Chapter II

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The factors such as geography, economic development, political tradition, domestic milieu etc., determine foreign policy of a country. Therefore, these factors play significant role in determining bilateral relationship. In the case of two neighbouring countries, these determinants assume greater significance. India and Burma, the two Asian neighbours, have some common factors which in the past, played a very vital role in determining their mutual relations. Thus, their overall relationship can be understood by analysing and evaluating properly their geography, culture, economic and political systems, political leadership and their common approach in foreign policy.

Geographical Factor

Geographically, India roughly resembles "an inverted triangle with its base resting against the Himalaya Mountains in the north and its apex jutting about 2,000 miles southward into the Indian Ocean". At the foot of the Himalayas lies the Indo-Gangetic Plain, a broad alluvial lowland that is fed by three major river systems -- most important of them being river Ganges.

Burma on the other hand, is situated on the western most edge of South-East Asia. Surrounded on three sides by mountains and on the fourth by sea, Burma assumes a distinctive form. The

country descends from the hill peaks of the Himalayas which protect the north-eastern frontier and connects its eastern borders with China, Laos and Thailand. On the western side, Burma has its frontier with India and Bangla Desh. On the south are the waters of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman sea separating it from India and Bangla Desh. Like river Ganges in India, it is river Irrawaddy in Burma that plays a significant role in the economic life of the Burmese. This river begins its 1,400 miles course in the snow fields and glaciers of mountains standing near the junction of the Chinese, Indian and Burmese boundaries and drains itself into the Bay of Bengal. However, so far as the Indo-Burmese relations are concerned, the common border between the two countries and the Bay of Bengal are important.

The India-Burma boundary is about 1,460 kilometres long from its southern extremity to its northern end which is the tri-junction of the boundaries of India, Burma and China. The boundary line passes through deeply forested hill country, like the Mizo hills, Manipur and Nagaland on the Indian side and the Chin hills, Saga hills and the Kachin State on the Burma side. This line has always been regarded as the arbitrary line drawn

4 B.L. Sukhwal, India a Political Geography (New Delhi, 1971), p. 222.
by the British under the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. A portion of the McMahon Line covers the northern frontier of Burma as far as the Isu-Razi-pass on the Irrawaddy-Salween watershed. The distant most borders of the North-east frontier where the hills of Upper Burma and those of Tibet mingle with those of the State of Assam, constitute the "Magenot Line" across which different seas of humanity meet and interfuse.

The Indo-Burmese border areas have been inhabited by a number of tribes such as the Khamits, the Nagas, the Abors and the Mishmis. The Khamits, a people of Mongoloid race are of Shan origin and inhabit the eastern top of the Brahmaputra valley which is hilly. In course of time/section of this Shan tribes turned northwards and entered into Assam and settled there. The hilly range lying on the Assam-Burma border are the least accessible regions of south-east Asia. This area is inhabited by a warlike Naga race called Konyak-Nagas. They represent India's most ancient and colourful civilization. The people who actually constitute India's bastion of defence along side the Himalayan regions in the North-east frontier are the Abors and the Mishmis. Both belong to a sturdy race of Tibeto-Burman stock. These various tribes created problem for the British when India and Burma were under

the British rule. Even after the independence of India and Burma, the tribal problem persisted. Both the Indian and the Burmese Government had to show considerable concern about the unrest among the tribes.

From India to Burma, there are half a dozen routes. But none of them are much in use. In northern Burma, there are the Jukaung Valley route and the Tulu-gap route. A third route, comparatively an easier one passes through Manipur. This route was used by the Allied troops who drove the Japanese out of Burma in 1945. It may be worthwhile to mention that during World War II, roads played a very important part in this theatre of operations. The Allies constructed two roads, vitally required for their eventual success, viz. the Burma Highway linking Burma and China, and the Assam Highway linking India with China through Burma.

From the Indian side, movement by sea to the Irrawaddy delta channels was far easier and of great importance in Burma's history. This brings the question of the importance of Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal as factors, in Indo-Burmese relations.

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8 Ibid., pp. 324-6; also see Parshotam Mehra, The McMahon Line and After (Madras, 1974), p. 2.


10 Sukhwal, n. 4, p. 17.


For a very long time, the sea route which joins Bay of Bengal with the channels of Irrawaddy delta played a significant role in strengthening Indo-Burmese relations. Cultural mixing in the Indian sub-continent, it should be noted, came largely from the northwest rather than from the north or northeast. Indo-Burmese border being surrounded by mountain ranges, it became easier for India to make contact with Burma by sea. However, it cannot be said that the land routes connecting India and Burma were without any significance.

The striking differences between India and Burma, however, are their respective size and population. With a land area of 1,261,817 square miles and a population of about 430 million in early 1961 India is the seventh largest country in area and the second most populous in the world exceeded only by its northern neighbour Communist China. On the other hand Burma with an area of 261,600 square miles and a population of about 21.6 million in mid-1961 has been one of the least populated countries of Southeast Asia. The small physical area of Burma as lying between the two big powers India and China has been of significance as far as relations with India on one side and China on the other are concerned.

