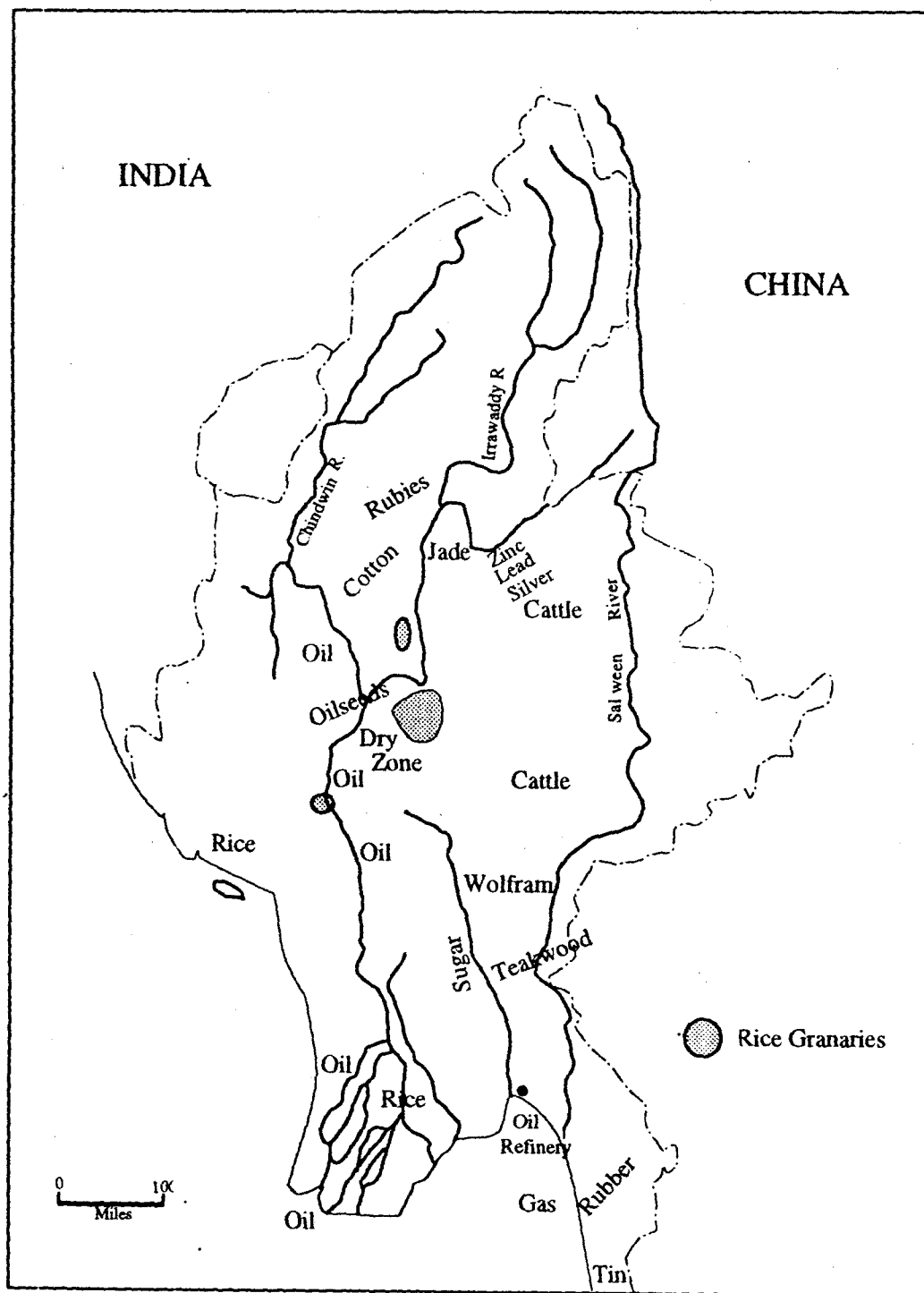


FIG-4

Source: Cady, John, F, *The United States and Burma* (1976), p.5.

Myanmar. Market-based economic policy was introduced to replace the centralized planning policy. Simultaneously, a number of economic reforms measures were initiated, such as, decentralizing central control; allowing direct foreign investment; opening of exchange centre; establishment of joint ventures between the local private banks and the foreign banks etc. The government also formulated a Short Term Plan for 1992-93 to 1995-96 (successfully implemented in some areas). The main thrust of the plan was to increase production and exports aimed at achieving full economic recovery. Priority was given to the development of productive sectors such as agriculture, livestock and fisheries, manufacturing, and mining.

The result of the economic reform measures was purely reflected in the growth of the GDP which was 5.4% in 1989-90 and increased to 6.7% in 1990-91, after three years of negative growth during 1986-87 to 1988-89.¹⁰ Although the GDP declined by 0.6% in 1991-92 because of devastating floods which had an adverse impact on the agricultural sector, the economy grew at the rate of 9.7% in 1992-93. The foreign investments (FIs) also improved significantly from 2459.3 million dollars (1995-96) to 4864.9 million dollars (1996-97).

An overall macro economic picture of Myanmar, (as given in table I) shows a positive growth trend. According to this official figures, Myanmar's economy recorded a strong growth rate of 9.8% in

¹⁰ Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmad, 'Myanmar : Politics, Economy and Foreign Relations', *BISS Journal*, Vol.18, No.2, 1997, p.134.

1995-96 compared to 7.5% in the previous year. This may be due to the remarkable performance of the agricultural sector which recorded an increase from 6.7% to 11.8% during the same period. The manufacturing sector also registered considerable increase from 8.8% in 1994-95 to 11.7% in 1995-96 which further increased to 12.0% during 1997-98. The private sector share in total exports was 60%.¹¹ But the million dollar question is whether the recent trend of strengthening of the economy can be sustained. Overall, according to the official report the plan is a success story. The plan, in terms of GDP, was over fulfilled, achieving 102.7% of its target.¹² The average annual GDP growth rate was very strong at 8%, against the plan target of 5.1%.¹³

Table 1: Selected Economic Indicators of Myanmar

	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
GDP(%)	9.7	6.0	7.5	9.8	6.0	6.5
Agriculture	12.4	4.7	6.7	11.8	5.8	6.2
Manufacturing	10.8	9.4	8.8	11.7	10.0	12.0
Services	6.1	8.0	9.6	4.8	9.0	10.0
Money Supply						
% Change	34.8	19.8	41.1	22.1	25.0	20.0
Inflation CPI						
% Change	22.3	33.6	22.5	21.8	35.0	30.0
Exports						
US \$ million	591	92	879	963	-	-
% Change	27.4	17.1	27.0	9.6	-	-
Imports						
US \$ million	879	1297	1547	2166	-	-
% Change	3.3	47.6	19.3	40.0	-	-
Exchange rate						
Kyat/US \$						
Official	6.1	6.1	5.9	5.9	5.9	-
Market	120	110	110	125	130	-

Source: As Given in Ahmad, A.T.S, "Myanmar: Political, Economy and Foreign Relations, *BISS JR*, 18(2), 1997, p.137.

¹¹ Referred to in *Regional Outlook: Southeast Asia 1997-98*, (Singapore: 1997), p.35.

¹² Ibid., p.36.

¹³ Ibid., p.37.

However, critics have pointed out that the changes that economic liberalization has brought so far were superficial development as it touches only a few people. For the majority of Myanmarese, who are small farmers in rural areas, there is virtually no benefit. 'Severe inflation drives down the buying power and living standards of most people'.¹⁴ Another criticism is that the junta's agricultural policies are creating grave problems as it shows little concern for the environmental impact. The farmers were forced to double and treble the rice crop out of which they must then sell a quota of their harvest to the state at far below the market price. In short, the 'economic development is proceeding without public input, reliable economic data or official accountability'.¹⁵

(i) Economic Base: Myanmar has extensive natural resources, which are closely related to the salient features of its physical geography. Thus, while the older plateaux of the east have long been noted for a variety of metallic minerals, including silver, lead and zinc, tungsten, tin, etc, the young folded mountains of the west are not noted for mineral wealth. High quality jade has long been available in the Kachin state far to the north, while rubies are still to be found along the upper western edge of the Shan plateau. The northern Shan states also contain silver, nickel, and lead deposits in commercial quantities. Tungsten mining is profitable along the western edge of the southern Shan

¹⁴ *Burma: Country in Crisis*, (New York: 1998), p.17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

plateau escarpment and in middle Tenasserim, which also forms a minor part of the South-east Asian tin zone.

Myanmar possesses substantial resources in both petroleum and natural gas deposits which occurs in the Tertiary structures underlining the middle Irrawaddy valley. It is in this area that the oldest oil deposits are located and they were being exploited by surface operations long before the Europeans arrived. Recently, additional oil and gas deposits were discovered along the lower Arakan coast behind Bassein extending southward offshore along the submerged mountain range, and in Tenasserim coastal waters.

Non-mineral resources include valuable timber stands along both the slopes of the lower Salween river valley and in the Shan plateau areas adjacent to the Sittang river. Teakwood constitutes an estimated 20% of the total timber stand and has long been one of Myanmar's leading items of export. The Arakan Yoma teak in comparison with other areas are less easily accessible. The most valuable animal resources are oxen and water buffaio, which are extensively used for ploughing and transportation.

Myanmar is primarily an agricultural country and it is in agricultural resources that the country is potentially most richly endowed. The Irrawaddy delta provides one of the larger rice-bowls of the world. Agriculture (including livestock and fishing) remains the largest sector by far in Myanmar's economy, contributing 45.2% of

GDP in 1995-96.¹⁶ (See Table II). Agricultural sector accounted for 68% of employment in 1992/93.¹⁷ Agriculture is thus central to the overall performance of the Burmese economy.

**Table II:
GDP Composition (for 1995-96)**

Sector	Share (%)
1. Agriculture	38.3
2. Livestock and Fishery	6.9
3. Forestry	1.1
4. Mining	1.3
5. Processing and Manufacturing	9.4
6. Power	1.0
7. Construction	3.8
8. Transportation	4.0
9. Communication	1.1
10. Financial Institutions	1.2
11. Social and Administrative Services	6.4
12. Rentals and Other Services	4.0
13. Trade	21.5

Source: as quoted in *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*, p.18.

Rice dominates the country's agricultural production and thus, the economy. It is the main source of employment as well as the principal export earner. It is also the staple food, providing the bulk of the calorie. Area under paddy cultivation in 1994-95 was estimated at 5.8m.hectare, about 50% of all land under cultivation.¹⁸ Its annual production has increased from 16 million metric tons in 1993 to 20 million metric ton in 1995. (Table III).

¹⁶ Basic facts on the Union of Myanmar, No.7, p.18

¹⁷ Harvey Demaine, 'Myanmar: Physical and Social geography', in *The Far East and Australia*, 29th Edit. (London: 1998), p. 679.

¹⁸ Ibid

Table III:

AGRICULTURE

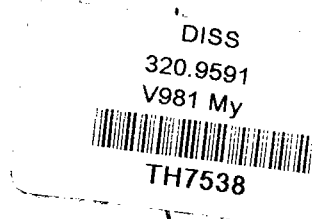
Principal Crops ('000 metric tons)

	1993	1994	1995
Wheat	139	109	147
Rice	16,760	18,195	20,109
Maize	205	284	272
Millet	144	123	150
Potatoes	143	173	146
Sugarcane	3410	2849	2167
Dry beans	611	812	966
Chick pea	101	60	77
Other pulses	182	199	185
Groundnuts	433	431	501
Cottonseeds	46	45	57
Cotton (lint)	23	23	28
Sesame seed	237	304	297
Tobacco	52	52	38
Jute	39	27	35
Natural rubber	16	16	27
Vegetables	2225	2214	2235
Fruits	1013	1093	1015

Source: FAO, Production Yearbook, as quoted in, *FEA, 1997, (London: 1998), p.679.*

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Besides paddy, Myanmar produces a wide range of other crops including maize, pulses, groundnuts, sesame seed and the so-called industrial crops like jute, cotton, sugarcane and tobacco. These are produced primarily for domestic use, although pulse and sesame seeds are important export commodities, and small quantities of maize, rubber, jute and tobacco have also been exported in recent years.



1.6. POLITICAL ENTITIES AND PEOPLING OF MYANMAR:

(i) Political Entities

The geographical conditions of Myanmar has directly or indirectly been affecting the politics, policies and programmes of the region to a great extent. Topography and location of the country have, over the centuries, helped to channelise successive migrations from the north along the Chindwin, Salween and Irrawaddy valleys. It also permits the arrival of seafaring groups, notably the Mons. Most of these immigrants occupy the highland areas along the country's borders and have strong cultural links across them, thereby, enhancing the likelihood of inter-cultural conflict and territorial disputes. The Second World War experiences have encouraged the various tribal groups, notably Kachin, Karen, Shan, Wa, Mons, etc. to fight for autonomy or independence. Different periods of history have witnessed different solutions to this problem: for example, the British applied a classic 'divide and rule policy', administering the ethnic periphery separately from the Myanmar core. This policy had a wide implication on the political set-up of Myanmar today. (detailed discussion on the subsequent chapters).

Administratively, Myanmar is divided into fourteen divisions and states comprising 314 townships. The townships in turn are composed of 13751 village tracts (some 65,000 villages).¹⁹ The seven states and

¹⁹ David I Steinberg, *Burma's road toward development: Growth and Ideology under Military rule*, (Colorado; 1981), p.6.

seven divisions of the Union of Myanmar are:

States

1. Kachin state
2. Kayah state
3. Kayin state
4. Chin state
5. Mon state
6. Rakhine state
7. Shan state

Divisions

1. Ayeyarwady Division
2. Yagon Division
3. Mandalay Division
4. Magway Division
5. Bago Division
6. Tanintharyi Division
7. Sagaing Division

As already mentioned, the foundations of the machinery of government in modern Myanmar were laid under British rule. During the 19th century, when British rule was taking shape in Myanmar, the administrative system was organized on territorial lines, and local authorities were responsible to the head of the government, for the maintenance of law and order and for such other functions as might be imposed on them.²⁰ Except for the frontier region, the large Divisions were sub-divided into three or four Districts; in each districts, two or three subdivisions, and in each subdivisions, two or four townships. The township was the smallest unit of general administration. The hill areas or the frontier region were governed through their own chieftains. This effectively cut them off from the Myanmarese and from one another.

(ii) Peopling: The present day population composition of Myanmar is an outcome of a very long process of peopling of the country. Human groups with different ethnic backgrounds have entered the country at

²⁰ J.S. Furinval, *Governance of Modern Burma*, (New York: 1958), P.6.

different points of time. Their in-migration, settlement and later movements within the country have led to high ethnic and cultural diversities.

The differences in the physical characteristics and the resources found in the different regions have already been noted. Obviously, the river basins have been the main areas of attraction as they had been penetrated and colonised again and again. The racial groups ousted from these basins, after each incursion, had moved into the relatively less accessible tracts. The hilly and the forested tracts, on the other hand, have been most unattractive areas from the point of view of settled agriculture, and the indigenous groups inhabiting them have remained comparatively undisturbed. They have also in some cases, served as refuge areas for the ethnic groups uprooted from the river basins. It is in these otherwise isolated regions that the earliest racial groups have survived till today.

About 70% of the Burmese - speaking majority of the country's forty five million total population (1996) is concentrated largely in the central Irrawaddy plain area. They are descendants of people who once lived in the eastern regions of Tibet. 'The first Tibeto-Burman immigrants, known as the Pyu people, were present in lower Myanmar as early as the third or fourth century A.D'.²¹ The Burmans proper migrated to the central valley in the 9th century. The newly arrived Burmans conquered the surviving Pyu people in the north, along with

²¹ Cady, John F. *The United States and Burma*, (Cambridge: 1976), p.7.

the Mons. Around 1050 A.D, the Pagan Burmans also conquered the Mon territories in the south. Later migrations of Tibeto-Burman people included the Kachin and Lisu tribesmen who still inhabit the mountains of upper Myanmar and areas adjacent to China borderlands. The Chins in the Indo-Myanmar border hills are also believed to have migrated to Burma before the Burmans.

(iii) Demographic Growth of Myanmar

Myanmar presents an interesting demographic study. In spite of its large size, the country with 45.9 million population in 1996,²² is one of the least populated country in Southeast Asia. Before independence, Myanmar's population was within the limit of 20 million. However, there is substantial rise in the population after independence. Myanmar doubled its population between 1938 and 1978, when officially it was 32.2 million, at the annual growth rate of 2.2%. In the 1990's its population crossed the limit of 40 million and it is expected that the population will reach over 50 million by the end of this century (2000 A.D).

According to estimates prepared by the population division of the United Nations, the country's population was 45.92 million in 1996 and its annual growth rate was 1.7 % whereas the official figure (as given in the Basic Facts of the Union of Myanmar) was 44.74 million

²² The figure is based on UN's estimate of mid-year population for 1996. *UN Demographic Year Book 1996*, Dept. of Economic & Social Affairs, 48th Issue (New York, 1998), p.157.

(1995-96) at the growth rate of 1.87 %. The male population was 22.22 million or 49.66 % and female population was 22.52 million or 50.34 %.²³ This is an interesting observation because Myanmar is one of the few country in the world where there is an excess of females over the males.

Although there is no hard evidence to dispute the 1.7% growth rate, such a low increase in population is inconsistent with the birth rates as recorded throughout the region. According to the United Nations estimates for 1990-95, the country's birth rate and death rate was 28.8 and 10.9 respectively. It registered 17.9 % as natural increase, but with a very high infant mortality rate of 90%.²⁴

Inspite of the 1.7% growth rate, the Myanmar authorities considered their country under-populated, and therefore, adopted a pronatalist policy. This is because of 'economic conditions, the influences of more-populated nations on Myanmar's border like China, India, Bangladesh and Thailand'.²⁵ Birth control commodities are banned, and the official approval of abortions is so complicated (involving the husband, doctor, local party committee and so on) that effectively there is no official population control programme. There is a three-year prison term for physicians and patients involved in sterilization.²⁶

²³ *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*, No.15, p.3.

²⁴ *UN Demographic Year Book*, 1996, No.2, p.148.

