

**History of the Bengalee Settlers in Burma (1826 – 1962):
Their Impact on the Political, Economic and Cultural Life of
Burma (Myanmar)**

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PREFACE

This study presents the history of the Bengali settlers in Burma, their development in the country during the period of 1824-1962. The history of the Bengali settlers in Burma is a relatively neglected area of research. Though important scholars and academicians have contributed in the studies of diasporic community particularly in Burma namely N.R.Chakraborty, Usha Mahajani, Uma Shankar Singh and others but most of the writings are focused on the Indian community as a whole and assertion is on the economic aspect of the community in the diasporic country. The writings do not deal with the serious issues of cultural and political development of the Bengali community which was the largest immigrant community among the Indians in Burma. The Bengalis in the study speaks of the undivided Bengal till 1947.

The proposed study addresses to the issues of push and pull factors for immigration, the economic, political, cultural development of the Bengali community in Burma and the post independent policies on the community in Burma. It also touches the problems of the Bengalis who emigrated from Burma during the post –independent period in 1948 and again in 1962 with the establishment of the military rule under General Ne Win.

The objective of the work is to investigate the history of the Bengali settlers in Burma who were one of the most significant communities among the migrant community in Burma. The community had left a definite mark on the economic, political and cultural life of Burma. The partition issues and refugee problems have received enough attention from the scholars but the exodus of the Bengali community from Burma has not received much attention or investigation. The hardship, trauma and difficulties faced by the Bengalis are still remembered by many of them as nightmares.

The proposed study intends to understand the history of Bengali settlers in Burma which has been largely unexplored area of study.

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The responsibility for all errors remains mine alone.

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Dahlia Bhattacharya.

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ABBREVIATIONS

GCBA	General Council of Burmese Association
GCSS	General Council of Sangha Sametggi
YMBA	Young Men's Buddhist Association
CNE	Council of National Education
BPCC	Burma Provincial Congress Committee
BISNC	British India Steam Navigation Company
DBA	Do Bamar Asiayone
BNA	Burma National Army
INA	Indian National Army
INC	Indian National Congress
SYMTI	Swaraj Youngmen's Training Institute

GLOSSARY

Muluk	country
Kalas	the Indians were called as kalas due to their complexion
Kamauk	a hat wore by the peasants of Burma
Shinbyu	initiation ceremony into Buddhist faith for boys
Basha	bamboo
Phongyi	the religious priest
Zerbadis	off springs from a Muslim of foreign origin and Burmese
Kirtans	religious songs
Maistry	labour contractors
Pwe`	a dance form in Burma
Bhajans	religious songs
Longyees	a long cloth wrapped around the waist
Hartal	strikes
Tounga	slash and burn system of cultivation
Zamindars	feudal lords
Sayagyi	great teacher
Thakin	master
khitisan	experiment for a new age
Dharma shalas	guest houses
Madrasas	elementary schools for the Muslim community
Babus	educated middle class

Chapter - I
Introduction

The present thesis titled 'The Bengali Settlers in Burma (1824-1962): Their impact on the political, economic and cultural life of Burma (Myanmar) aims at portraying the rise of the immigrant Bengali community of Burma. The study covers the immigration of the Bengalis in Burma (Myanmar) after their annexation of Burma and their settlement in the country. The British colonial rulers after their annexation of Burma in the three consecutive wars of 1824, 1852 and 1886 wanted to establish a full fledged administration in Burma. They, therefore, wanted labours and workers from India for clearing jungles, swamps, construction works, railways, road building and also for the clerical works. They encouraged the unlimited and unchecked immigration which was mainly from two of the presidencies, Bengal and Madras. The Bengalis were recorded as the highest in number in the census of India during the 1901, 1911 and 1921. It has to be noted that in this study the Bengalis are meant for the Bengalis of undivided Bengal which included men from Comilla, Chittagong, Noakhali and other parts of eastern Bengal (at present Bangladesh). The number of the Chittagonians became highest among the Indians in Burma so much that they were recorded as a separate category in the Census. However, Bengali became the largest language spoken in Burma during 1901-1931 among the Indian languages as shown in the Census of 1901-1931.

