**Arakanese Nationalism and the Struggle for National self- determination**

**(An  overview  of Arakanese political  history up to   1988)**

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Introduction

Arakan had been an independent kingdom before it was invaded by the Burmans in

1784. The invasionof the Burmans into Arakan in 1784 led the Burmans into conflict

with the British in British-India . The Arakanese people took refuge in chittagong Hill

Tracts of British- India and repulsed the Burman invaders to restore their home land .The

resistance wars launched by the Arakanese people were misjudged by the Burmans as to be

the encouragement of the British . This gave rise to conflict between the British and the

Burmans .

After the first Anglo-Burman war in 1826 , Arakan was ceded to the British by the

Burmans. Instead of ceding Arakan to Arakanese people ,the British colonized it and

incorporated it into British–India .The British’s rule in Arakan in the 19

th

 century faced

numerous pro- independence revolts staged by the Arakanese people .The imposition of the

British’s control in Arakan took long time, some areas not being pacified until the early

20

th

century .In 1852 , a second Anglo- Burman war resulted the Burmans to surrender to

the British and the remainder of the Burmans territories were incorporated into British

-India .

Up to theearliest 20

th

  century , the national liberation movement of Arakan was carried out

in isolation having no relation with the neighbouring nationalist movements .

The Burman’s  nationalism was faded away under the oppressive British colonial rule .In

1917 ,the emergence of saradaw U Ottama , an Arakanese Buddhist monk ,woke up the

Burman’s  nationalism .

Being aware of impossibility for freedom for the  Burmans  without co-operation

of non-Burman ethnic nationalities in British-Burma, the Burman political leaders persuaded

the non-Burman ethnic nationalities to be united in struggle against the British colonial rule

giving a sham promise for establishment of Federal Union of all ethnic nationalities equal in

every respect .The Arakanese political leaders hopefully believed the sham promise given by

the Burman political leaders and co-operated with the Burmans to achieve independence of

British -Burma instead of setting up definite political position to gain the right to self-

determination of Arakanese people .

When Burma gained independence from the British in 1948 by the collective efforts of the

Burman and non–Burman ethnic nationalities including Arakanese people , Arakanese

people found themselves that they were a colony of the Burmans and were deceived by the

Burmans , who transformed their nationalism into the form of military dictatorship to

dominate the non-Burman ethnic nationalities : Chin, Kachin, Karen ,Kayah,

Mon ,Rakhaing( Arakanese people ) and Shan .However , the Arakanese people did not give

up their struggle for the right to self-determination .They continued their struggle and they are

stillstruggling for their right to self-determination by various means sacrificing a lot of their

lives .After forty years of Burma’s independence, the Burman nationalism in the form of

military dictatorship became a detriment even to the interest of the majority Burman people .

In this paper ,I attempt to define the Arakanese nationalism and examine the general condition

of their struggle for national self-determination.

Arakanese Nationalism

The Arakanese nationalism at this present phase can be classified into two streams

according to the national movements carried out by the Arakanese nationalists. One is

characteristic of third-world anti-imperialist nationalliberation. It is originated from the

political concept to regain the long lost national independenceand takes the form of political

struggle to establish a national state with jurisdiction over Arakan national  territory  based on

the self-determination as defined by the United Nations Organization. There is another stream

of Arakanese nationalism which is based on the principles of federalism, political equality and

the right to self-determination of all different ethnic nationalities in Burma.

This stream of Arakanese nationalism claims that a condition of peace and progress for

different ethnic nationalities in Burma is possible only as a result of abolition of the

Burman’s chauvinistic domination in the form of military dictatorship, and establishment of

an authentic federal union on the basic of full freedom and political equality of non-

Burman ethnic nationalities .Such a change in the basic structure of Burma’s political

community that those relations which breed exploitation of non-Burman ethnic nationalities

by the Burmans, and human misery will come to an end. Therefore, its goal is the attainment

of national freedom of Arakanese people and other ethnic nationalities, and the beginning of

free society of all ethnic nationalities of Burma, where racial oppression , economic

exploitation and violations of Human Rights will be terminated.

The rights of self-determination has been interpreted by both streams of Arakanese

nationalism as a people’s freedom to determine their political status, to pursue their

economic, social and cultural developments independently.{ (1)the Arakanese people must be

in a position to act – they must not be compelled by external forces or the threat of

punishment (2) the actions of Arakanese people must be performed in obedience to a law-

they must be rational free choosers (3) the Arakanese people must themselves create or

prescribe the law to which they are obedient.}

Both streams of Arakanese Nationalism claim that the people of Arakanare a people who

have the rights to self-determination according to the UN charter ,and take the view that there

are all the features of a colony in Arakan. This is because Arakan, which was an independent

kingdom till 1784, was conquered by the aliens as the Burmans in 1784, the British in 1826

and the Japanese in 1942 successively, and the Arakanese people are still subjected to extreme

national oppression and political domination by the aliens Burmans. That is why both streams

of Arakanese nationalism demand the decolonisation of Arakan. The Arakanese people, who

carry the political heritage of the independent kingdom of Arakan, have the will to be

identified them as a people having a social entity with their own identity and characteristics in

their own territory.

**Both streams of Arakanese nationalism assert in the matter of racial groups in Arakan**

**that the minority rights shall be guaranteed to the racial groups that migrated in**

**Arakan before 1826, the year on which the British occupied Arakan. However, those**

**Bengali Muslims, who were brought to Arakan after 1826 by the British for the purpose**

**of employments in the expanded cultivation in Arakan, are considered as individuals,**

**not a racial group. Their rights as citizens shall not be deprived like other citizens. The**

**individual citizens and freely constituted groups or organizations shall enjoy full**

**participation in every aspect of Arakanese political community. Arakanese nationalists,**

**who centre national independence, struggle by all necessary means, violence or non-**

**violence, against the Burman domination. But, Arakanese nationalists, who centre the**

**right to self-determination of Arakanese people within the frame-work of a genuine**

**federal structure, struggle by non-violence means.**

The successive Burman military regimes always attempt to crush any form of Arakanese

national movements through their military and police apparatus. It is illegal to establish an

Arakanese political organization in Arakan.

The socio-economic conditions of Arakan are aggravated as a result of the successive Burman

regime’s policies to retard deliberately social and economic developments of Arakanese

people. Their policies aimed at economic exploitation of natural resources and economic

bases of Arakan bring about million of Arakanese people to live in a condition of absolute

poverty. The mortality rate is higher in Arakan compared with in the territory where the

majority Burmans inhabit due to the lack of health care and medical expenditure. Most of the

industry are constructed in the territories where majority Burmans inhabit, and there are no

industry for the interest of Arakanese people in Arakan.

Transportation and communication are very poor, and standard of living in Arakan lags far

behind the territories where the majority Burmans inhabit. The education is neglected and

Arakanese people continue to experience decline of per capital income.Accordingly,

Arakanese nationalism contains a back-ward looking elements demanding redress of past

grievance and it also claims that Arakan national question must be viewed historically and

economically.

**Location and Territory of Arakan**

Arakan is situated between Burma on the east and Bangladesh on the west, and is separated

from Burma by the Arakan mountain ranges ( Arakan Roma). It is also bordered by India and

Bangladesh on the north and bounded on the south-west by the bay of Bengal .The present

total area of Arakan is about 18,500 sq-miles. Actual territory belonged to Arakan before it

came under foreign rule in 1784 was twice the area of the present day Arakan. The

southernmost territory of Arakan, from Kyauk-chwan River to cape Negres, was integrated

into Bessein district of lower Burma by the British in 1853. The territories covering Tripura

region, Chittagong Hill tracts and plain was integrated into British-India in 1937 by the

British again. Arakan Hill Tracts (Platwa district) was integrated into Chin special division by

the U Nu-led AFPFL Burman regime in 1952 in order to create discords between the peoples

of Arakan and Chinland.

A Short History Background of Arakan

The origin and development of Arakanese nationalism and national movements lie in the

history of Arakan. The history of Arakan can be viewed dividing into the following periods.

