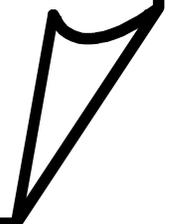


Chapter - 3

Historical and Political Background of Myanmar



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

EARLY HISTORY OF BURMA (MYANMAR) :

In spite of the fact that Myanmar (formerly known as Burma till 1989) and India having close geographical contiguity, historically and culturally had been sharing each others common circumstances, still both had remained distinct from each other, till the end of 20th century. During the colonial period, both were part of the British rule in India. But after independence, both these new countries did not realize much to develop better co-ordination and co-operation for the mutual benefits of each other. Having major diplomatic relations with each other was not enough for them, which shared many common factors. It was a kind of negligence on the part of both sides. Burmese having their typical way of living and inward looking community could not impress Indian politicians to develop meaningful neighbourly relations. The globalization process in 1990's and changed geostrategic environment in the world and particularly, in South Central and South East Asian regions, had opened the eyes of both the countries. Both countries had realized the importance of their geo-strategic advantages for betterment of both the countries.

Historically, India and Myanmar had close contacts between the people of their respective countries since the pre-historic times. It was difficult to establish since when, but there was little doubt that contacts between the two countries civilization certainly pre - dated much before

Christ. Sanskritised names in Myanmar bear out that by the 2nd century AD, Indians had set up settlement there.¹

ORIGIN OF THE BURMESE PEOPLE:

The first people in Burma to leave definite traces of their settlement were the "Môn". Speaking an Austroasiatic language, they were close cousins of the Khmēr with whom they originally came down the "Mekong River". Later the Khmers veered Southeastward following the twisting river to what is now Cambodia (Kampuchia) and the Mons veered southwestward towards the source of the Me-Nam River and went down its valley. By the 3rd century A.D., the Mons not only occupied the entire Me-Nam Valley, but also had spread to the Sittang Valley doubtless through the gaps in the eastern mountain wall of Myanmar. Their port capital was That ôn which was not far from the Isthmian portage routes and through this window to the sea, they saw India in its full glory, united and peaceful under the rule of emperor Asoka and a flourishing centre of Theravada Buddhism.²

As stated by an eminent historian, "The Mons of the Southern Myanmar were part of a settled community of people that lived in a series of small states." The Môn states extended southwestward from Burma into Thailand (Siam) and were so united by racial and cultural bonds that they

¹ Wagh, Laxman Popatrao., India-Myanmar Relations, Atul Prakashan, Kanpur, 2017, p. 9.

² Murari, Krishna., Cultural Heritage of Burma, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 4.

formed a whole, regarded in later times by Arab geographers, as making up a territorial unit known as Ramañña- desha. (the country of the Môns).³

Buddhism of Theravada variety was the prevailing religion in the Môn regions. When they appeared in history, the Môns had already imbibed Buddhism and a literature in the Môn language that had developed under their influence, had become the common heritage of all Ramaññadesha.⁴

The ethnic groups that were part of modern Myanmar had lived in the region for centuries. Myanmar's history as a united kingdom dates back to the early 8th and 9th centuries, when the Myanmarese migrated south from the eastern Himalayas and occupied the central plains of Myanmar and established a dynasty that ruled for almost 500 years. Over the past 1000 years, different ethnic groups established Kingdoms in the areas what is now Myanmar, at different times.

THE PEOPLES:

The people of Burma comprise of various groups, some large in numbers, others quite small, of the Mongolian family. Likewise, Mons spread into the south-eastern parts of the country was from a racial centre in what is now Siam. There they united with South Indian colonists and developed the earliest civilization in the country. Later on, the Burmese themselves began to infiltrate down the river valleys from eastern Tibet. One early branch of theirs, the Pyu, settled in Central Burma, but

³ Ibid, pp. 4.