The time frame of my work is from 1824 (First Anglo-Burmese War) to 1962 (the rule of General Ne Win). It begins with the First Anglo-Burmese War signifying the beginning of the colonial policy of a concerted effort towards the immigration of the Bengalis in Burma. Though there were numerous references of Bengali immigration in the pre-colonial period in Burma particularly from Navadwip and south eastern part of Bengal to Burma. But the systematic and constant flow of immigration began in the colonial period. I have restricted my work up to 1962 which marks the beginning of military regime of General Ne Win in Burma. It also marks the final stroke to the nail of the Bengalis in Burma. The rights and privileges of maintaining the citizenship of the Indians came to an end in 1962. After the independence in Burma in 1948 there was the beginning of the process of nationalization which gave a warning to the Bengalis. But after 1962 the process became further intense. The Bengalis who chose to remain had to adapt to the culture, tradition and language of Burma. The present study does not take into account the contemporary condition of the Bengalis in Burma after 1962. But

the period is a turning point in the life of the Bengali settlers in Burma. The final decline of the Bengali community took place in 1962. There was a huge exodus of the Bengalis during the Second World War and in the post independent period. The Aung San Government had recognized the efforts of the Bengalis who took part in the independence but after assassination of Aung San the changes appeared in the Indo-Burmese relations. The coming of General Ne Win and his military rule rather disturbed the life style of the Bengalis. The Bengalis did not feel themselves secure and there was a sense of the loss of identity. Therefore, a large number of Bengalis came back after 1962. The glorious history of the Bengali settlers in Burma also came to an end in the year 1962.

The present work has been selected as the Bengali community had occupied an important place among the immigrant community in Burma. In fact, as the Census reports suggest the Bengali community had been the largest group among the Indians in Burma. The community was present in the form of temporary or permanent settlers in Burma. Burma 'muluk' was special for the Bengalis who wanted to earn a prospect and a better livelihood. The community had occupied different professions in Burma. Bengalis were found from the labourers, workers, civil servants, business magnets, factory owners, petty businessmen, clerks, railway employees, teachers, postmasters, government office holders and even important government services. Thus the presence of the Bengalis was there in every occupation of Burma. The community had carved a significant identity among the Indians and immensely. There was a rise of the immigrant community in the early years of the twentieth century. The community had close political ties with the Burmese. The Swarajists like C.R.Das had a contacts with the Burmese political leaders and the movement. Besides the mainstream politicians the revolutionary activists groups namely Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar and Prabartak Sangha had established a network in Burma. They made contacts with the Burmese students and youths to foster a unity among the Bengali and Burmese youths. The 1940s saw a collaboration of Subhas Chandra Bose and Aung San in their national movement. The Bengali communists were prominent in the Thakin movement. The Bengalis had imprinted a cultural development in Burma. They established libraries, reading rooms,

cultural organizations namely charitable dispensaries, drama and theatrical centres, recreational gatherings and others sometimes with the Burmese.

The large number of the Bengalis who came to Burma occupied important positions in the country. Their numbers began to increase till 1931. After 1931 the immigration was disturbed due to anti-Indian riots. Gradually, there was a change in the atmosphere as the unlimited immigration. . But it is interesting to note that the alienation of the Burmese towards the Bengalis was reflected in their occupation of jobs, lands, particularly in the economic level but in the political sphere there was a close collaboration of the community with the Burmese. Subhas Chandra Bose and Aung San had a close relation and cooperation. Moreover, Bhikkhu U Ottama, the Gandhi of the Burma was highly influenced by the concepts of Bengal politics. The Bengal politics had a deep impact on the Burmese politics and nationalism. Therefore, the Bengali – Burmese tie up was present in the political sphere and the man to man relationship was very positive in Burma. There was no anti –Indian feeling in that relationship.

The Bengalis occupied a significant place in the history of Burma but so far no work has been done in the academic sphere. Though many scholars and researchers have paid attention to the activities of the Bengali revolutionaries in Burma but no one has paid much thought towards the Bengali community. There are number of historians and scholars who studied the Indian migrant community in Burma but no particular work has been done on the Bengali settlers. Some stray work has been found in vernacular or Bengali periodicals and newspapers but comprehensive work on the subject has not yet been made. The Bengali community which had been politically, economically and culturally played an important role in Burma has not been explored yet by any academician.