(a) Independent kingdom of Arakan ruled by Arakanese kings 3325 BC - 1784 AD

(b) The Burman rule 1784 AD - 1825 AD

(c) The Brithish rule  1826 AD - 1942 AD

(d)   The Japanese rule 1942 AD - 1945 AD

(e)   The British rule 1945 AD -  1947  AD

(f)   The Burman rule      1948 AD to Up to Date

Ethnically, Arakanese people are mixture of Indo-Aryans and Mongolians. The ancient

chronologies gave 3325 BC as the date of the founding of the first Dynnyawaddy dynasty on

the east of Gissapa River (also known as Kalandan River). The founder of the first

Dynnyawaddy dynasty was king Marayu ( ayoung hero) who was a descendant of the ancient

tribe of the Shakyas in the northern India. King Marayu and his army was successful to

subdue the carnivorous barbarians who forayed Dynnyawaddy occasionally. King Marayu

established a beautiful city and led the kingdom to be a prosperous and peaceful society, and

he died at the age of eighty. The name of his kingdom “Dynnyawaddy” means a land of

plentiful rice production.

The Ananda Chandra inscriptions (686 A.D) on the Chite-thaung pillar of Mrauk-U has

recorded the presences of Arakanese dynasties from the 6

th

 century BC. According to the

Ananda Chandra inscriptions and other ancient chronologies, the following six dynasties

reigned in Arakan.

(1) The first Dynnyawaddy  ( BC 3325 to BC 1510) founded by King Marayu,

(2) The second Dynnyawaddy (BC 1483 to BC 581)founded by King Kanrazargree

(3) The third Dynnyawaddy ( BC 580 to AD 326 )founded by King Chandrasuria

(4) Wesali Dynasty (AD 327 to AD 818) founded by King Dvan Chandra,

(5) Lemro Dynasty (AD 818 to AD1404 ) founded by King Khattathun,

(6) Mrauk-U Dynasty  (AD 1430 to AD 1784) founded by King Sawmon.

The 243 Arakannese kings ruled Arakan for a long period of 5108 years. The land which is

known as Arakan by the foreign peoples is christened by her own people as “Rakhaing Pray”.

According to the ancient Arakanese chronologies, the name “Rakhaing” is originated from

pali word “Rakkhapura” which means the native land of “Rakkha”. The word “Rakkha”, in

the course of time, evolves into “Rakhaing”. “Rakkha” in pali means safe-guarding of nation

and moral precepts. In an old history record of Arakan in poetic form, the meaning of

“Rakhaing” is mentioned as:

“Because they are capable of cherishing

and safe-guarding of their nation

and moral precepts,

They are deserved to be named

and to be called “Rakhaing”.

(Ashon Nagainda Mawgun, 14

th

Century).

In the Ananda Chandra inscriptions, the ancient name of Arakan is mentioned as

“Arakhadesa” in Sanskrit. “Arakha” means safe-guarding of nation and “desa” means land.

“Arakha” may be the source of foreign version “Arakan” for “Rakhaing”.

The fifty eight descendents of King Marayu ruled for (1818) years till BC 1510. The 58

th

 King

Pyaw Hla Si Thu was usurped by the three disloyal ministers in BC 1510. Under the usurpers,

the insurrections were rampant throughout the kingdom. About the same time, a wave of

Indo-Aryan tribe led by Kanrazagree, entered Arakan from the north. Kanrazagree eliminated

all insurrections and dethroned the usurpers.

In BC 1483, Kanrazagree ascended the throne and established the second Dynnyawaddy

dynasty. His 28 descendants ruled Arakan for 927 years. The second Dynnyawaddy dynasty

was succeeded by the third Dynnyawaddy dynasty founded by King Chandrasuria in BC 580.

King Chandrasuria was a descendant of King Kanrazargree. He was a contemporary to king

Bimbisara of the kingdom of Magadha in India. During the reign of King Chandrasuria,

Arakan had commercial contact with the Kingdom of Magadha in India by both land and sea

routes. The Kingdom of Magadha was economically and technologically a valuable support to

Arakan. Dynnyawaddy inscriptions dated 544 BC says that during the reign of King

Chandrasuria, Lord Buddha visited Arakan.

It is quite possible that Arakanese people professed faith in Buddhism since then, and from

that time onwards, Buddhism seems to have continued to flourish and to influence Arakanese

civilization. Owing to the trade between the kingdom of Maghada and Arakan, there was

much cultural contact with the kingdom of Maghada at that time.

The third Dynnyawaddy dynasty was succeeded by the wesali dynasty which was established

by King Dvan Cahdra in AD 327. The capital city Wesali was very beautiful and popularly

known as the city of the stone Pier. Contacts were had with foreign peoples and trade was

carried on through both sea and land routes. The trading ships from foreign countries

harboured at the stone pier of capital city Wesali.

The kingdom of Arakan under the Chandra kings of Wesali dynasty became prosperous due to

the trade relations with foreign countries. In the trade relations, gold and silver coins were

used as currency. During this periods, although Arakanese court used Sanskrit alphabet and

Pali language, a new style of “Rakkhawunna” script ( Arakanese script) was invented and

promoted for a purpose of public use and the writing of Arakanese language to be uniform,

and thus fostered national unity. A lot of translation of Sanskrit literature into Arakanese

language were done in this period. Among them, the translation of law of Manu, translation of

Sarrnakya’s Niti and translation of the fables of King Kyammadike were famous and well

known. In this period, books written in Arakanese language on traditional medicines , arts,

warfare, metallurgy, pottery and architecture were produced in vast quantities. The most

famous Arakanese literary works as “Pyinnyameda chronical”in poetic form and “Thein Kan

Mein Twin Poem” were written in this period. “Pyinnyameda chronical” in poetic form was

composed by Medapynnya, a Minister of King Thirichandra, in 622-658 AD and “TheinKan

Mein Twin Poem” was composed by Princess Thuwunnadevi in 650-667 AD.

The industry of Arakan, in this period, produced household utensils such as stone plates, the

decorated carvings of stone and metal images, lamps, pots, golden sash, rings, bracelets, ears-

plugs and textiles. Dams and embankments were built and irrigation systems were used in

order to distribute water for agricultural lands, and thus yield rich harvests. Buddhism thrived,

and pagodas, stupas, monasteries and shrines were built throughout the kingdom. Buddha

images were cast, and land grants were made to the religious institutions. The Buddhist synod

of 638 AD was convened by attending 1,000 Buddhist monks from the Island of Lanka

(Ceylon) and 1,000 Arakanese Buddhist monks. It lasted for 3 years, and the Pitakas, the three

repositories of Buddhist scripture, were written on the 5,000 copper plates. Arakan was a

prosperous and powerful nation in this period, and was the highest level of the world standard

of that period.

The Wesali dynasty was followed, in AD 818, by a new dynasty, the Lemro (four cities) which

ruled Arakan nearly 600 years, until 1404 AD. Sixty kings ruled from four cities of Pyinsa,

Parein, Nereinsara Taungoo and Launggrat successively .During the rules of king Kawlia and

King Datha Raza, the fifth and sixth kings of the Parein city of Lemro dynasty , Arakan grew

into a more powerful nation. The Lemro period was one of the most glorious periods in the

history of Arakan. One of the outstanding kings of Lemro period was King Mun Htee, who

was on the throne form 1238 AD to 1389 AD or a little over 96 years. Under him, military

operations were greatly expanded the territories of Kingdom of Arakan; to the west into

Bengal , to the east the west bank of Irrawaddy river, and to the north Kammapura and

Tripura. King Mun Htee and his great army paid a visit to Buddha Gaya of India, and repaired

the temples there and setup a stone pillar on which he mentioned his arrival and merit. The

Kingdom of Arakan flourished during King Mon Htee’s rule. He is still famous in the world

history as a king who was an example to his people by being obedient to the laws which were

made by himself. During the Lemro Period, there lived a Buddhist monk named “Rakhaing

Thu Mrat”, who wrote “Lakathara Pyo”( the essence of human conduct), which is still

considered as the outstanding literature of Arakan and Burma.

After Lemro dynasty, there came Mrauk-U dynasty founded by King Saw Mon in 1430 AD.

Mrauk-U dynasty ruled Arakan for more than 350 years. During the time of Mrauk-U dynasty,

Arakan saw the development of Arakanese literature and culture in all sphere of national life

for which it is called “the golden age of Arakan history”. The Kingdom of Arakan became

more unified and powerful under the reign of Mun Khari (1434-1458 AD).In 1454, King Mun

Khari met King Narapati of Ava of the Burmans (1443-1469 AD) and the watershed of

Arakan mountain ranges ( Arakan Roma) was demarcated as the border line of the two

kingdoms. Again in 1480 AD , by the another meeting between Arakanese King Ba Saw Pru

and Burman King of Ava Thihathuria, the stable friendship of the two kingdoms was

established. During the reign of King Ba Saw Pru (1458-1481 AD), the famous Arakanese

literature “Rakaing Munthamee E Chin” ( the classical poem addressed to a child princess

extolling the glory of ancestors) was written by Minister Phadu Mun Nyo.