²⁵ Steinberg, No.18, p.104.

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

Apart from the indigenous races in Myanmar, Indians and Chinese are the major alien minorities. Both trace their presence to the earliest time. Although the government has no published population data on the racial composition of the society except the sample 1953 Urban Census Survey, it was estimated in 1970 that there were approximately 450,000 Indians and about the same number of Chinese in the country.²⁷ Since independence new immigration has been banned. However, many Chinese still cross the land frontier into Myanmar, and their absolute number is growing. Until the military coup in 1962, Indians and Chinese played major roles in the commercial and financial lives of the nation. While the 1964 exodus of Indians reduced their role in the economic life of the nation, the Chinese have taken over their place. Outside of the diplomatic community, very few Europeans live in Myanmar today.

Another important aspect of Myanmar's population is its religious composition. It is commonly known that the dominant religion of the land is Buddhism. About 89.5% of the total population practice Theravada Buddhism, the same variant practised in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. The other important religious groups of Myanmar consists of Christians (4.9%), Muslims (3.8%), Hindus (0.05%) and Animists (1.3%).²⁸

²⁷ Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation*, (London:1977), p.42.

²⁸ *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*, No.22, p.3.

1.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The geographical settings of Myanmar show that the country is structurally isolated but geostrategically plays an important role in maintaining peace and prosperity in the region. It has been a bridge between China, India and other nations of Southeast Asia. The north-south extensions of mountainous ranges and valleys in Myanmar help in the distribution of incoming tropical monsoon rains, thereby giving pleasant climate throughout the country. Even in the rain-shadow areas temperature never exceeds 41°C.

Myanmar is a resource-rich but economically poor nation. The country is primarily an agriculture country and it is in agricultural resources that Myanmar is most richly endowed. About 70% of the people directly or indirectly depend on agriculture. Recently, the macro economic indicators of Myanmar have started showing a strong positive trend of economic growth which is likely to bring back the economy on the right track. Both in the economy and population the country is in an advantageous position at the moment. However, the 8.2% GDP growth rate in 1995-96 is far below the requirement for the 46 million population. At a density of 67.4 person per sq.km, pressure on its agricultural lands is increasing. If the economic growth is unable to match the population growth, it will result in further decline of already low standard of living.

Myanmar's potential has never been fully realized. In the prewar

period, Myanmar was a wealthy colony that paid for itself, but it was the virtual prototype of a colonial economy. And the World War II destroyed its industrial base, physically dislocated the population and the economy collapsed. The present military junta tried its best to revitalize the economy by opening up the country's markets.

The policies that various Myanmar governments, civilian and military, formulated were products of-monarchical Myanmar, the colonial experience, the growth of nationalism, and the struggle for independence. Thus, it is appropriate to first turn to Myanmar's history and then to the rise of Myanmarese nationalism to understand these influences on contemporary Myanmar.

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CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

‘Myanmarese history has both haunted and sustained Myanmar. What enabled Myanmarese society to survive the periodic onslaught of destructive events was institutional continuity. But that continuity has in turn prevented Myanmar from changing in fundamental ways’.¹

Michael Aung-Thwin

For a better understanding of the political developments in Myanmar and the contemporary geopolitical issues that the country is facing today, an outline sketch of its historical background is necessary. Though a sizeable section of the following discussion is devoted to the early history, colonial period, rise of nationalism, independence and subsequent military rule in Myanmar, the major focus of this chapter is on the contemporary politics of Myanmar, particularly from the 1988 uprising to till date.

2.1. EARLY HISTORY:

The earliest history of Myanmar date back to the 5th century A.D Kingdom founded by Pyus above Irrawaddy delta, under strong Indian cultural influence.² This formative age in Burmese history was short

¹ Michael Aung-Thwin, ‘Spirals in Early Southeast Asian and Burmese History’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.21, No.4, (Spring, 1991), p.602.

² Bernard Eccleston, etc.: *The Asia-Pacific Profile*, (London: 1998), p.40.

lived as the Pyu Kingdom was subjugated in 832 A.D by the Kingdom of Nanchao of the present-day Yunnan Province. When the Burmans moved in force into the Irrawaddy area, it created a political and demographic vacuum, leading to the emergence of Pagan dynasty in the mid-ninth century. Therefore, it can be said that the authentic Myanmarese history goes only as far as the reign of Anawrahta, a Pagan King, because it was during this period that the Burmese evolved into a distinct people.

Myanmar's political history between the Pagan dynasty (1044-1287) and the British conquest (1824-1886) was characterised by endless struggles among at least four of the indigenous groups inhabiting the area of modern Myanmar, and their outside neighbours.³ The pre-dominant groups in the internal struggle were the Burmans, the Mons or Talaings, the Shans and the Arakanese.

Inspite of the struggles among themselves, the Burmans had undergone three short periods of political unification prior to the British conquest. The first attempt to unify the whole country politically and to achieve religious uniformity was successfully made by the Pagan Kings. Theravada Buddhism became the religion of the Burmans of Pagan; they also evolved their script from the Mon during this period.⁴

³ Josey Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* (London: 1977), p.4.

⁴ David I. Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia*, (Colorado: 1982), p.18.

The second unification of Myanmar under Burman rule began in 1486 A.D. and lasted till 1752 A.D. The Tuongoo Dynasty is the briefest and, unlike its Burman predecessor, left no great cultural or architectural legacy.⁵

The third unification came under the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1886). The new dynasty also pursued an expansionist policy; conquered all of Burma and then went on to subdue Manipur, Assam, parts of East Bengal, Laos, and Thailand. It was during this period that the Thai capital was moved south to the Thonburi area and then across the river to Bangkok. The dynasty's foreign adventures in the west, however, came into conflict with an equally expansionist British policy under the leadership of the East India Company. This confrontation led to the dismemberment and the ultimate demise of Myanmar as an independent Kingdom.⁶

2.2. BRITISH EXPANSION AND THE FALL OF THE MYANMAR KINGDOM

The consequences of the industrial revolution in Britain arrived in Myanmar by the early 1800's. The British annexed the country in three successive stages: 1824-1826, 1852-1853, and 1885-1886 which were, in other words, called the Anglo-Burmese Wars. During this period the British viewed their expansion into Southeast Asia as an important

⁵ Silverstein, No.3, p.5.

⁶ Steinberg, no.4, p.24.

element in their efforts to control the potentially rich China and to deny that area to the French.⁷

The first stage of British annexation was precipitated by three areas of conflict. The first developed over control of buffer areas located inland from coastal Chittagong; the second area of tension developed in Manipur and Cachar states; and the third area centred around the Arakan-Chittagong border. In fact, it was the conquest of Arakan in 1784 by King Bodawpaya which brought Myanmar into direct contact with the British administered Chittagong coastal district in Bengal. The result was the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-1826. The War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826; accordingly, the Arakan and the Tenasserin regions were ceded to the British, leaving the Burmans out of Manipur and Assam, which were eventually incorporated into the British empire.

The Second Anglo-Burman War (1852) developed out of local friction at the port of Rangoon. The British took this small incident as a pretext to declare war. The *de-facto* effect was the ceding of the Lower Myanmar, the Irrawaddy delta, Rangoon and the Mon territories of Pegu and Martaban to the British.⁸

The third and final stage of British annexation of Myanmar was accomplished after the conquest of the Kingdom of Mandalay in Upper Myanmar in the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885-1886). It was the

⁷ Ibid., p.25.

⁸ Ibid., p.27.

British commercial interest and the Anglo-French rivalry which made the final annexation inevitable.

2.3. THE COLONIAL PERIOD: 1886-1948

After the annexation of the whole of Myanmar and the establishment of British sovereignty in 1886, the country was proclaimed as a province of India.⁹ Thus, politically and administratively, Myanmar became a part of British India until it was separated from India in 1937, by the Government of India Act, 1935.

The Japanese assisted the formation of the Burma Independence Army, led by Aung San, and granted nominal independence to Myanmar in 1943. The Japanese named Dr. Ba Maw, a former Prime Minister under the 1935 Constitution as the head of the government.¹⁰ This 'puppet' government was strongly resisted by leaders of the Burmese army and their civilian colleagues. Thus, Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL) was formed under the leadership of Aung San, and it assisted the Allied forces in driving the Japanese out of Myanmar in 1945.

The post-Second World War changes in British administration brought the Labour Party into power which also brought a reversal of the British policy towards India and Myanmar. The then British Prime

⁹ A.C. Banerjee, *Annexation of Burma* (Calcutta: 1949), pp.177-78.

¹⁰ Thakin Nu, *Burma under the Japanese* (London: 1954), p.39.

Minister, Clement Attlee met the Myanmarese delegation led by Aung San in January 1947 to negotiate Myanmar's independence. Accordingly, elections were held and a Constituent Assembly constituted.

Even at that point, the most important issue was that of the minority people. England had determined that the minorities (the Frontier Area People) should be free to decide whether they wished to stay in an independent Myanmar, to be independent, or to remain under the British rule.¹¹ The Frontier people, therefore, met at Panglong in Shan states and signed the famous Panglong Agreement on 12th February 1947. The Shans, the Kachins, and the Chins agreed to join Independent Myanmar, but the other minorities remained uncommitted.¹² Though the tribesmen did not know much about the meaning of 'Federation', they were willing to be a part of Ministerial Myanmar with full autonomy in internal administration.¹³

With much difficulties, Aung San could bring unification of Myanmar once again. The unification, however, proved to be short lived. Aung San and five of his top cabinet officials were assassinated during the drafting of Myanmar Constitution in July 19, 1947. The Burman-Karen relations worsened as they intensified their demand for a separate Karen state or *Karennistan*. The timely intervention of

¹¹ Steinberg, n.8, p.33.

¹² Silverstein, n.5, p.19.

¹³ Dr. Tuakhin Neihhsial, "*Burma: Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry Report*", (Delhi: 1988), pp.31-34.

Governor Rance in appointing Thakin Nu (later U Nu)¹⁴ as Chief Councillor and head of the coalition party enabled them to complete drafting of the constitution of the Union of Myanmar. The treaty of independence was finally signed in London by Britain's Prime Minister Clement Attlee and U Nu on 17 October, 1947. The British Parliament ratified the agreement in December, and Myanmar became an independent state, outside of the British Commonwealth, on January 4, 1948.

2.4. IMPACT OF COLONIAL RULE AND THE GROWTH OF NATIONALISM:

During their sixty years or so rule in Myanmar, the British made several changes in Myanmar's social organization, politics and economic institutions. The initial purpose of the British administration was the maintenance of law and order and the collection of revenues.¹⁵ On the pretexts of maintaining law and order, and protecting the minorities from the dominant Burmans, the British followed a '*divide and rule*' policy. They divided Myanmar into two sections:

(i) The area of Myanmar proper: This is the area where Burmans were in majority (it also included Arakanese and Mon regions), and was

¹⁴ The prefix *Thakin* or *Master* was adopted by the nationalists in the 1930's as a symbol of their defiance of the British rule. After independence, people use *U* or *Uncle*, the traditional term of respect in addressing an elder, a leader, or an esteemed person.

¹⁵ Steinberg, no.11, p.29.

administered directly.¹⁶

(ii)The Hill/Frontier areas: This area included the Shan states, the Karenni states, the Kachins and Chin Hills, and the Karen Salween district. This area retained some of the traditional leadership under overall British supervision, and eventually came under the control of a separate frontier administration in 1922.

Instead of protecting the minorities, this policy created tensions between the majority and minority groups, made the people conscious of their ethnic and cultural differences, and kept the society divided ever after!

The British also introduced several changes which were modelled on the Indian pattern. Some of the changes included making authority territorial instead of personal, eliminating the local chieftains, and elevating the local/village headmen to positions of salaried officials responsible to the central government rather than to the local community.¹⁷ Western legal processes were introduced as well. These institutional changes resulted in complex social and economic problems. The ethnic division of labour could be seen in the defense services as well, because the Army was formed on racial lines and the Burmans do not have much share in British – Burma Army.

The Burmans responded to these changes in various ways. Their

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Silverstein, n.19, p.12.

political awakening can be traced back to the agitation in 1917-1918 when a non-political Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was formed to fight against the deteriorating discipline in the Buddhist hierarchy and the pollution of the sacred shrines by the non-Buddhists. Then there emerged the General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA) which became politicized later. In 1930, a group of intelligentsia in Yangon formed the Thakin (master) Movement, seeking the revival of the national language, traditions, identity and culture, together with the development of a modern nation-state. The world-wide economic depression in the 1930s also provoked a rural uprising called the Saya San Revolt (SSR). All the later nationalist movements were basically political, guiding the nation through the war and into independence. Nationalism, which embodied both the new and the old, became the catalyst for uniting the people and spurring them on to political action.¹⁸

2.5. INDEPENDENCE AND CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD, 1948-1962

When Myanmar became an independent nation on Jan. 4, 1948, the country was once again united, for the fourth time in Burmese history. The initial task of independent Myanmar was to construct a 'union' in which formerly separated people could join together so as to benefit from uniting while retaining a nominal degree of autonomy. During

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 26.

1948-62, the people lived under a constitution of their own making, which provided legislative supremacy, judicial independence and personal freedom, i. e., authority basically stemming from the people and not from above. Another distinctive feature of the 1947 Constitution was the concept of federal union. Surprisingly, the constitution also provided that every state had the right of secession unless otherwise expressly stated.¹⁹

The first decade of constitutional period was marked by internal rebellions and factional fights. Keeping in line with the British policy of 'divide and rule', the states did not enjoy equal rights. For example, Kachin and Karen states were denied the right of secession; the Shan and Kayah states were to wait; and the right did not apply to the Chin Special Division because it was not considered a state equal to the others.²⁰ The desires of the minorities were not satisfied and the tide of rebellion swirled throughout the country.

Amidst all these problems, Myanmar held two elections in 1951 and 1956 in its first decade of the constitutional period. Both were won by U Nu, as leader of the AFPFL. Internal rebellions and factionalism intensified after 1956 election and reached its climax in 1958 when AFPFL split into two rival factions: U Nu and Thakin Tin headed the *Clean AFPFL* and U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein the *Stable AFPFL*. To avert open revolt, re-establish law and order, stop illegal economic

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

activities and prepare the country for new election, U Nu invited Gen. Ne Win to form a caretaker government in 1958, which the opposition called "*Coup by Consent*" or a "*Constitutional Coup De 'tat.*"²¹

The priorities of the military were to first, re-establish law and order, second promote democracy, and third, to develop a socialist economy.²² Majority-minority tension came down and the economy revived to some extent. As regards the frontier areas, the military regime took an important step in the democratization of the areas. The chiefs in the Shan and Kayah states were persuaded to surrender their historic rights (as safeguarded by the 1947 Panglong Agreement) and transfer administration to the elected leaders.²³ But the change did not bring peace as some of the deposed chiefs became insurgents.

The military government successfully conducted the third election in March 1960, and U Nu's Clean AFPFL²⁴ assumed power the same year. As in 1958, tensions built up, yet again within the party. Minority rebellions re-surfaced because of government's failed promises. U Nu introduced Buddhism as the state religion. The minorities, particularly the Kachins and the Karens, reacted sharply. The Buddhist Shan state revolted against economic and social discrimination, and even discussed the option of leaving the Union. The country once again displayed how Myanmar is far from the Union

²¹ Steinberg, n.15, p.69.

²² Ibid, p.71.

²³ Silverstein, n.20, p.78.

²⁴ U Nu's Clean AFPFL was renamed Pyilaungsu or Union Party in April, 1960.

of Myanmar.

All these circumstances, coupled with the administrative competence displayed by the military government during 1958-1960, prompted a military response, and finally led to a *Bloodless Military Coup de'tat* in March 2, 1962.

The crisis in Myanmar leading to the military coup in 1962 was essentially constitutional, yet it was also geographical in the sense that the fundamental issue was the unity of Myanmar, the relationship between the central government and the peripheral ethnic minorities.²⁵ If the constitutional period (1948-1962) was a period of experimentation in the running of constitutional democracy in Myanmar,²⁶ it was also an attempt to solve the country's problem of national disunity through participatory means. Although subsequent developments proved that it was an unsuccessful attempt, yet, the constitutional period was remarkable in Myanmar's politics.

2.6. PERIOD OF MILITARY JUNTA IN MYANMAR

The Burmese history since independence had two important eras – the *Pyidawtha* (1948-1958) and the *Pyidawcha* (1962-1988). The *Pyidawcha* era was a period of experimentation with monolithic socialism and the Sino-Soviet model of a polity under the Military

²⁵ Peter John Perry, "Military Rule in Burma: A Geographical Analysis", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol.19, No.1, January 1993, p.19.

²⁶ P.Sharan, "*Government and Politics in Burma*", (New Delhi:1983), p.63.

regime of general Ne Win in the name of “*the Burmese way to Socialism*.”²⁷ The Military period could be sub-divided into the following stages:

(i) Revolutionary Council Period (1962-1973)

The military rule ushered in by the coup of March 2, 1962 was expected to last for a short time only. The people were told that its purpose was solely to preserve the Union, restore order and harmony in the society, and to solve some of the economic problems that had developed and multiplied over the previous two years.²⁸ In explanation of his action, Ne Win himself declared that the integrity of the Myanmar Union was in danger and that Parliamentary Democracy was unsuitable for Myanmar.²⁹ Therefore, he demolished the Parliamentary Democratic set-up, suspended the Constitution and installed in its place the Revolutionary Council (RC) which assumed executive, legislative and judicial powers.³⁰

In their attempt to unite the people, the coup leaders wrote a new ideology which is contained in two documents – the *Burmese Way to Socialism (BWS)* and the *System of Correlation of Man and His Environment (SCME)*, in 1962. Both represented a new stage in the

²⁷ Mya Maung, ‘The Burma Road from the Union of Burma to Myanmar’, *Asian Review*, Vol. XXX, No.6, June 90, pp.603-604.

²⁸ Silverstein, n.26, p.80.

²⁹ John F. Cady, “*The United States and Burma*”, (Cambridge: 1976), p.236.