⁴ Ibid; pp. 5.

ultimately lost its language and separate identity. Another branch, the Arakanese, pushed eastwards from the Irrawaddy and went to colonize the coastal belt beyond the Yomas to form a kingdom, which remained independent until nearly the end of the 18th century. It was difficult to say when this process began or in what exact order the various tribes came into the country.⁵

The Chinese, the Japanese, the Koreans, the Tibetans, the Malays and the other races of East Asia were all Mongolians or Mongoloids. They could be classified into three principal groups - (i) The Tibeto- Burman (ii) The Mon Khmer and (iii) Thai - Chin. The Burmans and the proto-Burmans, the Chin - Khmers and the Lolos, the three principal branches of the Tibeto - Burmans, were again subdivided into thirty-two groups. The Mon - Khmers were also divided into the Mon or Talaing, Wa, La and nine other groups, and the Thai - Chins were divided into eleven groups such as the Shan, Karen, Siam and others.⁶

The three principal branches of the Tibeto - Burmans made their way into Burma from the north in about the middle of the 9th century of the Christian era. According to inscriptions and eminent historians, one is not in a position to conclude definitely whether they arrived in a massive wave of invasion or whether they trickled into the country in small bands, each under its own leader or leaders. They were traditionally known as the Piyus, the Kanrans and the Thets. Absorbed by the Burmese, the Piyus had

⁵ Hall, D.G.E., Europe and Burma, Oxford University Press, London, 1945, p.2.

⁶ Mookharji, Shubhanshu Bimal., Burma & the West, Ranjan Publications, Agra, 1976, p. 9.

lost their separate identity centuries ago. The Kanrans were probably the ancestors of the present day Arakanese. On their way to Burma, the Tibeto-Burmans might had to cross the source of the Irrawaddy in the hills, where the ancestors of the Chins were cut off from the main stream of the migrants. The Burmans and the Proto - Burmans pushed ahead to the south. Many small group of the Tibeto - Burmans were left behind during the long trek. The minor races of Northern or Upper Burma were probably descendants of these strugglers. The Lolos probably moved to the South by way of the Mekong Valley. Some Lolos were to be found today on the eastern fringes of Burma.⁷

The Mon-Khmers probably advanced to the South along the Mekong River and entered Indo-China, where they founded the kingdom of Cambodia on the east of the Mekong River. Some of the Mon-Khmers however, spread over southern or Lower Burma and the Shan Plateau to the west of the Mekong. The Mon-Khmers were the earliest immigrants in Indo-China. The Mons, the major constituent of the Mon-Khmer group, had made their way into Burma after the Burmese.⁸

Burma's demography had been further complicated by cultural assimilation and cross-breeding. As these diverse peoples swept over the land and as their power and influence ebbed and flowed, they exchanged language, modes of dress, customs, beliefs, ideas and blood. The Mons and Burmans absorbed the Pyus, then mixed with and influenced each other;

⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

and similarly Burmans and Shans, Shans and Chinese, Burmans and Chinese Kachins and Sham Rakhine and Indian. Nor can we now say with any confidence what originally was whose contribution, who borrowed what from whom.⁹

The Thai - Chin migration took place later than that of the Tibeto-Burmans and the Mon-Khmers. They had founded a kingdom in Nanchao in Yunnan province, before they migrated to Burma. It was from Nanchao that they moved into Thailand to the South by way of Burma and also into Assam (India) and Upper Burma to the West.¹⁰

It was upon these material foundations - the eco - demographic setting - that the peoples and cultures of Myanmar made and shaped their histories. In today's contemporary Myanmar, approximately seven major and many more minor ethno-linguistic groups occupy the country, nearly all of whom belong to three of the four main language families of Southeast Asia : Tibeto - Burman, T'ai - Kadai, Austro - Asiatic and Austronesian.¹¹

Burma remained more or less unified till the earliest years of the 18th century, when the Mons of the Irrawaddy Delta broke away from the Burmese tutelage. They became so powerful at the time that much of Upper Burma also fell to them. The Mon supremacy was, however, short-

⁹ Tucker, Shelby., *Burma : The Curse of Independence*, Pluto Press, London, 2001, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹¹ Aung-Rawin, Michael., and Aung-Thwin, Maitrii., *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times, Tradings and Transformations*, Rektoin Books, London, 2013, p. 44.

lived and about the middle of the 18th century Burmese King Alaungpaya (1752-1760) crushed the Mons and brought the whole of Burma under his subjugation. The dynasty founded by him ruled in Burma till 1886, when it was annexed and became a part of the British Empire.¹²

The Burmese were basically a religious minded people in the conventional sense. The 'pongyis' (monasteries) were held in high esteem. Orthodox and old fashioned Burmese housewives had always cooked some extra food for the 'pongyis'. But the 'pongyis' were today a degenerate and discredited lot in the main stream and many of the 'pongyis chaungs' used to shelter anti-social elements not very long ago.¹³ The Shans first arrived in Burma in the 13th century of the Christian era. A branch of the Thai race, they call themselves Tias or "free men".