The high pressure of population in India had, in the past, resulted in immigration of many Indians to the less

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populated neighbour Burma. During the colonial period, particularly, many Indians went and settled in Burma. The Britishers encouraged migration as noted earlier. This has relevance in Indo-Burmese relations because these Indians, later as a part of Burma's population, played significant role in the social, economic and political life of Burma.

Apart from the geographical location of India and Burma, the strategic location of China is also significant in determining the Indo-Burmese relations for many reasons. Firstly, both India and Burma have common border with China. Secondly, both these countries had commercial links with Tibet since long time. Thirdly, Burma due to its strategic geographical location between India and China acted as a buffer state between these two big Asian powers. Fourth, both Indian and the Chinese immigration did play an important role in shaping the growth and development of Burma and its economy in particular.

Both India and Burma have common borders with China. The Indian border with China covers an area of 4,000 kilometres while Burmese border covers an area of 2,000 kilometres. The long stretched common borders between India and China, vis-a-vis Burma and China as existed since the ancient days brought India, Burma and China to a close front.

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15 C.A. Soorma, "Whither Southeast Asia", *Guardian* (Rangoon), vol. 1, no. 6, June 1954, p. 36.


Both India and China have centuries of cultural and commercial links with Burma. The Chinese traders like the Indian traders, came to Burma and had left their imprint in the cultural and economic life of Burma. However, the Chinese unlike the Indians, were treated "almost as kinsmen and not as either a political or an economic menace".

Before the coming of the British, China like Mughal empire in India, was the most powerful organized Asian state. So when the British came, they had to keep this fact in mind. As the prime objective of the British imperialists was to maintain the political stability and territorial integrity of India, they wanted to check the Chinese from southward expansion. For this, Burma was of crucial importance to the British. The British calculated that once Burma was annexed and made a province of British India, the threat of Chinese expansion could be lessened to a very great extent.

 Till the year 1937, Burmese link with China was part of Indian links with China because Burma then was a part of India. But once separated from India, Burma was faced with the presence of China near its border. With the emergence of China as a communist power in 1949, its strategic importance as a communist country was of considerable significance to the countries of South and South-East Asia including India and Burma. India and Burma, being non-communist countries had to be careful about China who now had altogether a different

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13 Virginia Thomson and Richard Adloff, Minority Problems in South East Asia (Stanford, 1955), p. 3.
political system. In short, China was a factor of strategic importance in determining the nature of relations between India and Burma in their post-independence years, particularly after 1950.

Cultural Factor

Historically speaking, the important determinant in Indo-Burmese relations has been the cultural factor. Throughout the recorded history there have been two main foci of cultural development in Eastern Asia; one in India, the other in China. "Every society in Southeast Asia of which we have knowledge which has possessed even a modest degree of cultural sophistication has been quite emphatically subject to Indian or Chinese influence." Deep sentiments based on long established historical and cultural links have played a large part in shaping India's policy towards Asian countries, particularly those of South-East Asia. India's indigenous traditional culture, much of religion, literature, dance, language, folk lore, script, architecture, sculpture, family relations, personal and place names and law have gone out to these countries. So far as India and Burma are concerned, their people have known each other for centuries.

The cultural impact of India on Burma was in fact a part of the process of "Indianization" of Southeast Asia that started

19 Charles H. Heimsath and Surjit Mansingh, A Diplomatic History of Modern India (Bombay, 1971), p. 239.

since the earliest times. Indianization (expansion of Indian culture) must be understood essentially as the expansion of an organised culture that was "founded upon the Indian conception of royalty, was characterised by Hinduist or Buddhist cults, the mythology of the Puranas and the observance of the Dharmaastras and expressed itself in the Sanskrit language". Indian expansion, it should be noted was not a historical fact clearly delimited in time and space. It was a phenomenon that touched vast and diverse regions and lasted several centuries, it involved successive waves, local currents of various origins.

Burma is one of the first countries to have come in contact with India and Indian civilization. The process of cultural assimilation between India and Burma started during the pre-Christian era. By seventh century Burma had embraced Buddhism and adopted Indian concept of government while trade between the two countries had already been established. The impact of Indian culture that can still be seen in various aspects of the Burmese were achieved not by military expedition but by peaceful trading and religious teaching. Archaeological and literary accounts mention that the Indian immigrants who came to Burma included all people -- traders, Brahmans and

22 Ibid., p. 32.
23 Ton That Thien, India and South East Asia: 1947-60 (Geneva, 1963), p. 150.
Following different arts and crafts they came in different waves of immigration from India, but did not colonise Burma. Instead they left behind in Burma a great impact of their culture in the domain of literature, sciences and arts and in the fields of religious endeavour and spiritual aspirations.

