

**CHAPTER-VIII**

**CONCLUSION**

The Bengali community had been the most significant migrant community among the Indian community of Burma. The British had encouraged the immigration and the Bengali labourers, workers, and the educated youths in spite of the religious restrictions on the sea travel (Kalapani) in Hindu religion they had crossed the sea to the call of Burma, the golden land where they would get a better livelihood. Besides the illiterate and semi literate workers came from Chittagong, Dacca , Noakhali and Cumilla as well as western part of Bengal . A large number of educated Bengalis were present in Burma as professionals, businessmen and officials. In fact, they had occupied a lion's share in the field of administration of the expanding bureaucracy of the British colonial empire in the country. The process of immigration though started earlier in the ancient and medieval period but the Bengalis started to immigrate in a large number particularly from the colonial period. Burma 'muluk' was, in fact, the 'Golden Land' for the Bengali merchants and businessmen could make their fortune as well as educated unemployed could earn fortune by securing jobs as the local Burmese were uneducated in English laws and procedures. The Bengalis were a significant community as they adapted to the foreign land but they never forgot their roots, cultural connections and traditions . They have definitely paved the way for greater Indian brotherhood and an Asian identity by creating home away from home.

The Bengalis became prominent in various professions in Burma .There were well known Bengali doctors, engineers ,businessmen government employees , school teachers and others. The Bengali agricultural labours were also responsible for the rice boom in Burma. Burma was gradually transformed into one of the largest rice producers of the world. The Chittagong labourers who mostly came during the harvest season in Akyab and Arakan transformed the Burmese economy. The Bengali professionals included well reputed and well known bureaucrats. Thus Henry Cotton had rightly remarked that Bengalis rule from Peshwar to Rangoon as postmaster, station master and school master. Burma was filled with the presence of the Bengalis. The economic transformation besides

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the rice boom and rice cultivation was carried by the Bengali capitalists as owners of the timber mills , factories , shipping companies , contractors , paddy merchants , rice merchants , rice mills, etc. They contributed for the modernization of Burma and Burmese economy.

The English educated Bengalis became the chief lieutenants of the British administration in Burma. More and more Bengali were appointed in the new administrative institutions during the closing of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Bengalis became distinguished doctors, lawyers, postmasters, railways employees, and engineers in Burma and contributed largely for the modernization of Burma. The agricultural labourers in Burma were mostly Bengalis from Chittagong, Noakhali and Cumilla. The Burma Gazetteer says that "of the total population of Arakan no less than 70 per cent were Chittagonians". The Arakanese could not stand against the hardworking and thrifty people and they were concerned by the influx of the Chittagonian land owners. These Bengali land labours contributed immensely with their hard work and technique into one of the important rice producing nations of the world.

The political connection of the Bengalis with Burma was very strong. Bengal was the path shower for the 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalism. The swadeshi movement in Bengal had great impact on nationalism of Burma. The wave of swadeshi took place in Bengal as well as in India. The impact was also felt in Burma. A large number of the Burmese youths came to Bengal for higher education before 1920 in the Calcutta University and Calcutta Medical College. They were inspired by the Bengal politics and in the year 1906 there was the formation of the Young Men Buddhist Association in Burma. The University students' strikes in Rangoon were inspired by the students' politics in the Calcutta University. The demand for national education in Burma grew during the twentieth century. The Vishwa Bharati of Rabindranath Tagore also grew popularity in Burma. Tagore's visit to Burma was taken not only by the Bengali residents and Indians but the Burmese too. The Burmese poets were inspired by the humanism and

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universalism of Tagore. Tagore's popularity as a nationalist poet can be reflected in Burma. Kodaw Hmaing, one of the active members of the Thakin movement is known as the 'Tagore of Burma'.

It is true that though large number of the Indians had immigrated to Burma but Burma had a close interaction with the Bengalis. The political connection was maintained as the Bengali revolutionaries took political asylum in Burma. Chittagong was very near to Akyab and Rangoon. Bhupendra Kumar Dutta was the man behind the Saya San Rebellion. He was in the Mandalay prison during 1930s. The rebellion was directed against the colonial masters yet it was also expressed against the Indians. The Bengalis were against any kind of exploitation and imperialism irrespective of their character and racism. There were the presence of Anushilan Samiti , Jugantar, Pravartak Sangha in Burma. These organizations were also helped by the residing Bengalis in Burma. The Bengal politics had immensely influenced Burma and Burmese politics. The Bengali intellectuals and scholars had been as teachers, scholars and visiting professors had been in the University of Rangoon. They had helped in developing the political ideas of the students. These students in their later lives had become leaders of Burma like Aung San, the father of Burmese nation.