The Shans, who outnumber all other hill tribes of Burma, lived in the mountainous tract known as the Shan plateau situated to the east of the valleys of the Irrawaddy and the Sittang, to the north of Karenni and to the South of Bhamo district in Upper Burma. Concentrated primarily in the Shan plateau, the Shans were also to be found all over Upper Burma and in comparatively large numbers in the Tenasserim Division of lower Burma.¹⁴

One of the primary strategic concerns for rulers throughout mainland Southeast Asia was acquiring more manpower to till the land,

¹² Ibid, p. 11.

¹³ Ibid; p. 12.

¹⁴ Mookharji, Sudhanshu Bimal., Burma and the West, Ranjan Publication, Agra, 1976, p. 14.

expand the army and build temples, places and irrigation works. Unlike neighbouring India, Burma never had a fixed class structure. Social and political relationships were, however, ordered by status considerations. Older people were considered higher in status to younger people, monks to lay people and kings appointees to commoners.¹⁵

The Kachins (wild men), one of Burma's important racial minorities, had been given the name by the Burmese majority. Their original name Gygnpaw (Cannibal), probably a word of Tibetan origin, is hardly more complimentary. The Kachins migrated about a thousand years ago from the plateau of Central Tibet to the lowlands to the South by way of the Nmai and Mali valleys. They live today mainly in Bhamo, Katha and Myktina districts of Upper Burma and in the northern Shan Plateau. Some Kachins are also to be found in Kentung state of the Shan Plateau. The Kachins were mostly animists. The Kachins have today an autonomous State of their own, comprising most of Bhamo and Miktyna districts.¹⁶

British Influence on Burma

Burma was an important kingdom during the 16th to the early 19th century. Located between Thailand and the Indian subcontinent, Burma's culture serves as a bridge between West Asia and Southeast Asia, both culturally and strategically. Burma's decline started with the ascendancy of Siam in the late 18th century which saw considerable centralization and development in the Central Southeast Asian Kingdom.¹⁷

¹⁵ Fink, Christina., *Living Silence in Burma*, Silkarm Books, Thailand, 2009, p.9.

¹⁶ Mookharji, Sudhanshu Bimal., *Burma and the West*, Ranjan Publication, Agra, 1976, p. 16.

¹⁷ Feigenblatt, Otto F. Von., *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations ASEAN conflict and Development*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 110-111.

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.¹⁸ 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 Minkyinyo (1486-1531) and his son Tabinshwehti (1531-50).¹⁹

During this period, the Burmese rulers succeeded in unifying a majority of the Burmese population, but failed in one significant direction. Their rule could not extent to the major ethnic groups like the Shans and the Mons.²⁰ The third and final stage of unification took place in the eighteenth century during the rule of the Konebaung 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, waged a war against Arakan and conquered it. From the British point of view, Bodawapaya's reign was significant because, “it was in his time that the clashes with the Indian empire began, which ended in the

¹⁸ George, Mc Turnan Kahin., (ed.), Governments and Politics of South East Asia, New York, 1959, p.78.

¹⁹ Pradhan, K. Swatanter., New Dimensions in Indo-Burmse Relations, Rajat Publications, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ Trager, N. Frank., Burma From Kingdom to Republic, London, 1966, p. 5.

extinction of Burmese kingdom.”²¹ 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.²²

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 sides. 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.²³ It was not 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.²⁴ After full consolidation of its power on the Indian territory, the Britishers thought in terms of bringing Burma too under their colonial rule.²⁵

While the British East India Company gradually established itself in Bengal, gaining colonial control over the Ganges plain and delta after the Battle of Plassey (1757), Burma underwent a phase of thorough political reorganisation. The British were worried about the expansionist ambitions of the Burmese Kingdom, who viewed the East India Company as a possible commercial partner, rather than as a political and military rival.

²¹ Scott J.G., *Burma*, London, 1921, p. 188.

²² Cady, F. John., *A History of Modern Burma*, New York, 1958, p. 68.

²³ Sarkar, Jadunath., *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Calcutta, 1964, Vol. 3, p. 20

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 52.

²⁵ Pradhan, K. Swantanter., *New Dimensions in Indo- Burmese Relations*, Rajat Publications, New Delhi, 2000. p. 3.