The most important part of Indian culture that had its imprint on Burma was Buddhism. It was the amazing zeal of the early Buddhists of India that laid a foundation for cultural association between India and Burma. Buddhism, by virtue of its tolerant spirit, sympathetic attitude, rational outlook and progressive nature left a permanent mark on the Burmese society. Although Buddhism has not been declared the State religion of Burma and freedom of worship is granted to all Burmese, yet it is the religion of 90 per cent of Burma's total population and has enjoyed a special official position in the period under consideration. U Nu, the then Premier of Burma gave high importance to the influence of Buddhism on Burmese


26 The Union Government of Burma under the leadership of U Nu officially favoured Buddhism and its spread. U Nu being a staunch Buddhist had been making even official celebrations of Buddhist festivals and practices by holding feasts on massive scale. Buddhism as such has a deep hold on the people of Burma. For details of the Buddhist influence on Burmese culture see Francis Story, "The Voice of Buddhism Speaks From Burma", The Guardian, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1954, pp. 18-19. Also see U Khin Zaw et al., "The Burmese Culture", Ibid., vol. 1, no. 10, October 1954, pp. 42-44.
life when he said "Buddhism, not geographical location, has
influenced Indo-Burmese relations".

Two Ceylonese chronicles - the Dipavamsa and the
Mahavamsa provide ample proof of the volume of impact of
Buddhist religion on the different walks of Burmese life.
According to these chronicles, it was during the rule of Ashoka,
the Maurya, that the process of spread of Buddhism to Burma
began. Some scholars are of the opinion that Buddhist
missionaries reached the shores of Burma early in the Christian
era. Buddhist legends of Burma tell us of Indian influence
coming to Lower Burma by sea in 241 B.C. So far as historical
evidence is concerned, however, there is no trace of the penetra-
tion of Indian influence earlier than 500 A.D. Buddhism as
developed in India and later on divided into three sects like
Theravada, Mahayana and Tantrayana, gained a tremendous
popularity in Burma at different periods of historical
development. Large number of Buddhist remains have been found
in different parts of Burma to prove that Buddhism flourished
peacefully for a long time. The religious remains, however,

27 Author's correspondence with U Nu dated 27 December 1979.
28 According to these chronicles, Asoka (273 B.C. - 232 B.C.)
of Magadha sent to Burma two Buddhist monks Uttaro and
Shona by name to propagate the gospel of Buddha. See
S.B. Mookerji, "India and Burma Through Ages", United
29 D.G.E. Hall, A History of South East Asia (New York,
30 Chandra, n. 24, p. 439. For details see Donald Eugene
Smith, Religion and Politics in Burma (New Jersey, 1965),
pp. 12-20.
are mixed and syncretist. There are numerous stone sculptures of Vishnu, bronze statuettes of Avalokitesvara and other Mahayanist Bodhisattvas, besides statuary and Pali inscriptions showing that Hinayana Buddhism flourished there from an early date.

Apart from Buddhism, Hinduism too had its impact in Burma. The influence of Hindu culture can be judged by the fact that in Burma, old kingdom of Pegu was called Sri Ksetra which is the sacred name of Puri and the old name of Pegu was Ussa derived from Orissa. Direct Hindu influence can be seen in the field of Sanskrit literature. The Court astrologers and professor of kindred sciences were till recently Brahmins known as Ponna and they were mostly from Manipur. Among usages borrowed from Hinduism, mention may be made of the daily washing with holy water of the image in the Arakan temple at Mandalay. Formerly court festivities such as the New Year's feast and the festival of ploughing were performed by Ponnas and with Hindu rites. Even the constitution of the Burmese calendar came from India, where astronomy was studied as a science long before the invasion of Alexander the Great. Moreover the modern Burmese Alphabet is the development of Devnagiri and South Indian scripts. The Burmese dancing and musical instruments are a modification of the ancient Indian dancing and musical instruments. The epic of Ramayana is still played all over

31 Hall, n. 29, p. 142.
33 Soni, n. 25, p. 145.
Burma regularly with great ceremony. There have been instances of marriages between the princes and the princesses of India and Burma. The most interesting aspect of the impact of Indian culture in Burma is provided by the Burmese law books known as Dhammathats based on the Hindu code of Manu which includes the basic principles of the Burmese Buddhist law.

Instances of Brahmanical Gods in Burma are much less in number and type. Still, certain traces of Brahmanical rites and rituals, myths and traditions have come to be interwoven into the texture of the social and religious life of Burma. The attitude of the court as well as the people towards the Brahmanical population and their gods was one of utmost religious toleration and Brahmanism was allowed to exist side by side with Buddhism which had an overwhelming following. Naturally enough, the followers of the latter religion did not altogether escape from the influence of the former. Moreover, in the history of the two religions in South-East Asia, it is not always easy to draw a clear dividing line between them especially in the case of Tantrayana Buddhism which showed marked Hindu features. Even in states where Hinayana Buddhism prevailed, Brahman played an

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34 Ibid.

