Chapter 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
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India and Burma are close neighbours with an extensive community of interests between them. They have centuries old geographical, cultural and strategic links with each other. In addition, both these countries had similar historical experiences. They were under the British imperial authority; India during 1857-1947 and Burma during 1886-1948. Even the independence movements in the two countries against British colonial rule drew inspiration and support from each other.

Indo-Burmese Relations Under the British

Prior to British India's conquest of Burma in 1886, the latter had undergone three stages of unification. The first one took place in the eleventh century when the Burmese Kings conquered their immediate neighbours and established an Empire of Pagan Dynasty which lasted for about two hundred years. This was a golden period of Burma characterized by flourishing impact of Indian inspired culture. The second phase of unification of Burma came in the sixteenth century during the reign of Toungoo dynasty founded by Minkyein (1488-1531) and his son Tabinshwehti (1531-50). During this period the Burmese rulers succeeded in unifying a majority of the Burmese population, but failed in one significant direction.

2 Ibid.
Their rule could not extend to the major ethnic groups like the Shans and the Mons. The third and final stage of unification took place in the eighteenth century during the rule of the Konbaung dynasty. Emperor Alaungpaya, the first ruler of this dynasty, tried to expand the kingdom by waging wars with the weak neighbours like Siam, Assam and Manipur. Later King Bodawpaya (1782-1819), with an object to further consolidate the empire, opened a war against Arakan and conquered it. From the British point of view, Bodawpaya's reign is significant because "it was in his time that the clashes with the Indian empire began which ended in the extinction of Burmese kingdom". It was the conquest of Arakan i.e., a strategic frontier on the Indo-Burmese side, that brought Burma for the first time into direct contact with Chittagong, a coastal area of Bengal administered by British India.

The conquest of Arakan by the Burmese king created some minor border tensions between British India and Burma. But, because of two important reasons, it failed to create a major rift between the two. Firstly, the Burmese king's military ambitions were directed more towards Siam than towards India. Secondly, India was faced with internal political crisis and instability caused by the fall of Mughal Empire. It was not

3 Frank N. Trager, Burma From Kingdom to Republic (London, 1966), p. 5; also see W.S. Desai, India and Burma (Bombay, 1954), pp. 7-8.
4 Quoted from J.C. Scott, Burma (London, 1921), p. 182.
6 Jadunath Sarkar, Fall of the Mughal Empire (Calcutta, 1964), vol. 3, p. 20.
until the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century that the British East-India Company was able to establish its supremacy in India. After full consolidation of its power on the Indian territory, the Britishers thought in terms of bringing Burma too under their colonial rule.

Throughout the 18th century, British India did not antagonize the Burmese king. During this period the Britishers had been involved in a war with the French who too had colonial interests in the region. The Britishers were to guard, that the Burmese ports should not become bases for French warships to attack British ships in the Bay of Bengal. Hence the Britishers had to move diplomatically while dealing with the Burmese ruler. In 1795 Sir John Shore, the then Governor-General, decided to start formal negotiations with the Burmese and appointed Captain Michael Symes to lead a full-fledged British mission to Burma. The mission was assigned three tasks: "(1) to persuade the king to close his ports to the French; (2) to obtain a commercial treaty; and (3) to explain the British position and eliminate any hostility the king might be feeling towards the British over the frontier incident." This mission and a second one in 1802 again headed by Michael Symes failed to achieve any settlement

7 Ibid., p. 52.
with the Burmese king.

In the meantime, Burma was confronted with problems. King Bodawpayah's military adventure in Siam towards the close of the 18th century met with absolute failure, resulting in the breakdown of law and order situation in Burma. The situation became further complicated when large number of refugees from Arakan and Lower Burma crossed into Chittagong, a part of British India. In such a situation, the British expected that the fresh missions to Burma might bring results. Hence during the years 1803-11, the British Government sent three more missions under John Canning to Burma. But the King considered it below his dignity to enter into any commitment with the East India Company which he considered to be nothing more than a commercial agency. This attitude by the Burmese King made the beginning of a period of confrontation between India and Burma.

In 1811 the British India authorities at Calcutta were implicated in "Chan Byan affair". Chan Byan was a rebel Burmese King who had indulged in abortive attempts to seize

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11 In 1803 John Canning, who had been a member of the second Symes mission, was named as agent to Rangoon. Because of the "insolent violence" of the Burmese Deputy-Governor, then temporarily in charge at Rangoon, he left after seven months. However, Governor-General Lord Minto (1807-13) twice reassigned Captain Canning to Burma in 1809 and again in 1811. Canning was recalled in 1812. This was the last mission to Burma up to breaking out of the Anglo-Burmese war in 1824. See Trager, n. 3, p. 21.
Arakan. Later on he took refuge in Chittagong from where he started subversive activities against the Burmese empire. The Burmese king accused British East India Company for its complicity with the rebel leader. The Company sent British Representatives to Burma to clear its position. But the Burmese King refused to agree. On the other hand, the King started displaying an aggressive attitude towards the East India Company. In 1819 King Bagyidaw (grandson of Bodawpaya) invaded and later occupied Manipur, Assam and Cachar. The invasion by King Bagyidaw created insecurity in Bengal -- the citadel of the East India Company. The long Anglo-Burmese frontier from Assam to Bengal became the scene of rebel activities and Burmese pursuits into British territory. Gradually the frontier problem became more serious and ultimately led to the first Anglo-Burmese war on 5 March 1824.

