PREFACE

The Burma Socialist Programme Party is no more. As the Burmese would say, "it has become a victim of decay and change." But the ideology with which the military regime sustained itself for more than 26 years, has left an indelible mark of agony, frustration, and ruination in its wake. The military ideologues sought to radically transform the social, political and economic life of the Burmese people in letter and in spirit. This study describes and analyzes the progressive decay and the protracted agony both of its system and of its doctrine. In the years to come, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) and the Burmese Way to Socialism (BWS) will, perhaps, be remembered as the country's most extraordinary political and intellectual aberration. The social and political consequences of the imposition of the BWS, and, with it, the authoritarian, one-man rule of General Ne Win, have been disastrous for the people of Burma. When the state, in the form of military rule, becomes the focus of social life and social obedience, the result in absolute terms is statism, the absence of the primacy of human rights, and a belated and half-hearted return to economic pragmatism.

The thesis may be viewed as a parallel to the situation arising from military intervention in third world countries in general. In Burma, after a decade of liberal democracy
since its independence in 1948, there was a short interregnum of military caretaker governmental rule upto 1960, when it was replaced by civilian rule. Since March 1962, authoritarian military rule, a result of the coup d'etat staged by General Ne Win, has tragically transformed Burma (or Myanmar as it is now called), a one-time "rice-bowl of Asia", into one of the poorest nations of the world.

The first Chapter of this study is concerned with the topographical, demographic, ethnic, socio-economic and political set-up of the country. It tries to analyze the background events leading to the March 2, 1962 coup d'etat by the then Army Chief of Staff General Ne Win.

Chapter II traces the ideology of the BSPP, while Chapter III discusses the formation, organization and structure of the Party.

The fourth Chapter deals with the interaction between the Revolutionary Council (RC) and the BSPP, whereby the latter became the tool of the former for the military leaders to legitimize their regime. This Chapter also analyzes the economic nationalization measures, administrative, executive and judicial reforms, the attempts at rectification of the policies, programmes, and goals by convening the First BSPP Party Congress in 1971, and the establishment of the 1974 State Constitution.
The fifth Chapter details the problems of ethnic conflict and insurgency in the country.

The last Chapter endeavours to analyze the causes, and the consequences, thereafter, of military intervention in developing societies, with particular reference to Burma. It tries to fathom the depth of Burman attitudes, of the aspirations of the ethnic minorities for autonomous rule, and the clash of objectives of the majority 'core' people and the minority ethnic peoples. The military leaders tried to subordinate society to the BWS, i.e. to remould society to an ideological blueprint. Politics thus became a prerogative and the preserve of the top leaders only. This shortcut to modernity through perpetuation of personal rule has proved transitory.

It is, therefore, appropriate to formulate a historical diagnosis of the performance of the BWS and a prognosis of its prospects in the near future, and to comprehend the painful lessons learnt from Burma's experiment with syncretic socialism.

In the preparation of this thesis, I owe a great deal to the Jawaharlal Nehru University for providing the necessary financial support for making a field trip to the United Kingdom. It was not possible for me to travel to Burma, being born there, but having naturalized myself in India, due to the restrictive regulations enforced by the
Burmese regime. The field trip thus enabled me to have access to the various Burmese-language source materials in London. The period of study, i.e. 1962-74, marks a watershed in the attempts by the Revolutionary Council (RC) to consolidate its stranglehold of power and legitimise its rule. This period is also important as the BSPP, the brainchild of the RC, became a mass party in 1971, and helped to establish a State Constitution whereby it became the sole, leading party guiding the state. In this twelve-year period too, the military leadership attempted to impose its authoritarian, one-party, autocratic elitist rule, transforming the social, cultural, political and economic mores of the people. In doing so, the RC miserably failed to provide even the basic necessities of life: ၫား ၫည် (rice, salt and oil, as it is said in Burmese). It failed to solve the ethnic minorities' problems of sub-national identification, and, while taking over judicial and legislative powers, the one-man executive leadership of General Ne Win paved the way for perpetuation of its own authority through civilianization of the military elite rulership. Military intervention, the scourge of many developing third world countries, has more often if not come to be considered the 'panacea' of all societal ills, but ultimately, it fails to deliver the goods.

This thesis has been successfully completed due to the help I have received in the past as well as the present. I
wish to thank the Chief Librarian, JNU, the ever-helpful and co-operative staff of the library and administration. Thanks are also due to Ms Patricia Herbert, Curator, Southeast Asia Collection, the British Library, London; Ms Helen Cordell, Principal Assistant Librarian, Southeast Asia and Pacific Division, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Miss S.J. Boyd, Press Librarian, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, for being kind enough to allow me to have access to their fine collections of Burmese and English research materials on Burma. My gratitude to Dr. Robert H. Taylor of the School of Oriental and African Studies, for providing me valuable advice while I was in London and to Miss Wan Lye Tim, Senior Assistant Librarian, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, for helping to procure the relevant research books and papers. My thanks also to Mrs. Kapoor of the British Council Library; Ms Kapasi, Director, the American Centre, here at Delhi, for permission to study the various newspapers on microfilm at their libraries. I have also had co-operation from the Senior Librarians and staffs of the Indian Council of World Affairs Library, the periodicals section of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses Library, and the Ministry of External Affairs Library. This is not to forget the help from the staff of the Indian Council of Social Science Research in helping me compiling Indian research materials.
I wish to express my appreciation to Ms. Marguerite C. Crawford, Administrative Assistant; John Badgley, Curator, both of John M. Nichols Collection on Southeast Asia, Cornell University Libraries, New York, for their valuable help in providing a comprehensive list of holdings on Burma with their libraries. I have received frank and candid advice from Dr. I.P. Singh, former Indian Ambassador to Burma, from my colleagues Daw Than Than Nu and U Aung Nyain at All India Radio, Delhi, my wife and daughters and numerous friends. Last but not least, my sincere appreciation and boundless gratitude to my teacher Dr. Bhagwan Dass Arora for his patient, timely guidance, expert supervision and steadfast encouragement at every single step in completing my thesis. It is he who has taught me, as we say in Burmese "ကြောင်းချင်းကြည့်ခြင်း" (to see and gauge the image from the reflection), by probing deeper into the innermost parts of a substance or subject-matter to determine its inherent mettle. I may also venture to add that many thousands of researchers will still enter the portals of learning at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and leave their Alma Mater, but few may feel the ethical bliss of having delved into the innermost deeper self and the outer self. It is only in ethical striving that one experiences inexpressible harmony between oneself and all else.