The greatest King Mun Ben (1531-1553 AD) created a naval fleet of 10,000 war boats that

dominated the bay of Bengal and Gulf of Marta ban. The kings of Arakan firmly established

their authority in Bengal during Mrauk-U period. The Mrauk-U dynasty ruled from the entire

coast line of Dacca and the Sundabans to Yankon and Moulmein, a coastal strip of a thousand

miles in length and varying from 150 to 20 miles in depth. The Mogul and Afghan kings sent

annual presents, and the kings of Island of Lanka (Ceylon) and Portugal paid their respect and

sent trading ships to Arakan. It was under the government of King Mun Ben that annals were

written at the court and an amendment of the Arakanese legal code was made, and a new

constitution of Kingdom of Arakan (i.e. Shwemyin Dhammathat) was adopted on the advice

of Ashon Mra Wa, an erudite hermit.

The ports along the Arkan coast received Arab, central Asia, Danish, Dutch and Portuguese

traders in this period. A Dutch man, who visited Arakan in the 16

th

 Century, described Arakan

as one of the richest countries in Asia ,and compared Mrauk-U city with Amsterdam of Dutch

and London of England in size and prosperity .Growing international trade, and political and

administrative skills of Arakanese kings enabled Arakan to be a prosperous and powerful

country in the South East Asia. The reigns of warrior kings; Mun Phalong (1571-1593 AD),

his son Mun Razagree (1593-1612 AD) and his grandson Mun Khamuang (1612-1622 AD)

strengthened the wealth and power of Arakan.

The Arakanese king of Mrauk-U dynasty practised open doors’ policy which attracted foreign

traders to the kingdom and appointed some foreigners as servants at the court. According to

the record of father Sebastiao Manrique of Portugal, not only the Muslim guards and

Portuguese captains of the fleet but also there were even a troop of Japanese guards at the

court around 1630 AD. With the Arakanese kings’ open doors’ policy, the imports of

techniques and skills in the fields of construction, ship-building , artillery and metallurgy

flowed into Arakan in this period.

The Barman’s , ever jealous of prosperity and cultural developments of the kingdom of

Arakan, always planned to break up her national sovereignty and to loot her vast wealth.

Eventually, the turbulent situation happened in Arakan during 1780s due to the power struggle

among the local Dukes led to be exploited by the Burmans. In 1782 AD, Thadoe Aung, Duke

of Rambree, became the king of Arakan. He was accorded the title “Mahasamada”(Great

President Elect) by the Mun Ahtaingban (The Royal Assembly of Lords). He was a

Republican and had the policy to form a more workable government elected by the Mun

Ahtaingban ( The Royal Assembly of Lords). Ngathade, Duke of Ngasaraingchaung, had the

policy to maintain feudalism, and asked Bodaw U Wyne, King of the Amarapura of the

Burmans, to invade Arakan. His idea was that Bodaw U Wyne would enthrone him as a king.

However, the Burman King Bodaw U Wyne had no intention of enthroning Ngathande as a

king of Arakan. His policy was to break up national sovereignty of kingdom of Arakan, and

toloot her vast wealth and to reduce Arakan to the position of an administrative province of

the Burman empire.

In 1784 AD, the expeditionary Burman invaders’ forces sent by the Burman king Bodaw U

Wyne invaded Arakan without declaration of war. The royal forces of kingdom of Arakan

were caught unawares, and suffered a crushing defeat due to lack of unified military

preparations. Arakanese King “Mahasamada”( Great President Elect) was dethroned and

murdered by Burman invaders.

The Struggle for National Self-Determination

The resistant wars broke out in various parts of Arakan as soon as Arakan was invaded by the

Burman invaders’ forces. Araknnese forces led by Crown Prince ThaukSan Shwe,

Taungmungree Kyaw Htwee, Duke Kaung Nyunt Randaing of Pinnaychaung Island, Duke

Poe Lone of Rambree Island, Dhapaing Mra Raung, Dhapaing Htwan Aung, Dhapaing

Hari, Dhapaing Ray San and Nga Myo Por fought against the Burman invaders in different

parts of Arakan.

Resistance spread to the whole Kingdom, when the Burman invaders had made an

arrangement to carry away the Great Mahamuni Buddha Image by January 1785.It continued

to grow till 1824, the year on which the British declared war against the Burman invaders in

Arakan. The imposition of the Burman’s control on Arakan was not possible during their

occupation of Arakan for 40 years. (from 1784 to1824)

During their invasion, the Burman invaders’ forces committed a crime against humanity with

a genocide killing about 236,000 Arakanese civilians including 10,000 infants of cradle age.

They killed the infants mercilessly with the slogan of “while cutting down the stalk of a reed,

its stump should not be left out”. A mass of 100,000 skilled workers, artisans, intellectuals and

Buddhist monks were arrested and taken across the Arakan mountain ranges, and they all

were initiated into slavery and servitude at pagodas and temples of pagan, Sagaing and

Mandalay.

The Great Mahamuni Buddha Image was also carried away to Mandalay. Moreover, the

Burman invaders destroyed many valuable creations of Arakan including royal palace, city

gates, the clock-tower, the booming drum that was believed to have a mystical effect on the

Burman dynasties and many other edifices of splendour. The industries and business centres

were also destroyed by them. The ancient chronicles and books were carried away by them

with an intention of eradicating of national feeling of the Arakanese people, and many others

were destroyed. The Arakanese books on literature, arts, traditional medicines, warfare,

metallurgy, architecture, ship-building, which were carried away by the Burman invaders, are

estimated to be about the height of two toddy palms. The Arakan genocide is the forgotten

genocide of the 18

th

century, remembered mainly by the Arakanese people.

More than 200,000 Arakanese people fled into the British-Bengal to escape the atrocities

committed by the Burman invaders. The Naff river was strewed with the dead bodies of all

ages and of both sexes. Captain Hiram Cox, a British officer, took care Arakanese refugees

with great sympathy. He managed to resettle about ten thousands in wasteland around

Chittagong, but many other had dispersed widely among the hill and jungle of Chittagong

hills tracts. The main settlement area of Arakanese refugees was named as Cox’s Bazaar.

About 10,000 Arakanese refugees from the southern region of Arakan escaped to delta areas

of east Bengal boating across the Bengal Sea, and made their settlement there.

In 1811-1815, the situation abruptly changed; war of tremendous resistance broke out in

Arakan. Lord Chain Bran known as King Bering in the contemporary British records

organized Arakanese people living among the hills and jungles of Chittagong hills tracts, and

built up an army with a 20,000 man strong and fought against the Burman invaders to drive

them out from the soil of Arakan. Lord Chin Bran and his army succeeded in crushing one

after another, and they were capable to lay siege Mrauk-U, capital city of Arakan, repeatedly.

They plundered Burman’s garrisons on their way to Mrauk-U and killed the Burmans whom

they encountered on their way.

Military campaigns were carried out in various parts of Arakan by Lord Chin Bran’s troops.

By 1812, almost the whole of territories of Arakan was under the control of Lord Chin Bran’s

troops. However, the Burman king sent larger reinforcements by land and sea to consolidate

the position. The Buman invaders slaughtered innocent civilians in revenge ,and so Lord

Chin Bran led his troops to retreat to Chittagong hills tracts. In order to defend the Burmese

forces, he built a fort at Plun Chural, a three days journey from Panwa (Ramu), where he died

of old age in 1815. The revolt, that Lord Chin Bran started, did not end with his death. He was

succeeded by other leaders, who gained support from Arakanese people, and continued

struggle against the Burman invaders. Outstanding among his successors were Dhabainggri

Kyaw Bone, Lord Aung Kyaw Zan ,  Lord Lat Ronephawgri and Zonetat Myattaungrhay.

Arakanese troops advanced inside Arakan and fought the Burman garrisons repeatedly giving

much trouble to the Burman’s shaky rule in Arakan. By 1818, the Burman governor of

Rambree sent a letter to the British authorities in Calcutta. The letter stated: “One lakh of

Arakanese people living in the British dominion are challenging the Burman’s rule in Arakan

many times with the encouragement of the British. I demand the British authorities to

extradite those Arakanese people to Arakan, and failure to accede the demand will be brought

to the destruction of the British dominion by the Burman forces” .