Lord Amherst, the Governor-General who had succeeded Lord Hastings, asserted that the causes of the war between the two countries were the Burmese acts of encroachment and aggression committed on the South-east frontier, the attack on the island of Shapuri and the invasion of Cachar. The war continued till a mission from Ava arrived at Prome in September

12 Cady, n. 5, p. 71.
13 Aung, n. 9, p. 211.
1826 to state the Burmese King's desire for peace. The two sides agreed to open negotiations which finally resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo on 24 February 1826. Under this treaty Burma was made to accept the loss of Arakan and Tenasserim, to surrender suzerain claim over Manipur and Assam, to pay an indemnity of 10 million rupees and to admit a British resident at its capital. This marked an end of the first Anglo-Burmese war which altered the territories and relations of the British in India with that of the Burmese in the eastern peninsula. The war was an important event as regards the Indo-Burmese relations. For the first time Indian forces were utilized overseas by the British to fight against one of its neighbouring country, in this case Burma. Obviously it was India's co-operation with the British that helped the latter to win this war and occupy strategic coastal areas of Burma. As far as India's administration of its occupied areas was concerned the Indian type of governmental and judicial control was established in Arakan and Tenasserim. Arakan was administered as an integral part of Bengal. Later it was

16 Ibid., p. 111.
18 Ibid.
19 W.F.D. Laurie, Our Burma Wars and Relations with Burma (London, 1890), p. 59.
20 Christian, n. 14, p. 32.
developed into a major rice-cultivating area by employing cheap Indian labour. Tenasserim was developed into a big tea estate. Thus the newly occupied territories of Burma by the Britishers helped them to enhance their commercial interest as much as the occupied Indian territories did.

During the period 1826-40, relations between Burma and Britain were conducted through a Resident in Ava and for a time through a Burmese mission in Calcutta. Major Henry Burney was appointed Resident on 30 December 1829. He initiated a few measures that helped in the improvement of Indo-Burmese relations. He succeeded in persuading Lord William Bentick, the then Governor-General, to return to Burma the disputed Kubo-valley which had been regarded as a part of Manipur by the East India Company. The Salween river was accepted as the actual boundary of the British and Burmese territory in the East. However, Burma's request for the return of the Tenasserim provinces, was rejected by the British.

Frequent raids by the Burmese armed bands into the British territory in the vicinity of Moulmein during the period created problems in the normalization of Indo-Burmese relations. Gradual deterioration in the Indo-Burmese relations after 1840 set the stage for Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852).


23 Christian, n. 14, p. 33. The Kubo Valley was officially returned to Burma on 9 January 1834 by the Government of India. For details see W.S. Desai, A History of British Residency in Burma 1822-1940 (Rangoon, 1939), pp. 214-16.

24 Christian, n. 14, p. 34.
During 1840 to 1852, many cases of exactions against British ships at the port of Rangoon and unnecessary harassment of the British merchants by the Burmese authorities, were reported. This compelled the British merchants to approach the British for direct intervention.

Lord Dalhousie, then Governor-General of India, did not immediately take recourse to direct aggression. Rather he sent in the beginning two ultimatums both aiming at an amicable settlement. But the Burmese did not respond. Later on, in March 1852 when a British boat (which had gone up to the Rangoon river) was fired upon by Burmese batteries, signalled the beginning of second Anglo-Burmese war. In April 1852 British Indian forces occupied Martaban, Rangoon and Bassein. Complete annexation of Lower Burma was considered to be of great strategic and economic importance for India. Governor-General Dalhousie immediately sought permission for its annexation from the authorities at London. And the annexation of the whole of Lower Burma was completed in December 1852.

The second Burmese war helped the British Government in India to gain some fertile areas like Prome and Pegu from the Burmese kingdom. These territories were of great commercial and strategic importance. As a result the British authorities

25 The climax came when two British sea captains were charged with murder and various other offences and although there was no trial they were imprisoned and heavily fined. See Bruce, n. 15, p. 132.

26 Christian, n. 14, p. 35.

were now encouraged to bring the whole of Burma under their control. This materialized in the year 1886 when the third Burmese war took place.

Prior to the outbreak of the third Burmese war, a few interesting developments took place that governed the Indo-Burmese relations. In 1862 a British Resident was readmitted to Mandalay. In 1867, he assumed full extra-territorial jurisdiction over the British subjects living in this kingdom. A commercial treaty was signed in the same year. The Treaty of 1867 granted British steamers the right to navigate the entire length of the Irrawaddy river up to Bhamo, where the trade route to China opened. "From the point of view of the British mercantile interests, the commercial treaty was a victory for British aims, as the backdoor to China was now open to them."

From 1867 onwards the British Indian Government followed a policy that was aimed at influencing Burmese foreign relations. But as a counterpoise to the growing British political and trade influence in Burma, the Burmese king began to make persistent efforts to build up relations with European Powers like France and Italy.

The third Anglo-Burmese war, which took place in 1885 leading to the final annexation of Upper Burma occurred under

28 C.L. Keaton, King Theby and the Ecological Rano of Burma (New Delhi, 1974), pp. 6-7.

29 For provisions of the treaty see A.C. Banerjee, Annexation of Burma (Calcutta, 1944), pp. 177-8.

30 Aung, n. 9, p. 247.

31 Ball, n. 17, p. 123.
different conditions. The most important condition was the strategic necessity of British Indian Empire which by 1853, had come under the direct control of His Majesty's Government at London. On the other hand, the French were pursuing an aggressive and ambitious policy in South-East Asia having lost to the British in other parts of the world. After annexation of coastal areas of Indo-China like Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, French designs to move towards Burma were suspected by the British in India. The threat to Indian security and British hegemony in Burma became more acute when a commercial treaty was negotiated between Burma and France at Paris in January 1885.

Alarmed by the arrival of the French as a strong rival power in South-East Asia, the British decided to improve their relationship with Burma. But the British failed in their attempt as the King of Burma as well as its people had lost all trust for the alien rule. Hence the British Indian Government had to think of possibility of installing a puppet regime under Prince Myingun in place of King Thibaw. This too was of no avail as the British suspected the affiliation of the Prince with the French Government. Therefore, finally it was decided that the French influence in Burma should be eliminated once and for all through its annexation. The British used "an

33 Banerjee, n. 29, p. 257.
34 For details about the British contacts with Prince Myingun see Keeton, n. 28, pp. 122-31.
incident between a British commercial firm and the Burmese king in 1885 as a pretext to start the third Anglo-Burmese war.