The Bengalis in Burma had paved the way for the strengthening of the Indo-Burmese relationship. The Bengali influence was felt in the foundation of the Burma Communist Party in 1940. It was organized by Thakin Soe, Aung Sang , Harinarayan Ghosal, Amar Nag , Amar De, Subhodh Mukherjee, Bijoy Sen , Kanti Roy, Aurobindo Dutta and others. The Bengal revolutionaries had a close contact with the Burmese revolutionaries. Bikkhu U. Ottama , a great revolutionary of Burma contributed for the Indo-Burmese collaboration. He had close contacts with the Bengal leaders and the Bengali politics. Bhikhu U. Ottama , the Gandhi of Burma could read and speak Bengali. He had contacts with the Bengali swadeshi leaders and the revolutionaries residing in Burma. He adopted

the Bengali swadeshi methods in his political mission. A large number of Bengali intellectuals and political leaders were present in Burma. N. C. Banerjee, the editor of Rangoon Mail, had connections with the revolutionaries of Chittagong. He was one of the eminent Bengalis in Burma who was anti-colonial and tried to establish Bengal-Burma relationship further stronger. The Bengal – Burmese relationship was further strengthened by Subhas Chandra Bose and his I.N.A. Subhas Bose made Rangoon the second headquarter of I.N.A. Aung San and Ba Maw were highly influenced by Bose. Women and men offered participation and money for Bose. Krishna Bose in her travelogue in Bengali named In the Trial of Netaji mentioned that a spontaneous response were received from the Bengalis as well as Indians in Burma. The I.N.A. soldiers were helped by the Indian restaurants, hotels and houses as they moved towards their march in Burma. Laxmi Sehgal has also mentions in her writing A Revolutionary Life about the support from the Indians in Burma towards the I.N.A. soldiers. The impact was felt in the formation of Burma National Army by Aung San and there was a close cooperation between Aung San and Bose. Bengalis came closer to the Burmese particularly in the religious attachment to each other. Buddhism was in Bengal and its impact was felt in tantrism, Sufism, Vaishnavism and also the bauls. The Bengalis never considered Buddhism as a separate religion than Hinduism. Buddha was considered by the Bengalis as one of the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Thus the religious confrontation never took place among the Bengalis and the Burmese.

The Bengali community residing did not wanted to lose its contacts with the roots i.e. Bengal. In its cultural life the Bengalis established religious organizations, associations, social clubs and literary organizations. They also celebrated cultural and literary programmes. The Bengalis celebrated the Bangla Sahitya Sammelan and Banga Sahitya o Sanskriti Sammelan in regular intervals. They invited important literary personalities. They also celebrated the religious festivals typical to the Bengali culture like Durga Pooja, Kali Pooja, Saraswati and Diwali. They organized theatre or musical programmes in these occasions. The essence of the Bengali culture was the formation of libraries;

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reading rooms as well as they have established schools in Bengali version. The vernacular schools provided Bengali education to the children of the settlers. The cultural life of the Bengalis was very rich and its influence was felt upon the Burmese. Many of the Burmese came to Shantineketan for their higher and artistic learning.

Burma had attracted not only the Bengalis but also the Indians. Rangoon being the commercial hub of the Southeast Asia attracted the Indians from all the different races particularly the Tamils, Telegus, Oriyas, Biharis and Sikhs. They immigrated as labours professionals, moneylenders, traders and others. The popularity of Burma and the city Rangoon were reflected in movies of the Hindi film industry.

The history of the Bengali settlers in Burma cannot be completed without the reference of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay . He remained in Rangoon for a long time. In fact, the literary fitness of Sarat Chandra developed in Rangoon. He wrote Pather Dabi based on Sabyasachi , a revolutionary nationalist found in Burma . Through this book Sarat Chandra preached the ideals of the armed struggle against the British government in India as well as Burma. He wanted a close friendship between the Burmese and Bengalis, while his stay in Burma he strongly took up the cultural activities of the Bengali clubs, provided help to the Indian labourers with medicine and money, acted as a homeopathic doctor and formed a drama group with the labours. His cultural side is appreciable as he wanted to create a home away from home. Moreover, his stay with the labourers bestowed him with observation of an author. Pather dabi mentioned about the route of Arakan –Chittagong used by the revolutionaries. Bengal at that time was at the boiling point of revolutionary activities. Sarat Chandra played an important role in Bengal –Burmese relationship and in upholding the Bengali culture in Burma.

The separation of Burma in 1937 started to seal the fate of the Bengalis in Burma. Further, the Second World War signaled the end of the Bengalis in Burma. The Bengalis

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started to come back to Bengal struggling through the forests of Assam and by foot. The mass exodus led to the spread of epidemic like dysentery and cholera. With less relief measure the Bengalis had to come to India. Many of them lost their lives. The hardship and trauma faced by the Bengalis has not been studied much by the scholars. Refugee and partition problems and resettlement have attracted attention of scholars and historians of modern Indian history but enough thought has not been paid by the scholars to the numerous refugee families from Burma in the modern Indian history.