The present work includes eight chapters consisting of the Introduction as the first chapter and Conclusion as the eighth chapter. The Chapter II titled 'Migration of the Bengalis from Bengal to Burma' deals with the immigration of the Bengalis to Burma in the colonial period. It also analyses the various reasons which acted as the push and

pull factors for the Bengalis to go to Burma. They migrated to the important cities to make fortune like Rangoon, Moulmein, Mandalay, and Akyab. There was unabated immigration to Burma from Bengal though the coming of the Burmese to Bengal was negligible. The colonial government also encouraged the immigration for the sake of colonialism and imperialism. There was also seasonal immigration during the harvest season as well as permanent immigration. Most of the immigrants in the early period were workers, labourers, and agricultural workers, the capitalists and businessmen. The workers wanted to save themselves from poverty and immigrated to avoid hunger and moneylenders and for the businessmen it was to earn quick money. The immigration, in fact, started with the fundamental change in the economic life of the Burmese and the rice being valued and estimated in the foreign market. The white collared job holders came to Burma as they wanted to look beyond Bengal to earn fortune and sometimes they were transferred by their colonial masters. The Bengali babus were the masters of the English language official works and British legal systems. This helped them to migrate to Burma.

The businessmen on the other hand tried to utilize the growing economy of Burma and immigrated to take a chance to make a brighter future. There was a constant inflow of Bengali migrants to Burma till 1931 from various towns which increased the population of Burma. It also created the Bengali community as the largest among the migrant community of India.

The Chapter III of the present work deals with the occupational dispersal of the Bengalis in Burma. The Bengali settlers in Burma had taken various professions. They were agricultural labours, skilled and unskilled workers, carpenters, cooks, guards, artisans, tailors, etc. The labours were mainly from Chittagong, Noakhali and Dacca. The men from Chittagong were hardy and they worked as agricultural labourers. They were the highest in numerically and the Census authorities had to make a separate head for the Chittagongians. The educated Bengalis had taken to various clerical jobs in railways, post and telegraph, municipal offices, schools, and hospitals. There were doctors, teachers, contractors, engineers and others who served in various professions in Burma. It is to be mentioned here that Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay had come to Burma seeking prospect in life. He had secured a number of jobs in Rangoon,

Langlabein and other places. There were many Bengali businessmen who had come to Burma seeking the opportunity of the expanding colonial rule. Burma, in fact, became the nurture place of the ambitious and prospecting Bengalis in the 19th and the 20th century. Most of the Bengalis had established themselves in high positions and also earned profits from Burma. There were ample jobs and opportunities in Burma which lured the Bengalis to migrate to Burma.

The Chapter IV delves into the political and economic development of the Bengalis in Burma and their impact or influence over the Burmese. The political developments included the activities of the revolutionary nationalists and secret societies namely the Anusilan Samitis and the Jugantar Party which had branches in Burma. They had a great impact upon the Burmese youths. The Bengalis residing in Burma towns engaged in various works had revolutionary connections. The political influence was felt in the Saya San Rebellion which was expressed against the Indians but the Saya San Rebellion also had a Bengali mind behind. Bhupendranath Dutta had contacts with the rebellions from the Mandalay jail where he was imprisoned. The Bengali revolutionaries chose to run away to Burma to protect them from the British surveillance. Moreover, they utilized Chittagong-Arakan route which is also mentioned in Pather Dabi of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. The Burmese youths before the establishment of the Rangoon College in 1920 came to Calcutta for higher education in the university or medical college were influenced by the ideas of nationalism and the anti-colonial movements. They returned to Burma with the ideas of nationalism and applied in Burmese national movement. The political influence apart from the Bengali residents was the Swarajists, namely C.R.Das who influenced and inspired the Young Men Buddhist Association. Bhikhu Ottama were in touch with the Bengali revolutionaries. He could speak Bengali and read Bengali books. He inspired the Burmese youths to join the Burmese politics of anti-colonialism.

The Chapter also deals with the cooperation of Aung San and Subhas Bose during the formation of the INA. The Bengali residents of Burma had cooperated with the INA and had donated their possessions in the call of Subhas Bose. Aung San followed Bose and formed the BNA. The Bengalis had also influenced the economy of Burma. The

Bengali businessmen had invested their capital in Burma which contributed to the development of the country. They established factories, rice mills, timber mills, shipping companies and others which helped in the commercial development of Burma. The Bengali petty shop keepers and businessmen had also contributed in the process of rapid commercialization and development of Burma. It is true that without the Bengali businessmen though earned profit from their investments but Burma would not have been modernized and commercialized without the Bengali capitalists.

The Chapter V deals with the cultural development of the Bengalis in Burma. The cultural development of the Bengalis included the formation of the libraries, reading rooms, social clubs and others which is typical to the Bengali settlement. The study of the Bengali culture in Burma cannot be completed without the reference to Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay who took a leading role in maintaining of the Bengali culture in Burma. There were numerous Bengali literary personalities in Burma namely Sita Devi, Pramod Sanyal, and others. There were regular visits from literary persons from Bengal. The most influential visit was by Rabindranath Tagore. The impact of Tagore was felt among the Bengali residents and also on the Burmese poets. Kodaw Hmaing was known as the Tagore of Burma. The influence of Tagore was felt in the writings of numerous up coming poets of Burma of the times. The chapter studies the visits of various professors and teachers from the Calcutta and Dacca universities. There were also Bengali teachers in the Rangoon University and schools who inspired the Burmese students with their ideas and ideology.