On 22 October 1885 the British Viceroy sent an ultimatum to the Burmese King Thibaw (which reached Mandalay on 30 October) calling upon him to submit to the British and take the position of a feudatory prince. The King Thibaw rejected the ultimatum. The Viceroy then issued orders to the General to advance upon Mandalay and dethrone Thibaw. The British met no resistance till they reached Ava. In the meantime, a peace mission was sent by the Burmese King Thibaw, asking for an armistice. The British commander demanded an unconditional surrender and the Burmese King had no other option but to agree. When the British ships sailed past Ava to Mandalay, the Burmese troops disembarked and surrendered the golden palace on 29 November 1885. This turned out to be a brief war lasting just a few days only. On 1 January 1886, Lord Dufferin, then Viceroy of British India, issued a proclamation of annexation of Burma. Thibaw had been deposed and exiled and the absorption of Burma into British-Indian Empire was completed.

For a narrative about the conflict between a British commercial firm like Bombay-Burma Trading Corporation and the King of Burma, see M.S. Desai, Deposed King Thibaw of Burma in India, 1885-1916 (Bombay, 1967), p. 7.

Ibid., pp. 8-9.


After the annexation of Burma, it was no smooth sailing for British administration in Burma as they faced stiff opposition from a section of the Burmese population. They were faced with a series of rebellions and organized banditry which proved enormously expensive in terms of money, men and material. In order to control this situation, more than forty thousand Indian troops and police contingents were posted at different places. This meant an expenditure ten times more than the estimated cost of the original military operation during the period 1824-36. As the annexation of Burma was undertaken for the defence of the Indian frontiers, the whole expenditure was charged on the Indian revenue.

After the annexation of Burma, the British took certain administrative measures for the pacification of their newly acquired empire. In 1887, Charles Crosthwaite, then Commissioner of Burma decided to replace the traditional system of local government with a new one modelled on Indian pattern. Thus a system of administration by districts each under the control of a British deputy commissioner, was introduced. As a result many Indians from Lower Burma and India who were found to be well conservant with the British method of administration were absorbed into service. Although military occupation of Burma

39 Kahin, n. 1, p. 79.

40 As late as 1890 some 30,000 troops and Indian military police were still maintained in the peripheral areas of Upper Burma with an additional 5,300 assigned to Lower Burma. For details see Cady, n. 5, p. 135.

41 Ibid.

42 Crosthwaite, n. 37, pp. 53-56; also see F.S.W. Donnison, Burma (London, 1970), pp. 75-77.
had been complete by 1886, it took five years for the pacification of Burma and many more years for the administration to be established on a firm basis.

In 1897 the executive head of the province became a Lieutenant-Governor. He was provided with a legislative council with himself as President, and nine members, four of them officials and five non-officials. After the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, the legislative council was re-constituted but the Lieutenant-Governor continued to be the President. In 1915 the legislatures were further enlarged to a membership of thirty out of which, only two were elected. Thus during the post-annexation period, "the Council remained almost exclusively a vehicle for British official and mercantile opinion, while throughout the country districts, the administration was directed by British officials who ruled their charges with a paternal authority."

Once under the grip of British colonialism, Burma underwent many social, political and economic changes. As these changes basically served the British interest, the Burmese did not take a passive view of the whole development. The economic exploitation of Burma and the introduction of Western concepts of government and politics by British India, provoked the Burmese to raise their voice against the alien rule. And thus started the Burmese nationalism. For sixty two years from the

43 Desai, n. s., p. 252.
44 Ibid.
46 Kahin, n. 1, p. 79.
end of monarchy until independence was regained, Burmese patriots and nationalists continued their anti-British, anti-colonial struggle in the same form. Over several decades, however, their weapons, their sources of inspiration and the scope of their political ambitions changed.

Nationalism in Burma: Indian Influence and the Co-operation Between their Two National Movements before Separation

Nationalism in Burma was influenced immensely by the Indian example. With minor variations, it followed the Indian pattern. It was India that served as a source of inspiration for millions of Burmese who raised their voice against the British colonial rule. "If Burma had been politically isolated from India", writes Moscotti, "its progress towards self-rule would have been slow and more uncertain." On various stages the Indian nationalists set the pace for reform in Burma and demonstrated methods of political action aimed at gaining freedom from foreign rule. The boycott, the hartal and the legislative walk-out were the techniques of political agitations which spread to Burma from India.

With the growth of national consciousness in India and Burma, the nationalist leaders of both the nations realized the need of mutual understanding and collaboration for attaining freedom from their common enemy i.e. the British imperialists.

47 Cady, n. 6, p. 125.
49 Ibid.
They found a common denominator in British imperialism which compelled them to unite for joint action. Opposition to this common enemy strengthened the bond of co-operation between the nationalist movements of both the countries. But an important feature of the nationalism of Burma was its anti-foreignism directed against the British but at times against the immigrants from India as well.

Presence of a large number of Indians in Burma, their economic position, their transitory character, the appearance of exploitive nature of the Indian moneylenders and the growth of aggressive nationalism in Burma created bitterness against Indians in the minds of the Burmese people. This led to more vigorous expressions of Burmese nationalism and aroused sentiments for separation from India. Despite this bitterness against Indians the peoples of India and Burma co-operated with one another. And the nationalist leaders of India remained quite sympathetic to the nationalist aspirations of Burma and advised the Indian settlers in Burma to co-operate with the Burmese people.

Nationalism in Burma was basically an indigenous force even though influenced by India. A look into the development of Burmese nationalist movement would show how the independence movement in India influenced the course of

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
freedom struggle in Burma. The first explicit expression of Burmese nationalist feeling came from the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) founded in 1908 by a group of youthful Burmans. Its objective was "to refashion valuable elements of Buddhist tradition in the context of the best western learning and standards." The objective of the YMBA resembles with the objective of the socio-religious movements that took place in India during the 19th century. The most important socio-religious movements in India during 19th century were the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and Theosophical Society. In order to achieve its objective, the YMBA started establishing many Buddhist schools in Burma, Maung Aung Aung writes:

The establishment of the Buddhist schools coincided with the rapid growth of the nationalist movement for freedom in India and the Government of British India rather foolishly exiled some of the Indian political leaders to Burma, thus making it possible for the more enthusiastic members of the YMBA to make contact with those Indian politicians. 54

As a result, the YMBA became more active in awakening political awareness following the First World War.