The British at that time was in difficulties both inside and outside India - distressing political

situation in various parts of India, troubled with Pandris ,and strained relations with China,

Nepal and Afghanistan. Therefore, the British first tried to avoid the direct conflict with the

Burmans by sending envoys to Ava. But, it was unsuccessful. Then, when the British were

fighting with Pandris, the king of Ava of the Burmans sent a letter again to Lord Hastings

demanding the surrender of Chittagong , Dhaka, Cassimbazaar and Murshidabad. Soon, in

1821-1822, The Burman forces invaded Assam, and in September 1823 the Shapuri Island

near Chittagong which was belonging to the British dominion. At the same time , the Bumans

were making preparation for the dispatch of a military expedition to invade the British-

Bengal. All those events frustrated the British.

At the beginning of 1824, an agreement was signed between the exiled Arakanese Princes and

the British authorities in Bengal to establish an alliance between the British and Arakan. By

the terms of this agreement, Arakanese forces under the command of Lord Aung Kyaw Zan

must fight the Burman forces on the side of the British, and Arakan must be ceded to the

princes of Arakan after the Burman invader’s forces were driven out of the soil of Arakan.

About the sametime, the advance of the Burman forces towards the eastern frontier of the

British dominion made the British inevitable to declare war on Ava of the Burmans. On 4

March 1824, therefore, Lord Amherst declared war on Ava of the Burmans. In the war,

Arakanese forces fought against the Burmans on the side of the British. The Burman forces

suffered a crushing defeat and by the “Yantabo Peace Treaty” at the end of the first Anglo-

Burman war on 24 February 1826, Arakan was ceded to the British by the Burmans. However,

after the conquest of Arakan, the British reneged on to comply with the agreement and

colonized and integrated Arakan into British-India.

In 1827, therefore, Arakanese nationalists led by Lord Aung Kyaw Zan, Prince Shwe Ban and

Lord Aung kyaw Rhee sought help from the French and hatched a plot to drive out the British

from the soil of Arakan. A lot of Arakanese patriots joined them and built up underground

resistance forces under their leadership. The resistance forces carried out guerrilla combats

against the British troops and attacked the British authorities. On one occasion, the resistance

forces made a raid up the police thana of Akyab and burned it up.

However, Lord Aung Kyaw Zan, Prince Shwe Ban and Lord Aung kyaw Rhee , who were

masterminds of the revolt, were discovered and arrested by the British on account of a traitor.

The revolt without its leaders was quelled by the superior British battalions, which were

reinforced with Indian troops from British-India.

Lord Aung Kyaw Zan, Prince Shwe Ban, Lord Aung kyaw Rhee and many other

leaders were put in the Dhaka jail for unlimited time. They died of hunger strike in Dhaka jail

in 1834. They all are still considered by the Arakanese people as the founders’ of new

Arakanese nationalism. Prince Shwe Ban left a message written on the wall of Dhaka jail with

his own blood to the future Arakanese generation. It was in a poetic from, and it reads:

“ Those who will come in the future,

    All Arakansese people;

    Do not deviate with other thoughts

    Follow my path

    Diligently and resolutely

    We shall regain our land Arakan

    Keep up with the efforts and work with determinations,

    Even Nirvana is not beyond the reach of attainment

    I ring the bell of the truth,

    These were my words at my death”

Similarly, Lord Aung Kyaw Rhee also left a message to future Arakanese generations. It was

also a poetic forms and it reads:

“If you are cheated with the face of money and betrayed,

  Oh! People of future, do not tolerate,

  In all international matters, use your wisdom and intelligence,

  And strive with good plans.

  Do not be derelict

  Be loyal to your nation,

   Be ready to sacrifice  your life

  And let your blood flows,

  We shall regain our own land,

  Don’t want to be underdog in this world.”

After the failed plot hatched by the Arakanese princes and patriots, the British rule in Arakan

in the 19

th

century faced numerous pro-impendence revolts staged by the Arakanese

nationalists, and the peasant revolts broke out simultaneously in different parts of Arakan.The

imposition of the British’s control took long time, some area not being pacified until the early

20

th

century. Among the numerous revolts,

(a) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Chit San in the Lemro delta of northern

Arakan in 1828,

(b) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Maung Tha Oo in southern Arakan in 1829,

(c) the pro-independence revolt led by Kyeintali Sayadaw in southern Arakan in 1831,

(d) The Peasant revolt led by Bo Maung Oo Pru in Akyab district in 1867,

(e) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Nga Mauk in Rambree Island in 1887,

(f) the pro-independence revolt led by Sandoway Saradaw and Kyauk Sein Bo in

Sandway district in 1890,

(g) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Maung Bun and Bo Ngataro in Akyab

district in 1888.

(h) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Mra Htwan, Bo Shwe Hla and Bo Lar Ba in

Akyab district in 1890-91.

(i) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Kyaw Wa in Sandoway District in 1890,

(j) the pro-independence revolt led by Bo Chun Pho and his son Maung Phaw Aung in

Akyab district in 1891-92 were enormous and popular.

The pro-independence revolts were staged with their plans to repulse the British and regain

independence of Arakan. The peasant revolts stemmed from the British’s evil administration

that raised land taxes, capitation tax and the practice of forced-labour from the peasants. The

revolts gave much trouble to the British rule in Arakan. The revolts were quelled by the

British hardly and at the great cost.

In 1852, after hostile acts of the Burmans to the British traders, a second Anglo-Burman war

led to the annexation of the Irrawaddy Delta of the Burman’s territory into the British

dominion. Finally, in 1885, the Burman king Thibaw, with the French encouragement,

confiscated the Bombay-Burma company’s properties, thus bringing down on his country a

force of 10,000 British and Indian troops, who deported the king and occupied the remainder

of the Burman’s territories.

After the end of the third Anglo-Burman war in 1886 , the entire territories of Burman

became a province of British-India empire. It was misfortune of the Burmans in the 19

th

century to be ruled by a dynasty bent upon conquest .The territory of Arakan, which was not

the integral part of Burma, was annexed to the territory of Burma by the British in order that

the British could establish convenient administration in their dominion.

Arakan national movement, from 1900 to 1940, was characterized by the multiplicity of its

organizations and the diversity of its methods. The Rakkhapura League established in 1918,

All Arakan League established in 1930 engendered an appreciation of Arakan’s lost heritage

and a sense of national identity among the Arakanese people. The national sentiment in favour

of independence remained active among the Arakanese people.

The Burmans’ nationalism was faded away under the oppressive British colonial rule. The

Burmans’ nationalism was awakened and motivated by Saradaw U Ottama, an Arakanese

Buddhis monk. There was nothing to indicate the existence of an genuine Burman nationalist

sentiment until emergence of Saradaw U Ottama in 1917.

After the first world war (1914-1918), the British colonial masters faced a political crisis to

control their colonies. Due to the impact of the First World War, the people of British’s

colonies suffered economic hardship, and grew their indignation with the British. Saradaw U

Ottama , during this period, travelled from one place to another, and preached the Burmans

and non- Burmans in British-Burma sermon about being vigilant to the cause of freedom. He

stimulated them to have valour to fight for freedom. Thus, he became their leaders who was

indivisible from them.

In April 1918, Sir Montague Chelmsford , the new Governor of British-India, produced the

Montague Chelmsford report in British-India to compensate a severe blow to British power

and influence by the first world war. In order to deceive the peoples in British-Burma, sir

Reginald Cradock , lieutenant Governor of British-India, produced the Cradock scheme for

Burma in December 1918 before the administrative system of diarchy had been introduced in

India.

Saradaw U Ottama undauntedly challenged the Cradock scheme by yielding “Get out

Cradock from Burma”. At that time , the Burmans were afraid of even a police man of British

administration . He incited the Burmans and non-Burmans to oppose the British rule without

fear. The British’s arrest of Saradaw U Ottama and the sentence of the British’s court to him

for three years imprisonment with hard labour due to his challenge against the British in 1922

woke up the Burmans from their silent fear of the British colonial masters. This event spread

as the forest fire and turned the entire people of British-Burma against British rule.