The Chapter VI takes into account the non –Bengali Indian settlers in Burma, their professions, development and their impact on Burma. The Indian settlers other than the Bengalis had migrated to Burma in search of better prospect in life and the immigration policies of the British Government of India. Indian settlers mostly from Madras presidency, Orissa , Maharashtra, Gujaratis, and others. The Tamils had migrated in large numbers and they took to works as labourers and workers in the constructions of railways, roads and others. The Indians other than the Bengalis were engaged in professions like the Gujaratis were shipping merchants and moneylenders. Sikhs were

also present in Burma. The Indians had also developed themselves in economy, politics and culture in Burma. The Indian capitalists and merchants immensely contributed for the development of Burma. The chapter also deals with the Chettiar community of Burma. The Chettiars or the money lending class had looked upon as the section of the Indian population who had deteriorated the Indo-Burmese relationship. The fact lies that though the Chettiars had occupied lands but they had invested their capital mostly in agricultural tools, seeds and agricultural requirements. Moreover, the Chettiars had used the capital for the development of Burma. The Chettiars had contributed for the growth of economy of Burma. The Chettiars have been identified as the exploiters yet they have helped to flourish the laissez faire economy of the British rule in Burma. The chapter also mentions about the contribution of the Indian civil servants, administrators, clerks, government service holders who were responsible for running the British administration in Burma. They helped to form the basic structure of the British administration in Burma. Besides the economic influences there was other social, political and cultural development of the Indians other than the Bengalis in Burma. The Indians had taken an active part in politics of both India and Burmese nationalism. Indian settlers had helped the revolutionaries like the members of the Ghadr party and at the same time they had cooperated with the Indian National Congress. The Burma Provincial Congress Committee was formed in 1908 under the leadership of Dr. P. J. Mehta with the support of some of the Indians in Burma. The Provincial Congress Committee in Burma had Burmese members and the Burmese nationalism also received Indian support. The Indians like Dr. P. J. Mehta and others had tried to uphold the Indian National Congress and its programmes and activities in Burma. In the cultural life the Indians had carved a separate cultural identity of itself by forming clubs, societies, religious associations and organizations. They created a united forum in a land away from home.

The Chapter VII mainly deals with the impact of the post-independent policies of Burma upon Indians and particularly the Bengalis. The Bengalis were the most numbered in Burma. They had settled in Burma but the strain in the relationship started with the separation of Burma in 1935 which came into effect from 1937. This was followed by the anti-Indian riots in 1930 and 1938. The small incident by the dock

labourers in 1930 and the publication of the book in 1938 had a deep impact in disturbing the relation between the Indians and Burmese. Further, the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Burma created a panic among the Bengalis who decided to leave Burma. They had to leave their property, home, belongings and rush back to their country. In their emigration from Burma the Burmese Government had provided not much of help to them. They had to travel by road walking through the jungles of Assam and Manipur. Relief measures provided by the British Government were not enough in number and therefore, there were outbreaks of epidemics with cholera, dysentery, and fever. The Burmese nationalists by that time started to consider the Indians as a threat to the development of the Burmese and the nation. There were slogans 'Burma for the Burmese' and such strong nationalism led to the emigration of then Bengalis from Burma to Bengal. The post independent era under Aung San recognized the role of the Indians in the national movement of Burma but after the assassination of Aung San, the process of nationalization became further stronger which had put the a question to the safety and security of the Bengalis. So, there was another exodus from Burma to India in 1948. The Bengalis who remained back adapted to the process of nationalism. Further, in 1962 with the establishment of General Ne Win's Government in Burma the fate of the Bengalis was permanently sealed. There was again mass exodus to Bengal from Burma during this period. The Chapter also deals

with the problems faced by the Bengali Muslims who immigrated to Burma from Chittagong and settled in Arakan. There was Mujahid Movement in 1940s and in 1950s. The Bengalis Muslims had intermixed with the Burmese and had adapted to the Burmese environment. But these Bengali Muslims has been deprived of the rights and privileges. There was an exodus of these men from Burma to Bangladesh during 1950s and 1970s but the Bangladesh Government did not recognize them as their citizens. The Rohingyas are, in fact, stateless people suffering from non recognition of both the countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The chapter also deals with the problems and hardships taken up by the Bengali families while immigrating and up holds the struggle of the families to resettle and establish themselves in their motherland. The exodus had taken several lives. It is like a

nightmare for the suffering families coming to Bengal without proper medical help, police assistance, shelter, water and food.