The social impact of the Bengali immigration was seen in the Indo-Burmese marriages. Many of the Bengalis left their families in search of a better fortune and often settled in Burma by marrying a Burmese woman. There is an old folk tale of eastern part of Bengal (now Bangladesh) which speaks of a boatman named Nasur and his wife Amina. Nasur goes to Burma to earn a better livelihood and settles there with a Burmese wife. His wife Amina had to go through many hardships and social problems being left by her husband. This was a common story in the Bengali households. There were numerous men who left their families for Burma, earned profit and never came back. Again the story had another side there were many Bengalis who while residing in Burma married a Burmese lady and deceived her and came back to India. Sarat Chandra had rightly described it in his literature. The effect of this was the passing of the act which put a restriction on Indo-Burmese marriages. There was also the growth of the race that was known as the zerbadis. The growth and rise of this race led to the growth of different political movements in the future.

Some of the Bengali families who survived the emigration from Burma had to undertake the problem of resettlement. Some of them went to the eastern part of Bengal and again they had to migrate to India after 1947. The hardships and trauma taken up by the Bengalis was undoubtedly unexplainable. While those who chose to remain in Burma had absorbed them in the process of Burmanization after the post-independent period. The military regime, in fact, finally sealed the lives of the Bengalis in Burma. Thus the Bengalis who migrated to Burma had rose to the zenith of power in the country but after

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1937 onwards their halcyon days began to be faded out. The community started to wear out due to the anti-Indian riot, separation of Burma and Second World War. The post-independence and the military regime was the last steps in the decline of the community. The Bengalis who rose to the highest position, in business, government services and other places experienced a sad downfall in the late 30s and 40s.

In the post independent period a treaty between India and Burma for friendship and peace in 1951 was signed but no specific action was taken to strengthen the bond. The Indians who wanted to come back to India were not provided with any specific help. The Burmese Government and the Indian government though at high levels maintained coordination but the Government did not stop to take steps against the Indians in matters of trade and profession. The nationalization process affected the Indians most and by large the Bengalis. They had to pay for General Ne Win's Burmese way to Socialism. The Bengalis who remained back were given the time to become Burmese nationals. Many of the Bengali families survived the perils of Japanese occupation and the British reoccupation and of course, the Second World War. There were many Bengali families who had come to Bengal but returned back to Burma after 1948 because of their properties which remained in that country. Some of them were the employees in different offices and institutions so they returned. But the Civil War in 1949 again led to the immigration of a large number of Bengalis from Burma to Bengal. Throughout the period of 1950-1960 there were constant emigration from Burma to Bengal. The ultimate blow to the Bengalis was in 1962 when the military regime finally took drastic measures of nationalization. The Bengalis in large numbers and remaining lot came to Bengal and to East Pakistan. The Bengalis who back became stateless and helpless. They needed a lot of time to resettle themselves. The evacuees from Burma had to struggle with the minimum relief and help from the Government. The remaining Bengalis in Burma are absorbed in the mainstream life of the Burma.

In fact, the Bengalis had to evacuate Burma twice. The first time was during the Japanese invasion. There was no organized evacuation of the civil population and they had to move on foot through the jungles and swamps leaving their belongings and property. Large numbers died, survivors were robbed of everything including clothing and women were raped. Some reliefs were provided by the Ramakrishna Mission. After the war many of the Bengalis started to go back to Burma to retrieve whatever they could. In the newly independent country they could survive well. But in 1962 General Ne Win and his Socialist Republic nationalized all business and industry. Bengalis became paupers overnight. The second evacuation started but it was more organized than the earlier one. The second exodus was complete by 1964 -65 . Many of the Indians had to travel over land as they had lost everything and had no money to afford air fare or the ships. There were many who remained back in Burma to survive in the local conditions. There are many Bengali families in Burma clinging to their culture. They speak Bengali in a Burmese accent. Some of their children cannot speak the language and some are inter married with the local population. Yet they remain stateless people and need passes to go out of the country even for short visits.

The history of the Bengali community in Burma which showed the rise of a community in the peak of success had come to an end in 1962. It is a kind of the destiny of the Bengalis who had migrated and settled in the country of Burma which was dear to them. They could easily go to the country without much geographical barriers. The Arakan mountains were not so high and it was similar as the Tamils could go to Sri Lanka. It is a historical question that the Indians who immigrated to the other places of colonial possession namely Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, West Indies, Natal had remained there even after independence of these countries. They had occupied different high positions in the Government in the post independent period. But most of them immigrated in the country as labours and workers in the plantation industry. It is not the same in the case of Burma who were mostly the educated middle class Bengalis had immigrated but in the post independent era of Burma could not survive and there was a mass exodus from the country to Bengal.

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