During the early part of the First World War, the Indian freedom movement spread to Burma but failed to incite the politically apathetic Burmese. Until the end of First World War Burma was described as the most placid province of the

53 Cady, n. 27, p. 403. For details about the YMBA see Frank N. Trager and U Hla Maung, "Burma", The Guardian (Rangoon), vol. 3, no. 8, August 1956, pp. 39-41.

54 Quoted from Aung, n. 9, p. 279.
British India. But when the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918 expressly excluded Burma from the reforms awarded to India under the Act of 1919, the Burmese nationalist movement took a more vigorous form.

The Burmese leaders now felt that they must unite together to agitate and demand the same measure of self-government as the Indians had been given. They were afraid that Burma would be denied any real advance towards self-rule. That is why they proposed that Burma be separated from India and the foundations for democratic government be laid directly under British control. In fact it were the educated members of the YMBA and GCBA (General Council of Burmese Associations) who gave such an organised turn to the trend of nationalism in Burma. Thus "where Buddhism and Buddhist organizations had formerly been its fulcrum, after World War I, the expression of nationalism became openly political."

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56 As regards Burma the Montagu-Chelmsford Report stated: "Burma is not India. Its people belong to another race in another stage of political development, and its problems are altogether different.... The desire for elective institutions has not developed in Burma.... We therefore set aside the problem of Burma's political evolution for separate and future considerations." Cmd. 3568, Report of the Indian Statutory Commission (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), vol. 1, p. 77.

57 Moscotti, n. 48, p. 25.

58 After 1919 the Burmese leaders of YMBA intensified their nationalist activities and presented demands similar to those presented by the Indian National Congress. For this purpose they organised the GCBA embracing many of the earlier groups in 1919-20. See Trager, n. 3, p. 47.
The Burmese nationalists speeded up the process of politicisation in the quest for increased participation in the Government. The movement which they launched followed more or less the lines of the Non-Co-operation Movement started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920s to attain complete independence — Purna Swaraj from the colonial rule of the British Empire. During the non-co-operation movement in Burma the strikes were organised by the employees of the British Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and the railway, tram, dock and mill workers, to manifest their political aspirations. Even the school boys and university students went on strike in the name of patriotism. The Burmese not only boycotted the educational institutions but also the law courts and set up national schools and courts of arbitration. They also boycotted the visit of the Prince of Wales. In fact Tharrawaddy U Pu, one of the leaders of non-co-operation movement in Burma, and a Lower Court lawyer, was called Gandhi Pu.

Burma had a branch of the Indian National Congress, the membership of which was confined mostly to the Indians settled

59 For details about the non-co-operation movement started by Gandhi see Tara Chand, History of the Freedom Movement in India (Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1972), vol. 3, pp. 493-510.

60 For example in 1920 the university students called a national strike to protest against the education plans connected with a new university. The strike marked the entry of students into the mainstream of politics. See U Ba Cho, "Our National Day", The Guardian, vol. 1, no. 12, December 1953, p. 9.

61 Asha Ram, The Impact of the Indian National Movement on the Burmese Politics, Paper presented to a seminar at School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi, 8-10 March 1972), p. 4 (mimeo).
there. But a number of prominent Burmese nationalists too were members of the provincial Committee of the Indian National Congress and attended its sessions. One was, U Ottoma, a political monk and the leader of the "Home rule" agitation, who was in touch with the Bengal Revolutionaries also. Another was Chit Elaing, the President of the GCBA. In fact, a very prominent leader of the Burma Provincial Congress, Pran Jivan Mehta, was a devout follower of Mahatma Gandhi and was greatly responsible for arousing political consciousness among the Burmese.

Most of the Indian political, religious and even the sectional and caste organizations such as the Khilafat, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Khalsas and the Akalis, the Arya Samaj and the Nattukottai Chettiyars had their branches in Burma which invited political leaders and religious preachers from India. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and J. M. Sen Gupta paid visits to Burma and influenced not only the Indians but also the Burmese public opinion.

In 1921 when the Government of Burma Act was passed to bring Burma on line with the other provinces of India, an agitation for "home rule" was intensified by U Ottoma and his followers. U Ottoma strongly campaigned for the boycott of the dyarchyical form of reforms as contemplated for Burma.

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62 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
63 Ibid., p. 5.
But on the issue of whether to support dyarchy or not leadership in Burma was divided. In May 1922 the GCBA started splitting. Twenty-one members of the GCBA decided to work for the dyarchical reforms and formed the so-called "Twenty-one Party". They adopted the moderate tactics of the anti-Gandhian "Swaraj Party" and also believed in the policy of "wrecking the Council from within" as a step towards self-rule. They also followed the policy of participating in all General Elections of Burma and became strong advocates of separation from India.

The other younger group of the GCBA which was in a majority and led by U Chit Hlaing, stood for non-co-operation. Nevertheless, unlike the Indian National Congress which remained a focal point of the national movement in India, the GCBA could not continue for a long as a unified body. It split into three small groups under the leadership of U Chit Hlaing, U Su and U Soe Thein respectively. In spite of this split there was no difference in their stand and principles. All the three were inspired by the Indian National Congress particularly by Gandhi's policy of non-co-operation and civil disobedience. They opposed dyarchy as inadequate and unacceptable, followed the tactics of boycotting the elections, and advocated complete independence. These three factions of GCBA later on turned against separation from India and formed the Anti-Separationist

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65 The group later came to be known as the People's Party. See Sen, n. 64, pp. 17-18, 29-30.