A wide variety of tools and techniques are available and used by the scholars in this field. This research area has not been explored by any academician. In the present study, the primary sources, namely archival sources including published and unpublished Government records, secondary sources including books, journals unpublished PhD thesis as well as interviews has been used. Apart from these, there is an extensive use of the Bengali language source materials; particularly there is a heavy dependence on biographies, memoirs, auto biographies and travelogues. English literature and reminiscence in English language by the contemporaries have been used. These data is supplemented by the vernacular newspapers and contemporary English dailies.

Researches of the past scholars and academicians have been of great help in the work. A large number of works has been done by the scholars of high stature like R.C. Majumdar, B.C. Chhabra, N.K.Sastri, Kalidas Nag and Niharranjan Ray regarding the cultural bond of South East Asia with India. The Indianisation of South East Asia, architectural aspect of Buddhism and ancient Burma. The trend of Burma studies, in fact, begins with a systematic work in the ancient period of Burma and the sculptural studies. Further work has been done by Himanshu Bhushan Sarkar named 'Cultural Relation between India and South East Asian countries' and Krishna Murari in "Cultural Heritage of Burma" which deals with the India's cultural influence on South East Asia and cultural richness of Burma. There were adaptation, assimilation and even rejection of Indian culture in ancient Burma. Anil Chandra Banerjee wrote The Eastern Frontier of British India and Annexation of Burma which describes the importance of the eastern frontier and the description of the annexation of Burma. The scholars like D.P.Singhal published The Annexation of Upper Burma in 1960 (Singapore) also describes the reasons for the annexation of Burma. There are numerous scholars who described the Indo-Burmese relationships like W.S.Desai's book 'India and Burma: A Study'; N.C.Sen's, 'Peep into Burmese Politics'; Sudhangshu Bimal Mukherjee's 'Burma and the West'; Usha

Mahajani's 'The Role of the Minorities in Burma and Malaya' and N.R.Chakraborty's 'The Indian Minority in Burma : The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community'. The works of N.R.Chakraborty and Usha Mahajani are of great importance and their studies have highlighted the role of the Indians in Burma. The contributions of the Indians have received prominence in their works. The Indo-Burmese relations have received further notice by the works of Uma Shankar Singh (Burma and India 1948-1962); Surendra Prasad Singh (Growth of nationalism in Burma 1900-1942) and Kumar Badri Narain Singh (Freedom Struggle in Burma). These works deal in details the political developments of both the countries. They have focused on the constitutional reforms, exchange and sharing of ideas of nationalism by both the Burmese and the Indians; the problem of the Indian immigration and the cooperation between the post independent India and Burma. The book of Uma Shankar Singh focuses on the friendship between the two contemporary prime ministers, U Nu and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Indians in Burma, their problems and identity has been dealt with by many academicians. A. Narayan Rao has dealt with the specific problem of Indian labours in Burma, the study migration, wages and settlement. As regards the migration some lights have been thrown by Haruprasad Chattopadhyay who wrote 'Internal Migration in India, a case study of Bengal'. He has highlighted the immigration of the Bengalis in Burma, their character and reasons for exodus.

Further studies have been made by Swapna Bhattacharya in her book India -Myanmar Relations (1886-1948). It is a thorough and detailed study of the immigration, political relations, revolutionaries in Burma and the changing aspects of Indo-Burma relationship. The book is an exceptional work on Burma studies. A recent book has been published by Lipi Ghosh and Ramakrishna Chatterjee edited 'Indian Diaspora in Asia and Pacific Regions: Culture, People, Interactions' (2004). It has an article by Paramita Das on the diasporic Indian community of Burma. Another author named I.J. Bahadur has published an edited book named Indians in South Asia which contains number of essays including

the Indians in Burma. A Bengali book named *Banger Bahire Bangalee* by Gyanendra Mohan Das has also described the various activities of the Bengali community outside Bengal including Burma. It has touched the development of the Bengalis in Burma in an abridged form. There are some fictional books on the subject and one of them is *The Glass Palace* by Amitava Ghosh which describes a story of Bengali boy migrating from Chittagong and establishing himself as a businessman.