35 An important instance is provided by a great Burman King Anawratha (1044-77 A.D.) who brought practically whole of Burma under his control, married an Indian princess of Vaisali. See R.C. Majumdar, Ancient Indian Colonization in South-East Asia (Baroda, 1955), pp. 60-61.


37 Ibid.
important ceremonial part, especially at Court and still do so in Burma and Thailand.

In view of all that mentioned above, one can say that the Indian cultural influence can be seen in every branch of Burmese life, not only in religion and government, but also in architecture, its festivals, and social ceremonies as well. And the best quality of Burmese religion and culture lies in the fact that it can absorb the impact of other culture in the mainstream of Burmese life.

**Economic Factor**

Mutual economic interests between India and Burma was another factor that determined their relationship before and after independence. Both the countries came from the same economic background viz. colonial economy. For years they were British colony and as such had served the economic interests of the colonial master. So in a sense, their economic condition was the same by the time they gained independence. Both were under-developed and colonially exploited countries.

After independence both India and Burma were confronted with the same economic problems. They had to re-construct their respective economies to offer a better living to their people. Although they followed independent lines to improve their economies, they had a lot to learn from each other's experience. As India was a bigger country with much bigger population than Burma, it could not give much in terms of economic help to the latter immediately after independence. However, two economic

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38 Hall, n. 29, p. 12.
factors like the immigration and trade, played quite significant a role in shaping Indo-Burmese relations during the later period.

Economic links between two neighbouring countries have always been there. It was more in the case of India and Burma, the two friendly Asian neighbours. Their economic link started with trading activities. The origin of trade between India and Burma goes back to the ancient times because these two countries had trading routes on land as well as on sea. However, the economic relations between India and Burma took a remarkable turn as a result of the Indian immigration to Burma. Hence, it is necessary to discuss first the issue of Indian immigration to Burma and then evaluate the trading activities between India and Burma.

The conquest of Lower Burma by the English East India Company in 1826 was the starting point of Indian immigration into Burma on a large scale. Indian migrants to Burma almost trebled in number between 1861 and 1871. There were 131,000 Indians in Burma in the latter year. They were mostly settling down in urban areas. Then Burma became a province of British India, thousands of Indians moved into the province of Burma. Some of them were no doubt pioneers who brought the land under the plough. The average Burmese of those days was less industrious.

39 In the 5th and 6th chapters of this thesis I have discussed in detail the issue of immigration and trade. However, a short survey here will not be without relevance.


41 B.R. Pearn, The Indians in Burma (Ledbury, 1946), pp. 5-6.
than the Indian and the Chinese.

With the expansion of Burmese commerce under the British impact, demand for labour increased from year to year. As a consequence more and more Indian labourers migrated to Burma. For several years from 1918 onwards more than three lakhs of Indian labourers poured into Burma. As a result the Burmese steadily lost ground to the Indian immigrants in other fields of life as well. The Parsees from Bombay, the Chettiyars and Chulia Muslims from Madras, the Kakka Muslims from Nalayalam, the Khojas, the Boras and the Memons from Gujarat and Hindu jewellers and goldsmiths from northern India particularly controlled the economic and commercial life of Burma till 1940.

The labourers from Madras and Andhra respectively had a virtual monopoly of all category of manual labour for many decades before Burma became independent. All throughout the British period, Burma was in fact "a dumping ground for India's surplus capital and a splendid field of employment for the Indians unemployed from all walks of life". The independent Government of Burma placed a number of laws in the statute books to check the growing influence of the economic role of the Indians, and thereby, to safeguard the interests of the Burmese.

Indian immigration to Burma was not the only factor which speaks about the Indo-Burmese economic links. More important and

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43 Hookerji, n. 28, p. 526.
44 Ibid.
45 For details see Chakravarti, n. 40, pp. 176-8.
of a greater dimension was the trading activities between India and Burma which started in the ancient days and continued up to the modern period. It is generally held that Indian traders came to Burma in the beginning of Christian era. Due to difficult nature of the land routes, they largely used the sea routes for carrying out their trading activities. By 50 A.D., Indian traders were founding permanent Hindu and even Buddhist settlements in the towns along the coast of Burma. Thereafter, until the British came, Indian traders played an unhindered role in shaping the economy of Burma. When the Britishers colonized India and Burma, trade between the two countries gained considerable momentum. It was due to the introduction of frequent steamship services and other transport facilities between India and Burma that the Indian traders' access to Burma became very convenient and safe. Moreover, as long as Burma remained a province of British India (1886-1937) the large scale influx of Indians into Burma was encouraged by the British. These Indians dominated the economic situation in Burma and became money lenders, urban shopkeepers, commercial agents and were also protected by the British law and civil administration.