66 Desai, n. 8, p. 256.
League which disappeared after separation of Burma from India in 1937.

In the year 1923, the British had finally decided to extend the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms to Burma too. As a consequence of application of reforms, the province of Burma was constituted as a Governor's province from 2 January 1923 -- thus included Burma under the dyarchy reforms. Since this year till the coming of the Simon Commission, the political trend in Burma was not so significant in view of the ties between Indian and Burmese nationalist movement. In fact in India also the spirit of militant nationalism had gone down due to the failure of the non-co-operation movement. However, as in India, in Burma also, the movement had spread down to the village level by this time. It is interesting to note that although the GCBA tried to keep politics and religion separate, the pongyang (monks) in Burma remained instrumental in taking the movement to the village level. These monks helped in the spread of non-co-operation movement in the village level and gained wider support among the population. The GCBA also received the support of many of the pongyang who exercised influence in the villages.

When the Simon-Commission came to Burma to review the working of the dyarchical reforms the "Twenty-One Party" offered its co-operation. On the contrary the GCBA like the

68 Sir Reginald Craddock, The Indian Dilemma (London, 1929), p. 115. For details also see Moscotti, n. 48, pp. 40-42.
Indian National Congress boycotted the Commission. The CCBA feared that a separated Burma would receive no concessions at all. Moreover it was aware of the British diplomacy of divide and rule and desired to remain in federal India until such time when both the countries were granted self-government. It was also aware of the fact that Indian National Congress was the only body capable of fighting for freedom. The CCBA got support from the Indian business interests and the Indians domiciled in Burma who wanted to forestall the separation of Burma as envisaged by the Simon Commission.

Unlike India, where the freedom movement in early 1930s was marked by Salt Satyagraha and civil disobedience, in Burma the movement was divided due to the separation controversy. Hostility towards Indians was in fact the root cause of the separation controversy. The economic depression of early 1930s had led urban Burmese into competition with Indians working as dock labourers. When Indian dock labourers in Rangoon struck for higher wages in 1930, they were replaced by the Burmese. Attempts to displace the Burmese led to Indo-Burmese riots in May 1930. Hence "nationalism expressed itself in hostility towards the Indian minority as well as toward the government". These riots were followed by more violent and widespread

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69 Desai, n. 8, p. 256.
70 Moscotti, n. 43, p. 54.
71 In the riots about a hundred persons were killed and a thousand injured almost exclusively Indians. See Sen, n. 64, p. 40.
72 Moscotti, n. 43, p. 55.
attacks on Indians. This coincided with the agrarian nationalist rebellion in December 1930. Though the uprising led by Saya San was initially directed against the government, it was the collapse of law and order in rural areas that encouraged the Burmese villagers to give vent to their "antagonism against the Indians". Although the rebellion could not make any significant effect on the development of a new political arrangement for Burma, yet it threw light on the depth of Burmese national feeling. It focussed British Government's attention to conditions of tenancy, indebtedness and economic depression in rural areas.

In early 1930s the national movement in Burma as in India had started becoming radical. A new generation of young leadership who called themselves Thakinns had started emerging. These Thakinns formed the Dobama Asi-ayone or "We Burmans" society to intensify the nationalist drive. The members of this society were mostly university students who came mainly from the European oriented segment of population. Thakin Aung San and U Nu were their leaders. These Thakinns wanted to assert

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73 The rebellion launched by Saya San in 1930 first broke out in the district of Tharravaddy and gradually began to spread to other neighbouring districts. But it was crushed ruthlessly in 1932 and its leader Saya San was hanged. Saya San was a quack village doctor and an astrologer associated with the radical wing of the GCBA, viz. the See Thein faction. See Desai, n. 8, p. 257.

their right to equality with the foreign ruling class. They as such had no ideological unity among them and also lacked ideological clarity. They represented different trends such as the Socialists, the Communists and even the Fascists, but they were all united in one respect — their burning desire for freedom. However because of their weak numerical strength they could not succeed in posing a serious threat to the British colonialism in 1930s.

In view of all these developments, the British Government during this period, however, was getting highly worried about the growing influence of Indian national movement in Burma. In India, Mahatma Gandhi's demand for immediate and complete dominion status had been gaining momentum. So the British Government realised that in case Burma continued to remain part of India, the reforms introduced in the latter shall have to be made applicable to the former. "A separated Burma", however, appeared to them to "be more convenient to handle than otherwise". Moreover, Indian shipping, rice trade and textile industry were competing with the British. Hence the British interests favoured the separation of Burma and retaining of their trading and commercial interests in India as well as in Burma. Inside Burma the peasantry, labour and

75 However, in 1940s Thakins were able to give a new dimension to Burmese nationalism which finally led their country to complete independance. For details about the activities of Thakins in Burma, see Frank N. Trager, ed., Marxism in South East Asia (London, 1959), pp. 31-31. Also see U Maung Maung, From Sangha to Laity — Nationalist Movements of Burmese 1820-1940 (New Delhi, 1980), pp. 75-82.

middle class had been hit hard by the depression and a section had apparently started supporting separation. Thus the most important political issue which Burma faced from 1930 to 1936 was whether or not the country should be separated from India and if so on what terms.

The question of separation was considered in a preliminary fashion at the First Indian Round Table Conference of 1930-31 and more fully by the Burma Round Table Conference held a year later. The report of the Indian Statutory Commission published in 1930, had among other changes recommended separation of Burma from India. The details about the future constitutional set up for a separated Burma was left to be decided by the Burma Sub-Committee of the Indian Round Table Conference which requested the British Government to make a clear statement about the constitutional status of separated Burma. On 20 January 1931, the day following the conclusion of the Indian Round Table Conference, the Secretary of State for India, announced the decision of His Majesty’s Government to proceed with the idea of separation of Burma.

In order to seek the greatest possible measure of agreement regarding the future constitution of Burma and the

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77 AshaRam, n. 61, p. 9.
80 Ibid.
relations of Burma with India, a special Burma Round Table Conference was convened in London from 27 November 1931 to 12 January 1932. In the final session of the Conference the British Prime Minister made a statement that read as follows:

His Majesty's Government are prepared, if and when they are satisfied that the desire of the people of Burma is that the government of their country should be separated from that of India, to take steps, subject to the approval of Parliament, to entrust responsibility for the government of Burma to a legislature representative of the people of Burma and a Ministry responsible to it, with the conditions and qualifications which I am about to specify.