Saradaw U Ottama dominated the course of Burma’s politics more than two decades from

1917 to 1939.His political speeches, political writings and political activities created many

political organisations and movements against the British’s rule in Burma. Under the political

leadership of Saradaw U Ottama, the first Rangoon University student’s boycott in 1920 came

to be launched and the national colleges and schools emerged in Burma; the Cradock scheme

was withdrawn ; the visit of prince of Whale to Burma in 1924 was boycotted; When the

white committee led by Sir A.S White came to Burma to investigate for administrative system

of diarchy, it was boycotted; When Simon commission, a body named to study Burma’s

political conditions, arrived in Rangoon on 29 January 1929, it was not welcomed and

boycotted; the second Rangoon University student’s boycott came to be launched in 1936; a

series of hunger strikes, public demonstrations, marches of protest, strikes and boycott

followed; the administrative system of diarchy disappeared in 1937. He was the  first national

leader not only to secure the support of the Burma’s intelligentsia and the middle class, but

also to stir and attract the loyalty of the untold masses in the countless villages of Burma.

Saradaw U Ottama, who initiated non-violent tactics in Burma, was designated as Mahatma

Gandhi of Burma. His policy was to liberate the Asian people from the yoke of European

colonial masters through non-violent means. The British authorities jailed him for four times

in order to eradicate all uprisings in British-Burma and his fighting spirit. Nevertheless , he

never gave up his struggle against the British colonial rule till his death on 9

th

 September

1939. That is whyAung San Suu Kyi, in her famous book “ the freedom from fear, ”wrote:

“the first exciter of fighting will and fighting capability for independence of

Burma was Saradaw U Ottama”.

In this phase, two main strategies were developed by the Arakanese elite groups. One was to

collaborate in the British administration in order to upgrade educational, and economic

conditions of the Arakanese people through self-government and democratic means, and at the

same time, to wear the British administration down by erosion from within .Another was to

co-operate with the Burman national movement if the Burman movement aimed at not only

freedom of the Burmans alone but also freedom of Arakanese people as well.

As a consequence, the Arakanese intellectuals, who centred the former strategy entered the

British administration securing major civil services positions. Such intellectuals as Sir Paw

Tun , deputy chairman of the executive council of Governor Sir Dorman Smith, Sir Tun Aung

Kyaw, the famous supreme court judge, ICS U Kyaw Mun and U May Aung were Arakanese

nationalists who took major civil services positions in the British administration. The

Arakanese nationalists, who centred the latter strategy, co-operated in the Burmans’ national

movements emerged under the political leadership of Saradaw U Ottama. Such Arakanese

nationalists as Dr. Shwe Zan Aung, U Sein Hla Aung and U Sein Tun Aung became the

famous leaders of the General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA) (1920), which was

the forerunner of the political parties in Burma. U Ba U, an Arakanese student leader, led the

first Rangoon university students’ boycott movement in 1920. Ko Kyaw Yin, Ko Nyo Tun and

Ko Ba Zan took part in the front line of the second Rangoon university boycott movement led

by Ko Nu and Ko Aung San in 1930.

In this phase, the Arakanese people and the Burmans were the same oppressed peoples under

the British colonial rule, and had the same sentiment against the British domination over

Asian peoples. A satisfactory promise for independence of Arakan after throwing off of the

British was also made by the Burman leaders who were languishing under the British rule.

Arakanese people and their leaders hoped that after attaining freedom of British-Burma,

Arakan which had been an independent kingdom would regain her independence. Arakanese

nationalists, therefore, fought on the political front by means of deputations and petitions, and

sometimes strikes to influence the British’s policies in British-Burma. In December 1931, a

round table conference for Burma’s political affairs was convened in London. Daw Mra Sein,

an Arakanese woman politician, presented the case for Burma’s separation from India in the

British commons as a representative of Burma’s delegation to the round table conference in

London.

The following year, a general election was held in Burma in which the majority people voted

to separate Burma from British-India .In 1937, Burma was detached from British-India and

given some self-government which made it more autonomous and gave more room to

motivate Arakanese nationalism as well as the Burman nationalism. In 1939, Arakan National

Congress (ANC) was formed by uniting various groups- democrats, socialists, communists

and other well defined groups of the Arakan independence movements. Alongside the

growing in strength and developments in organization of ANC was the emergence of the

major poor peasants’ movements and solidarity among the Arakanese people.

In 1942, the Japanese invaded British-Burma. In the invasion of British-Burma, the Japanese

forces had been joined by a small force known as the Burma Independence Army (BIA) led

by General Aung San. The British retreated to India creating many social disorders in Arakan.

The Japanese fascists were at first welcomed by the Burmans as liberators because they

established a government led by Dr. Ba Maw and proclaimed Burma’s independence on 1

st

August 1943. However, the Burmans soon discovered that the independence the Japanese

fascists existed only on paper. Everywhere in Burma were guilty of atrocities committed by

the arrogant Japanese fascists.

The allied forces in India carried out their first offensive against the Japanese fascists in

Burma in November 1942 but were repulsed with heavy losses. For the allied forces in India,

the battle for British-Burma was one of the hardest-fought of entire war(i.e. the second world

war). By 1942, Arakan National Congress (ANC) under the leadership of Saradaw U Seinda,

Saradaw U Pyinnyathiha and U Tha Zan Hla grew in strength and became a powerful

organization of Arakan. By 1944, ANC was invited to attend the Anti-fascist Conference in

Rangoon. Saradaw U Seinda and U Nyo Tun attended the Anti-fascist Conference in Rangoon

and signed on the Treaty of Burma Revolutionary Front(TBRF), representing the Arakanese

people. As a consequence, the Anti-fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) was formed as

a coalition of various political organizations in British-Burma.

All the Burman and non-Burman nationalistic, socialist and communist parties joined AFPFL

including ANC, and elected General Aung San as chairman of AFPFL. They agreed on a

program of collective struggle against the Japanese fascists, struggle for independence of

British-Burma and a political program based on the principle of a Federal Union of Burma.

ANC joined AFPFL as a member organization because AFPFL’s policy stood for the freedom,

equality and the right to self-determination of all ethnic nationalities in the territory of British-

Burma, and the Burman AFPFL leaders also promised an independent state of Arakan after

attaining freedom of British-Burma.

With an aim to liberate Arakanese people from the yoke of colonists , ANC built up

Arakanese Defence Army(ADA) with a 3,000 man strong in the rural areas of Arakan in

1944.Commander Kra Hla Aung became the chief commander of ADA. When AFPFL leaders

sought support from the British in India, the leaders of ANC provided much help to them. The

British in India promised support. ADA under the leadership of ANC waged the anti-Japanese

fascists war in the middle of 1944. ADA was supported with arms and ammunition by the

British in India. In December 1944, the Japanese fascists were totally wiped out from the soil

of Arakan by ADA, and ANC made a plan to set up Arakanese government and run the

business of government in Arakan.

However, the British forces invaded Arakan and occupied Akyab, the capital city of Arakan,

on 1

st

 January 1945.Thus, Arakan came under the British rule again. Commander Kra Hla

Aung and the Arakanese volunteers of ADA under the leadership of ANC were the first

resistance fighters against the Japanese invasion in British-Burma. They fought against the

Japanese fascists prior to the Burmans’ anti-Japanese resistance which commenced on 27

th

March 1945.After the British’s reoccupation of Arakan in 1945, two different strategies were

surfaced among the leaders of ANC. One was to continue co-operation with AFPFL until full

freedom of Arakan was achieved. Another was to revolt against the British for the

independence of Arakan. At last, ANC split into two factions. The Arakanese nationalists, who

favoured the latter strategy, realized that Arakan should be granted independence separately

according to the provisions of Atlantic Charter.

As soon as Arakan came under the British rule again, the British promulgated that all

arms and ammunitions in the hand of  ADA’s  volunteers should be made  over to the

British .For this act , the British gave reason that those arms and ammunitions would be

supplied to the AFPFL’s troops under the command of General Aung San in order to begin

anti-Japanese war in proper Burma .The faction of ANC, which had the strategy to cooperate

with AFPFL, made over their arms and ammunitions to the British .But ,the another faction

of ANC ,which had the strategy to revolt against  the British for independence of Arakan if the

British failed to comply with the Atlantic Charter ,did not make over their arms and

ammunitions to the British. Instead ,they prepared for revolt.