Indo-Burmese trade was of great importance to India as well as to Burma and it remained highly beneficial to the


economies of both the countries. In due course of time, however, the Indians had to face criticism of being exploitative in their economic activities, and such a criticism often created problems in the smooth growth of Indo-Burmese trade and relations. But it was only for the sake of some understanding between Nehru and U Nu, the two great leaders of India and Burma respectively that the trade between their respective countries did not come to an end, although it kept on fluctuating at different periods.

**Political Factor**

As regards political situation, India and Burma had many things in common. In the past history of these countries, various dynasties had ruled over the destinies of their people. If in India, it was the Mughal dynasty that ruled before the British came, in Burma, it were the Toungoo and Konbaung dynasties that shaped the future developments in Burma. In the recent history, both the countries came under one colonial rule -- the British rule.

During the period of British colonial rule, both India and Burma gained similar kinds of political experiences. Since the end of pacification in 1890, to 1937, when Dyarchy was introduced, Burma was "ruled and developed by that amazing bureaucracy, the Indian Civil Service". Till the year 1937, Burma in fact was ruled as a province of India. In other words,

49 Chakravarti, n. 49, p. 73.

it was under one political framework that governed both India and Burma. As a result, the constitutional development in Burma proceeded more or less on the same line as it did in India, although at a different pace. Even after separation, the constitutional development, nature of leadership and formation of political parties in Burma, had been influenced to a great extent by the political developments in India.

In 1937 when Burma was separated from India, the Government of Burma Act of 1935 set up a constitution combining the functions of the Government of India under the Government of India Act of 1935 with those of a provincial executive. Similarly, the functions of the Federal Legislature were combined with those of the provincial legislature. There was no distribution of powers between the Centre and the Units. There were the same "safeguards" as in the contemporary Indian Constitution Act. This constitution was abrogated after Burma was overtaken by the Japanese in 1942. This did not happen in India as it did not come under the Japanese during the Second World War.

India achieved its independence on 15 August 1947 and chose parliamentary democracy as the form of government. Similarly the Burmese Draft Constitution of September 1947, based on the constitution of 1935 as a model, provided for a democratic form of parliamentary system of government at the


51 Ibid.
national level. The new Burmese constitution was "parliamentary in form, liberal democratic in political orientation, welfare socialist in economic outlook and federal in structure". The original constitution of Burma does not include however, any reference to Burma as a "socialist" state. But provisions in chapters II, III and IV of the constitution indicate that the founding fathers of the Burmese constitution held various socialist convictions. Here there is a striking similarity with the Constitution of India. The Indian constitution also does not refer India as a Socialist State but has many provisions like national economic planning, industrialisation and others which favour a socialist pattern of economy. It appears that the Burmese constitution makers had been more or less influenced by the ideas of the Indian constitution makers.

There is no doubt that the Burmese followed a parliamentary type of government based on the British model as existing then in India. But as far as the success of the system is concerned, there is a noticeable difference. The basic principles of

53 Trager and Maung, n. 49, p. 40.
54 Provisions are made in chapters II, III and IV for national economic planning, state ownership of public utilities and state aid to economic organizations "not working for private profit". For details see Constituent Assembly of Burma, The Constitution of the Union of Burma (Rangoon, 1947), pp. 2-8.
parliamentary system as provided in the Burmese constitution, and based on the principle of justice, liberty and equality, were quite sound. But unlike India, where parliamentary form of democratic system has been stable since the day of independence, it has been a failure in Burma. Many incidents threatened to reduce democracy in Burma to a shadow. Finally in 1962, Burmese democracy was overthrown by General Ne Win in a bloodless military coup.

Regarding the elite who dominated the national politics of India and Burma during the British colonial rule and in post-independence years, it may be said that it represented a remarkable homogeneous group in terms of educational experience and social backgrounds. The elite in India and Burma belonged to the upper middle class of their respective countries. They were predominantly lawyers, with some businessmen, university professors, journalists and school teachers. They had the opportunity to present their political demands in legislatures, municipalities, the press and the courts of law, and to them political power was associated with these institutions. In India this elite actively participated in the freedom struggle and brought independence to India ultimately. Similarly in Burmese freedom struggle too, the middle class played the most


important role. "Whether or not the nationalistic and westernized elite which led Burma to ultimate independence, would have settled, as did these in India, ... for Dominion or Commonwealth status, is debatable." Generally speaking both India and Burma championed non-violence particularly during their struggle against the British. But there was a difference of degree in the approach. In Burma, it was Aung San and his National Army which believed in violence. In India, Subhash Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army (INA) too rejected the path of non-violence. Unfortunately Burma had to face the impact of Second World War, while India did not.