The rice boom and the economic change of Burma have been given a highlight in the book of Micheal Adas, 'The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Changes on the Asian Rice Frontier 1852-1941'. Much recently a book edited by the Indian Communities in South East Asia by Kernial Singh Sandhu and A.Mani. It has an article by Tin Maung Maung Than titled *Some Aspects of Indians in Rangoon* which describes the history of Indian migration in Burma and Rangoon. A number of books, edited volumes and articles have been published on the Indians in Burma. But the academicians and scholars have not touched the contribution, development and character of the Bengali settlement in Burma and their political, economic and cultural impact in Burma. The Bengalis were a significant community residing in Burma. Most of the Bengalis were attracted to the growing economy and expanding colonial administration. Moreover, the geographical location was responsible for the Bengalis to migrate to Burma. There was

no natural barrier between Burma and Bengal except only the tropical jungles and the Arakan Mountains which are not too high. Chittagong was attached to Arakan and Akyab of Burma. This was added with the colonial policy of immigration. The Bengalis' prior acquaintance with the English language, rules, procedures and practices proved to be an advantage on which the British could rely upon and the local people could not compete with them. As a result they soon started dominating in the respective professional fields in their host societies. In its course of settlement in Burma it has left a deep impact on the political, economy and cultural development of Burma. The present study does not restrict itself on the Bengali community but it has also studied the Indian community other than the Bengalis in one of the chapter.

There are many new publications and reprints of the books used in the later years but I could not use them as they were not available to me. The Bengali books and writings have been made into English as free translation. The sources and earlier books have mentioned the country as 'Burma' though it is now known as 'Myanmar'. In the present study I have chose to mention the country as Burma as Burma 'Muluk' was more dearly and near to the Bengalis than Myanmar.

CHAPTER -II

**IMMIGRATION OF THE BENGALIS FROM
BENGAL TO BURMA**

Burma one of the closest neighbour of India particularly Bengal attracted Indians as well as Bengalis to migrate to the country. Though the history of the migration took a definite shape during the colonial period but there was inflow of the Bengalis also in the ancient and medieval times. Burma or Myanmar is geographically located between 10 and 28 degrees North latitude. It is bordered on the north-east; India and Bangladesh on the north-west; Thailand and Laos on the east. In the south it is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal and in the south-west by the Andaman Sea¹. Burma occupies approximately 261,552 square miles, longer than it's wide. With main mountain chains , the Arakan , the Pegu , and the Shan Hills , lying north to south, and its major rivers, the Irrawaddy and Salween, running parallel to these, Burma is divided into long , large plains , areas easily accessible in the north-south movement but difficult when moving east-west². The country's geography has played a significant role in shaping its history.

I

Historically, Burma and India had a close relation ever since the growth of the civilization. In fact, not only Burma but the entire South -East Asia was very closely tied to India. The region was influenced by the Indian culture, religion and language. During the closing years of B.C. and the early centuries of A.D. India carried to three countries particularly Laos, Vietnam, Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, etc their religion, language, literature and arts. The entire region was highly influenced by the Indian culture³. Indians had established colonies in South East Asia including Burma particularly in localities known as Tagaung, Pagan, Thaton, Prome, Pegu, Rangoon, etc. Burmese chronicles speak of the foundation of the Tagaung and Prome kingdom in the 9th century B.C⁴. Trade relations between India and Burma had existed during the ancient period. Burma has been referred as Suvarnabhumi or Sonapranta in Pali i.e. the golden country. According to Suvarnabhumi , or the gold land which was a concept primarily used as a vague general designation of an extensive region.....used to denote Sumatra and also portion of Burma⁵. It is also believed that Buddhism was propagated to Burma from India

during the time of Asoka (273-232B.C.) by two missionaries Sona and Uttara, who were sent by the Mauryan emperor himself⁶. The truth of the fact is unknown but Buddhism had certainly arrived in Burma in the early centuries A.D. with the rise of the centres at Sri Ksetra and along the coast. The coastal areas as they were exposed to travel and trade from the south of India they were influenced by the Buddhists learning centres like Amravati and Narjunikonda on the Krishna River. The interior parts of the country including the pagan were influenced by the overland contacts with Bengal, Tibet and Yunan. These areas were later the strongholds of the Tantric Buddhism and Mahayana, with the University of Nalanda in Bengal being the most prominent of the all contemporary centres of the Buddhist learning⁷.