So, a warrant was out for the arrest of Saradaw U Seinda ,his guerrilla leaders and followers

.They all went underground .However , the hundred of guerrilla leaders and their followers

were arrested and charged with the criminal offences .They were inhumanly tortured, and

sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour by the British Courts .Some were

condemned to death by hanging four or five times. The villages in the rural areas, which gave

support to the guerrilla leaders, were set fire by the British troops. Feeling  in Arakan rose to a

danger pitch , Saradaw U Seinda become canonized as a great national hero .

During 1945, Arakan become more and more tense. Irate mobs periodicallyparaded in the

streets of Akyab and other towns as Kyaukpru, Sandoway, Kyauktaw and Minbra . There

wasanti-British sentiment prevailing .The Arakanese guerrillas , who took part in the anti-

Japanese war in 1944, became intolerable , and they manifested their readiness to sacrifice

their lives in the struggle against the British .

On 10 March 1945, the British fourteenth army conquered Mandalay ,the second capital city

of proper Burma .On 27 March 1945, AFPFL forces under the command of General Aung

San declared war against the Japanese fascists and began guerrilla combats against the

Japanese forces in proper Burma .The British forces conquered Rangoon, the capital city

proper Burma, on 2

nd

May 1945 , and thus proper Burma also came under the British rule

again.

In July 1945, a national election had been held in Great Britain, and Winston Churchill, the

conservative leader ,had been displaced as prime minister by Clement Atlee . The coming to

power of the labour party was a good augury for the cause of Burma’s independence .

By 1946, the Mraybon Conference was held under the auspices of Saradaw U Seinda in

Mraybon town of Arakan. At theconference , the unity of all the Arakanese left wings was

successfully built. At the beginning of 1947, the People’s Liberation Party (PLP) led by

Saradaw U Seinda was formed, and began the armed struggle against the governments in

Rangoon for independence of Arakan. The PLP was capable to control a number of

villages in Akyab district  and kyaukpru district , and acted as local  government .

The struggle  of PLP against the governments in Rangooncontinued till  1958.

In January 1947, the British labour government signed an agreement with General Aung

San , chairman of AFPFL, agreeing both independence of Burma and incorporation of the

territories owned by the non-Burman ethnic nationalities in British-Burma . But, theterms of

the agreement contained a proviso which stated, “ the free consent of the non-Burma ethnic

nationalities shall be required  for the incorporation of their territories into  Burma .”

AFPFL’s leaders including General Aung San, thus, sought political support from all non-

Burman ethnic nationalities – Chain, Kachin ,Karen , Kayah, Mon ,Rakhaing (Arakanese )

and Shan to achieve the independence of Burma speedily and without any hindrance. When

AFPFL’s leaders sought political support from non-Burman ethnic nationalities , they

promised a new Federal Union of all ethnic nationalities equal in every respect .General

Aung San and AFPFL’s leaders promised Arakanese political leaders that after

independence of British-Burma , Arakan might join Union of Burma or might establish a

sovereign independent state according to the free will of Arakanese people .

The factionof ANC led by U Pyinnyathiha, U Nyo Tun and U Aung Zan Wai accepted the

promise made by General Aung San and AFPFL’s leaders and made their decision to

cooperate with AFPFL for the speedy attainment of independence of British -Burma.

Accordingly , U Aung Zan Wai accepted the proposal of the British governor of Burma to

join the interim government of Ministerial  Burma as a cabinet minister together with General

Aung San, chairman of AFPFL, in order to hasten the process of independence of British-

Burma .

Eventually, an agreement between AFPFL’s chairman General Aung San , who was also a

representative of interim government of Ministerial Burma ,and the leaders of non-Burman

ethnic nationalities reached at the Panglong Conference on 12

th

  February 1947 .

This agreement is still known as “the Panglong Agreement”. The Panglong Agreement

recognized equality, voluntary association and self-determination of non-Burman and

Burman ethnic nationalities in the federal structure as a Nation made up of nations, and

provided the basic principles for the establishment of future Federal Union . The leaders of

non-Burman ethnic nationalities also agreed in the Palonglong Agreement to co-operate with

the interim government of Ministerial Burma to hasten the process of achieving independence

of Burma from the British.

On 19July 1947, General Aung San was murdered, together with most of the cabinet minister

of interim government of Ministerial Burma, and U Nu took the leading role of the Burman

politics in the place of General Aung San. U Nu-led AFPFL, however , deviated from the

fundamental principles for authentic Federal Union laid down by General Aung San and the

leader of the non-Burman ethnic nationalities at the Panglong Conference, and adopted a

constitution which was favourable to the hegemony of the Burmans over non- Burman ethnic

nationalities .

According to the 1947 constitution adopted by the U Nu-led AFPFL, the non-Burman ethnic

nationalities were deprived of their right to self- determination. The Union of Burma formed

by the U Nu-led AFPFLwas, in  essence,  unitary and  colonial in structure . Therefore, when

Burma attained independence on 4 January 1948 ,the Burmans completely monopolized over

economic ,social , educational , administrative and military affairs, and run

the whole machinery of government of the so-called Union of Burma , reducing the non-

Burman ethnic nationalities to colonies. For non-Burman ethnic nationalities , independence

of Burma in 1948 meant super session of the Burman domination in the place of the British’s

domination.Accordingly , the non-Burman ethnic nationalities took up arms and civil war ,

that has been going on for almost sixty years , began soon after Burma had gained

independence from the British . Under the sham Union of Burma, the Arakanese people,

who carry the heritage of an independent Kingdom, were not even given an autonomous

state , but reduced to a mere administrative formality .

Consequently, the Arakanese peopleintensified the struggle for autonomous state through

democratic and non-violent means. All Arakan National United League (AANUL) under

the leadership of U Maung Kyaw Zan won landslide victory in Arakan in the elections held

during the parliamentary period of AFPFL’s governments ( 1948-1962). AANUL, which

was popularly Known as “Ra-Ta-Nya” , struggled hard in the parliament joining hands with

other non-Burman ethnic nationalities parties to modify 1947 constitution to an authentic

federal constitution and to gave Arakan a political status of autonomous state in the

authentic federal structure. AANUL’s struggle and influence among the Arakanese people

grew tremendously. Under the leadership of AANUL, Arakanese people fromall walks of life

took to the streets widely and periodically demanding  for autonomous state .

As a result , in 1961, the then ruling Pa-Hta-Sa (the Union Party ) government led by U Nu

promised for the autonomous states of Arakan and Mon. During this phase from 1948 to

1962, the federal movements formed by uniting all non-Burman ethnic nationalities became

increasingly enormous and popular . In this movements ,the role played by the Shan

nationalists was great . The unity and solidarityamong the non-Burman ethnic nationalities

became greater than had been achieved before .In the Parliament debates ,the MPs of non-

Burman ethnic nationalities demanded to amend the sham Union constitution to be genuine so

that non-Burman ethnic nationalities could enjoy their right to self-determination as the

promise made to them before independence of Burma by General Aung San and the Burman

AFPFL leaders.

Moreover , on 25 February 1962, the leaders of non-Burman ethnic nationalities attended the

historic “Taung Gyi Conference” in southern Shan State and signed on the draft genuine

federation popularly known as “the Shan’s principles ”,and unitedly demanded it to the then

ruling Union Party government led by U Nu . The features of genuine Federal Union of

Burma in the draft genuine  federation could be summed up as follows:

( 1) . Eight federating states should be constituted to establish genuine Federal Union of

Burma .they are : (a) Arakan state (b) Burmar state (c) Chin state (d) Kachin state (e) Karen

state  (f) Karyar state (g) Mon state (h) Shan state .

(2) The federating statesshould be sovereign and equal in every respect with the exception

of some powers empowered to the federal legislature .

(3) Every  federating  state  should  have its own constitution, legislature and government.

(4) The federal legislature should be bi-cameral legislature in which there are a national

Assembly composed of equal numbers of representative from the federating states and

the people’s Assembly composed of representatives elected from among the entire

people of the Federal Union according to the defined constituencies. Both Assemblies

should have equal power .

(5) The president and thegovernment of the Federal Union should be elected from among

the representatives of two Assemblies in a Joint session . The government of the

federal  Unionshould be responsible  to the parliament .

(6) The   federal  legislature  should be empowered the following power:

(a) Foreign affairs ( b) Defence  (c) Finance (d) Judiciary (e) Currency and coinage

(f) Post and telecommunication (g) Railway and Airway (h)Taxation on seaports.

