



**CHAPTER - 1**

**INTRODUCTION**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The country of Burma now known as Myanmar, since 1989, got its independence, like India from Britain in 1948. The country is a sovereign country in Southeast Asia and is bordered by China, Thailand, India, Laos and Bangladesh. One-third of Myanmar's total perimeter of 1930 kilometers (1200 miles) forms an uninterrupted coast line along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. At 676,578 km. (261, 227 sqm), it is the 40<sup>th</sup> largest country in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is also the 24<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world with over 60.28 million people.<sup>1</sup>

—The first real economic and cultural exchanges between the Indian and Burmese regions goes back to the third century B.C., when Emperor Ashoka sent two Buddhist emissaries to Burma.<sup>2</sup>

It is pertinent to note that Myanmar was a country where precious stones, oil, natural gas and other mineral resource were abundant. If we look up the history of Myanmar, it was the home to some of the early civilization of Southeast Asia, including the Pyu and the Mon dynasties. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, most of the population residing in the Irrawaddy Valley had converted to Buddhism. Of the many city-states, the largest and most important was Sri Ksetra, Southeast of modern Prome (Pyay). During this period, Burma was part of an overland trade route from China to India. Trade with India brought Buddhism from southern India. As early as 6<sup>th</sup> century, another group of people called the Mon began to enter the present-

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<sup>1</sup> Chandra, Puran., "Burma Past and Present :- A 'Fact Book", Forward Books, New Delhi, 2013, p.-1.

<sup>2</sup> Egreteau, Renaud., "Wooing The Generals :- India's New Burma Policy", Author Press, New Delhi, 2003, p.7.

day Lower Burma from the Mon Kingdoms of Haribhunjaya and Dvaravati in modern - day Thailand.<sup>3</sup>

Burma was inhabited by people of different origin, where past historical relations were often contentious. In the pre-colonial days, Burman kings routinely conquered other peoples and in this period consolidated their rule over a number of neighbouring kingdoms and principalities. The successes of such expansionist campaigns brought pride to the victors, but in some cases involved terrible massacres.<sup>4</sup>

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Burmans of the kingdom of Nanzhoo entered the Upper Irrawaddy Valley and following the establishment of the Pagan Empire in the 1050's, the Burmese language and culture slowly become dominant in the country. During this period, Theravada Buddhism gradually became the predominant religion of the country.<sup>5</sup>

By the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, Pagan had emerged as a major power alongside the Khmer Empire in Southeast Asia, recognised by the Chinese Seng Dynasty and Indian Chola Dynasty. In the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, most of mainland Southeast Asia was under some degree of control of either the Pagan Empire or the Khmer Empire. Anawrahta implemented a series of key social, religious and economic reforms that had a lasting impact on Burmese history.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chandra, Puran., 'Burma Past and Present :- A 'Fact Book', Forward Books, New Delhi, 2013, pp. -46-47.

<sup>4</sup> Fink, Christina., "Living Silence in Burma", Silkworm Books, Singapore, [Second edition](#), 2009, p.-8.

<sup>5</sup> Chandra, Puran., 'Burma Past and Present :- A 'Fact Book', ~~F~~Forward Books, New Delhi, 2013, pp.-1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

In 1228, the Ahoms - a Shan warrior tribe of today's north-eastern Myanmar (bordering China and Laos)- invaded the Brahmaputra Valley after a long east-west migration and settled in the heart of what later became India's Assam. The Assamese, were thus of Shan decent and adopted Hinduism (basically Shaivite).<sup>7</sup>

The Mon speaking kingdom was founded as Ramannadesa, immediately after Pagan's collapse in 1287. In the beginning, the Lower-Burma- based kingdom was a loose federation of regional power centers spread in the region of Martaban (Mottama), Pegu (Bago) and the Irrawaddy delta. The energetic reign of Razadarit (1384-1422) cemented the kingdom's existence. Razadarit firmly unified the three Mon-speaking regions together and successfully held off Ava in the Forty Years' War (1385-1424). After the war, Hanthawaddy entered its golden age, whereas, its rival Ava gradually went into decline. From the 1420's to the 1530's, Hanthawaddy was the most powerful and prosperous kingdom of all post-Pagan kingdoms.<sup>8</sup>

The Pagan Empire fell due to the Mongol invasions (1277-1301) and as a consequent to this, several Warring States emerged. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Pagan Empire and the Khmer Empire were the two main powers in mainland Southeast Asia. The Burmese language and culture gradually became dominant in the Upper Irrawaddy Valley, eclipsing the

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<sup>7</sup> Egreteau, Renaud., "Wooring The Generals :- India's New Burma Policy", Author Press, New Delhi, 2003, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Chandra, Puran., 'Burma Past and Present :- A 'Fact Book', Fforward Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 50.