³⁰ Udai Bhanu Singh, “Myanmar Marches On”, *Strategic Analysis*, XVII, No.9 (December 1994), p.1103.

development and formulation of the Military's concept of a national ideology. According to the SCME, the ideology of the Revolutionary Council rested on three basic principles: Change, revolution, and Socialism.³¹ The BW's defined the ultimate goal for the Burmese state.

On the basis of these ideologies, the Military Junta brought critical changes to Myanmar. The regime disbanded the elected assembly, the supreme court and the high court, substituting them with military tribunals. The regime believed its survival depended on "thorough control of all aspects of society",³² and did extensive nationalization of the means of production and distribution (both internal and external). Only Burmese citizens were eligible to hold businesses.³³ This affected many Indians and Chinese who were holding important posts in business and administration.

The Ne Win's regime also embarked on a policy of "Burmanisation."³⁴ Personal liberty and freedom were limited. Ethnic minority languages were downgraded. Political parties were allowed to function, but under one party named the *Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP)* – a unique combination of Marxism and Buddhism.³⁵ The BSPP, known in Burmese as Lazin, remained a cadre party until 1971, when it was transformed into a mass national party. "Thus, despite

³¹ P. Sharan, 'Government and Politics of Myanmar', (New Delhi: 1983), p. 69.

³² Far Eastern Economic Review, 7 July 1988, p. 5.

³³ Bertil Lintner, "Burma and its Neighbours: An Overview", *China report*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1992, p. 121

³⁴ Singh, no. 30, p. 1103

³⁵ Sharan, no. 31, p. 68

General Ne Win's desire to build a popular form of Burmese socialism his government in fact destroyed the democratic traditions U Nu had sought to develop.³⁶

As the economy deteriorated and corruption and capitalism persisted, the military government faced opposition from several quarters throughout its first phase of governance. The indigenous minorities, political parties, religious groups, and particular individuals like U Nu posed great challenges to the military rule. Increased violence and insurrections broke out in the Shan and Kachin states, and the Karen revolt, active since 1949, intensified.³⁷ Both the Red Flag and the White Flag rebellion continued. The Kayahs and Mons also fought for separate states with greater autonomy. In order to pacify the multitudes of insurrections, Ne Win offered a general amnesty to all insurgents group in April 1963, but with limited effect.

The other elements of opposition came from university students, Buddhist monks and individuals like U Nu who did not support the coup. In late 1970, U Nu formed a united front – National United Liberation Front (NULF) – with several minority dissidents.

The government and political pattern began to change in the early seventies. In July 1971, the military leaders announced plans to draft a new constitution and to transfer power to a civilian government.

³⁶ Ibid, p.68.

³⁷ Steinberg, no.21, p.83.

In accordance with the move towards constitutionalism, Gen. Ne Win and 20 of his officers retired from the army in 1972 and became civilian members of the government. At the same time, the RC proclaimed the end of the revolutionary government.

The new constitution drafting committee headed by Gen. San Yu completed the job in the early 1973, and a referendum was held in December 1973. Elections in the same year confirmed Ne Win's Presidency under the new constitution, and RC was replaced by People's National Congress (PNC).

According to the 1974 constitution, the BSPP is the sole party responsible for drawing up lists of candidates for all offices (Art. 179),³⁸ also to give advice and suggestions to the government at all levels (Art. 205). As long as the constitution remains in effect, the military controlling the party remain in power. The constitution therefore confirms the military dictatorship.³⁹

The last step of altering governance from direct military dictatorship to the new constitutional dictatorship was the promulgation of laws (laws 2 & 3 of 1974) that transferred the powers of the RC to the People's Assembly and the three levels of People's Council. This was completed on January 28, 1974. On March 2, 1974 – twelve years after the coup – the second phase of the military rule

³⁸ Silverstein, no.28, p.122.

³⁹ Ibid.

began.⁴⁰

(ii) The Second Phase of Military Rule: Constitutional Dictatorship (1974-1987)

The new constitution and the institutions that it created came into existence in 1974. However, it failed to solve the economic problems or to create political tranquility. By May 1974, demonstrations and worker's strike had developed over higher wages, and in June demonstration again broke out over food shortage,⁴¹ and maldistribution. University and educational institutions were closed to prevent further disturbances. In December 1974, there were riots by students and monks over the burial of UN Secretary – General U. Thant, and martial law was declared. As Steinberg remarks, it was not that they were pro U. Thant, but anti Ne Win⁴² and his one-party dictatorship.

Unrest was not limited to the students and workers; ethnic and political rebellions continued as they had since 1948. In March 1974, the government once again declared amnesty for those in revolt, but without much response. Instead, five insurgent organizations representing national minorities – the Karen, Karenni, Shan, Mon, and Arakan – agreed on May 1975 to unite under the Federal National Democratic Front (FNDF), in order to “overthrow Ne Win’s one party

⁴⁰ Silverstein, no.41, p.137.

⁴¹ David I. Steinberg, *Burma's Road Toward Development: Growth and Ideology under Military Rule*, (Colorado, 1981), p.73.

⁴² Ibid.

military dictatorship and establish a federal Union in Myanmar based on national self-determination.”⁴³

Of more importance to the regime and its continued survival was the attempted coup by young army officers in July 1976, under the leadership of Captain Ohn Kyaw Myint. The plotters were moved by their dissatisfaction with the government’s one-party system and the failures of the economic policies of the government.”⁴⁴ This revealed how deeply the social discontent had penetrated into the new military elite.

Instead of eliminating capitalism, corruption and exploitation, Ne Win’s socialistic politics actually encouraged all the three evils. The Secretary-General San Yu also admitted that the party programme adopted in 1974, was a failure and a new one had to be drawn up and adopted. Therefore, a special meeting of BSPP was held in October 1976 in which a new central committee comprising 180 member was elected. In January 1978, another national election was held. The result brought no real changes either in the nation’s leadership or its policies. All the political, economic and social problems of the past were still there.⁴⁵

Ne Win’s reputation as a ruthless despot was somewhat softened in 1980 when he convened the ‘Congregation of the Sangha of all

⁴³ Sharan, no.36, p.139.

⁴⁴ M.C.Tun, “Diversion on the Road to Socialism”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 2, 1976, p.18.

⁴⁵ Silverstein, no.40, p.146.

Orders for Purification, Perpetuation, and Propagation of the Sasana.’⁴⁶

In response to its success in bringing the Buddhist clergy under his control, U Ne Win made an unexpected call for a general amnesty for the country’s insurgents (the third call since 1962 military coup), however, ‘almost no communist or ethnic insurgents accepted the amnesty offered.’⁴⁷ Thousands of prisoners were released.

On 8th August –1981, Ne Win announced his resignation as the President of Myanmar, but retained the Chairmanship of BSPP – the Number One post. San Yu was appointed as the new President. The third national election held in October 1981 was a mere confirmation of the party’s choice of candidates in the four levels of the councils!

Throughout the 1970’s and 80’s, the Burmese economy which was in a relentless grip of a nationwide black market known cynically as “Corporation 23”, was kept alive by massive foreign aids from the western world.⁴⁸ Under the pretence of introducing liberalization measures, Ne Win’s was able to woo international donors. In fact, ‘Ne Win’s anti-communist stance served as the basis for receiving aid from the west, while the staunch denunciation of capitalism and the BSPP model of a totalitarian common economy pleased the Sino-Soviet bloc.’⁴⁹

Despite the massive external aid, the economy continued to

⁴⁶ Steinberg, no.37, p.88.

⁴⁷ Bertil Lintner, *Outrage* (London: 1990), p.64.

⁴⁸ Mya Maung, no.26, p.613.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.614.

experienced rampant corruption, gross mismanagement, and galloping inflation, fueled by black marketeers, which compelled Ne Win to apply for the UN defined status of Least Developed Country (LDC) to get some badly needed relief in 1987. For the first time ever, Ne Win admitted that there might be flaws in the sacred principles of the 25 years old 'Burmese way of Socialism', rather than in its implementation.⁵⁰ In an extraordinary twist of policy, 'the government demonetized 25, 35, and 75 Kyats currency notes'⁵¹, to combat insurgents and black marketeers.' New notes – 45 and 90 Kyats – were issued just because it added up to 9, which is Ne Win's lucky number.⁵²

There was a spontaneous outburst of violence, and protest was organized both inside and outside Myanmar. The LDC status and demonetization of currency was perceived as a final confirmation of the total failure of 26 years of Burmese Way of Socialism. Burmese exiles organized themselves and set up the Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB). In 1987, they had a meeting with the National Democratic Front (NDF) – 'the umbrella organization of nine antigovernment rebel groups.'⁵³ Years of frustration with military regime were beginning to surface everywhere.

⁵⁰ Lintner, no.47, p.67.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Robert O.Tilman, 'Burma in 1986: The Process of Involution Continues', *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXVII, No.2 (February, 1987), p.258.

2.7. CONTEMPORARY MYANMAR POLITICS: THE 1988 UPRISINGS TILL DATE

In the recent history of Myanmar, two dates stand out: 18 September 1988 and 28 April 1992. On the former, the Burmese army seized power and instituted a military dictatorship, justifying its action by declaring that it was necessary in order to restore order and save the nation from disintegration. On the latter, the military rulers ordered a halt to its military operations against the Karens 'to expedite the attainment of amity among all race for national unity with a view to strengthen national solidarity.'⁵⁴

(i) The 1988 Uprising:

The year 1987-1988 has been Myanmar's most turbulent and violent years since 1962. After 26 years of military rule, there came a whirlwind of violence in 1988 'as the Burmese people struggled toward an end to the discredited 'Burmese Way to Socialism' and a transition to a more moderate form of democratic government'.⁵⁵ The Burmese populaces became less tolerant and were provoked even by the slightest of incidents. Therefore, since early 1988, normal political and economic developments were being overshadowed by a series of violent periods, the major incidents being in March, June and

⁵⁴ Peter Carey, *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society*, (New York:1997), p.129.

⁵⁵ Burma Watcher, "Burma in 1988: There came a Whirlwind", *Asian Survey*, Vol.29, No.2, Feb 1989, p.174.

September 1988.

The first major anti-government demonstration came about on 12 March 1988, which involved a fight between a small group of students and a tea-shop proprietor near the Rangoon Institute of Technology. The student riots eventually led to mass public demonstration due to unruly handling of the conflict by the government. The riot police, called *Lon Htein* brutally suppressed the demonstration which resulted in the death of hundreds of demonstrators, including the suffocation to death of 41 students who were stuffed into a police van.⁵⁶ Again, all universities in Myanmar were closed down in order to calm down the students' unrest.

Political activities soon renewed when universities were reopened in late June. This is the beginning of the second period of violence in 1988. Students demanded the release of the detainees, compensation to the families of the victims, proper report of the 12 March incident as 'the Enquiry Commission gave a totally distorted version of what had happened'.⁵⁷ The peaceful demonstration by university students was joined by the monks, workers, school pupils and received whole hearted public support. The movement was now bigger than ever before and it was becoming increasingly militant. The government's response was again extremely brutal, incurring even more hatred in the process. The official death toll was 9 whereas

⁵⁶ David I. Steinberg, "Crisis in Burma", *Current History*, Vol.88, April 1989, p.186.

⁵⁷ Lintner, no.5, p.74.

diplomatic sources estimated it at 80 or more civilians and 20 police men.⁵⁸ A curfew was imposed and the universities and schools were closed indefinitely. Elsewhere, Taunggui, Pegu and Prome came under curfew as unrest spread throughout the country. The government's emergency measures also included a total ban on gatherings, making speeches, marching in procession, agitation, exhortation, demonstration and causing disturbances.⁵⁹ In spite of these measures public anger continued unabated with more and more disturbances fueled by the hatred of the military ruler.

Under great pressure from an aroused populace, U Ne Win called an extraordinary meeting of the BSPP and the Pyithu Hluttaw in late July. U Ne Win resigned as party Chairman and the Congress 'appointed Sein Lwin, the most hated man in the country, as both BSPP Chairman and President of Myanmar.'⁶⁰ The public response was immediate and widespread. They demanded the resignation of Sein Lwin and an accounting of the students missing after the March and June incidents. They also demanded re-establishment of democracy and the removal of the one-party system run by the BSPP. Under such circumstances the government declared Martial law and ordered troops to fire at any violation.⁶¹ Dozens were shot and violence was on. Brutal repression continued, and according to reliable diplomatic sources over

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.77.

⁵⁹ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol.141, No.31, 4-10 August, (Hongkong: 1988) p.12.

⁶⁰ *Watcher*, no.55, p.175.

⁶¹ *Steinberg*, no.56, p.186.

3000 people were killed and more than 1000 were wounded.⁶² Against police brutality the students called a general strike and most government services came to a halt. Sein Lwin was forced to resign on August 13, after only 17 days in office. He was replaced by the more moderate Dr. Maung Maung. He ended martial law, and released the leaders imprisoned by Sein Lwin. However, violent protest still continued because the peoples' demand was not a change in the ruling circle but an end to the military rule and one-party system, to be followed by extensive political and economic reforms.

Gradually the movement became more organized, and three personalities – (Rtd). Brigadier General Aung Gyi, Retired Major General Tin OO, and Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Gen. Aung San – assumed importance as leaders of the movement. Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as the leading voice for the opposition that demanded the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. Former Prime Minister U Nu, ousted by Ne Win in his 1962 coup, formed a second major opposition party.⁶³

By the end of August 1988, the entire BSPP empire collapsed. As government officials, troops and senior party members started to leave the townships, local committees or councils were set up to run the local administrations.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid, p.187.

⁶³ Watcher, no.60, p.179.

⁶⁴ I.P.Khosla, "Myanmar: Cohesion and Liberation", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.21, No.9, February, 1988, p.1653.

(ii) Creation of SLORC: The Military Anew

Dr. Maung Maung's government ignored the opposition's demand for an interim government and continued to hold on to power. Fresh demonstrations started, this time joined by large numbers of soldiers, particularly from Navy and Air Force. Wide spread confusion and anarchy prevailed all over the country. The economy, already in shambles, grounded to a halt.

An emergency meeting of the BSPP Congress was held in September 1988. 'All members of the armed forces, police and the civil services resigned from the BSPP.'⁶⁵ Now, distanced from the BSPP, the armed forces led by Gen. Saw Maung, seized power on 18 September 1988, in what has been called a '*mock coup*.'⁶⁶ Saw Maung created a new ruling body called 'the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), with himself as Chairman. According to the coup leaders, SLORC has the following objectives:

To ensure

- (i) law and order
- (ii) safe transportation and communication
- (iii) adequacy of food
- (iv) housing and other essential needs,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Bruce Mathews, "Myanmar's Agony: The Struggle for Democracy", *The Round Table*, 325, January 1993, p.38.

(v) preparations for holding of multi-party elections.⁶⁷

The newly formed ruling junta abolished all state organs (including the Pyithu Hluttaw, the State Council and Council of Ministers); demonstrations and gatherings were banned, and martial law was re-imposed.

Despite these restrictions, thousands of enraged demonstrators protested against the military take-over. There was a renewed period of brutal military repression. The army gun-fired unarmed demonstrators on the streets of Rangoon and other cities, and raided strike centres all over the country. Estimates suggest that as many as 10,000 people lost their lives in 1988 in the fight for democracy.⁶⁸ Many students and young people fled to the bordering areas of Thailand and India where they sought the protection and help of ethnic insurgents.

To reinforce the impression that Army had intervened to safeguard national interests, the SLORC on 19th September revoked the 1964 law⁶⁹ on the pretext of protecting national unity. The official name of the state was changed to "the Union of Burma" (as it had been before 1974), and the BSPP was re-established under a new name, the

⁶⁷ Shankari Sundaraman, "From SLORC to SPDC: Political Continuity Versus Economic Change in Myanmar", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.21, No.8, January 1988, p.1538.

⁶⁸ *Burma Action Group: An Alternative Guide* (London: March, 1996), p.3.

⁶⁹ The Law had banned all political parties except the BSPP.

National Unity Party (NUP).⁷⁰ On 15th September 1993, the name of NUP was subsequently changed to the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), an army-backed social movement.⁷¹ On June 1989 the name of the country was further changed to the Union of Myanmar.

About the same time, when SLORC was created in September 1988, the emerging opposition leaders, Brig-Ben Aung Gyi, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, formed the National United Front for Democracy (NUFD), later renamed the National League for Democracy (NLD)⁷², with Aung San Suu Kyi as its Secretary-General. The party continued its peaceful activities unabated, although the government passed repressive laws against any kind of opposition and criticism. Tension between the SLORC and the opposition groups increased in 1989. On 19 July 1989, Suu Kyi and Tin Oo were placed under house arrest.

(iii) The 1990 Election and its Aftermath:

The 1990 multi-party election in Myanmar is another landmark in the internal political development of the country. The SLORC did hold election as promised on 27 May 1990, but with much manipulation and restrictions. Campaigning was restricted to a three-month period; no freedom of the press or speech was allowed; all speeches were

⁷⁰ Far East and Australia, 1997, 29th ed. (London:1988), p.670.

⁷¹ Peter Carey, "From Burma to Myanmar: Military Rule and the Struggle for Democracy", *Conflict Studies*, 304, Nov/Dec, 1997, p.9.

⁷² FEA, 1997, no.70, p.670.

censored, and several opposition leaders were arrested.⁷³ But a total of 93 parties did contest the elections. To the surprise of many, the voting was orderly, quiet and free! The NLD -led opposition won an overwhelming majority, taking 392 of the 485 seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw or Parliament, while the military - backed NUP won 10 seats.⁷⁴ The total seats won by anti-SLORC forces⁷⁵ was 461 or some 95%.

Following the NLD's electoral victory, its leaders demanded immediate transfer of power and movement towards popular rule. However, the SLORC announced that the election was intended only to produce a constituent assembly, which was to draft a new constitution under the direction of a National Convention to be established by the SLORC.⁷⁶ SLORC was unrelentingly firm on holding on to power. New election laws were issued; accordingly, 'the elected members of the assembly were after all, merely a body which would be involved in drafting a new constitution. Further, SLORC maintained that it alone had legislative, administrative and judicial legitimacy.'⁷⁷

Following the repressive measures against NLD, the party leaders were arrested everyday 'while 28 electoral winners fled to the

⁷³ Khosla, no.65, p.1654.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Anti-SLORC forces includes the NLD, UNLD, and the Party for National Democracy led by Dr. Sein Win.