There has been two phases in the political development of the newly independent countries of Asia. In the first phase the government rested in the hands of the leaders and the movement which had achieved independence. The second phase has been marked by the departure of those leaders from the political scene and the consequent disintegration of the national movement. Both India and Burma passed through the first phase after independence. Nehru and the Congress in India and U Nu and the AFPFL in Burma, continued to guide the destiny of their

59 In 1947, when the Burmese were offered an option by the Attlee Government, it was considered too late for deciding membership in the Commonwealth. In fact, the inept execution of the bad policies outlined in the White Paper of May 1945 had led to the withering of all sentiments for retaining membership in the Commonwealth. Finally, the Burmese nationalist elite unlike that of India preferred to achieve independence outside the Commonwealth. See Trager and Haung, n. 49, p. 40.

60 Saul Rose, "Left and Right in Asia", The Listener, vol. 59, no. 1515, 10 April 1958, p. 605.
respective nations during and after the independence struggle period.

The development of political parties in India and Burma is quite interesting. In India, the Indian National Congress has, from its very start in 1885, consistently maintained its position as the supreme national organization of the country—a position which remained unchallenged for quite a long time. Unfortunately there was no such a political party in Burma. During the British rule, many parties sprang up in Burma. Most of them had been influenced by the ideas and by the spirit of struggle of the Indian National Congress. But they could not maintain the position as the Indian National Congress did. Ultimately in Burmese national movement and thereafter it was the AFPFL that played the key role. About AFPFL, Trager writes:

The history of the AFPFL parallels in certain respects to the Congress Party of India. Before independence both parties constituted the main organisational and political force of the nationalist movements of their respective countries. They were composed of individuals, all types of groups, and various affiliates, including trade unions and the communist and socialist parties.

Eventually the communists were excluded from the broad organisation of both the parties. Subsequently, it was the Congress in India, and AFPFL in Burma that was able to not only

61 Ibid.

62 According to Rupert Emerson the party system in Burma was "rapidly shifting kaleidoscope of factions and personalities with little in the way of a stable base and of coherent and differentiated programs." See Rupert Emerson, Representative Governments in South East Asia (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 42.

63 Trager, n. 56, p. 173.
bring complete independence to its respective country, but also guide the destiny of its independent nation by adhering to the principle of democracy both in theory and practice. Both Nehru and U Nu after independence dedicated their respective parties to the goal of democratic socialism and opposed communism.

But unfortunately unlike the Congress in India, the AFPPFL in Burma was confronted with insurrections, both ethnic and communist ever since the day of independence. This situation at home subsequently resulted in a split in the AFPPFL in the year 1953 and ultimately to its disappearance after Ne Win's military takeover in 1962. It was replaced by BSPP (Burma Socialist Programme Party) which was opposed to the idea of parliamentary democracy in Burma. However, the differences within the AFPPFL during U Nu's period did not disturb the nature of friendly relations between India and Burma. Even the replacement of parliamentary democratic government by Ne Win's military regime in 1962 did not bring any radical change in the existing pattern of friendly relations between the two countries at the official level.

The importance of political factor as a determinant in Indo-Burmese relations will not be complete without a few words about Indian and Burmese leaders and their relationship

64 Ibid.

65 For details about the split in AFPPFL and Ne Win's takeover leading to the formation of BSPP see Josef Silverstein, Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation (New York, 1977), pp. 62, 67, 100.
particularly at personal level. Prior to independence and during post-independence period, some Burmese leaders and their Indian counterparts had developed friendly relationships. Of all Ba Maw's relations with Subhash Chandra Bose of India are very interesting. Both of them became not only personal friends but also had the same political aim during the Second World War, viz. support to the Japanese in their war against the Britishers. However, it is the relationship of Jawaharlal Nehru with the Burmese leaders especially U Nu that is very significant. Nehru and U Nu who emerged as undisputed leaders of their respective countries immediately after independence also were heroes of their national revolutions. Hence their personal friendship was very significant and contributed to the cordial relations between India and Burma.

Approaches to Foreign Policy

Common approach in foreign policy of India and Burma has been yet another significant factor to determine their relations. What was this common approach? It was an independent foreign policy based on non-alignment and peaceful co-existence. Both India and Burma strongly advocated a policy of keeping a safe distance from the power blocs and preached the gospel of peaceful co-existence among nations.


"Non-alignment" has often been characterised as "neutral policy" although it had very few features in common with the policy of neutrality followed by a country like Switzerland. The traditional policy of the Swiss government is not to get involved in the developments in the neighbouring countries. The non-aligned countries on the other hand, take a keen interest in the developments taking place in the different regions of the globe. About non-alignment Coral Bell writes:

One of the most notable side-effects of the intervention crisis in Indo-China and the Western Powers' definition of their lines through the Manila treaty and the "northern tier" arrangement was to throw into bold relief and into each other's company those nations which for one reason or another, found it more comfortable to occupy the diplomatic no-man's land between the western and Communist camps than to attach themselves to either. These non-aligned or uncommitted Powers were... mostly the South Asian States, India, Burma, Indonesia and Ceylon. 69

These powers were sometimes referred to as the neutralist bloc. Here it should be noted that India called its foreign policy as "non-alignment" whereas Burma preferred to call its policy as "positive neutrality". Irrespective of the use of different terminology it can be said that both India and Burma followed in essence one line of foreign policy. Evolution of


70 It was a description they repudiated, pointing out that their policy was not based on the neutrality in the Swiss sense. Ibid., p. 283.

foreign policy in India and Burma based on similar lines in respect of approach and practice, emerged because of a number of reasons.