(7) The federating states should be fully autonomous and free from interference of centre

and other federating  states .

(8) Fair and just financial allotment should be made among the federating states , and

natural  resources  and economic bases of a federating state should be owned by itself.

However, before U Nu’s government coulddo nothing regarding these demands of the non-

Burman ethnic nationalities, highly chauvinistic Burman senior military officers led by

General Ne Win took over the state power by staging a military coup on 2 March 1962.

General Ne Win justified his act of military coup by alleging that the Union of Burma was

being torn apart by the non-Burman ethnic nationalities .The background to the military

coup was nothing but a planed effort of highly chauvinistic Burmans not only to secure

Burman domination over non-Burman ethnic nationalities but also to thwart peaceful

struggle of non-Burma ethnic nationalities for their right to self-determination in the federal

structure.

The coup leaders dissolved the democratically elected government and parliament, and

arrested and jailed the president of Union , the cabinet members and the leaders of non-

Burman ethnic nationalities who were attending the Taunggyi Conference . They revoked

political freedomand all democratic rights, and abolished the 1947 constitutions .They

formed themselves the Revolutionary Council (RC) under the leadership of General Ne

Win, and  assumed all powers and military dictatorship was put into practice . The  Burmese

Socialist Program Party( BSPP) was formed under the tight control of the Revolutionary

Council on July 4, 1962 .The Burmese way to socialism was the BSPP’s policy .All

economic activities , including retail trade, were nationalized . The private properties and

ownerships were confiscated .The government’s strategies were directed to the monopoly of

political power by the Burman military ; the removal of affairs of non- Burman ethnic

nationalities from politics to the safe containment of the Burman military’s administration;

the fragmentation of non-Burman ethnic nationalities into various racial groups. The

Burmese way to socialism plunged Burma intothe conditions of technologically backward,

with low living standards , and an underdeveloped  , and chaotic education infrastructure.

Soon after the military coup led by General Ne Win in 1963, Arakan National Liberation

Organization (ANLO) was formed  under the Leadership of  U San Phaw Oo and  U Maung

Sein Nyunt. A new movement wascarried out by ANLO which between 1962 and 1969

revolted against the Burman central regime . The political background to insurrection of

ANLO was attributable to failure of the Burman central regime to recognize the political

status of Arakan i.e. the right to self-determination of Arakanese people .The ANLO’s

political ideology was socialism and its organizational activities and guerrilla warfare were

carried out mostly  in the rural areas of Arakan. But, it had its clandestine intellectual groups

in the urban areas .

About the same times, a faction led by U kyaw Zan Rhee and Bo Maung Han broke away

from the communist Party of Burma ( Red Flag) and established the communist Party of

Arakan ( CPA) and set up its political stand on the Arakanese national line .The CPA

espoused Marxism -Leninism and demanded independence of Arakan .It recruited its

members both from the rural and urban areas of Arakan. Some Arakanese intellectuals gave

support to the CPA , but it was largely a peasant party . The socio-economic and political

background to insurrection of CPA included indignation of majority

Arakanese peasants arising fromfailure of the successive Burman regimes to decolonise

Arakan, and indigence of Arakanese peasants brought about by enormously exploitation of

peasant’s production ,natural resources and economic bases of Arakan by the chauvinistic

Burman regimes.

In 1963 , the then ruling Revolutionary Council led by General Ne Win declared a country

-wide cease fire and invited all armed organizations waging war against it to the so-called

peace-talks .U kyaw Zan Rhee and U Thein Pe of CPA attended the so-called peace -talks

,and demanded to withdraw Burman troops from Arakan and to recognize the right to self-

determination of Arakanese people so that Arakanese people could establish an independent

Republic of Arakan peacefully and exercise their right to self- determination without

interference of alien. The demand ofCPA was not acceded by the Burman Revolutionary

Council, and guerrilla activities were  launched widely in Arakan by  the CPA again.

In 1964 , a new armed organization, Arakan National United Organization (ANUO) came

into existence . Commander Kra Hla Aung wasat the head of the ANUO, which committed

to the armed struggle as the vehicle for independence of Arakan .However, the guerrilla

activities were carried out by the ANUO mostly in areas of so far distant from the main

centres of population that they had little impact on the majority of the people.

In 1967, there was a great scarcityof rice in Arakan due to the economic exploitation of

Burman Revolutionary Council led by General Ne Win. The production of rice everywhere

in Arakan was confiscated at gun point by the Burman troops in order to make profit  for the

Burman military , neglecting the Arakanese people who were suffering famine . Thousands

of Arakanese civilians in rural and urban died of starvation at the beginning of 1967. On

13

th

  August1967, a march of tens of thousands of Arakanese people took place in Sittwe ,

capital city of Arakan, demanding distribution of enough rice for public consumption. But

,the demand of the Arakanese people was neglected . The Burmantroops, instead, opened

fire into the mob: over 400 were killed and thousands were wounded. The August killing in

Arakan in 1967 resulted increasingly growing in anti- Burman sentiment and fighting spirit

among the young Arakanese people , which instigated the armed insurrection for

independence in the 1970s . There was a specific grudge against the Burmans, and anti-

Burman sentiment was prevailing.

By 1967, Arakan Independence Front ( AIF) led by Peter Ba Cho was formed to struggle

for independence of Arakan .By 1969 , Arakan National Liberation Party(ANLP) was

established by the unification of ANLO and AI F in order to intensify struggle against the

Burman central regime. U Maung Sein Nyunt was elected as the chairman of ANLP . The

guerrilla combats were launchedin the northern region of Arakan by ANLP, giving much

trouble to the Burman  central regime .

In the early 1970s, Arakanese nationalists had many links with both Karen and Kachin

struggles for national self-determination . Many Arakanese young people participatedin

military combats against the Burman troops in Karenland and kachinland. Both Karen

National Union (KNU) and Kachin Independence organization (KIO) had aims to help in

building up of new Arakanese armed forces in their lands, and many plans were made to

send Arakanese armed forces to Arakan in order to open a new military front in the struggle

against the Burman  domination in Arakan.

On 3

rd

March 1970, Arakan Independence Organization ( AIO) was formed under the

leadership of Htwaan Shwe Maung and San Kyaw Htwaan in Kachinland .AIO created a

new Arakanese nationalism by blending classic nationalist concepts with a new vision of

armed struggle for independence of Arakan. In this plan, Arakan IndependenceArmy (AIA)

became the armed wing of AIO. The officersand volunteers of AIA were trained by KIO in

Kachinland.

The first expedition of AIA under the command of Lt-Col Htwaan Shwe Maung exploredthe

long march from Kachinland to Arakan on 5

th

 November 1971 along the Indo-Burma

borders. This military expedition led by Lt-Col Htwaan Shwe Maung reached Arakan on 27

th

February 1972 successfully . AIA staged many guerrilla combats against theBurman troops

in Kyauk-taw , Mrauk-U, Mimbra and Palatwa townships in Arakan . AIA received a lot of

support from Arakanese people in rural and urban area. AIO was capable to create a network

of resistance cells which were spreadto  every village and every town in Arakan.

However ,the second military expedition of AIA under the command of Major San Kyaw

Htwaan suffered a crushing defeat in face with the outnumbered and outgunned Burman

troops in chinland in mid 1977. Major San Kyaw Htwaan died in action .The fall of

Major San Kyaw Htwaan was a great loss to the struggle of Arakanesepeople for their right

to self-determination because he was a person who possessed martial prowess and mental

faculty. His political essay titled “what should we do?” (Nga Roe Zar lote Ket Phoe Le`) still

arouses the Arakanese national sentiment in favour of independence among the Arakanese

people . He is still remembered by the Arakanese people as a national hero.

In 1973,Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and its military wing Arakan Liberation Army (ALA)

under the leadership of Khaing Moe Lunn was formed in Karenland .ALP insisted that the

sole solution to Arakan national question is the armed struggle against the Burman central

regime . ALP recruited its members from overseas Arakanese people in Burma and

Thailand.But it had its network of resistance cells in the rural and urban areas of Arakan .

The officers and volunteers of ALA were trained by KNU in Karenland . They hadto

participate in the military combats launched by the KNU against the Burman troops in

Karenland so that they could have a practical  military experiences .