⁷⁶ FEA, 1997, no.72, p.670.

⁷⁷ Mathews, no.66, p.39.

Thai border.’⁷⁸ At the same time, as many as 111 elected MP were also disqualified.⁷⁹ On 18 December 1990, the MP’s in exile formed a Burmese government in exile, called the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). One important objective of the NCGUB was to draft a new federal constitution, and form a true democratic government.

Some analysts have pointed out that the elections were a move on the part of the junta to appease foreign critics and to remove the sanctions that had been placed following the massacre of 3000 pro-democracy protestors in September 1998.⁸⁰ In explaining the military’s refusal to transfer power, Silverstein had pointed out that it was because of the junta’s fear that ‘it will be held accountable for corruption and the human rights violations committed against the people under its rule and on the battle field.’⁸¹ This is not the first time in Burmese history that military denied power to the elected leaders. Thus, in the post-Ne Win period, the line of political thinking remained very much the same and very little change occurred in terms of a more liberal political process with a greater participation by the Burmese people.

⁷⁸ James F. Guyot, “Myanmar in 1990: The Unconsummated Election”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.31, no.2, February, 1991, p.211.

⁷⁹ Mathews, no.77, p.39.

⁸⁰ Sundararaman, no.67, p.1538.

⁸¹ Joseph Silverstein, “Myanmar’s (Burma’s) six domestic challenges in the 1990’s”, in Rohana Mahmood and Hans-Joachun (edit), *“Myanmar and the Wider South East Asia”*, (Kuala Lumpur: 1990), p.11.

(iv) Political and Economic Development Under SLORC

In the post – 1990 period, the SLORC “resorted to repressive measures against the NLD, pacified the dissident ethnic rebels, and at the same time mapped out a plan that would legitimise its rule in Myanmar”,⁸² consolidating its position within the Burmese political setting.

In order to improve their international image, the SLORC made some internal reorganization in 1992. Its Chairman, Saw Maung resigned and was replaced by Than Shwe, although Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt still remained as the first Secretary of the SLORC. Following the reshuffle, the SLORC revoked two martial law decrees; released about 100 political prisoners, including U Nu and many NLD representatives.

In a drive to pacify the ethnic rebel groups, the junta concluded peace deals with 11 of the country’s 12 major ethnic tribal groups.⁸³ There had not been any student protests of importance since 1990 also. The SLORC launched major military offensive against one group while it secured agreement with the others. In this way armed challenges to the ruling SLORC was drastically reduced. The military junta’s campaign against insurgent groups also went on side by side with the ‘increase in manpower, massive arms procurement, modernization of the weapons and equipment, and upgradation of its operational

⁸² Abu Taher Salah Ahmed, “Myanmar: Road to Democracy or East Asian Model?”, *BISS Journal*, vol. 17, January 1996, p. 123.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.124.

capabilities.’⁸⁴

In the economic front, the SLORC opened up the Burmese economy and ushered in a market-oriented system, which put an end to the BWS and instead replaced it with the ‘Burmese Ways to Capitalism’. The SLORC has been using this ‘open-door economy’, and other measures since 1988 to improve its international image and to attract foreign direct investment in order to stay in power.⁸⁵ In 1996, James F. Guyot remarks that, ‘Myanmar’s economy continued to grow while the SLORC and NLD moved further into isolated opposition.’⁸⁶ However, some foreign analysts and dissident Burmese nationals pointed out that the real economic performance and conditions of life is still bad and remains bleak.

Another important political development under SLORC is the National Convention, the body to draft the new Constitution. The NC first met on January 9, 1993. The junta inducted a clause which reserved one quarter of the seats in the National Assembly for the Military. In explaining the rationale for military dominance in the Assembly, John Badgley wrote that it is “because of the army’s great experience in administration and its non-political nature.”⁸⁷ Today, the

⁸⁴ Andrew Seth, “The Myanmar Army Since 1988: Acquisitions and Adjustments”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.17, no.3, Dec 1995, p.237.

⁸⁵ Mya Maung, “Burma’s Economic Performance under Military Rule”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.37, No.6, June 97, p.503.

⁸⁶ James F. Guyot, “Burma in 1996: One Economy, two politics”, *Asian Survey*, Vol.37, no.2, Feb,1997, p.188.

⁸⁷ John Badgley, “Myanmar in 1993: A Watershed Year”, *Strategic Digest*, Vol.34, No.9, Sept.1994, p.1258.

NC remained suspended and there seemed to be no immediate plans to gather the delegates again!

(v) The Release of Aung San Suu Kyi and After:

On 10 July, 1995, after almost six years under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi was released unconditionally. Some observers suggested that the SLORC had finally yielded to international pressure, while others indicated that the regime's increased confidence in consolidating its position was responsible for her release.⁸⁸

Initially after the released of Suu Kyi, the political situation remained calm. At that time, the junta had asked for her help for, "achieving peace and stability in the country."⁸⁹ However, the junta ignored her call for a dialogue. The political standoff, therefore, continues even after a decade of the traumatic events in 1988. The junta continues its repressive measures and restricted Suu Kyi from meeting her provincial members. Her sit-in protest on the Yagon-Panshein highway in July 1998 received world wide attention for its pro-democracy statement and put the junta on the defensive.

Inspite of the political standoff, the junta gradually improved its international image. One important milestone in Burmese history is the day when Myanmar became ASEAN member on July 1997, correctly

⁸⁸ Mary P. Callahan, "Burma in 1995: Looking Beyond the Release of Aung San Suu Kyi", *Asian Survey*, Vol.36, No.2, Feb.1996, p.159.

⁸⁹ As quoted in Sundararamna, no.80, p.1540.

termed as a “diplomatic coup”⁹⁰ by the Generals in Yangon. On 15 November of the same year, there was another internal change. The SLORC was replaced by a State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).⁹¹ In explaining the official reasons for this change, the Cabinet Minister Gen. Daniel Abel said, “the SLORC had completed its task of restoring law and order and now needs to take a further step forward to bring peace and development.”⁹² However, some critics have pointed out that the changes were made “to get rid of that reviled acronym SLORC, and remove several corrupt Ministers.”⁹³

At present, ‘Myanmar faces a political stalemate, an economic reversal of fortune and leadership gap.’⁹⁴ The juntas do not want Suu Kyi to be a part of any dialogue whereas the NLD insisted on her participation. Unless the junta dramatically alters its ways, it looks set to lose on the political and diplomatic fronts as well. Similarly, unless Suu Kyi and her NLD softened their demands there does not seem to be any meeting point; because the military junta in Myanmar, be it the RC or SLORC or the SPDC, will not tolerate any threat to its internal stability and political continuity. Finally, one can safely say that vagueness and uncertainty characterizes Myanmar’s 50 years of independence!

⁹⁰ *Asia Week*, August 28, 1998, p.18.

⁹¹ Roger Mitton, “Country in Limbo”, *Asia Week*, Feb.13, 1998, p.18.

⁹² As quoted in, *Ibid*, p.19.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴ Susan Berfield and Roger Mitton, “The General v/s the Lady”, *Asiaweek*, Nov.6, 1998, p.39.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The historical background of Burma and its political development presents an important study. Even before the arrival of British in Burma there were endless struggles among the indigenous groups inhabiting the area of modern Myanmar. The seeds of minority movements against imperialistic policy were sown right from the pre-British period. Importantly, the country had undergone three short periods of political unification prior to the British conquest: under the Pagan dynasty, Shan dynasty and Konbaung dynasty. These unification movements were significant in the contemporary Myanmar politics to the extent that all the Military Junta (whether it is RC or SLORC or SPDC) also claimed to try to prevent the country from disintegration!

Under the British colonial rule, Burma's political culture had been modified; but it has not changed. They introduced Western ideas and institutions which, though acted as unifying forces, never fostered national unity. The British rule, both directly and indirectly, stimulated sectional particularism, and fostered racial antagonism. It separated Burma proper from the Frontier area and it divided the frontier people from each other by leaving them under their own local chieftains. This is because the British were interested only in the geopolitical, geostrategic and economic unity.

Soon after independence in 1948, Aung San brought about another short spell of political unification in Myanmar. But it fell short

of “the Union of Myanmar.” Therefore, the first decade of Burmese independence was marked by internal rebellion and factional fights; finally ushering in the Military rule in Myanmar (since Ne Win’s 1962 *Coup De 'tat*). Ne Win, who ruled the country for about three decades, was succeeded by Gen. Sein Lwin in July 1988. The latter was succeeded by Dr.Maung Maung in August 1988, only to be overthrown by another *Coup de 'tat*, masterminded by Gen.Saw Maung on 18 September 1988.

During the first three decades of military rule (1962-1988), the government usurped the freedom of private enterprises and adhered to its ‘isolation policy.’ However, in the 1980’s and 1990’s, Myanmar was compelled to open itself to foreign investment and towards economic liberalization. This resulted in the junta’s relative success on the economic front, while dimming the prospects of opposition from NLD and other forces.

Today, the overall political picture shows that the junta is all set to perpetuate its rule in Myanmar, and it will crush any opposition to it; at the same time, still projecting itself to the world that it has to do so for the sake of national cohesion and reconciliation.

Both the physical and historical information of Myanmar that has been discussed in the first two chapters provided solid background to the study of various contemporary issues (ethnicity, insurgency, narcotics trade, etc.) that has besieged Myanmar today.

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CHAPTER III

CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL ISSUES

This chapter briefly deals with four issues that have currently received attention in Myanmar: ethnicity, insurgency, narcotic trade and the movement for restoration of democracy. The issues identified here do not conform to the traditional concepts of geographical analysis. However, they are pertinent to an effort to understand more fully the current international relations in the geopolitical setting of the country.

The factors that affect Myanmar's geopolitics had been changing from time to time. As discussed in the first chapter, the physical settings and the locational relationship are the first factors, followed by ethnicity, migration of various ethnic communities into Burma and their respective territorial distributions at different period of time. Insurgency and narcotic problems are related issues, which have wider implications across the border. Recently, it is the movement for restoration of democracy in Myanmar which received widespread international responses. Therefore, the movement for restoration of democracy forms a part of the geopolitical analysis, and its international responses, particularly the extent to which other democratic countries of the world supported or opposed it is in itself another issue of geopolitical importance.

3.1. ETHNICITY IN MYANMAR

i) Dimension of Ethnicity in Myanmar:

Myanmar is inhabited by multi-ethnic races with some 135 ethnic minorities¹. The major national races are Kachin, Kayin (Karen), Kayali (Karenni), Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine and Shan. Its remarkable ethnic diversity can be seen from the fact that the country is divided into seven Burman dominated divisions, and seven ethnic minority States of the Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine (Arakan) and Shan. These political divisions are not, however, an accurate reflection of the complex ethnic structure of Myanmar which has over 100 languages and whose Chin or Zomi ethnic group alone has 44 ethnic sub-groups within it.² The present day statistics on minority ethnic communities are contentious, making it impossible to analyze except on the basis of rough estimates of the composition of Burma's ethnic mosaic or its total population. For example, the total population of Myanmar, the official figure is 44.74 millions³ whereas others have estimated it at 47 millions⁴. The official ethnic breakdown, according to 1931 census, also differed from the estimates of ethnic minority leaders. Officially, Burmans consisted of 65% of the 14 million population; Karen – 9%; Shan – 7%; Chin and Mon – 2% each; Kachin,

¹ *Political Situation of Myanmar and its role in the Region*, 13th edition, (Yangon: GOM, Jan. 1991) p. 1.

² Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of Ethnicity*, (London: 1991) p. 30.

³ *Basic Facts on the Union of Myanmar*, (Yangon: Sept. 1996) p.3

⁴ *Burma: Country in Crisis*, (New York: 1998), p. 5.

Palaung-Wa and Chinese at just one percent each, and others constituted 7%. On the other hand, the minority leaders estimated that the population of Karen was 3-4.5 millions (over 32.40 %); Shan and Mon at 4 millions (17.85 %); Rohingyas at 2 millions (14%); Zo or Chins at 3 millions (21.42%); Kachin at 1.5 million (10.7%) and Palaung-Wa at 1-2 millions (7-14%).⁵ Recently, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has estimated the break up of major ethnic groups in Burma as: Burman (68%), Shan (9%), Karen (7%), Rohingya (4%), Mon (4%), Chin (3%), Indian (2%) and Others (5%).⁶

How contentious the population statistics may be, is clear from the fact that the Burmans are the largest single ethnic group comprising about two-thirds of the total population. The Karen forms the largest minority group followed by Shan, Kachin, Mon, Chin, Naga, Wa and Rohingya people.

(ii) Factors for Burma's Ethnic Diversity:

Before looking at the regional distribution of ethnic groups it will be appropriate to study the factors contributing to Myanmar's ethnic diversity. To begin with, historically, Burma has experienced a long history of migration and conflict among various ethnic groups along the frontiers, which were finally fixed only during the British imperial rule (1820-1948). The immigration of various ethnic communities during the course of its long history, together with governmental

⁵ Smith, no. 2, p.30.

⁶ As shown in, Burma: Country in Crisis, no. 4, p. 5.

policy, therefore, contributed to Burma's ethnic diversity. Secondly, it is partly because of the complex physical relief which provides natural routes of migration from central Asia. In the process of this migration, the earlier inhabitants were presumably either absorbed or pushed deeper into the remote mountains and forests. For example, the Pyu were absorbed by the Burmans.⁷ According to some English officials, the Arakanese tribes like Chaungtha, Khami and Mro, are the representatives of the race which peopled the country before the Burmese occupation.⁸ Today these tribes have been assimilated within the Burmese group, following the same customs, languages and religion! Whereas the minority ethnic groups continue to live in hostile hill areas, the Burmans occupy the Irrawaddy Valley which provides the seed of Myanmar's politics till today.

(iii) Regional Distribution of Ethnic Groups:

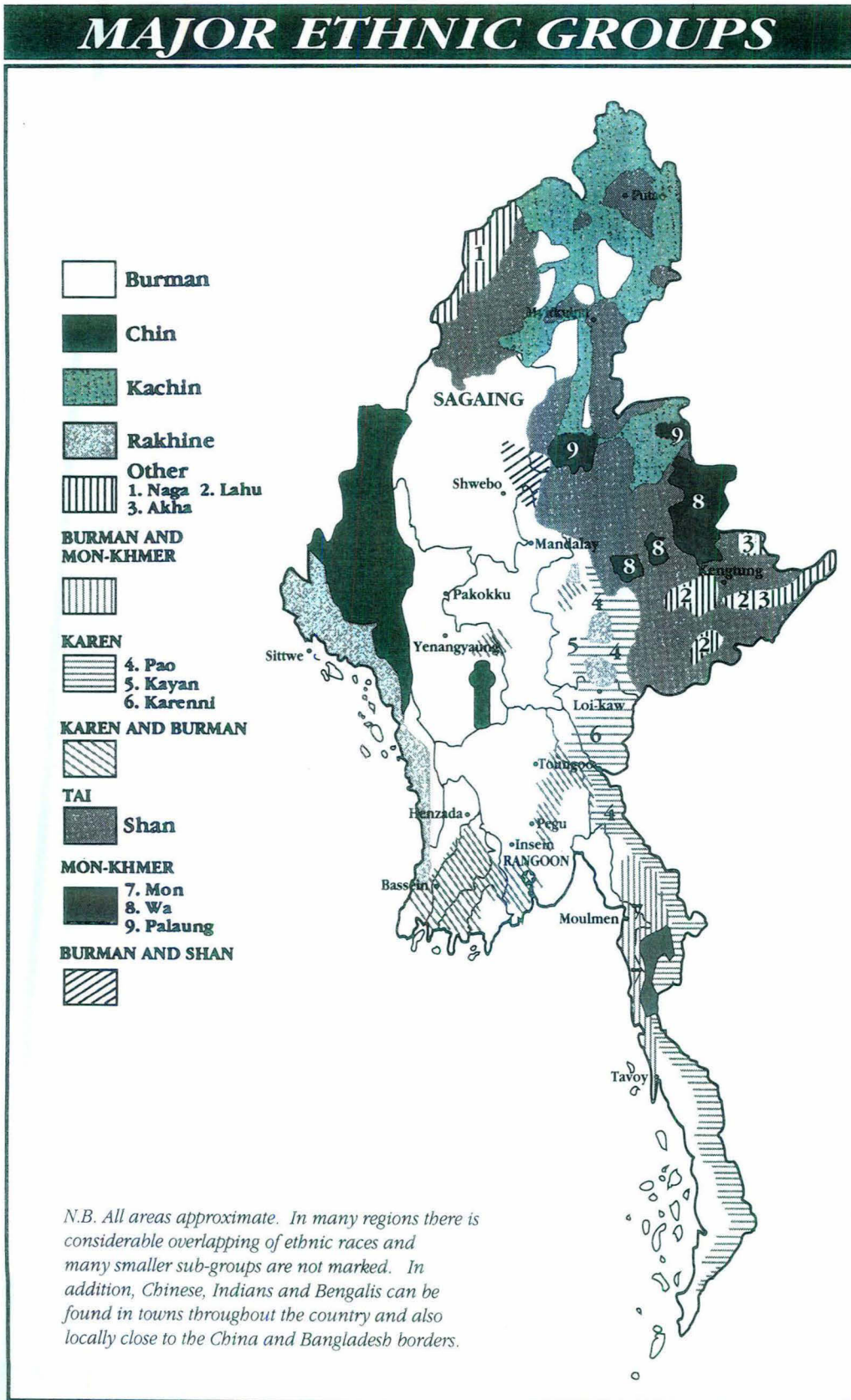
As mentioned earlier, the Burma proper is the province of the Burmans, but the peripheral areas specially the arc around the Irrawaddy and Sittang Valleys, including the coastal regions, were the homes of the minority groups.⁹ In these areas, the heterogeneous ethnic minorities lived in traditional way while submitting to the suzerainty of the

⁷ Smith, no.5, p.32.