The adjournment of the Conference led to increased political activity at home. Two major political groups emerged -- one supporting separation and the other opposing it. The separationist League consisted mainly of the elements of the People's Party while the Anti-Separationist League comprised of the members of the three factions of the CCBA. Both strongly advocated their respective principles. In 1932 when a general election was held on the big issue of separation from or federation with India, the election produced a massive victory for the Anti-Separationist League. The new Legislative Council's attempt to resolve the issue of separation proved unsuccessful. The issue was finally resolved in 1935 when the

81 Ibid., p. 178.
82 The Anti-Separationist League captured forty two seats. The Separationists won only twenty nine while nine went to neutrals. For details see Moscotti, n. 43, p. 63.
83 By now the British Parliament had contemplated the separation of Burma from India on the basis that all the Burmese Parties were opposed to permanent federation with India. For details see Sen, n. 64, p. 46.
British Parliament passed the Acts of India and Burma. A new constitution embodied in the Government of Burma Act 1935 came into force on 1 April 1937. Its main provisions terminated the century old subordination to the Government of India. One of the unfortunate elements of Burma's constitution of 1935 was its denial of immediate control by Burma over immigration and tariff policies. This ruling was made out of deference to British and Indian commercial and industrial interests and in disregard of major consideration supporting Burmese desire for separation from India.

Nationalism in Burma: Indian Influence and the Co-operation between their Two National Movements after Separation

The amount of autonomy granted to Burma by the new Act was equal to the one enjoyed by the Indian provinces as provided in the India Act of 1935. However, even after separation Burma did not lose completely its long standing links with India. The relations between India and Burma continued on the basis of friendship and mutual understanding. The initiative was started by India when two months after the

85 Gady, n. 27, p. 519.
87 To illustrate it Burmese maintained their association with Indians working in different services in Burma like the railways and banks, etc. Besides, the Indian High Commissioner in the United Kingdom continued to remain High Commissioner for Burma. Similarly the British Secretary of State for India remained as before the Secretary of State for Burma. See Desai, n. 3, p. 66.
separation Jawaharlal Nehru visited Burma. In Burma, he addressed several meetings and met many important nationalist leaders of Burma. He appealed for wider co-operation and preservation of friendly spirit between Indians and Burmans.

Friendly relation between India and Burma was temporarily disturbed due to some anti-Indian riots in 1938. The riots, although termed as "religio-communal outbreak", in fact, manifested at the same time, the "anti-foreign feeling of the awakening Burman". An important cause of the riots was the uneasiness among the Burmese as to the future course of Indian immigration and of its effect upon the future of the Burmese nation and the economic and social life of Burma. However, the ill feeling temporarily created by the riots did not embitter the relations between India and Burma. Friendship and goodwill for Burma continued in India. Subhash Chandra Bose, the Congress President for the year 1938 expressed the feeling of the millions of Indian people when he said:

We cherish feelings of friendship, cordiality and esteem for Burma and her culture and civilization, with which we have so much in common. We also feel that Burma must have her freedom just as India must. But we expect our Burmese friends to do justice to the Indian minority.

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83 The Indian Review (Madras), vol. 38, no. 6, June 1937, p. 376.
89 Desai, n. 3, pp. 41-42.
90 For details see Interim Report of the Riot Inquiry Committee (Rangoon, 1939), pp. 14-17, 21-22.
91 The Indian Review, vol. 39, no. 9, September 1938, p. 624.
Even the Tripuri session of the Indian National Congress paid sufficient attention to the significance of continuation of Indo-Burmese relations on friendly terms. Satyamurti, a veteran Congress leader, appealed to the good sense of the people of Burma so that there might be harmonious relations between India and Burma.

After 1938, a close contact and co-operation was developed between the freedom fighters of India and Burma. The Indian National Congress became great source of inspiration to the young Thakins of Burma who by now had become quite popular in their country. The Thakins started sending delegates to the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress. This gave them an opportunity to come in contact with Pandit Nehru, the Congress leader, and Jaya Prakash Narayan, the socialist and also with many Indian Communists who operated within the Congress socialist ranks. The proclamations and methods of the Indian National Congress were studied and often copied by the Thakin nationalists.

In March 1940, Aung San led a Thakin delegation to the Ramgarh session of the Indian National Congress. The delegation met important Congress leaders including Ghandhiji and Pandit Nehru. They also visited places like Gaya, Banaras, Allahabad,

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92 The Indian Annual Register (Calcutta), vol. 1, January–June 1939, p. 939.

93 For example, at a Conference of the Dobama Asiayone held in Moulmein during 6–9 April 1939, the current programme of the Congress was placed by Thakins Aung San, U Nu and others, and was adopted in toto. See Maung Maung, Burma and General Ne Win (Bombay, 1969), pp. 63–64.
Agra, Delhi, Peshawar, Khyber Pass, Lahore, Amritsar, Ahmedabad, Bombay and Calcutta. At Ahmedabad, on 7 April 1940 Aung San addressed a meeting of students. He said:

If a struggle is started in India, it will have its repercussions in Burma and it is just possible that the struggle may be started simultaneously in Burma and India. If Mahatma Gandhi's experiments in non-violence succeed it will give a new light to the world and we are watching it sympathetically.

The Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Burma (1942-45) gave a new turn to the nationalist movement led by the Thakins. It also speeded up the process of political evolution in Burma. Keeping in view the relationship of Indian and Burmese nationalist struggles, it should be noted that Burma came under the Japanese occupation whereas India did not. But the nationalist leaders of both the countries detested imperialism of any kind whether British or the Japanese. A significant development during the period of Japanese occupation of Burma was the liaison between Subhash Chandra Bose and some important Burmese leaders. The first name to be mentioned in this connection is that of Ba Maw who had been impressed by the revolutionary leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose and tried to maintain close links with him. This close association between Ba Maw and Netaji strengthened with the encouragement of the Japanese. As a result, Netaji who had declared the establishment of the

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95 Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), 8 April 1940.
96 Desai, n. 3, p. 81.
Government of Free and Sovereign State of Azad Hind at Singapore in October 1943, now shifted its headquarters to Rangoon in January 1944. As the Japanese wanted to exploit anti-British sentiments for invading India during 1943-44, Subhash Chandra Bose assumed high importance in the eyes of the Japanese. The Provisional Government and Army of Netaji received utmost hospitality and co-operation from Japanese and from the Burmese as well. Many Indians living in Burma and many Japanese too, enrolled themselves in the Army of Netaji. This had obvious impact on Indo-Burmese relations. The bonds between the two peoples now became more firm and the racial tensions which had once existed under the British virtually disappeared.

Interesting developments were noticed in Burma when the Japanese invaded it and thereafter. The Japanese on reaching Thailand, had formed the Burma Independence Army using the Thirty Comrades as nucleus. After fighting a few battles in Burma, they emerged victorious and the British army walked out. The Burmese welcomed the Japanese soldiers as liberator but were surprised and disappointed to find the

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98 Ibid.
99 In 1940 Thakin Aung San after getting disillusioned with the British was prompted to slip out of the country with 29 other young comrades, specially selected by him. They went to Japan for intensive military training. The members of this group were later known as "The Thirty Comrades" who either belonged to the Thakin Party or were its sympathisers. They marched into Burma when the Japanese invaded the country in early 1942. See Maung Htin Aung, *The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations, 1762-1942* (The Hague, 1968), pp. 119-31.
Japanese behaving as conquerors. General Aung San, who was the most disappointed man sent in May 1942 Thakin Thein Pe Myint overland to India to negotiate with the British authorities there so that Burma Independence Army could turn and fight against the Japanese in a concerted move. Gradually, both the general public and the Burmese Army continued to plan in secret to throw off the Japanese yoke. Sensing the rebellious mood of the people, the Japanese authorities granted some amount of nominal independence to Burma by declaring Ba Maw as Head of State on 1 August 1943. But this did not satisfy the Burmese for long. Very soon a resistance movement built up in Burma under the leadership of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). The League had been formed secretly in 1944 by some Thakin members of Ba Maw Government and Thein Pe a communist who had established himself in India at that time. The objective of the League was to strike the Japanese if possible by joining hands with the British forces who were then fighting the Japanese. In order to achieve a free constitution for Burma, the League, therefore decided to co-operate with the Allies.

Lord Mountbatten, then Allied Commander of South-East Asia, wanted to use Burma as his principal base to eliminate the Japanese control from the rest of South-East Asia. To

100 Ibid., p. 112.
101 Ibid., p. 113.
102 Cady, n. 27, p. 576.
achieve his objective, he found in the AFPFL a convenient military ally. As a result Aung San’s Burma National Army now joined hands with the Britishers and intensified their resistance against the Japanese. It should be remembered that Subhas Chandra Bose and his INA were in the opposite camp, i.e., the allies of the Japanese. Yet, Aung San held Netaji Bose in high esteem and this in fact was the reason that the DNA and INA never fought each other directly during the course of Second World War.

By May 1945, everything had been clear on the war front. The Japanese had been defeated. They had to retreat from Burma leaving the country’s future once more in the hands of the British. Here it can be noted that the British Indian forces played quite a significant role in evacuating the Japanese forces from Burma. Thus the war period ended which marked a memorable chapter in Burmese as well as in Indian history.

While comparing the activities of India and Burma during the period of the Second World War, U Nu rightly said:

Both countries had given Britain trouble. Burma had joined with Japan in assailing Britain. Subhas Chandra Bose, the Indian leader had likewise collaborated with the Japanese. If


the Japanese had been successful in invading India, there might have been millions like Bose. 106

Apart from Subhash Chandra Bose, two other important leaders of Indian freedom struggle were closely linked with the Burmese freedom movement. They were Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhiji. "To a great extent", says U Nu, "leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru gave the Burmese freedom movement much inspiration." 107

As a matter of fact, India did not forget the interests of her Asian neighbours during the critical days of the Second World War. In 1942 when the All India Congress Committee (AICC) gave a call for Quit India Movement, it did not confine its demands for freedom to India alone. Rather it demanded 108 freedom to entire Asia including Burma. In its resolution of 8 August 1942, the All India Congress Committee said:

The freedom of India must be the symbol of and prelude to this freedom of all other Asiatic nations under foreign domination. Burma, Malaya, Indo-China, the Dutch Indies, Iran and Iraq must also attain their complete freedom. It must be clearly understood that such of these countries as are under Japanese control now must not subsequently be placed under the rule of control of any other Colonial Power. 109

Similar sentiments were expressed by Pandit Nehru also. One day before his arrest in August 1942, Nehru told B. Shiva

106 U Nu, *U Nu - Saturday's Son* (London, 1975), p. 120.
107 Author's Correspondence with U Nu dated 27 December 1979.
Rao, the correspondent of the Hindu that "India would regard it as dishonourable betrayal of the Allied cause to negotiate a separate peace with Japan or the Axis Powers". He reiterated that the Congress Party "want to see not only India free but also Burma, Malaya and the rest of Asia now under the Japanese".

In 1945 when the Second World War was approaching its end, Pandit Nehru again pleaded for the freedom of all South-East Asian countries including Burma. It was this concern for Burma and other South-East Asian countries that motivated the Congress Working Committee in June 1945 to instruct the Congress participants in the Simla Conference to make it clear that upon the conclusion of the war the Indian Government shall not "support any policy aimed at the continuation of imperialist control of any one of the countries of South East Asia", nor shall it "allow the use of Indian resources for the deprivation of freedom of any of these countries".