Firstly, the strong sentiment of nationalism in India and Burma affected their foreign policies. They felt that the pursuance of an independent foreign policy will suit their national pride and sense of independence. "Non-alignment with either of the blocs, they discovered, not only helped them to preserve their newly won independence, but it also gave them a sense of importance and recognition in world affairs." 72

Secondly, both India and Burma came from colonial background and as such had exploited economically by the colonial power. Their main concern immediately after independence was to re-construct the economic structure of their respective countries. For this they needed peace and stability at home and economic co-operation from outside. Economic co-operation from both the blocs was possible only when they maintained a neutral status. "In general, all neutralists regard a wide pattern of economic relations preferably with both the Cold War blocs...." 73

Thirdly, it was the common character of the leadership of India and Burma that had certain relevance in influencing a policy of non-alignment. As we have seen, the nationalist movements in India and Burma had been basically "middle class" in character, particularly in respect of their leadership.

72 Karunakaran, n. 68, p. 29.
73 Peter Lyon, Neutralism (Leicester, 1963), p. 113.
After independence it was in the hands of this class that power was concentrated. "The policy of non-alignment has, in many ways, been a reflection of the general thinking and characteristic of this class".

Finally, after independence both India and Burma did observe an international situation marked by bio-polarity and conflict of interests between the socialist led group of nations on the one hand and Anglo-American led group of nations on the other. Joining in any of the bloc they realized was, to enter the area of power rivalry. In power rivalry they were hardly interested and therefore both adopted policy of non-alignment.

The existence of the above factors in the national situation of India and Burma, do not however mean that they followed identical policies on all issues of international relations. Quite often, both in emphasis and in practice, their respective foreign policies made significant variations.

Non-alignment as an independent foreign policy emerged in India with Jawaharlal Nehru as its chief protagonist. In fact the basic rudiments of this foreign policy had already been

74 Karunakaran, n. 69, p. 31.
75 For details see Lyon, n. 73, pp. 29-35.
76 Ibid., p. 60.
77 In my 4th chapter entitled "Major Developments in Indo-Burmese Relations" I have taken up certain issues in which India and Burma though generally maintained a common stand on foreign policy, showed significant variation while debating these issues. For details see the fourth chapter of this thesis.
laid down by the Congress since its inception. Nehru himself admitted this in his foreign policy statement in the Parliament on 17 March 1950, when he remarked that "it was a policy, which flowed from our past history from our recent past and from our National Movement and from the various ideals that we have proclaimed from any point of view."

Jawaharlal Nehru, who had emerged as the most important leader of Indian freedom struggle after the Second World War, outlined the objectives of Indian foreign policy a year before India won independence. The official declaration of a policy of non-alignment was made by Nehru as the Vice-President and Member-in-charge of External Affairs of the first national government of the country, known as the Interim Government, formed on 2 September 1946. In a speech broadcast to the nation on 7 September 1946, he said:

We propose as far as possible, to keep away from the power-politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale.... We are particularly interested in the emancipation of colonial and dependent countries and peoples, and in the recognition in theory and practice of equal opportunities for all races.... We seek no domination over them, and we claim no privileged position over other peoples. But we do claim equal and honourable treatment for our people wherever they may go and we cannot accept any discrimination against them.

These objectives of India's foreign policy were further consolidated by Pandit Nehru after India won independence. In the post-independence period, Nehru in a speech on 17 March 1950 rightly said that "our general approach has been not to interfere in other matters and not to take part in the various conflicts in other parts of the world in so far as we can help it." He further emphasized upon the point that since "India which has newly become independent and which has to guard its independence and which has also to solve many problems that have accumulated in the past, it becomes an inevitable policy not only to try to the best of its ability to help in the maintenance of world peace, but also not to get entangled in so far as it can in world conflicts."

The character of the Indian foreign policy as outlined by the Indian National Congress and later developed by Prime Minister Nehru went on gaining wide emphasis and popularity during the period of his life time and in the latter period, although with slight variations. Therefore, it can be said without exaggeration that non-alignment has remained the main cornerstone of India's foreign policy during the period under study.