⁸ Joseph Dautremer, *Burma under British Rule*, (London: 1913), p.79.

⁹ David, I.Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia*, (Colorado: 1987), p.6.

FIG 5



Source: Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, Zed Books, 1991

Burman Kings (government later) because of 'poor communications and lack of nationhood'¹⁰ between the Burman and the ethnic communities.

The following is a discussion on the major ethnic minorities and their regional distributions:-

(i) **Karen:** The Kayin or the HK 'yin,¹¹ whom the English call the Karen, is a very distinct race separated from the Burmans. For the most part of Burma they are scattered clans, and it is only in the ranges east of Toungoo that they are found in a national state (covering most of the present day Karen state). Karens are the most numerous minority group, numbering 1340,000 in 1931 and estimated at around 3-4 millions today.¹² They are a large and heterogeneous series of tribes including related people such as the Kayah (formerly called Karenni), the Pa-o, and the Padaung.

The Karenni or Red Karen is the most important sub-tribe; less assimilated than the related Black Karens, their culture has been less influenced by the Burmans.¹³ They occupy a highland region around the basin of the Upper Salween north of the Thai border. They are differentiated from the larger Black Karen by the color of their

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dautremer, no.8, p.98.

¹² Steinberg, no.10, p.9.

¹³ James Minahan, *Nations Without States*, (London: 1996), p.292.

cloaks.¹⁴ However, this difference does not prevent them from cooperating when threatened by invaders, especially the on-going threats posed by the Burmans. Historically, they are never part of the Burman Kingdom. An agreement signed on 21 June, 1875 recognised Kayah independence under British protection,¹⁵ and this became the basis of Kayah uprising till today.

(ii) **Shan:-** Of the minority groups, the Shan or Tai are the most important race, politically the most autonomous and organizationally the most sophisticated. They occupy the frontier territory of Upper Burma, the administrative districts which merge with China, Tibet and Assam. In fact, the basin of the Salween river would be the broad description of the Shan country. The present Shan state comprises about 20% of the total land area of the country, but they constitute only about 10% of its population.¹⁶ The Shan state is composed of the territory of thirty-three state, each ruled by a *Sawbwa*¹⁷ with varying degrees of power - real or titular autonomy from the central court.

(iii) **Kachin:** The Kachins are a Tibeto-Burman people whose territorial occupation is towards the north of the Shan state. The present-day Kachin state consists of land areas bordering Assam (India), Tibet and China. Hence, a large number of Kachins are found in China. According to Brang Seng, Asia's two million Kachin people

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.293.

¹⁶ Steinberg, no.12, p.8.

¹⁷ Sawbwa is a prince or Maharaja who exercise traditional authority until the military caretaker government stripped of their political power in 1959.

scattered across the India-China-Burma tri-border region, are landlocked, vastly outnumbered by Burmans, Indians and Chinese.¹⁸ This is because they are never unified politically, evolving two distinct political systems – the *Gumlao*, democratic and egalitarian, and the *gumsa*, aristocratic and stratified, based on a Shan model.¹⁹ Most Kachin are animist, but a significant number of them have been converted to Christianity by the British missionaries.

(iv) **Chin:** The Chin tribe occupies the Western mountains bordering India. They are also member of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family and have a sizable population on the Indian side of the border. The Chins speak some forty-four related languages and call themselves Zo (as the related Zomi/Mizo people are known in India).²⁰ In 1931, the Chin, including those residing in the Arakan Hill tracts and the Irrawaddy Division, totaled 344,000. The total Zomi/Chin population in both India and Burma may be around 2-4 millions. As Martin Smith have pointed out in his book, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, “that the colonial officials have accepted that the political separation of the Zos as Chins or Mizos between Burma and Assam (India) was artificial and that they should be re-united in a new ‘North-East Frontier Province’ to have a fair chance in the self-governing

¹⁸ Smith, no.7, p.331.

¹⁹ Steinberg, no.16, p.8.

²⁰ Ibid.

India of the future.²¹ But no action was taken by the two countries. At the time of Burmese independence, the Zomi demanded separate independence but 'finally settled for autonomy in a loose Union of Burma in 1948,²² but this too was dashed by the subsequent military government. However, the Burmese soldiers failed to penetrate the Zomi stronghold areas of Chin State, Pakokku district of Magwe division, Upper Chindwin district of Sagaing division, and Arakan. By mid- 1970's, the Zomi had united as a nation.²³ Today the Zomi leadership advocates independence within a federation of sovereign states that would ultimately include all the Zomis in Myanmar and India.

(v) **Arakanese:** The Arakan, officially called Rakhine, occupies a long, narrow plain on the Bay of Bengal in northwest Myanmar, separated from the rest of the country by the mountain range called the Arakan Yoma. The Arakanese are people of Bengali, Arab, and Burman ancestry.²⁴ Unlike Myanmar's Buddhist majority, the Arakanese and the related Rohingyas are predominantly Muslim, comprising up to 20% of the total Arakanese population. Historically, the Arakanese are not less important as the other minority groups. They had important and independent Kingdoms at Vesali (until 1018) and Myohaung (1433-1784). In fact, it was the Arakanese rebellion that resulted in the First

²¹ as quoted in Smith, no.18, p.46.

²² Minahan, no.13, p.640.

²³ Ibid, p.641.

²⁴ Ibid, p.31.

Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. The British failed to meet their promise of a separate administration in the wake of Burmese independence, and particularly after the military takeover in 1962, Arakanese nationalism became a potent force in the region.

(vi) **Mon:** The Mon or Talaung are emigrants from Dravidian India, who came to settle in Lower Burma long before the Christian era and there founded a Kingdom with Pegu as their capital.²⁵ Presently, they are mostly found in the district of Martaban and Amherst, extending to the Thailand frontier. Historically, the Mons are of special significance. The Burmans assimilated important elements of their culture from the Mon, particularly the Theravada Buddhism and a script. However, they are linguistically closer to the Khmer of Cambodia as they belong to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic groups.²⁶ In 1931, the Mons numbered 337,000. Today, the population is believed to be lower as there has been much intermarriage with the Burman community.

Apart from the major ethnic groups discussed above, there are a few well-known minority groups which are scattered among the others. Mention may be made of the Wa, Paluang, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Pao, Naga, etc. (see Figure IV).

²⁵ Dautremer, no.11, p.81.

²⁶ Steinberg, no.20, p.10.

Relation among the minority people and between the minorities and the Burmans have been varied and complex. Historically, the minority groups rarely lived in complete isolation and relationships were not static. However, except for the Mon, the minority social or political institutions had little impact on the Burmans. They were peripheral to Burman interests except that they occupied important geographical regions – the Kachins-dominated trade and military routes to China, or the Chin passes to Manipur.

In the end it may be pointed out that the ethnic boundaries rarely correspond to the regional or even national ones. In other words, Burma's frontiers and divisions have been loosely defined in ethnic terms. For example, ethnic minority people like the Zos or Chin (Zomi/Mizo), Nagas, Kachins, Shans, Lahus and Karens live in substantial numbers on both sides of the present borders, and in many areas constitute the majority.²⁷ Even today, ethnic Burman influence is minimal in most border regions. This prompted the growth of insurgency in the border areas of Myanmar (as discussed below).

3.2. INSURGENCY IN MYANMAR: ETHNIC ELEMENTS

Burma has the largest number of ethnic insurgencies besides experiencing one of the longest running communist insurgencies of any

²⁷ Martin Smith, "Burma's ethnic minorities", in Peter Carey (edit), *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society*, (New Delhi: 1997), p.97.

country in the world.²⁸ Even during the pre-colonial period ethnic groups often raided villages in the valleys and plains. The British had done little to reduce this historic tensions. Much of the remote minority-dominated areas lay uncharted and little known. It is largely in these areas that the insurgent movements have remained most firmly entrenched since independence,²⁹ and all attempts by the British or the majority Burmans to extend authority into the hills have been met with strong resistance. It was because of this fact that the interim government under U Nu failed and the subsequent military rulers faced the formidable task of political integration.

The contemporary insurgency problems in Burma is generated by lack of access to the political arena through politicization of ethnicity. 'As ethnicity becomes increasingly politicized, socio-economic gaps widen, power disparity rule, the competition for control of territory dominates, and the tendency toward mobilization of discontent increases'.³⁰ Some of the insurgent groups, therefore, seek recognition, access, or participation in the political system whereas other groups seek separation, autonomy or independence.

(i) A legacy of Tension: The current insurgency problems in Burma reflect the legacy of the past. The pre-colonial kingdoms of the central

²⁸ Ananda Rajah, "Ethnicity and Civil War in Burma", in Rotberg I Robert (ed.), *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic future*, (Washington: 1998), p. 135.

²⁹ Smith, No. 18, p.27.

³⁰ Curtis N. Thomson, "Political Stability and Minority groups in Burma", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 85, no.3, July 1995, p. 270.

Burma never exercised more than a nominal authority over the highlands.³¹ In contrast to the Burman, who lost their monarchy in 1885, the frontier peoples were able to maintain their traditional political and social hierarchies more or less intact.

It was only after their contact with the British that the minorities in Burma became a concern. During the colonial period many diverse groups were categorized under broad ethno-linguistic labels. The British delineated a region for administering the lowland (Burma Proper), and allowed retention of local power structures in the uplands (Frontier Areas). According to the Frontier people, 'the colonial state was as remote and largely irrelevant as the pre-colonial state had been, and no concept of nation existed'.³² During the Second World War, Burman political leaders initially favoured the Japanese while the minority groups generally were loyal to the British. This reflected a genuine desire for independence on the part of both the groups: 'Burmans struggling to be free of the British colonial yoke, and the ethnic minorities wishing to escape Burman domination'.³³ The minorities, therefore, greeted the advent of independence with more apprehension than hope. In 1947, Gen. Aung San convened a conference of minority leaders at Panglong. Kachins, Chin and Shan representatives agreed to work with the Interim Burmese government in

³¹ John Bray, 'Ethnic Minorities and the Future of Burma', *World Today*, vol. 48, No. 8-9, Aug/Sept., 1992, p. 145

³² R.H. Taylor, 'Perceptions of ethnicity in the Politics of Burma', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1982, p. 7.

³³ *Burma a Country in Crisis*, (New York: 1998) p.5.

return for promises of regional autonomy (clause 5 of the Agreement).³⁴ It also specifically gave the Shan and Karenni people the option to secede from the Union a decade after independence. Yet these constitutional guarantees were never fully respected. Almost immediately after independence, Burma was thrown into a series of brutal ethnic wars that continued with varying intensity to this day.

Since independence, dozens of insurgent groups have fought the Yangon regime to 'gain genuine autonomy for their home areas and to achieved a significant voice in the affairs of the country as a whole.'³⁵ During the past decades, twenty-four related separatist movements have included twelve main groups: The Shan, Lahu, Arakanese, Karen, Karenni, Naga, Mon, Palaung, Pa-O, Wa, Kachin and Chin.³⁶ (Also see Table V). The most crucial of these insurgencies are probably those in the Karen and Shan states. The Karen uprising is perhaps, the oldest ethnic revolt in the world. As early as the 1880s, the Karens called for the creation of a Karen state, separate from the rest of Burma.³⁷

As diverse rebel movements continued to rise and fall with bewildering frequency, in many parts of rural Burma insurgency has become a way of life.³⁸ The fact remains that for much of the last forty years, the land borders of Burma's seven ethnic minority states have

³⁴ Dr. Tualchin Neihzial, *Burma Frontier Areas committee of Enquiry Report*, (New Delhi: IIP, 1998) p.32.

³⁵ *Burma a Country in Crisis*, no. 33, p. 5

³⁶ Smith, no 21, p. 323-353.

³⁷ Josef Silverstein, 'Civil War and Rebellion in Burma', *Jr. of Southeast Asia Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, March 1990, p. 115.

³⁸ Smith, no, 36, p. 89.

been under the control of forces in armed opposition to the central government. However, factional fights and divisions among the insurgent groups hampered a united struggle.

TABLE IV

MINORITY REBEL GROUPS

1. Abi Group (Lahu)
2. Arakan Liberation Party (Rakhine Liberation Army)
3. Arakan National Liberation Party (Rakhine Muslim Liberation Party)
4. Chin National Army
5. Kachin National Union
6. Karen Liberation Army
7. Karenni National Progressive Party
8. Karenni State Nationalities Liberation Front
9. Kayah New Land Revolutionary Council
10. Lahu National Unity Party
11. Muslim Liberation Front
12. National Democratic Group (Umbrella Organization)
13. National Socialist council of Nagaland
14. New Mon State Party
15. Palaung Patriotic Army
16. Palaung State Liberation organization
17. Pa-O National Organization
18. Rohingya Patriotic front
19. Shan State Army
20. Shan State Nationalities Liberation Group
21. Shan State Volunteer Organization
22. Shan United Revolutionary Army
23. Wa National Army

Source: Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 323-353.

Various attempts were made to bring about opposition alliances – the formation of National Democratic Front (NDF) in 1976, Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) in 1988, and National Coalition government of the Union of Burma (NGGUB) in 1990. All these testify to the ethnic groups' desire for unity. For example, 'the DAB's vision for the

future is a Federal Union composed of National States based on *Self-determination and special Union Territories*'.³⁹

ii) **State Policy:** Meanwhile, the military Junta's policy towards insurgency remained pathetic! Ever since the 1947 constitution, it neglected the requirements and needs of the ethnic races while going to the opposite extremes. To cite one example, proclaiming Buddhism a state religion in Myanmar. Since the 1962 coup, the government consistently followed a *policy of unitarist assimilation*.⁴⁰ The 1947 constitution furthered these interests. Most importantly, the state had shown little tolerance towards any non-Burman based minority-groups' interests. The ethnic people were left out of the mainstream of the national life; denied democratic participation, forced to take Burmese names and learn Burmese, and suffer continuing human rights violations by the army.⁴¹ Today, the plight of these ethnic groups, particularly the Karenni, are no less severe than that of the Albanians of Kosovo.⁴² Since its 1988 coup, the SLORC (now, SPDC) has negotiated cease-fires with most armed ethnic opposition groups, and waged fierce assaults against other. By using this carrot and sticks tactics, the government targeted the Muslim Rohingyas, Karens and Mons whereas cease-fires were signed with Wa, Kokang, etc. The government has also set up a Central Committee for the Development

³⁹ As quoted in Bray, no. 31, p.146.

⁴⁰ Thomson, no. 32, p. 282

⁴¹ As reported in *Link*, Jan. 6, 1991, p. 17

⁴² Carl-Grundy-Warr, "The Karenni: A Troubled Borderland people and a Destroyed State", *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*, vol. 6. No. 3, Autumn, 1998, p. 79.

of the Border Areas and National Races in May 1989, but progress has been extremely slow. In 1995, the military captured Kawmoorah and Manerphaw, the headquarters of the KNU and NCGUB.⁴³ These events marked a turning point in the oldest civil war in the world (i.e. war with the Karen insurgents).

Though successful to some extent, what is most regrettable about the government's (Burma's) policy towards insurgency is the total absence of political dialogue and failure to acknowledge the scale and intensity of the problem.⁴⁴ Thus, integration of these groups into a society strictly based on Buddhism and the Burmese language is even more difficult. As long as the Junta pursued the policy of unitarist assimilation, the prospects for a peaceful, long-term solution to the insurgency problems are not optimistic. The basic minority insurgent groups dilemma will continue until the rebelling factions find a place and an identity in a pluralistic society.

3.3. NARCOTICS FACTOR AND GOVERNANCE:-

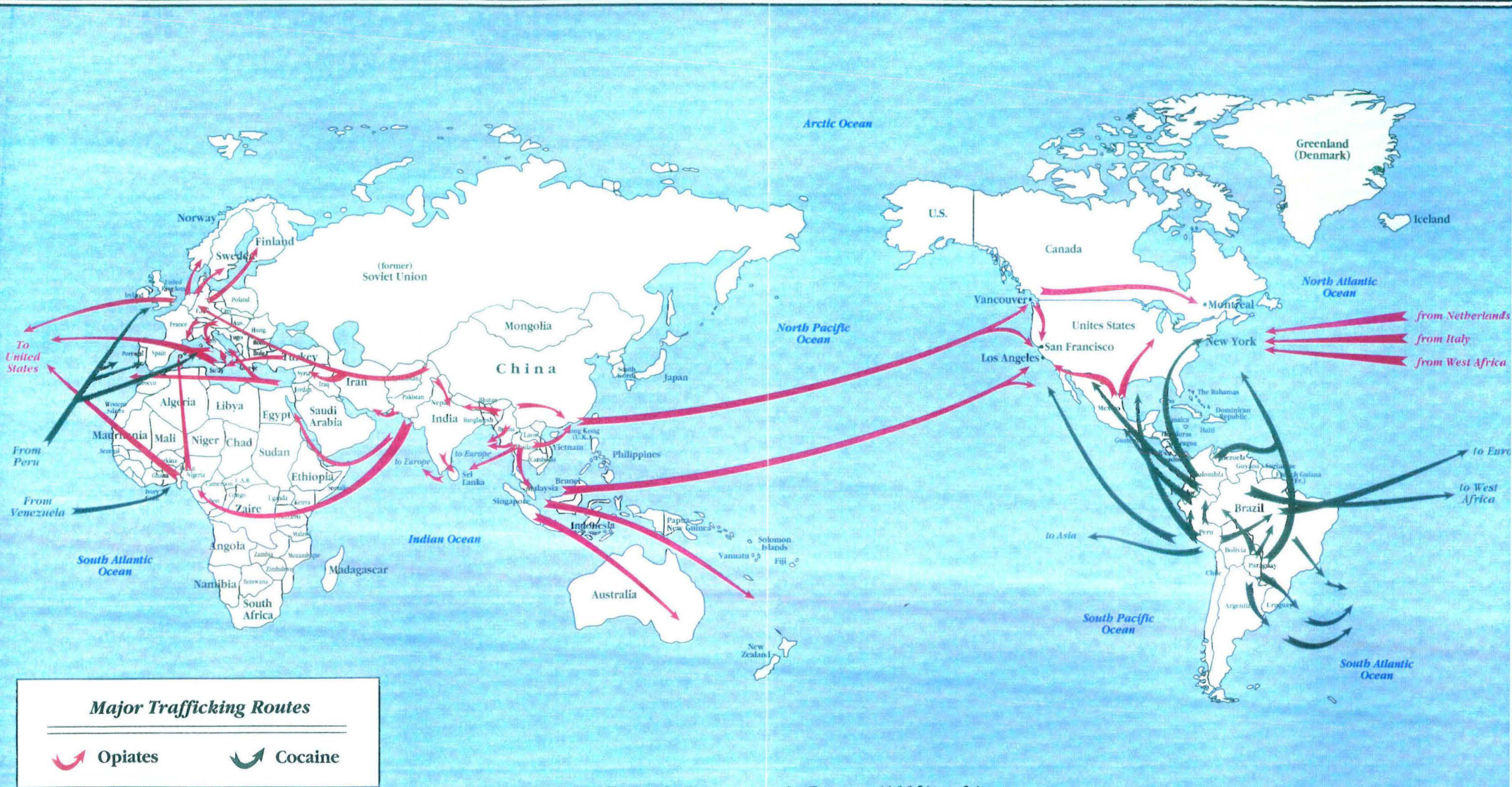
Besides the insurgency problem, another issue that draws the world's attention towards Myanmar today is the intractable narcotics problem. For many decades Myanmar has been a major producer of opium and its

⁴³ Thomson, no. 40, p. 269.