During the post-World War period, British policy towards Burma was influenced to a very great extent by the developments that had taken place in India. In 1942, the Indians had waged the "Quit India" Movement against the Britishers. The cry of nationalism in India had spread throughout the country. It had become evident that the Indians were going to achieve independence soon. In such a situation the Britishers had to

111 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 24 June 1945.
112 The Indian Annual Register, vol. 1, January-June 1945, p. 226.
keep in mind India while formulating a policy for Burma and vice versa. They knew that "Burma's post-war status would inevitably influence and be influenced by what happened in India".

After the war period, the APPFL under Aung San was the only strong and well organized party in Burma to negotiate for freedom with the British Government. Immediately after the war was over, the APPFL demanded freedom for Burma and generated in the process high nationalist feelings among the Burmese. In May 1945 the Supreme Council of the APPFL issued a statement which said:

The final objective of the People's Freedom League, as it has been hitherto, is the attainment of the right of self-determination for Burma. In concrete expression, Burma desires to determine her own constitution by means of a Constituent Assembly elected on universal adult franchise.

The growing pressure of Burmese demands for freedom compelled the British Government to issue a policy statement (White Paper) on Burma on 17 May 1945. It envisaged Governor's personal rule for the country for another three years, at the end of which elections were to be held and Burma was to attain self-rule. This White Paper which in Britain was considered to be generous enough was denounced not only by people of Burma but also by Indian leaders. The White Paper was seen by the Burmese as an instrument deliberately devised to withhold the

113 Cady, n. 5, p. 487.
114 See Desai, n. 3, p. 273.
independence of the country. Pandit Nehru also described this White Paper to be an unsatisfactory document and declared that if the British Government desired to meet the demands of the Burmese people it would have to revise its policy towards Burma.

During the last stage of India's struggle for independence, the Indians expressed concern over the independence of other countries of the region (including Burma) which were under colonial rule. The Indian National Congress expressed its deep anxiety over the attempts being made to "maintain the political and economic subjection of Burma, Malaya, Indo-China and Indonesia". In a resolution of 23 September 1945, the All India Congress Committee declared:

To continue imperialist domination over these countries, under whatever name or guise, would be a denial and repudiation of the professions made by the United Nations during wartime and sow the seeds of future wars.... A free India will inevitably seek the close and friendly associations with her neighbour countries, and would especially seek to develop common policies for defence, trade and economic and cultural development with China, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and Ceylon.

This AICC resolution on Asia's freedom had its echo abroad. At New York on 24 September 1945, Vijayalakshmi Pandit emphasised that "India's freedom can have no meaning unless Burma, Malaya and other colonial possessions are also free."

116 Maung Maung, n. 94, p. 158.
117 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 26 June 1945.
118 The Indian Annual Register, n. 112, p. 233.
119 Ibid., vol. 2, July-December 1945, p. 17.
The developments that took place in Burma during this period always drew the attention of the Indians. On the eve of the formation of the Burmese Interim Government, Pandit Nehru sent a warm message to the people of Burma on 27 September 1946 in which he said "I expect this will rapidly lead to the freedom and independence of Burma and also to close relations between our two countries." J.B. Kripalani, the Congress President also pleaded for close and friendly relations between India and Burma. On 23 September 1946, he said:

Indian nationals in Burma must identify themselves with the people of Burma and mix with them as sugar does with milk. Knit together in a common friendly relationship, India, Burma and Ceylon will be in a position to fulfill their historical mission in the creation of a federation of Asiatic nations that would constitute a powerful bulwark against imperialism and exploitation, whether of the Western or the Eastern type. 121

It was not that only the Indians supported the Burmese struggle. Similar sentiments of sympathy towards India's struggle for independence were reciprocated by the Burmese nationalists. On 24 July 1946 Aung San, the great nationalist leader of Burma and the President of the AFPFL expressed his deep concern for India in the following terms:

Our policy towards India ..., in Burma is one of the broadest conception and generosity .... We have no axe to grind, we nurture no .... racial bitterness and ill will .... We stand for more than friendly relations with our neighbours, we want to be not merely good neighbours, but good brothers even .... We stand

121 Ibid., p. 288.
for immediate mutual understanding and joint action, wherever and whenever possible, from now for our mutual interests and for the freedom of India, Burma and indeed all Asia. We stand for these and we trust Indian national leaders in India implicitly. 122

On 15 December 1946 U Saw another nationalist leader and ex-Premier of Burma expressed his confidence that "under the Vice-Presidency of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India will get her independence very soon." "An independent India as a united nation", he asserted, "will be a source of strength to Asia strategically, politically and economically." 123

As far as the issue of achieving complete independence was concerned, it was India which succeeded first. On 15 August 1947, India was declared completely independent, thus ending years of British colonial rule. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had been quite active during the freedom struggle period, became the first Prime Minister of India. Burma, too did not have to wait for long. Thakin Nu, who had succeeded Aung San, came to London in October 1947 to participate in negotiation with Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister of Great Britain. The outcome of the negotiation was that Burma became independent country on 4 January 1948. About Burmese independence

122 Silverstein, n. 104, p. 86.
123 The Indian Annual Register, n. 120, p. 55.
124 Aung San and eight of his associates had been assassinated on 19 July 1947, while attending a meeting of the Executive Council of Burma. See Maung Maung, "The Burmese Parliament", The Guardian, vol. 4, no. 5, August 1957, p. 27.
125 For details of the treaty leading to the independence of Burma, see Cmd. 7240, Treaty Between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Provisional Government of Burma (London, H.M.S.O., 1947), pp. 1-12.
W. S. Desai writes:

Thus did Burma part company with Great Britain and assume nationhood without any clash with the British people. The reason was that the main battle for freedom was fought in India by Gandhiji and the Congress. When India became free, the two appendages Burma and Ceylon were bound to share in this gain. 126

At the end, as in India and Pakistan, the departing British received many demonstrations of goodwill from Burma also.

Thus the independence of both the countries India and Burma, marked the end of an era of struggle of the different but identical nationalist movement against the colonial rule of the British imperialists. In the light of this old association between the two countries during the pre-colonial period, as enunciated in this chapter, that the post independence relations between them has to be analysed and assessed.

126 Desai, n. 8, p. 277.