The British had first set up factories in the port of Syriam (south of Rangoon) in 1647, but it was in 1680 that negotiations for a broader trade began between the British Governor of Madras and the court of Ava.²⁶

A century later, in 1785, the Burmese kingdom annexed the Arakan Coast and reached the very doors of Bengal. On its side, London, fearing that revolutionaries and later, Napoleonic France would settle in the region, attempted to reinforce its presence there by discussing an official trade agreement with the Burmese kingdom, but in vain. In 1811, relations between the British Governor General, based now in Calcutta and the Burmese royal were broken. Six years later, the Burmese launched their first attack against Assam, occupying it militarily in 1819 and a few years later, they annexed a small island close to Chittagong (Bengal), a territory that belonged to the East India Company. Then, when the Burmese attempted to invade the principality of Cachar (in Southern Assam, between the Khasi and Manipuri territories), which had also signed a Treaty of Alliance with the Company, the British reacted strongly and launched the first Anglo-Burmese War in February, 1824.²⁷

An expeditionary corps composed of Indian 'Sepoys' and British officers was sent to Rangoon by sea. The high caste Bengali soldiers refused to enter into battle with their neighbours and most of them were executed, as example, by their British superiors in Barrackpur, close to Calcutta (a garrison that would soon rise to fame for being the first to rebel

²⁶ Egreteau, Renaud., *Wooring The Generals, India's New Burma Policy*, Author Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9.

during the Great Mutiny of 1857).²⁸ Hence, the British mainly used sepoys from the Madras Presidency (Fort St. George). Decimated by tropical diseases, the British troops failed to win decisive battles and the first Anglo - Burmese war became one of the most costly colonial wars in which England was involved. However, the Burmese kingdom, which had a combative army, but with obsolete equipment, as compared to the more modern British troops, gave in after a year and with the Yandabo Treaty signed in February 1826, the British annexed the Arakan and Tenasserim coasts, driving the Burmese back out of Assam and Manipur, there by gaining a new defensive card in North - East India, while controlling strategic Assamese territory.²⁹

During the period 1826-40, relations between Burma and British 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, then Governor General to return to Burma the disputed Kobo 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,

²⁸ Desai, W.S., *India and Burma, A Study*, Orient Longmans Limited, Calcutta, 1952, p. 14.

²⁹ Egretau, Renaud., *Moving the Generals : India's New Burma Policy*, Author Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 10.

Burma's request for the return of the Tenasserim provinces, was rejected by the British.³⁰

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, it signalled the beginning of the 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.³¹

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 were now encouraged to bring the whole of Burma under their control. This materialized in the year 1885, when the Third Burmese War took place.

The third Anglo-Burmese War, which took place in 1885, leading to the final annexation of Upper Burma occurred under different conditions. The most important condition was the strategic necessity of British Indian Empire which by 1858, had come under the direct control of His Majesty's

³⁰ Desai, W.S., A History of British Residency in Burma, 1828-1940, Rangoon, 1939, pp. 214-16.

³¹ Cady, John F., South East Asia : Its Historical Development, New York, 1964, p. 384.

Government at London.³² 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, 1885.³³ 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.

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.³⁴ In the mean time, 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.³⁵

After the annexation of Burma, it was no smooth sailing for British administration in Burma, as they were faced with a series of rebellions and organised banditry which proved enormously expensive in terms of

³² Dunbar, George., *India and the Passing of Empire*, London, 1951, p. 156.

³³ Banerjee, A.C., *Annexation of Burma*, Calcutta, 1944, p. 287.

³⁴ Desai, W.S., *Deposed King Thibaw of Burma in India, 1885*, Bombay, 1967, p. 7.

³⁵ Grothwaite, Charles., *The Pacification of Burma*, London, 1968, p. 1-3, p.7.

money, men and material.³⁶ In order to control this situation, more than forty thousand Indian troops and police contingents were posted at different places.³⁷

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 introduction of western concepts of government and politics by British India, provoked the Burmese to raise voice against the alien rule. And as a consequent, the Burmese nationalism started for sixty two years from the 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.³⁸

The Indians of Burma were among the staunchest defenders of the British presence in the country, for most of the Indian traders and industrialists owed their success to the colonial system. Remarkably, in 1937, Burma not only continued to maintain the British Raj's currency printed by the Imperial Bank of India in Rangoon, but also inherited all the debts contracted under the previous political and administrative regime.³⁹

³⁶ Kahin, George Mc Turnan., *Governments and Politics of South East Asia*, New York, 1959, p. 79.