⁴⁴ Smith, no. 38, p. 324.

FIG 6

Major Opiate and Cocaine Trafficking Routes, 1989



Source: Towards Democracy in Burma, (1993), p.34.

deadly derivative, heroin.⁴⁵ Though the problems seemed to have escalated in the recent years, nevertheless, it has a long historical background, penetrating through the livelihood of ethnic minorities in the hill areas. Opium is a traditional crop in the eastern Shan and southeast region of the Kachin state. In these areas, the indigenous tribals cultivate opium as their sole source of income. Poppy is their main cash crop and covers 90% of the cultivated land surface.⁴⁶ Until the 1950's, it was mainly produced and used locally. Commercial production began with the rise of armed insurgent groups, particularly after the Koumintangs (KMT) were settled in Myanmar. The government (SLORC) alleged that the KMT had not only encouraged the growing of opium but was also responsible for the regaining of opium into heroin and creating heroin markets in *the Golden Triangle** areas.⁴⁷

Since the military coup of 1988, opium cultivation was dramatically expanded, from the traditional growing areas to the areas west of the Salween river.⁴⁸ According to the U.S State Department's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (1992) the area under

⁴⁵ Bertil Lintner, "Drugs and Economic Growth", in Robert I. Rotberg (ed), '*Burma: Prospects for a democratic future*', (Washington: 1998), p.165.

⁴⁶ Andre' and Louis Boucaud, "*Burma's Golden Triangle*", (Bangkok:1988), p.21.

* *Golden Triangle* is the name given to an area covering about 225,000 Sq.kms, comprising Shan states (Burma), north of Thailand, and high plateau of northern Laos. (Andre', p.19).

⁴⁷ Political Situation of Myanmar, no.1, p.6.

⁴⁸ Robert S. Gelbard, "Burma: The Booming Drug Trade", in Robert I. Rotberg, (ed.), '*Burma: Prospect for a Democratic Future*', (Washington: 1988), p.187.

opium cultivation increased from 116700 hectares in 1988 to 161012 hectares in 1991. Accordingly, heroin production had increased to 180 Mt. in 1991 from 68 (Mt.) only in 1988; exports of heroin increased from 66 Mt. to 175.36 Mt. in the corresponding years. Surprisingly, the percentage of seizure of heroin had decreased from 0.13% (1988) to 0.08% (1991) (see table VI). In 1996, Burma produced an estimated 2560 metric ton (Mt.); in the same year exports of opiate alone appeared to be worth as much as all legal exports, or 922 million dollars at the official exchange rate.⁴⁹ Some Burmese officials contend that the phenomenal rise in opium production is due to the favourable weather conditions. However, western and Asian narcotics officials have pointed out that, it is because of a combination of factors such as 'low political commitment to counter narcotics trade, widespread poverty and underdevelopment, low and declining education levels, corruption, and the lack of governmental accountability.'⁵⁰

TABLE V

**BURMA OPIUM CULTIVATION AND HEROIN PRODUCTION:
HEROIN EXPORT AND SEIZURES**

	1988	1991
1. Opium Cultivation	116,700	1611,012
2. Heroin Production	68	180
3. Heroin Exports	66	175.36
4. % of Heroin seizure to total production	0.13%	0.08%

Source: As quoted in *Burma: Towards Democracy in Burma*, (Washington: IAD, 1992), p.33.

⁴⁹ As quoted in, Bertil Lintner, "Narcopolitics in Burma", *Current History*, Vol.95, no.605, December 1996, p.435.

⁵⁰ Gelbard, no.48, p.185.

(i) **War Against Narcotics:** Myanmar had since 1974 co-operated with the U.S government in anti-narcotic operations. The U.S government has assisted Myanmar with 68 million dollar, from 1974 to 1988 mainly spent in training Myanmar officials. According to SLORC's statistics for 1997, various agencies captured 22,850 kgs of opium and 3400 kgs of heroin. Over 25000 acres of illicit poppy plantation was destroyed in the Shan state during November-December, 1997 alone.⁵¹ In January 1996, the Golden Triangle drug warlord Khun Sa and his Mong Tai Army (MTA) surrendered before the military junta. The SLORC touted this surrender as both a military and a counter-narcotics movement victory. However, an analysts has pointed out that Khun Sa's surrender has not significantly disrupted the flow of narcotics from Burma to the rest of the world. His associates continued to operate, and it appears that he had simply moulded his business activities according to the demands of Rangoon. In fact, the first priority of the junta is containment of any political oppositions and never narcotics control. The regime seemed to have sacrificed drug control objectives for the security and economic objectives! For example, in exchange for not fighting the government, former CPB military commanders were granted unofficial permission to engaged in any kind of trade, which inevitably meant developing the local drug

⁵¹ As quoted in, Swaran Singh, "Myanmar: The Strategic Hub of the 21st Century Asia", *USI Jr.*, Vol. CXXVIII, No.532. April-June, 1998, p.254.

industry.⁵² Similar cease-fire agreements was signed with, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the New Democratic Army (NDA), United Wa State Army (UWSA), Kachin Democratic Army (KDA), Pa-o National Army (PNA), Kayan Home Guards (KHG) and several other insurgent groups. According to the terms of the agreements, these groups were not only allowed to engage in various kinds of business, but were also to retain their arms and exercise control over their respective areas.⁵³ Therefore, in many cease-fire areas, opium-production has risen sharply, promoting a massive expansion of Burma's heroin production.

Inspite of its limited success, it may be noted that Myanmar has signed bilateral narcotic drug cooperation agreements with Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam in 1997, under the auspices of the UN Drug Control Programme. These are aimed at providing alternative development projects or substitution of poppy crop by other crops, and monitoring its cultivation.⁵⁴ In June 1999, India and Myanmar have a high-level joint narcotic drug control meeting,⁵⁵ and both decided to check trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substance including other chemicals used in refining drugs on the Myanmar-India border. At this stage, it is still pre-mature to comment on the success in implementation of this agreements, but past experiences show that

⁵² Lintner, no.45, p.166.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ronald D. Renard, *The Burmese Connection: Illegal Drug and the Making of the Golden Triangle*, (London: 1996), p.85.

⁵⁵ *Hindustan Times*, Saturday June 12, 1999, p.14.

Burmese authorities lack the resources, ability or the will to control narcotics. As a result, money laundering increases, resulting in a widespread impact on the Burmese economy.

(ii) Narcotics Trade: Myanmar today is the source of an estimated 90 percent of the raw opium cultivated in Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle region⁵⁶ and is the main refining centre for illicit heroin and morphine. Pure and refined heroin were exported to western countries and its Asian neighbours. In June 1996, nearly two-thirds of the heroin seized in America's largest city was produced in Myanmar.⁵⁷

The CPB mutiny in 1989, and the subsequent cease-fire with the government in Rangoon led to the opening of new trading routes across the border into Yunnan Province, and on to ports along the coast of southern China. Today China has more addicts than most countries in the region.⁵⁸ Another trading route is along the Indian border. In this area drug trade is "free" with many private traffickers and peddlers.⁵⁹ In the early 1992, a string of six new heroin refineries was identified along the Chindwin river. Consequently, drug addicts have become rife in the north eastern Indian states, particularly in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. Along with it has come an explosion of AIDS and corruption.

⁵⁶ Smith, no.27, p.113.

⁵⁷ Burma: A Country in Crisis, no.35, p.7.

⁵⁸ Lintner, no.52, p.172.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Narcotics from Myanmar also pass through Laos en route to Danang and other seaports from which they are smuggled to North America and Australia. Vietnam is becoming an important transit point for destinations such as France, Germany and East Europe. In Cambodia, drugs pass through Khmer Rouge as well as government controlled areas. Here, the island of Koh Kong has emerged as a major drug trafficking centre. Taiwan and Thailand are also lucrative markets for Golden Triangle heroin. Thus, Burma's expanding opium cultivation has tragic effects on the U.S and the South & Southeast Asian countries.

(iii) Narcotics and Myanmar's Economy:

Given the magnitude of Burma's drug production and the rapid expansion of markets in the West and Asia, it can be said that narcotics have become the country's single most important export, what Bertil Lintner coined as 'the country's growth industry.'⁶⁰

Hard evidence to show that the junta makes huge profits from heroin exports is not publicly available. But analysts believed that earnings from heroin smuggling may exceed those receipts from all of Myanmar's legal exports, and are in effect criminalizing much of Myanmar's economy. Immense heroin profits are allegedly laundered through Myanmar's weak banking-system. The post - 1989 developments, particularly, the signing of cease-fires with drug lords,

⁶⁰ Lintner, no.49, p.435.

have enabled the traffickers to invest in hotels and other businesses. The Burmese government admit that it has awarded an official contract to Khun Sa, the drug warlord, to run buses between major cities in Myanmar.⁶¹ According to private sources Khun Sa and his organizations have been allowed to mine rubies and sapphires in the Mogok area. The U.S State Department reports pointed out that the former CPB drug warlords like Lin Mingxian, Peng Tinsheng, Pao Yochang, Li Ziru, etc. have prospered as their businesses are now considered part of the 'legal fold.'⁶² The Burmese economy, therefore, has become vulnerable to the growing influence of the traffickers, who have gained enough say over investments and commercial activities.

Clearly, heavy reliance on drug money can have a distorting effect on the economy. If this trend continues, Myanmar would join the likes of Colombia, where drug trafficking reaches the highest political levels distorting economic incentives. Within the next few years, the government may have to rely on drug traffickers for additional capital investment to finance Burma's economic development.

3.4. CIVILIAN RULE: THE MOVEMENT FOR RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR

The movement for restoration of democracy in Myanmar is what the NLD leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, called 'Burma's second struggle

⁶¹ Lintner, no.59, p.166.

⁶² Ibid, p.178.

for independence.’⁶³ Today, the movement has become one of the burning geopolitical issues because international interest has begun to gain momentum, with both Asian and Western governments struggling to redefine their long-standing policies towards Myanmar. Having discussed the political developments of Myanmar in chapter 2, the focus in this section will be mainly on the international response to the movement.

Democracy has been a living force in Burma. The Burmese people participated in no less than five free elections between 1935 and January 1948, and another four in the post-independence period up to the military coup of March 1962.⁶⁴ Myanmar became independent in 1948 with a democratic form of government, but her democratic experience was short lived as the military took over in 1962. The military rule since then has left Myanmar’s economy in shambles. Therefore, in early 1988, a popular movement for the restoration of democracy began. Thousands of people from all walks of life participated in the movement; according to some estimates as many as 10,000 people lost their lives in 1988 while fighting against military oppression.⁶⁵ The presence of Suu Kyi provided impetus to the movement. She, along with Tin U and Aung Gyi formed the National

⁶³ Smith, no.45, p.421.

⁶⁴ Peter Carey, ‘From Burma to Myanmar: Military Rule and the Struggle for Democracy’, *Conflict Studies*, 304, Nov/Dec., 1997, p.8.

⁶⁵ *Burma Action Group: An Alternative Guide*, (London: March 1996), p.3.

League for Democracy (NLD) on 24th September 1988. The Party, under the leadership of Suu Kyi, continues to lead the movement till today. Recently, on Burma Women's Day, Suu Kyi exhorted the women of Burma to fight for democracy and human rights.⁶⁶

In 1988, when thousands of demonstrators were killed, international responses came quickly. Many foreign missions in Rangoon protested and condemned the violence. They suspended their assistance programmes including the three major aid donors: Japan, West Germany and the United States.⁶⁷ Protest notes were issued by Australia, most members of the European Union, Sweden and even the former Soviet Union. Foreign embassies withdrew all non-essential personnel and dependents, because Burma seemed to be on the brink of chaos. The World Bank stopped negotiations on new projects. On September 7, 1988 the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution unanimously calling for democracy in Burma, and later cut off its modest assistance, including its anti-narcotics programmes. At that point, when Burma was well on its path to be internationally isolated, China quickly moved in to fill the vacuum; opening its borders with Burma for trade, extending loans to Rangoon, and 'selling massive quantities of arms and ammunition to Burmese government.'⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Hindustan Times*, June 20, 1999, p.10.

⁶⁷ Burma Watcher, 'Burma in 1988: There came a Whirlwind', *Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 2, Feb, 1988, p. 175.

⁶⁸ David I. Steinberg, "Crisis in Burma", *Current history*, vol. 88, 1989, p. 187.

This move by China have wide implications; leading to a shift in regional security environment (details in chapter IV).

On the other hand, the military Junta discarded the Socialist state ideology and introduced fairly liberal foreign investment laws. The SLORC also conducted multi-party election in 1990, which was overwhelmingly won by NLD. The Junta have constantly refused to hand over power to the NLD. According to the government, power will be transferred to a civilian government after a constitution, acceptable to all the people of Myanmar, had been drawn up and approved.⁶⁹ They regard themselves not as a political party but as a transitional government shouldering the responsibility of discarding the Socialist One-Party-System practicing a Socialist Economy, paving the way for a Multi-Party Democracy, and introducing a Market-Oriented Economy.⁷⁰ On the other hand, Suu Kyi and other opposition group's message is that democratic reforms must be effected in order to establish democracy in Myanmar. The contradictions continued and the ruling Junta has all along adopted several measures to further delay the transfer of power to civilian hands (i.e. the democratically elected representatives).

In order to lessen international pressures, the SLORC further opened up the Burmese economy and ushered in a market-oriented system. The NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released in 1995.

⁶⁹ Farzana Hossein, "Authoritarianism and Prospect For Democracy in Myanmar", *BISS Jr.*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, p.63.

⁷⁰ Political Situation of Myanmar, no. 47, p. 15..

Following these new developments, the responses that Myanmar received from the foreign powers have changed. The most interesting reaction came from U.S.A., Japan, the ASEAN countries, and China.

Immediately after the May 1990 election, the White House asked the military government to honour its promise by transferring power to the newly elected People's Assembly. In the post-cold war period the Americans (USA) have adopted a strategy of three levers towards Burma: an international arms embargo; preventing new bilateral assistance; and mobilising concerted action for resolution in the UN fora.⁷¹ These leverages had little impact because, since the opening up of the economy, more foreign investments have flowed in from the non-Western sources. The policy was, therefore, reviewed in 1994, as a result of which 'isolating Myanmar' acquired importance. In 1996, President Bill Clinton imposed a visa ban on the members of SLORC, their family members, and others who are against transition to democracy in Burma.⁷² The country also prohibited all American investments in Myanmar. The European Union followed suit; but all these restrictions did not move the SLORC as only 5% of its trade were with US and the EU.

Japan is Myanmar's main aid donor from the mid 1950. Though it cut all aids, after 1988 killings, they soon changed this policy in

⁷¹ I.P. Khosla, "Myanmar: Cohesion and Liberalism". *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 21, No. 9, Feb 1998, pp.1658.

⁷² Lintner, no. 60, p. 433.

1991 by recognizing the SLORC and by partially restoring financial assistances. This is because of economic considerations and internal pressures. At the same time, it also urged the Junta to hand over power to the NLD. Japan's leadership believes that by being friendly with the SLORC will motivate it to reduce its human rights abuse and will gradually help in bringing about democracy.

In principle, all ASEAN countries want to see the healthy development of democracy in Burma. They officially believe that a policy of "Constructive Engagement" would be more effective than putting economic pressures, to achieve the desired goal. All the ASEAN countries continue trading with Myanmar. They went one step further by admitting Myanmar as its seventh member in 1997. In fact, all these happened not because they are against restoration of democracy in Myanmar but to counter the economic-strategic influences of China over Yangoon. India is equally disturbed by Beijing's arming of Myanmar. Thus, New Delhi, though highly critical of the SLORC, is in favour of the pro-democracy movement. At the same time, she has toned down her critical stance and switched over to a two-pronged strategy; economic engagements and support for democracy in Myanmar.⁷³

China is, by far, the most important trading partner of Myanmar. China has continued to extend support to the military junta, and

⁷³ Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed, "Myanmar: Road to Democracy or East Asian Model?", *BISS Journal*, vol17, no. 1, Jan. 1996, p. 141.

Myanmar in turn, depends on China for its economic as well as military developments. Today, China controls Burma economically, militarily and politically.⁷⁴

It is because of these facts (as discussed above) that western policy of economic sanctions and international isolation that had been successfully employed in the case of South Africa will not work in the same way in Burma. International economic pressure can have an effect if astutely applied, particularly by ASEAN countries. Though not successful to the level it should have been, pressure on the military junta – both from within and without – is still the only way forward.