Moreover, the colonization of Burma is proved by the fact that "the conquest of the part of Burmah by Rajendra I is accepted, as it must now be, this would only mean that Rajendra Kulottunga distinguished himself as a prince in the eastern exploits of his grandfather, either during Rajendra Cola's reign or under Virarajendra. He reconquered Burmah which is being referred as Kadaram⁸. The conquest led to some serious impact on the culture of the country which led to the development of some common concept of hierarchy in the Government; the acceptance of royalty or kingship; the divine origin and status of the king; ministrations of the Brahman priests at the palace; royal patronage of the Buddhists religion; the King, supporter of the religion; acceptance of the traditional Hindu family system; social and religious ceremonies of many kinds; e.g. celebration of births; casting of horoscopes of the new-born; domestic rituals of womenfolk; Shinbyu ceremonies (initiation into Buddhist faith) for boys; ear-piercing ceremonies for girls⁹. The Burmese birth customs are identical with that of the Indians. There is also a system of consulting the horoscope prepared by the Phongyi—the religious priest. Similar to the southern part of India when the Burmese migrate to distant lands or tracts and found new hamlets there, they often bear the name of the village whence the colony was planted¹⁰.

There always existed a trade relation with Burma in the ancient times. Trade between Burma and India existed as early as first century A.D. This is proved by the statement in Periplus that ships from India regularly sailed to Chryse and there was a brisk trade between the two Chryse according to this authority, has the same connotation as the Trans -Gangetic India of Ptolemy included Burma, Indo-China and Malaya archipelago¹¹. The interest of developing the trade relation further increased during the British period who wanted to create Burma a buffer state. But the migration from India to Burma started in the earliest times. The Bengali community like any other community of India had migrated to Burma and settled in that country for different purpose.

II

The history of the Bengalis settling in Burma can be traced back to four hundred years ago. The Burmese kings especially from the Pagan period promoted Buddhism and there was a respect for the Bengali learned men and knowledge, it was that the Burmese society needed the expertise from India to conduct court rituals and other obligations¹³. Manipur and Arakan were the area which the Brahmins went to Burma. The Bengali Brahmins mostly immigrated from Navadwipa, which was the centre of Sanskrit learning¹⁴. The Bengali Brahmins came to Burma through Arakan and settled in Mandalay. The immigrant Bengali and the Manipur Brahmins gradually led to the growth of a community which were referred by the Burmese as Ponna. They wore sacred thread like any other Bengali Brahmins and performed religious duties¹⁵. Many of the Ponna Brahmins were brought from Manipur and western Bengal as astrologers. They had settled in Mandalay and had expanded their profession¹⁶. It has to be noted that there was the spread of Bengali Vaishnavism in Manipur throughout the nineteenth century and its influence was present among the Brahmins who migrated to Arakan or Burma. The Ponna were an important part of the Burmese religious and cultural life. The word Ponna actually derived from the Burmese word Pyinnya-shi, meaning possessors of knowledge. Again the word Pyinnya-shi is very close to the Pali word Pundit¹⁷. The cultural contact



with Bengal and the functions of the Bengali origin Brahmins were maintained down to the end of the Burman dynasty in the times of King Theebaw. In a letter of King of Burma to the Governor of Bengal mentioned that, "In my service are Pundits learned in sastra.....have come just across the Arakans"¹⁸. The spread of Islam in Chittagong was the probable reason to the immigration of the Brahmins from Bengal to the neighbouring areas mainly Arakan and Lower Burma.

It is difficult to trace the exact date from which the migration of the Bengalis have begun in Burma. It is stated that the Bengali Muslims had started to come to Burma during the time of Alauddin Khalji. During the 16th and the 17th centuries there was immigration of the Muslim population from Bengal to Burma¹⁹. It could be so that the Buddhist Arakanese kings had patronized the coming of the Muslims. The King Min Saw Mon, the founder of the Mrauk-U dynasty (1430-1784) with the assistance of the armies of the Sultan of Bengal, after living in exile for twenty-four years, his Bengali retinues were allowed to settle down in the outskirts of Mrauk-U where they built a mosque called Santikan mosque. They were the earliest Muslim settlers in Arakan. In the middle of the seventeenth century the number of the Bengali Muslims increased because of the assignment of the Bengali slaves in various workforces of the country. The Arakanese raids of Bengal of loots and captives who were mostly Muslims which had began continuing since the sixteenth century onwards. Furthermore, there seemed to a small group of Muslim gentry in the court of Arakan who helped the king with Bengali, Arabic and Persian writings. Though the Mrauk-U kings were Buddhists but they adopted some of the style and fashion of the Sultan of Bengal²⁰. Burma during the medieval period had many instances of the Muslim dominant villages with Bengali Muslim migrants as prominent in number. The Muslims had settled in Syriam, Pegu, Dela and other places in the coastal area of Burma. Actually, Burma is situated on the way of Mecca and Malacca; therefore, many of the Muslims gave a stop at the lower ports of Burma. Many of the Muslims settled permanently by marrying Burmese women²¹. There was a growth of a community called *zerbadis* who were the off springs of a Muslim of the foreign origin and of the Burmese origin. *Zerbadi* is a corruption of the Persian zir-bad or 'below the winds' a reference to South-East Asia²². Nikitin, the Russian traveler of the 15th century