³⁷ Cady, John F., *South East Asia : Its Historical Development*, New York, 1964, p. 135.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 159.

³⁹ Egreteau, Renaud., *Wooring The Generals : India's New Burma Policy*, Author Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 21.

The period between 1939 and 1948 was a turbulent phase in the history of Burma. After the fall of Ba Maw's ministry in February 1939, U Pu, a defected member of his government took over the command of Burma, by forming a coalition with U Saw and U Aye of Myochit Party, U Ba Pe and U Tun from the Ngabwinsaing remnant and Saw Po Chit, Karen independent.⁴⁰ From the day of the formation of Government, U Pu had to face the problem of keeping the heterogeneous coalition partners together and tackling the opposition of Ba Maw's group. U Pu took certain land reforms measures like the passing of the Tenancy Act in May 1939, to ensure more security of tenure at lower rentals by enabling householders to appeal to revenue or settlement officers of the government and tried to set a 'fair rent' standard. But the measure proved unworkable because it was physically impossible for the officials designated as rent determines to make thousands of examinations requested by as many tenants.⁴¹

Meanwhile, with the outbreak of Second World War in Europe in September 1939, the political climate of Europe, as well as of Asia rapidly changed and neither Burma nor India was an exception to this changing scenario.⁴² 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

⁴⁰ Cady, John F., A History of Modern Burma, Cornell University Press, New York, 1958, p. 402.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 406.

⁴² Rajshekhar., Myanmar's Nationalist Movement 1936-1948 and India, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, p. 69.

view the relationship, it was pertinent to observe that Burma came under total Japanese occupation, where as India did not.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ The Burmese welcomed the Japanese soldiers as liberator, but were surprised and disappointed to find the Japanese behaving as conquerors.⁴⁵ By May 1945, everything was 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.⁴⁶

In 1945, when the Second World War was approaching its end, Pandit Nehru again pleaded for the freedom of all Southeast Asian countries including Burma.⁴⁷ It was this concern for Burma and other Southeast 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

⁴³ Desai, A.R., *India and Burma*, Bombay, 1954, p. 81.

⁴⁴ Aung, Tint Maung., *The Stricken Peacock : Anglo-Burmese Relations, 1752-1948*, The Hague, 1965, p. 110-111.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 112.

⁴⁶ Furnirall, J.S., *Burma Past and Present*, *Far Eastern Survey*, New York, Vol. 22, No. 3, 25 February, 1953, p. 23.

⁴⁷ Cited in the *Modern Review*, Vol. 77, No. 6 June 1945, p. 258.

it "allow the use of Indian resources for the deprivation of freedom of any of these countries."⁴⁸

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 feeling 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 keep in mind India, while formulating a policy for Burma and vice-versa. They knew that "Burma post-war status would inevitably influence and be influenced by what happened in India."⁴⁹

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 illwill We stand for more than friendly relations with our neighbours. We want to be not merely good neighbours, but good brothers even We stand 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 for all Asia. We stand for these and we trust Indian national leaders in Indian implicitly."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The Indian Annual Register, Vol. 1, January- June 1945, p. 225.

⁴⁹ Cady, John F., A History of Modern Burma, New York, 1958, p. 487.

⁵⁰ Silverstein., Josef., The Political Legacy of Aung San, New York, 1972, p. 86.

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. 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 negotiations with Clement Attlee, the then Prime Minister of Great Britain.⁵¹ The outcome of the negotiation was that Burma became an independent country on 4th January, 1948.⁵²

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 will be analysed and assessed.

To India, Myanmar was a vital strategic land bridge to the ASEAN, fundamental for unlocking and development of a land locked NER, a resource and energy base to sustain growth, key to stabilising its eastern land frontiers and means to secure the eastern sea frontiers in the Indian Ocean.⁵³

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⁵¹ Maung, Maung., The Burmese Parliament, The Guardian, Vol. 4, No. 8, August 1957, p. 27.

⁵² Treaty between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Provisional Government of Burma, London, H.M.S.O., 1947, p. 1-12.

⁵³ Kurlantzick, Joshua., Conditional Normalization with Myanmar. 30 Nov, 2011, from Council for Foreign Relation website: www.cfr.org/burma/myanmar/conditions-normalization-Myanmar/P26554 (accessed 25 Aug 2012.)