Nevertheless, the movement for restoration of democracy in Myanmar has gained extensive international responses. The NLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, the Thorolf Raflto Memorial Prize for human rights and the EC Parliament's 1991 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. The Indian government also conferred the Jawaharlal Nehru Peace Prize on her for her non-violent struggle for restoration of democracy in Burma. The military regime may continue for some time; but it is one's hope that, with the recent changes in Indonesia, the winds of change will sweep through South East Asia, particularly Myanmar, and effect a transformation in the political regime.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

3.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS:-

The contemporary geopolitical issues discussed above are inter-related, and their solutions needed combined efforts of forces from within and without Myanmar. While no one can expect that the answers to these problems will be easy, the evidence from all these grave issues sends a simple message: that no real progress will be made until a peaceful settlement is brought about - both to the current state of armed conflict in the countryside, and to the political deadlock between the military junta and the NLD. For the ethnic minorities, this means the full restoration of the economic, social, cultural and political rights which were promised by the 1947 Panglong Agreement. The enormous number of cease-fires that were signed between the government and the insurgent groups has not addressed these fundamental political and constitutional issues. Thus, the narcotics problem is bound to increase with its related problems like AIDS and drug addicts. Today, the people of Myanmar, irrespective of their ethnic divergences, must unite to restore democracy; a federal democracy which alone will address the problems which the country is facing today. A transition to democratic rule is the means, not an end, to the achievement of a better future for all those who live within the contemporary borders of Burma!

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CHAPTER IV

GEOSTRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF MYANMAR

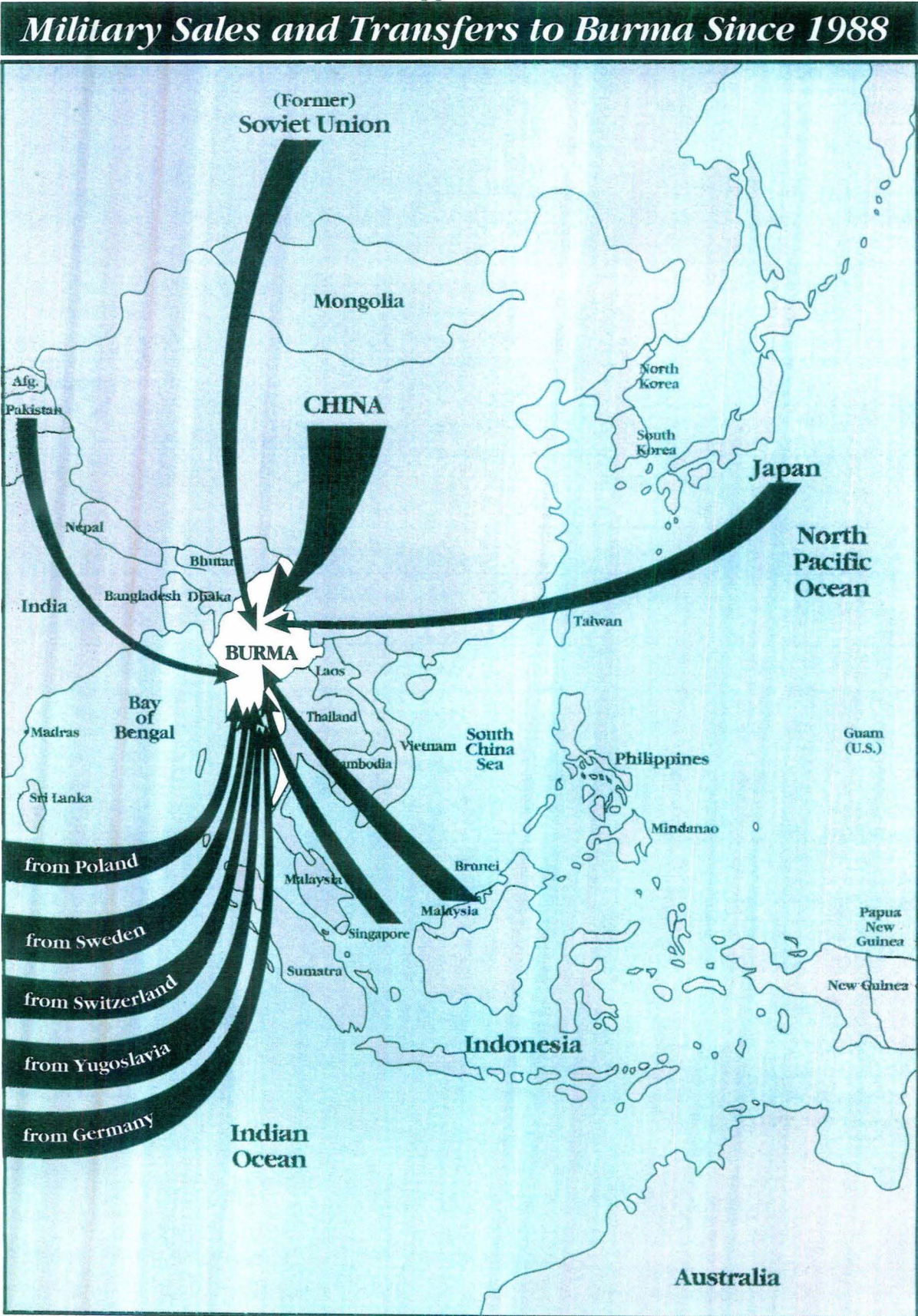
4.1 GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF MYANMAR:-

Burma (Myanmar) occupies a critical geostrategic position. It lies at the juncture of three regions within Asia – East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. It is located in a region which has experienced tremendous economic growth over the last two decades. Traditionally, it is the ‘*buffer state*’ between the two regional giants – China and India, with which it shares long and permeable borders populated by rebellious ethnic groups and independent armies. In fact, its history has been shaped by the uneasy relationship between India and China.

For centuries Burma had offered China a trade outlet on the Indian Ocean.¹ It also worked as a springboard for the spread of Indian culture among East Asian nations in ancient times. Myanmar’s strategic importance as a centre of competition can be seen during the 19th century A.D as well. During this period, the British explored traditional routes to open the potentially rich market of Yunnan, thus competing with the French in the Red River Valley of Vietnam who were intent on dominating the same market through construction of railroad to Kunming. Today China is doing exactly the reverse by

¹ Swaran Singh, “Myanmar: ‘The Strategic Hub’ of the 21st Century Asia”, *Journal of the USII*, Vol.CXXVIII, No.532, April-June, 1998, p.245.

FIG 7



Source: Towards Democracy in Burma (1993), p.57.

trying to open its market to the Southeast Asian countries, and to the Indian Ocean via Burma. Myanmar's global significance in modern times was first evidenced during the Second World War when both the Axis and the Allied powers used Myanmar to consolidate or defend their positions in the Southern Asian region and to expand into the larger Indian Ocean region. For example, the Japanese completed their blockade of China after successfully closing the Burma Road. Conversely, this same Japanese control over Myanmar threatened Britain's control of her great empire in India. Meanwhile, Myanmar provided the Allies in India with their only land route to the Nationalist Chinese regime in Changking.²

Myanmar's strategic significance was not debated in public as long as it remained part of the British Indian Empire. However, soon after her independence in 1948, the country was besieged with internal political instability, disunity and international challenges like the Cold War. Under such circumstances, Myanmar adopted neutralism and non-alignment as the cornerstone of her foreign policy.³ This policy was put to test on several occasions. During America's anti-Communist struggle of the 1950's, Myanmar was used as a sanctuary for the Koumintang forces fighting against Mao's Communists in northern Myanmar. Later, the old British formula of growing opium was put to

² Andrew Selth, "Burma and the Strategic Competition between China and India", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.19, No.2 (June 1996), p.213.

³ Nilufar Choudhury, "Burma's Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change", *BISS Journal*, Vol.7, No.2, April 1986, p.178.

use against the Chinese for a second time. China, on its part, tried to exert her leadership in Southeast Asian politics to offset the Soviet influence by enlisting Burma as an important ally. During this period, Myanmar was considered by the Western democracies to be an '*Asian Domino*', of as much value as Thailand or Vietnam.⁴

Burma's geostrategic importance declined after the 1962 Military Coup, when the coup leaders withdrew into self-imposed isolation. During the 26 years of military rule (1962-1988), Burma's inward-looking posture marked its relations with all the other countries. It strictly tried to be neutral to the point of isolating itself,⁵ a policy of 'autarkic' isolation.⁶ For nearly all of this period, Burma has been of little strategic or foreign policy interest to the United States and other Western countries. Because of its geographic remoteness and self-imposed isolation, Burma was geopolitically irrelevant to them.

In 1988, following the Military coup, Myanmar once again emerged as an important factor in the regional security calculations of most Asian powers. In particular, changes in Burma's relationship with China and India, and the resulting shift in the regional power balance, gave rise to far-reaching implications.

The SLORC, in contrast to its predecessors, abandoned

⁴ Singh, no.1, p.246.

⁵ Choudhary, no.3, p.182.

⁶ Marvin C.Ott, "*From Isolation to Relevance*", in Robert I Rotberg, ed. "*Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*", (Washington: 1998), p.69.

Myanmar's autarkic socialist economic policies and its traditional neutrality in international affairs.⁷ The Military junta adopted "open-door" policy and undertook economic reforms. In doing so, the military regime allowed China unprecedented access and influence. This in turn has led to a major shift in power relationship in the region and a much greater political and economic interest in Burma by other countries. Today, Burma is no longer a buffer state between India and China, but a "*Chinese Satellite*" or a "*Client state*"⁸ or what Munro would call China's '*de-facto military and diplomatic ally*.'⁹

(i) Geo-Economic importance of Myanmar:-

Before discussing the regional security environment, it is important to first study the economic-strategic importance of Myanmar. This is because in most of the cases, economic factors are as equally important as political or security factors in determining one's foreign policy, particularly in the fast developing region of Southeast Asia.

As noted earlier, Burma is richly endowed with vast natural and human resources, including one of the largest forest reserves in Asia and soils that once produced a considerable proportion of the world's

⁷ Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmad, "Myanmar: Politics, Economy and Foreign Relations", *BIISS Journal*, Vol.18, No.2, 1997, p.139.

⁸ P.Stobdan, "China's Forays into Burma: Implication for India", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.16, No.1, April 1993, p.23.

⁹ R.H.Munro, "China's Waxing Spheres of Influence", *Orbis*, Vol.38, No.4, (Fall 1994), p.590.

rice. Little of its potential wealth has been exploited. A nonaligned, neutral, democratic, and prosperous Burma will certainly be a stabilizing factor in Asia. However, Burma today cuts a sorry figure. It is one of the least developed country in the world. Knowing the sorry state of Myanmar's economy, her neighboring countries (particularly China) are trying to exploit the situation to the maximum possible limit. Chinese officials describe Burma as a potentially lucrative outlet to the Indian Ocean for Chinese trade. For China, the Burma market is a key to the economic development of its southwest region, i.e., Yunnan Province. Burma is also an important source of raw materials.

China has always aspired to become a superpower in the Asia-Pacific region by the 21st century. Therefore, the Chinese have visualized Myanmar as their second gateway into the Indian Ocean (apart from South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca)¹⁰ Commenting on the significance of these sea outlets, J. Mohan Malik remarks, "Given the geostrategic significance of Spratly Islands for seashore defense, interdiction, and surveillance, whoever dominates the Malacca Straits and South China Sea will determine the destiny of the whole region."¹¹ And that is exactly what China is trying to do today. In order to achieve this goal, China is developing a blue-water navy along

¹⁰ Swaran Singh, "Myanmar: China's Gateway to the Indian Ocean", *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, Vol.3, No.1, November 1995, p.80.

¹¹ J.Mohan Malik, "Burma's Role in Regional Security – Pawn³ or Pivot?", in Robert I Rotberg, ed., *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, (Washington: 1998), p.117.

the Salween river and Irrawaddy River and a naval base on Hainggyi Island at the mouth of the Bassein river and a major surveillance base on the CoCo Island.¹² This means that the Sea lanes from East Asia to the Gulf, together with the countries along that path like Burma are assuming increasing strategic importance.

Another aspect of Myanmar's economic-strategic importance can be seen from the fact that various rail-road highways, waterways, gas and oil pipelines that runs across the region have their axis in Myanmar. A 669 km. gas pipeline was constructed to transport natural gas from Yadana gas fields (Myanmar) to Ratchaburi (near Bangkok). This has generated prosperity in southern Myanmar. The 4800 kms long Lancang-Mekong River Project, called '*Oriental Danube*', flows through China, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. It has led to an international water transport boom. In 1989, Myanmar also became a party to the Asian Highway Project.

The geo-economic and geo-strategic importance of Myanmar that has been discussed above will emphasise its role as a "*strategic hub*" in the 21st century. Considering the unpredictability of the situations in Myanmar, it is extremely difficult to predict what will be the role of Myanmar in the future regional security. The following discussion is an attempt to highlight and analyse the various aspects of threat perceptions in Myanmar as well as in the region.

¹² Swaran Singh, "The Sinicization of Myanmar and its Implications for India", *Issues and Studies*, Vol.33, No.1 (January 1997), p.129.

4.2 DIFFERING THREAT PERCEPTIONS:-

i) **Within Myanmar:-** Within a year of Myanmar's independence, the unity and resolve of the military were severely tested when civil war broke out with the armed revolt of the Burma Communist Party (BCP) on 29 March, 1948. This was followed by the ethnic and minority uprisings. The 'opium-war' and the narcotics trade that blossomed henceforth added a new dimension to the security problems confronting the tatmadaw.¹³ In brief, during the 26 years of military rule (1962-1988), Burma's threat perception in relation to defence and military security was overwhelmingly focussed on the problem of insurgency with its attendant prospects of inviting foreign intervention.

After the 1988 popular uprising and subsequent military coup, the primary threat was based on the fear that it might lose its monopoly on political power. The Military Junta, therefore, recognised that the pro-democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi is the most powerful obstacle to its consolidation of power.

Today, there are a number of developments which could disrupt the SLORC. The most worrying prospect would be the possibility of a major split in the armed forces, its sole power base and the instrument through which it governs.¹⁴ In 1997, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, (SLORC

¹³ Tin Maung Maung Than, "Burma's National Security and Defence Posture", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.11, No.1, June 1989, p.41.

¹⁴ Andrew Selth, "The Armed Forces and Military Rule in Burma", in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, (Washington: 1998), p.97.

Secretary – I and head of Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI) faced a strong challenge from within the SLORC. The two prominent challengers are General Maung Aye and Lt. Gen. Tin Oo. In May 1997, General Maung Aye threatened to form his own military intelligence unit to counter that of Khin Nyunt.¹⁵

There have also been reports of suspicion and rivalry between the graduates of Myanmar's prestigious Defence Service Academy (DSA) at Maymyo and the Officers Training School (OTS) at Hmawbi. After the discovery of a plot by some DSA graduates to overthrow Ne Win in 1976, these suspicions increased, and marked discrimination resulted in appointments to senior position. Such divisions constitute a potentially explosive problem in Myanmar where the unity of the army is deemed essential for political control.

In recent years, the nature of the armed forces is changing, but at present the forces binding them together are stronger than those which might cause serious division. Barring unforeseen developments, Burma's future seems to be one of increasing military strength and a tighter exercise of political power by the armed forces.

ii). **Immediate Neighbours:-** None of Burma's immediate neighbours pose a security threat to the country, except that it suffers from centrifugal tendencies generated by its own ethnic groups,¹⁶ who have

¹⁵ Peter Carey, "From Burma to Myanmar: Military Rule and the Struggle for Democracy", *Conflict Analysis*, 304, Nov/Dec, 1997, p.29.

¹⁶ Malik, no.11, p.110.

obtained limited support from China and Thailand in the past. Her relationship with the neighbouring countries took a dramatic turn ever since the juntas's policy change in 1988. All of Burma's neighbours have welcomed the SLORC's free-market 'open-door' economic policy, but they are equally concerned with the economic and military dominance of China over Yangon. Today, the key external actors of Myanmar are China, India, ASEAN and Japan. Of all, her relationship with the two regional giants: India and China are at the forefront because it determines the regional security environment.

a) *China's influence*: Relations between China and Burma have never been closer than they are today. Earlier, this relationship was plagued by problems such as the border dispute, illegal immigration and smuggling.¹⁷ During the three decades of Burma's independence, China's influence was sharply limited to its substantial, provocative, and futile support for a Burmese Communist Part (BCP) insurgency against the government. But with Beijing's renunciation of its BCP policy and Rangoon's international isolation after the bloody repression of democracy activities in 1988, the picture changed dramatically. Since then, the two pariah countries became strategic partners out of necessity. The new ideological affinity (i.e., authoritarianism and free-market economy) provided further impetus to partnership between the two countries. At present, China views Burma as a *Client State* both for southward expansion and to counteract the

¹⁷ Bertil Tintner, "*Burma and its neighbours*", (New Delhi: 1992), p.9.

moves of its rival powers. In fact, strategic alliances with Pakistan in the southwest and Burma in the southeast constitute the lynchpin of Beijing's strategy.¹⁸ In the political front, China has given the much-needed political and diplomatic shields to Myanmar in the face of her international isolation. Beijing also helped the ruling junta settle its scores with some of the ethnic insurgent groups in Myanmar's northeast.

China was responsible for providing generous help towards strengthening and modernising SLORC's armed forces and other defence infrastructure and facilities like training, expertise, etc. This military co-operation took a concrete shape in 1989. According to the deals signed in 1990 and 1999, China has supplied Myanmar weapons worth 1.8 billion dollars.¹⁹

Economic relations between China and Burma deepened following the signing of a cross-border trade agreement in August 1988. Since then, trade between the two countries has boomed, reaching an estimated 1.5 billion dollars per year.²⁰ While Burma supplies the much needed raw materials, inexpensive Chinese goods flood Burmese consumer markets. Today, Mandalay is described as a predominantly Chinese city dominated by Chinese money. Thus, China has successfully opened a lucrative trade outlet to the Indian Ocean. This is a reflection of China's slow transformation from a continental

¹⁸ Malik, no.16, p.129.

¹⁹ Singh, no.2, p.82.