Like India, Burma too followed a policy of non-alignment labelled as positive neutrality. In fact the groundwork for the policy of "positive neutrality" had been prepared by

80 Parliamentary Debates, n. 78, p. 1694.
81 Ibid., pp. 1694-5.
Prime Minister Nehru of India. Burma seemed to be so impressed by the features of Indian foreign policy that at the time of formulating a foreign policy for their country, Burmese leaders took the help of Nehru who was the founder of an independent foreign policy of non-alignment for his own country. In the words of Nehru, non-alignment was not "a negative or ... neutral policy, but a positive policy ... helping those forces that we consider right and ... disapproving of the things that we do not like, but fundamentally keeping apart from other countries and other alignments of power which normally lead to major conflicts."

Burma opted for this foreign policy for yet another important reason which in fact, was missing in the Indian case. Unlike India, Burma had been directly affected by the Second World War. The Japanese occupation period had taught the Burmese leaders the evil effects of a war. Burmese economic potential had been damaged by the war and what Burma needed after independence was the re-organisation of its economy. This in turn demanded a peaceful, stable atmosphere so that Burma can progress without unnecessarily drawn in the conflict of any kind. In the formulation of the policy of positive neutrality, U Nu attempted to make it clear that it was dictated

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83 Parliamentary Debates, n. 78, p. 1695.
by Burma's strategic weakness, economic needs and the wish to avoid devastating consequences of a new war. "Our country", he said, "suffered the most by the war and seeks peace for the whole world. We do not wish to seek dissension between the Big Powers, and we shall support any measure for securing unity between Britain, the United States, Russia and other Powers." Laying emphasis on the need of economic relations with different countries, U Nu said that "as an independent country, we need to sell our produce at the best prices available in the markets of the world and to obtain imports that we need at the most favourable world prices."

In the post-independence period some of the internal factors in Burma led the country to lean towards the policy of non-alignment. The outbreak of Karen insurrection in early 1949 created an apprehension that they might get aid from the west and thus provide an excuse for Soviet intervention. Such an apprehension led U Nu to stress all the more upon a policy of non-alignment. During all these turbulent years of 1948-50 there were firm pronouncements by the Burmese leaders that gave definite indication that

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85 U Nu further reiterated that "only if these great Powers are in harmony will the peace of the world be secured. That is why we see that Burma should seek friendly relations with Russia and the New Democracies of Eastern Europe. We must derive use and benefit not only from the way of life, methods and culture of Britain and America and other Western countries, but also from the way of life, methods and culture of countries like Russia." See Thakin Nu, Towards Peace and Democracy (Rangoon, Ministry of Information, 1949), p. 130.

86 Ibid., pp. 130-1.

87 Johnstone, n. 71, p. 50.
Burma was going to follow an independent foreign policy. The Prime Minister of Burma U Nu stated in 1948 that, "of the three Great Power, the United Kingdom, the United States and U.S.S.R., ... the A.F.P.F.I., wish that Burma should be in friendly relations with all the three." Two years later, in 1950, he categorically stated that Burma did not desire "alignment with a particular Power bloc antagonistic to other opposing blocs".

U Nu's emphasis to "follow an independent course" was not only found correct from the point of view of international relations, but also the safest to adopt in view of the conditions prevalent in his country. According to U Nu "any other course would expose Burma to unwelcome political pressure from quarters nearest to her which might involve her in grave risk and danger."

An analysis of Burma's foreign policy during the first few years after independence shows that the basic policy of positive neutrality which was properly outlined and developed by U Nu during this period was one based on considerable freedom of action in extension of their political and economic relations with different countries of the world. However, in 1955 (29 June - 16 July) during his visit to the United States, U Nu said on 1 July before an audience at the

88 Thakin Nu, n. 85, p. 117.
89 Thakin Nu, From Peace to Stability (Rangoon, Ministry of Information, 1951), p. 86.
National Press Club in Washington more explicitly about his country's foreign policy. He said:

Nations that choose not to participate in military blocs usually are referred to in this country as neutrals. If my impression is correct, this word "neutral" has acquired a distinct and unfavourable semantic coloration. Apparently, the word suggests the image of the ostrich with his head in the sand, a negative attitude towards world politics, a blind withdrawal from reality. 91

According to U Nu "it was our love of independence -- call it pre-occupation if you will -- leads us logically and inevitably to the foreign policy of independence from any alignment of major powers on the basis of a military treaty. This policy has been called neutralism in the Cold War. Perhaps that is the right name for it." U Nu further defined that "This is not a negative policy towards world affairs. Rather, it is a positive concept. It is a positive policy of seeking peace and friendship with all countries. It is a policy of actively seeking to discover through negotiation and compromise and accommodation some acceptable basis on which the peace of the world can be secured." 92

U Nu's quest for friendly relations with all nations like that of Nehru was related to his strong conviction in the principles of peaceful co-existence. Thus U Nu like Nehru believed in a foreign policy based on principle of

92 Ibid., p. 18.
93 Ibid.
co-existence with any country irrespective of any system of government prevailing there.

These similarities in foreign policy approach led to active participation of both Nehru and U Nu as well as the representatives of their respective countries in conferences sponsored by Afro-Asian group of nations as well as in world conferences organized by the United Nations.