Pyu, Mon and Pali norms by the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. Theravada Buddhism slowly began to spread to the village level, although Tantric, Mahayana, Brahmanic and animist practices remained heavily entrenched. Pagan's rulers built over 10,000 Buddhist temples in the Pagan capital zone alone. Repeated Mongol invasions (1277-1301) finally toppled the four century-old kingdom in 1287.<sup>9</sup>

It was only after the Portuguese navigators entered the eastern seas that any real notion of the actual state of Burma could be formed. Malacca was captured by Albuquerque, a sailor of Portuguese origin in 1511; and at that time it seemed that the country now known as Myanmar, was divided into four kingdoms - Arakan, Pegu, Burma and Ava.<sup>10</sup>

In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the country was reunified by the Taungoo Dynasty, which for a brief period was the largest empire in the history of Southeast Asia. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Konbaung Dynasty ruled over an area that included modern Burma, as well as Manipur and Assam. Pagan's collapse was followed by 250 years of political fragmentation that lasted well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Like the Burmans four centuries earlier, Shan migrants who arrived with the Mongol invasions stayed behind. Several competing Shan states came to dominate the entire northwestern to eastern arc surrounding the Irrawaddy valley.

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<sup>9</sup> Chandra, Puran, Burma - Past and Present - A Fact Book, Forward Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, George James, "Burma, As It Was, As It Is, And As It Will Be," R.N. Bhattacharya Books, Kolkata, 2002, pp 14-15.

Like the Pagan empire, Ava, Hanthawaddy and the Shan states were all multi-ethnic polities. Despite the wars, cultural synchronization continued. This period is considered a golden age for Burmese culture. Burmese literature "grew more confident, popular and stylistically diverse" and the second Pan-Burma chronicles emerged. Hanthawaddy monarchs introduced religious reforms that later spread to the rest of the country.<sup>11</sup>

From the 1720's onward, the kingdom was beset with repeated Manipuri raids into Upper Burma and a nagging rebellion in Lan Na. In 1740, the Mon of Lower Burma founded the restored Hanthawaddy kingdom. Hanthawaddy forces sacked Ava in 1752, ending the 266 year old Toungoo Dynasty. After the fall of Ava, one resistance group, Alaungpaya's Konbaung Dynasty defeated the restored Hanthawaddy and by 1759, had reunited all of Burma (and Manipur) and driven out the French and the British who had provided arms to Hanthawaddy.<sup>12</sup>

With the rise of the Konbaung dynasty, Burma was once again get unified and its influence extended outward to India and Siam. After a succession of wars with China, from 1765 to 1769, Burmese military prowess had reached its apex. England, meanwhile, was successfully subduing India, in Asia, as well as, ~~in~~ Africa. Burma, throughout this struggle, had remained uninvolved politically, although economic penetration was to lead where Burma was not prepared to go.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Chandra, Puran., *Burma ÷ Past and Present* ; A 'Fact Book', Forward Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; p.6.

<sup>13</sup> Trager, Halen G., "Burma Through Alien Eyes," Popular Press, Bombay, 1996, p. 6.

With Burma preoccupied by the Chinese threat, Siam recovered its territories by 1770 and went on to capture Lan Na by 1776. Burma and Siam went to war until 1855, but all resulted in a stalemate, exchanging Tenasserim (to Burma) and Lan Na (to Siam). Faced with a powerful China and a resurgent Siam in the East, King Bodowpaya turned West, acquiring Arakan (1785), Manipur (1814) and Assam (1817). It was the second largest empire in Burmese history, but was also one with a long ill-defined border with British India.<sup>14</sup> The country was colonized by Britain following three Anglo-Burmese Wars, viz., Ist War (1824), 2nd (1852) and IIIrd War (1885). British rule in Burma brought social, economic, cultural academic and administrative changes.

Apart from trade, the three B's - Brahmanism, Buddhism and British- moulded the relationship between India and Burma during the British occupation; the last B-British rule - had a peculiar and painful outcome. The idea and plan to subjugate Burma, divesting it of its independence and monarchy, which was absolutely pivotal to its socio-political structure, was that of Britain. In its implementation, not only the leadership role was played by the rulers of British India, but a vast majority of the agents of implementation were Indian soldiers, civil servants, traders, workers, agriculturalists and financiers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Chandra, Puran., *Burma ÷ Past and Present* ; A 'Fact Book', Forward Books, New Delhi, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Bhatia, Rajiv., *India-Myanmar Relations : Changing Contours*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 71.