²⁰ Selth, no.2, p.214.

power into a maritime power as 80% of the country's external trade is transported by sea.²¹

b) *The Indian Connection*:- India's links with Myanmar date back to the ancient times. Burma was perhaps the first among the Southeast Asian countries to feel the impact of the Indian culture and civilisation. However, relations between India and Burma was never satisfactory. During colonial period, the Britishers used Indian troops to conquer the Burmese. They also encouraged migration to Burma, gradually dominating the Burmese economy and bureaucracy. This resulted in a backlash against the Indian community when Burma became independent in 1948.

Following their independence, relations between the two countries generally remained friendly. The Indo-Burmese land border (above 1000 miles) was demarcated in December 1967 in the wake of the Sino-Indian border dispute. The maritime boundary was delineated in March 1984.²² Throughout the length of the Indo-Burmese border, there were other concerns as well. Since the inhabitants of the borderland area have the same culture and ethnic affinity, insurgents from one side of the border found safe sanctuaries among their counterparts in the other side. The Nagas and 'Zomis' (Chin in Burma and 'Mizo' in India) present good examples. Along with insurgency,

²¹ Malik, no.18, p.115.

²² R.G.Sawhney, "Burma", in U.S. Bajpai (ed), *India and its Neighbourhood*, (New Delhi: 1986), p.352.

there exists the problem of black marketing, illegal trades, narcotics, drugs, AIDS, drug addicts, etc. which are of serious concerns for both the countries.

From the early 1990s, New Delhi's good neighbourly ties began to be overshadowed by the 'China factor' i.e. Beijing's influence over Yangon. Presently, India has realised, along with the rest of the world, Myanmar's strategic profile in the 21st century Asia. Therefore, India has switched over from her earlier stance of isolating Burma to 'constructive engagement' with Rangoon. In pursuance of her 'Look-East policy', India opened border trade centres at Moreh (Manipur) in 1995. The Indo-Myanmar ties got a boost after Foreign Secretary K. Raghunath visited Rangoon in Feb. 1999 (the first official visit since Mr. J.N. Dixit visited Myanmar in 1993). The two countries agreed to co-operate in checking cross-border insurgency and narcotics trade. They also agreed to co-operate (in future) in the field of hydro-carbon, mining, power, railways, inland water transport, and developmental assistance in infrastructure and highway construction.²³ Accordingly, another pact was signed in June 1999 for co-operation in the field of science and technology. The then Union Human Resource Development and Science and Technology, Minister Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi admitted the need for closer ties with Myanmar in view of the regional significance of the country (Myanmar).²⁴ So far India has had some

²³ *Hindustan Times*, February 28, 1999, p.22.

²⁴ *Hindustan Times*, June 25, 1999, p.1.

successes and these significantly checked China's influence over Myanmar.

(iii) ASEAN CONTEXT:

Like India, it is again the '*China factor*' which acted as the underlying reasons that prompted ASEAN to develop its relations with Myanmar. From ASEAN's perspective, Vietnam in the southeast (of China) and Burma in the southwest serve as two pillars in shoring up the regional defenses.²⁵ Therefore, instead of getting drawn into a strategic competition, the ASEAN countries' interests lie in maintaining a multi-polar balance of power. Considering the geo-strategic realities, ASEAN has pursued the policy of '*constructive engagement*' i.e. encouraged reforms in Burma by maintaining commercial and political contacts. It is an 'engagement' of Myanmar to integrate and interact with ASEAN fully and on an equal footing.²⁶

The main rationale behind constructive engagement is to counteract China's use of Burma to extend its military and political reach into Southeast Asia. ASEAN's view is that a policy of isolation and pressure toward Burma (as followed by western countries) only heightened the region's insecurity, causing greater repression at home and closer ties with China abroad.²⁷ The second reason for constructive engagement stems from regional nationalism. Burma was, therefore,

²⁵ Malik, no.21, p.121.

²⁶ V.Jayanth, "ASEAN and Myanmar", *World Focus*, Vol.18, No.6, June 1997, p.20.

²⁷ Ott, no.6, p.74.

given full membership of the ASEAN, in July 1997.

Some analysts have pointed out that Burma's membership brings risk to the association because, ASEAN will now be a cohesion of less like-minded states. There is also a high possibility that Burma will use ASEAN as a shield against western criticism. A greater danger is that Burma will become a proxy of Chinese interests and policies within ASEAN.

Nevertheless, since the adoption of constructive engagement, Myanmar-ASEAN relations began blossoming with both sides showing increasing commercial interests. Investments in Myanmar by neighbouring countries increased considerably. For example, investments of Thailand increased from 421.1 million dollars (1995-96) to 1026.8 million dollars (1996-97). During the corresponding periods, Singapore's investments increased from 603.8 – 1215.1 million dollars.²⁸ Significantly, Singapore is gradually emerging as an alternative source of weapons procurement for Myanmar's army, offering better and more sophisticated equipments than the Chinese.²⁹

Each of the ASEAN governments has its own bilateral agenda vis-à-vis Burma, driven in varying degrees by economic, political and security considerations. As an immediate neighbour, Thailand and Laos shared the 'Golden Triangle' area with Burma, and large-scale smuggling takes place across their common border. Insurgency and

²⁸ as quoted in Ahmad, no.7, p.135.

²⁹ as quoted in, Ibid, p.145.

refugee problems are other serious concerns between Burma and Thailand. Burma's military operation against Karen insurgents along the Thai border have, on a number of occasions, caused tensions and thousands of civilian refugees leading to economic problems to the Thai government. Despite these irritants, Thailand has been one of the main sources of funds and construction aid. A major pipeline project on the Myanmar-Thai border have developed, thereby, immensely deepening their relationship.

Other ASEAN members like Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia were not happy over Yangon's treatment of Myanmar's Muslim community, especially in the Arakan state. Malaysia is not in favour of pro-democracy movement in Burma; and Singapore officials declared that – “at the end of the day the only entity that can run Burma is the army, and the democratic opposition ultimately will have to accept the fact.”³⁰

Thus, it is clear that, although the ASEAN's policy of constructive engagement helped to neutralize any potential threat of '*Finlandnization*' of the region by China, politically, it has produced neither national reconciliation nor the restoration of the democratic process.

³⁰ as quoted in Ott, 27, p.79.

4.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Myanmar's location in the tri-junction of South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia gives the country a geo-strategic importance beyond its size and resources. Her strategic location, as well as natural and human resources, suggest that Myanmar has the potential to be a major Southeast Asian player in the 21st century.

Throughout the cold war period, successive military juntas strictly followed a non-intervention and neutrality policy even to the extent of international isolation. At the same time, the country was besieged with problems of insurgency, narcotics trade, and ethnic uprisings. Occasionally, discontents and factions among the ranks and files of the military officers also posed a great threat to the regime. But as deeply divided (internally) as the nation may be, as long as it adheres to the policy of neutrality, Myanmar will be an important buffer state between India and China.

In the post-cold war world, things changed dramatically. Myanmar adopted open door policy and re-emerged (like her pre-independent state) as an important strategic state, leaning more towards China. The Chinese took full advantage of this new development by opening the much needed Chinese trade outlet to Indian Ocean. It also used Burma as a '*Satellite State*' to further its supremacy towards the south and Southeast Asia. This is a serious concern for India and

ASEAN countries. They adopted 'constructive engagement' policy in order to neutralize China's military and economic dominance over Yangon. Today, there is a sign of success in the policy. There is also growing Burmese opposition to Chinese domination. However, transition back to a more neutral and economically independent Burma will be neither quick nor easy, because China's strategic weight is steadily increasing. This means that the contest for dominating Burma, particularly the sea routes along the coast (Malacca Straits) will continue till the early part of the 21st century.

Over the long term, as China changes, Burma's political and economic standing will improve, and the country's economy will become more integrated with India and ASEAN, and Rangoon will move slightly away from Beijing. At this stage, Burma is unlikely to play the role of an independent or pivotal player in regional security concerns.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The political study of Burma (Myanmar) reveals the significance of geographical factors in shaping the country's socio-economic and political patterns. The country's longitudinal mountain ranges and rivers in particular have affected the distribution of the diverse ethnic groups, and the relationships among and between them. The mountainous borders often splitted the ethnic groups indiscriminately and created diverse political allegiances. It also sheltered these peoples from stringent Burman control during the period of monarchy.

Thus, a closer look at the geographical configuration of Myanmar helps us to conclude that at least three geographical features have had a direct bearing on the political development of Myanmar. First, as pointed out earlier, the country has a predominance of north-south valleys, mountains and rivers. The major lines of communications follow the contours of the land, and served as natural routes of migration to a constant flow of people from the high plateaux of central Asia – first, the Mons of Lower Burma, followed by Karens and Chin, even before the Burman migrated into the heartland in the 9th and 10th century A.D. Secondly, the country is divided naturally into two distinct areas – the plains and delta, and the mountains. The political and cultural heartland of historic Burma was located in the valley, whereas the mountainous border areas lay uncharted and little

known even in the era of the British rule. It is largely in these remote ethnic minority areas that insurgent movements have remained most firmly entrenched since Burma's independence in 1948. Thirdly, because of her geographical location, the country has been partially isolated from its neighbours.

Initially, it was this isolation (geographical) that contributed to Burma's inability to counter the rapid penetration of European traders and soldiers in the 18th and 19th century A.D. Despite more than a century of contacts with the West, there seem to be a sense of isolation and a desire to find solutions to local problems from within the Burmese tradition. Burmanisation and assimilation efforts undertaken by the military Junta are clear signs of such cases. Moreover, the physical separation of people also contributed to the differences among them in languages, culture and political consciousness, thereby leading to the growth of separate identities and political aspirations leading to demands for separate state or secession from the Union by various ethnic minorities.

Today, there is international recognition of the need for reforms in Burma – both political and economic - but, the fact remains that for many Burmese citizens, the post-colonial Burma has yet to find a cohesive national and political identity. Since 1988, the SLORC had put in serious efforts to win the allegiance of the ethnic populations, or at least neutralize the ethnic military forces. Infrastructural projects have been undertaken in some border areas and cease-fire agreements

have been reached with as many as fifteen insurgent groups. Yet, no lasting political settlement has been reached, and the fear remains that the internal security situation in Myanmar may deteriorate again in near future.

The historical geography of Burma is no less important in the process of achieving a national identity and setting up a Union of Burma. In fact, Burma's internal relations with ethnic minorities have been more important than foreign relations in both the traditional period of the monarchy and in the period following Burma's independence. Burma has experienced centuries of incessant wars of ethnicity between the Burmans and the minority ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the country had undergone three short periods of political unification prior to the British conquest: under the Pagan dynasty (1044-1287 A.D); under the Shan Dynasty (1287-1531 A.D), and under the Koubaung Dynasty (1752-1886).

In 1947, Aung San brought about another short spell of political unification in Myanmar and signed an agreement with the ethnic minorities at Panglong in Shan state. But it fell short of achieving a complete "Union of Myanmar" in the letter and spirit. Thus, independent Burma was faced with rebellions from both the ethnic groups and the communists who left the government.

The question remains why Burma have such an intrinsic problem of national unity till today? Many observers and analysts have

attributed this to the British rule. The British piecemeal occupation of Burma effectively ended Burman – minority interaction, thus freezing relations in a pre-modern pattern. The hill areas in which the minorities resided were administered separately from the rest of Burma, thus allowing no new and more modern relationships to evolve between the Burmans and the minorities. As a result, both groups had little experience in mutual accommodation.

In the post-independence period, successive military regimes furthered the British divide and rule policy. Since the 1962 coup, the military junta has consistently followed a policy of unitarist assimilation. The ethnic minorities were left out of the national mainstream, were forced to take Burmese names and to learn Burmese language. Neither the 1947 constitution nor the 1974 constitution, met the political aspirations of the minorities. Various cease-fire agreements were signed only as a part of the SLORC's '*carrot and stick tactics*.' It was said, 'if foreign imperialists were insensitive to the Burman aspirations and problems during the colonial period, the Burmans themselves have revealed this same insensitivity towards the minorities'.

In short, the geographical features naturally divides the Burmans and ethnic minorities; the British gave a sort of political recognition to these divisions; and the military regimes furthered it by following unitarist assimilation policy. This dilemma will continue until the

minority group's political aspirations were met, and they find a place in a pluralistic society.

A study on the political developments of Burma also help us to understand how the geopolitical aspects of Myanmar have been changing accordingly. The geographical context of the initial phases of military rule was Barman loyalty, peripheral rebellion, and minimal contact with traditional antipathic neighbours. This is because the goals of the state have focussed on political, economic and cultural integration and assimilation. That is why the 1962 *coup* is also geographical, though it was essentially constitutional. It was geographical in the sense that the fundamental issues were the unity of Burma, and the relationship between the central government and the peripheral ethnic minorities. The military forces under Gen. Ne Win felt that the civilian government (under U Nu) had endangered the Union by making unnecessary concessions to the ethnic demands for autonomy.

Another geographical dimension of political changes in Burma are evident from urban transportation, changed internal relations, and renewed exploitation of resources. Initially, the ethnic minorities' movements prevented the government free access to the important natural resources in the border regions; for example, opium trade from the Golden Triangle. In the late 1980's, the government gained ground and has started controlling these resources. It also liberalised the economy to some extent and thus the geo-politics shifted again, the

most important being the geography of the regime – both the geographical consequences and the geographical context of its activities. Due to the collapse of some insurgent movements, an opening up of the country's resources to foreign exploitation, improved infrastructures in frontier areas, better military equipments, and improved relations with several neighbouring countries, the regime strengthened its positions and extends its control in many areas of ethnic insurgents. Thus, in contrast to its initial geographical basis, the military regime in Myanmar in the 1990's lacks any popular support, but effectively controls most of the national territory (and its rich resources) and is committed to a close business relationship with its neighbours. The Army's historical reputation as the guardian of the Myanmar people and protector of the Union (as was in 1962 coup) has been damaged by the 1988 massacre of pro-democracy demonstrations. Thus, the apparent strength of Burma's present government rests on geographical foundations quite different from those under which it gained power. How far these foundations hold it up will be an important geo-political analysis in the years ahead.

Among the various contemporary issues in Myanmar, ethnicity and its related insurgency problem, narcotic trade, and the movement for restoration of democracy in Myanmar have drawn the world's attention today. In the 1990's, insurgency continues with low intensity. On the other hand, narcotic trades have increased manifold. Burma's expanding opium cultivation has tragic effects on the United States and

other Asian countries. Narcotics have become the country's growth industry and its influence on the economy is growing at an alarming rate. It was believed that earnings from heroin smuggling alone exceeds those from all of Myanmar's legal exports i.e. about 922 million dollars at the official exchange rate. The SLORC's interest in maintaining cease-fires with narcotics trafficking groups, and the growing involvement of drug traffickers in economic development projects, suggests that the SLORC is unlikely to take effective actions against producers or traffickers of drugs. Thorough change will come only when Burma's government can offer ethnic minorities a legitimate means of sustenance through increased national prosperity, and encourage national reconciliation.

The prospect for restoration of democracy in Myanmar is another issue that draws international attention today. Considering the present internal weakness of the NLD coupled with the SLORC's increasing repression against it, their relative success in the economy, the political, economic and military support it received from its neighbouring countries, the prospects for democracy is dimmed, but it is however, not without any hope. The SLORC's recent policy changes (open-door policy), the democratic aura that permeates the world thinking today, the recent changes in Indonesia, and Suu Kyi's undiminished moral and political credibility provide modest hope that Burma can soon begin to move toward a democratic future. At present, Myanmar faces a political stalemate. The problem can be resolved only

when the Military Junta and the NLD softened their stands, accommodating each other and negotiating with utmost seriousness.

The sooner the problem is resolved, the better it is for the development of the country. Given her immense natural and human resources, a peaceful, neutral, and economically sound Myanmar is going to play the role of "*strategic hub*" of the 21st century Asia. Burma's potential wealth, added to its geostrategic location between South Asia and Southeast Asia, suggests that it has the *potential* to be a major Southeast Asian player. Few Southeast Asian nations possessed the resource base that Myanmar enjoys, and few have done so little with so much. However, it is very difficult to predict as to whether Myanmar will play the role of a *Pawn or Pivot* in the regional security environment (in the 21st century). At present, Burma is a puppet of China as well as a base for future Chinese military operations in South and Southeast Asia. China has strong influence on Burma's economic, political and military decisions since the 1988 coup. In short, Myanmar is emerging as a Chinese *strategic outpost* and Chinese *trade outlet* for its expansion into the open seas. This new development is a cause of serious concern for India and ASEAN countries. They followed the policy of "*constructive engagement*" with Myanmar in order to check China's dominance over Yangoon. On the other hand, Burma's long-term strategic interests lie in counter balancing China's influence and power through its ties with India and ASEAN. There have been indications that the SLORC has started looking toward India as a

bargaining chip in its dealings with China. In these circumstances, there is every indication that Burma will eventually draw back from China and try to find a more balanced international position. However, these changes may not happen so easily, and Myanmar will continue to depend on China (at least) till the early part of the 21st century. Whether Myanmar will use China or will find itself being used instead by China, is something that India and the other countries of the region will be watching very closely in the years ahead. In brief, the present situation helps us to conclude that Myanmar is unlikely to play the role of an independent or pivotal player in regional security affairs. But stronger economic and closer alliance with India and Southeast Asian countries will help Myanmar to play a pivotal role over the longer period.

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Glossary

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BCP	Burma Communist Party
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
BWS	Burmese Way to Socialism
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DDSI	Directorate of Defence Service Intelligence
FNDF	Federal National Democratic Front
GCBA	General Council of Burma Association
KDA	Kachin Democratic Army
KHG	Kayan Home Guards
KMT	Koumintang
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MTA	Mong Tai Army
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NDA	New Democratic Army
NDF	National Democratic Front
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUFD	National United Front for Democracy
NULF	National United Liberation Front
NUP	National Unity Party
PNA	Pa-O National Army
PNC	People's National Congress
RC	Revolutionary Council
SCME	System of Correlation of Man and his Environment
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSR	Saya San Revolt
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
UWSA	United WA State Army
YMBA	Young Man's Buddhist Association