In 1974, a new constitutionwas adopted by the Burman military regime led by General Ne

Win , but without consent of non -Burman ethnic nationalities . A lot of political leaders of

non-Burman ethnic nationalities were arrested and put in the jails forlong term in order to

implement the new constitution of 1974 without the voice of non -Burnan ethnic nationalities

.Under the constitution of 1974 , Arakan was recognized as a state of the so-called

socialist Republic of Union of Burma . But, in essence, the statehood of Arakan was merely

nominal within the sham Union of Burma .The domesticated Arakan State Council’s

authority under the tight control of the Burman military was introduced. The elections were a

farce, as the only political party allowed was BSPP, which was dominated by the Burman

military .There was no possibility of Arakanese people to exercise their right to self-

determination .

In 1976 , the military expedition of ALA, under the command of Col. Khing Moe Lunn

marched from Karenland to Arakan , traversing Kareland ,Karennilnd , Kachinland and

Chinland . It was a long march of nearly 2000miles .The military expedition of ALAwas

only a force with a 300 man strong .Throughout the long march , it fought several combats

with the Burman troops. In Chinland alone , it fought 100 combats with the Burman troops.

However ,whenit encountered the Burman force with a 10,000 man strong in Chinland in

June 1977, it suffered a crushing defeat. Col .Khing MoeLunn killed himself preferring

death in dignity to surrender . The remnants of ALP’s leaders and its troops spent their times,

preparing their new plans and participating in the combats lunched by KNU against the

Burman troops in Karenland . Col.Khing Moe Lunn is still considered as a national hero by

the Arakanese people.During 1970s, as the BSPP Burman military regime mounted its

strategy of annihilation in rural areas of Arakan evrey underground armed groups of Arakan

had to retreat to bordering countries such as India and Bangladesh ; ANLP in 1975, CPA and

CPB (red flag) in 1978, AIO in 1979 CPA and CPB (white  flag) in 1980. In October 1979, the

Vanguard of Arakan Revolution ( VAR) –a coalition of two parties including AIO and ANPL-

was created at Raju camp in Bangladesh.

The Burman centralregime deployed many battalions in Arakan unprecedently , and

implemented the strategy of the four cuts operation under martial law in order to keep

Arakanese people in rural areas aloof from the Arakanese armed revolution. With heavy

military offensives, the Burman troops committed gross human rights violations as numerous

arrests, torture ,killings , raping of women , lootings ,the destruction and forced relocation of

villages against the Araknese people in rural areas .The gross human rights violations in

Arakan during 1970s led to the killing of 2000 civilians , destructions and forced relocations

of 1500 villages, and detention of 10,000 civilians in military  concentration camps.

On May 1986 , a clandestine troop of CPA led by**Major Maung Saw Yin**, which had

remained underground , gained public support and captured Minbra Town and proclaimed

independence of Arakan there . The next day ,the people from all walks of life of Minbra

town and nearby townships (about ten thousands people) flocked to the football field of

Minbra town, where they manifested their support to proclamation of independence of Arakan

by CPA. Being incapable to control Minbya townfor long time , after two days , the troop of

CPA retreated to the jungle area of the Arakan mountain ranges. After CPA’s capture of

Minbya town, the martial law was imposed, and wide-scale arrests, jailing ,torture and

killings of innocent civilians, looting of properties and money and restriction of free

movements of Arakanese civilians were conducted in Arakan by the Burman  regime.

In 1988, a tremendous country-wide democracy uprising brokeout in Burma . Millions of

citizens took to the streets and demandednot only ousting of the government of military

dictatorship but also replacing a democratic government in its place. The socio-economic and

political background to the democracy uprising in 1988 was stemmed from economic

hardship of the entire people of Burmaand the loss of their human rights due to the economic

mismanagement , corrupt , repressive and isolationist system of the Burman military regime

led by General  Ne Win ,which turned the country into the poorest in the world . In July 1988,

General Ne Win resigned following thedeaths of thousands of demonstrators who were

killed  in the streets by the military .

The series of replaced leaders were appointed, but the people responded by intensifying

theiractivities and demands sacrificing their lives. On 18

th

  September1988, the SLORC

military junta led by General Saw Maung, the successors of General Ne Win , seized the

state power after a brutal military crackdown , killing tens of thousands of innocent people.

During democracy uprising ,a great number of Arakanese people were killed in the streets of

Arakanese.

The background tothe military coup on 18 September 1988 was to consolidate the state

power in the hands of Chauvinistic Burman military senior officers . Following the violent

suppression of the pro-democracy uprising , hundreds of thousands of demonstrators,

students and Buddhist monks fled to the neighbouring countries such as Thailand, India and

Bangladesh to avoid arrest, torture and extra judicial killings of the military junta..

The progressive Burman democrats, students and intellectuals joined hands with armed

organizations of non- Burman ethnic nationalities in the border areas to struggle against the

military Junta for democracy, human rights and the right to self-determination of Burman

and non- Burman  peoples. A new chapter began for the new generation of Arakan to intensify

struggle for the right toself-determination of Arakanese people.

Conclusion

There is nodoubt that the kingdom of Arakanwas invaded by the Burman invaders in 1784

because Arakan national unity was sabotaged by the regional rivalries. The resistance wars

staged by the Arakanese princesand patriots did not triumph due to lack of the same master

plan and unified command. Under the rule of British (from 1826 to 1900), Arakanese

political leaders were unable to establish a strong national unity to repulse the British .Instead,

they fought against the British separately in different parts of Arakan .

During the pre-independence Burma, again, Arakanese political leaders were incapable of

setting definite political position of Arakanese people through their own initiatives .They,

instead, believed hopefully a sham promise given by the Burman political leaders .During this

period, Arakanese political leaders did not foresee the fact that the Burman’s main concern

have always been themselves and with political and cultural superiority of the Burmans over

all small nations such as Chin, Kachin, Karen ,Shan, Kayah, Mon and Arakan .

They also did not foresee the fact that the Burmans are feather-brained to know the need for

adopting a positive attitude towards the small nations.

From independence of Burma in 1948 to 1988 , intensification of the process of the armed-

struggle for self-determination of  Arakanese people  under one master plan was not attainable

.This must be attributed in the main to lack of skilled leadership and in the last analysis to

lack of political insights and political culture  among the armed- groups concerned.

Arakanese nationalistic armed groups which commenced guerrilla’s combats against the

Burman central regime during 1960s and 1970s had their differences. Those undesirable

differences that led to major clashes paralysed Arakanese armed movements and entailed the

declension of organizational activities among the people. The armed groups competed with

one another for power and influence; a crushing defeat suffered by one with the Burman

central regime was seen by his rivals as an opportunity for weakening it.

Moreover, the communist armed movement agitated by the communist party of Burma from

1946 to 1980 weakened the Arakanese national armed- movement to some extent. The

communists got moresupport from some rural areas in Arakan than nationalists. Along with its

growing in organizational strength in some rural areas in Arakan, the communist policy

towards Arakanese national armed- movement in the areas controlled by it was to break up

and eliminate as far as possible .The main reason of some rural peasant’s support to the

communist movement was ascribable to their indomitable spirit arising from various forms of

suppression inflicted to them by the Burman central regime .The communists were more

capable to exploit this indomitable spirit of some rural peasants in Arakan than Arakanese

nationalists .The communists knew how to impress upon simple-minded rural peasants.

However, Arakan was not yet industrialized and had no true proletariats, and the support of

rural peasants to the communists laid its root in the national sentiments of the rural peasants.

The majority Arakanese people have national sentiment in favour of their long lost right to

self-determination .Therefore, Arakanese nationalism is nothing, but Arakanese people’s

national sentiment in favour of their right to self-determination; the sense of permanent duty

to struggle against any regime which deprives their right to self-determination.

This national sentiment is manifested in their relentless and continual struggle for their right

to self-determination by various means since the fall of Mrauk-U dynasty in 1784. The

countless number of Arakanese people has shed their blood enormously for their right to self-

determination since the fall of Mrauk-U dynasty. The various forms of struggles against the

Burman central regimes, which claim their right to self-determination, have proven that

Arakan had never been a part of Burman till 1784 and the guerrilla outfits have further

testified that Arakan is still colonized by the union of Burma. From 1988 onwards, the

Arakanese nationalism seems stronger than ever .History of Arakan demonstrates the fact that

persistence and hardworking of Arakanese people with a clear vision and grim determination,

had accomplished and can surely accomplish in the future as well.

     K

haing Aung Win

  4.06.2005

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