From the Burmese perspective, it was evident that the country had come under the double domination of Britain and India. As the average Burmese grappled with this humiliating reality and as he came into daily contact much more with the Indians, rather than the British face of colonialism, he developed hostility towards both, but probably more for the Indians. This perception strengthened over time, although Burmese knew that Indians were victims of the same colonialism in their own homeland. This created some empathy too.<sup>16</sup>

The British took over 60 years to secure full control over Burma, from the launch of the first Anglo- Burmese War in 1824, till the end of monarchy in December 1885. Burma proper, comprising Lower and Upper Burma, as well as the provinces in the southeast and the southwest, was governed by the British directly.<sup>17</sup> Whereas, in the hills - the home of Kachins and Chins and the Shan States were under indirect control. These areas were not under the jurisdiction of the Legislative Council that was created by the Chelmsford Reforms of 1919.<sup>18</sup>

The British rule lasted 61 years counting from 1886 to 1947, as Burma gained independence in January 1948. Thus, when one looks at the longer period stretching for 121 years or the shorter period of 61 years, Burma-India relations were inevitably steered by the policy of Great Britain, which ruled over both India and Burma. The nature of linkage of governance in Burma, with British India and the influx of Indians into

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid; p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid; p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Fearon, James D., and Laitin, David D., "Burma" p. 4.

Burma, was necessitated by the British policy to develop Burmese economy and modernise administration, were among the key elements which shaped the relationship.<sup>19</sup>

The conquest of Burma was the fruit of British strategy and it was secured with the help of British arms. But the vast majority of troops were Indians. The country was ruled by the British, but the middle and lower positions in the officialdom were manned mostly by Indians. 'The number of European troops in Burma', wrote John L. Christian in 1945, 'was seldom more than 2,000 during the present century and frequently was as low as one battalion'. In the fields of agriculture, industry, police, administration and railways, as in the army, Indians played a pivotal role in Burma through the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

Almost immediately after Independence was secured, the country erupted in civil war. Three groups - the Communists, the People's Volunteer Organisation and the Karen National Union decided to fight the Government of U Nu for a wide range of ideological, personal and political reasons. Around the same time, members of the army who had been associated with these groups also deserted (sometimes in whole regiments), illustrating strong personal, ethnic and patron-client affinity that had superseded both ideology and the corporate identity of the armed forces.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bhatia, Rajiv., *India-Myanmar Relations : Changing Contours*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; pp. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Thwin-Aung, Michael and Thwin-Aung, Maitri., *A History of Myanmar Since Ancient Times, Traditions and Transformation*, Reaction Books, London, 2013, p. 238.

The period from 1937 to 1947 may be divided into three sub-periods: 1937-42, when the separated Burma functioned under the Raj, 1942-45, when it was 'liberated', but was in fact, under tight control of Japan and 1945-47, when the British rule was restored only to bring some normalcy after World War II and thereafter, paved the way for independence.<sup>22</sup>

After the war was over, the Burmese government, ending its exile in Simla, returned to Rangoon in October 1945. Burma, a major battle field of the war, had been devastated in the four years of conflict, occupation and liberation. Post-war reconstruction was now its top priority. Once the British realised that they could not stay on for long, they played a role in the creation of the new State. Aung San, the undisputed leader in Burma stood for building and preserving national unity, for he believed that without it, the nation would be weak and vulnerable. But he also encouraged and supported 'local autonomy, diversity and limited separations amongst the different groups, which were ethnically different from the Burmans and wanted to retain their difference'. In regard to the Indian and Chinese, Aung San's position was quite clear. He wanted them 'to choose whether or not, to join the people of Burma in creating a new State' He was particularly cordial to the Indians in conveying that 'we have no axe to grind, we nurture no feeling of racial bitterness and ill will'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bhatia, Rajiv., *India-Myanmar Relations : Changing Contours*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*; p. 82.

After the tragic assassination of Aung San on 19 July 1947, U Nu, who picked up the baton from Aung San to lead Burma, was well connected with Nehru. They were in close touch during the period leading to the attainment of independence by India on 15 August, 1947 and by Burma on 4 January, 1948.<sup>24</sup>

In 1948, U Nu became the first Prime Minister of Independent Myanmar and remained in power for fourteen long years till 1962. Myanmar's unity and territorial integrity was seriously challenged both by the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) and the disenchanting minority ethnic groups.<sup>25</sup>

The famous historian D.G.E. Halls aptly puts the relation between the two countries in the following manner - "the Indo-Chinese peninsula became a battle-ground between the Indian and Chinese civilizations. There was some blending, but in the long run Indian culture triumphed everywhere save in Annam and Tonking..... Burma's debt to India was great."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid; pp. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Raju, Subramanyam Adluri, Devi, Nirmala T., "India And Southeast Asia Strategic Convergence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2012, p. 317.

<sup>26</sup> Hall, D.G.E., Burma, London: Hutchinson's University Press, London, 1950, p. 7.