speaks of the Muslim Indian dervishes in Pegu²³. The Muslim migrating population mainly consisted of businessmen and traders particularly the horse and elephant traders who entered Burma by the land route of Manipur traveling through the Kohima pass. It can be roughly estimated that the Bengali Hindus started to migrate to Burma in 1025 A.D. and it persisted throughout the medieval period till the rule of Akbar²⁴.

Though the migration of the Bengalis into Burma had existed from the pre colonial days but there was no significant inflow of the Bengalis in Burma before the establishment of the British rule and the three successive wars of 1824-26, 1852 and 1885-1886. The development of British administration increased the inflow of the Bengali to Burma abruptly.

The first contact of the Burmese and the English had been with the coming of the Christian missionaries as early as 1807. The English Baptists had established a Mission in Rangoon under Charter and Mardon²⁵. But the significant impact was made by the First Anglo Burmese War of 1824-26. The Burmese had attacked the island of Shahpuri in 1823 which was a small island near Chittagong and commenced the war. The British under the Governor-Generalship of Lord Amherst declared war in 1824. The war had continued for two years and in 1826 the Treaty of Yandaboo was signed, in which the Burmese King agreed to pay the English Company the province of Arakan and Tenassarim. Burmese forces were withdrawn from Assam and Cachar. They also agreed to take a British Resident at their capital and pay a war indemnity of one million pounds²⁶.

When Arakan and Tenassarim were ceded to the English after the First Anglo- Burmese War they were found to be almost depopulated. A census was taken in Arakan in 1829 with the population to the number of 121,288 and the number in 1832 increased to 195,107. This increase of 60.86 percent was due to an influx from Pegu and to the return from Chittagong and other places further west of numbers who had fled thither on the conquest by the Burmans in 1784 and subsequently²⁷.

In 1829 the country stretching from the Thoung-yeng to the Pakchan contained a population estimated at a little over 70000 souls. From this time until the annexation of Pegu the increase was extraordinarily and increasingly rapid. In 1835 the number had risen to 85,000 or by 21 per cent; in 1845 to 127,455, or by 50 per cent in the decade; and in 1855 to 213,629 or by 69 per cent in the decade. It is, however, difficult to calculate the increase was due to the growth of the birth rate but it was definitely due the immigration which swelled the numbers. Immigration was from India to Moulmein and the district generally from Pegu where Burman governors still ruled. In Moulmein there was huge influx of the population and so rapid was the influx that the commissioner had difficulty in obtaining sufficient supply of rice and had to send to Tavoy to Re for grain²⁸.

After the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, a large number of British merchants had settled on the southern coast of Burma and Rangoon. But these merchants often complained of ill-treatment at the hands of the Governor of Rangoon. The British merchants had a petition to the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie who was an ambitious imperialist and declared war on Burma in order to maintain British prestige and dignity at all costs. We ensured in which the Burmese were defeated. Dalhousie who had already made up his mind to annex Lower Burma an account of threatening the advance of America and France in Eastern Seas. He issued a proclamation on December 20, 1852 annexing Pegu²⁹.

After the Second Anglo Burmese War the British started establishing administration in Burma. Although the trade and cultural relations with Burma and India had developed from ancient and medieval times and though the migration of the Bengalis had been there in the pre colonial days yet the beginning of the migration on an appreciable scale dated from 1852 onwards i.e. the annexation of Lower Burma by the British. The acquisition of Lower Burma by the British as a result of the war of 1852 led to the development of Rangoon, as a port for the exportation of rice and teak –timber. In a few years there were erection of mills for the husking and cleaning rice, later the petroleum refining industry has added to the importance of Rangoon. The extension of railways northward has brought it into the touch with ever widening markets, and by 1920s it is the chief port of the province, with a trade that expands as cultivation increases Rangoon became one of

the main camp in which the Bengalis, the members of the other community also in filtered into Burma and started to occupy a large portion of the economy³⁰.

III

The movement of the Indians including the Bengalis had its origin in the fundamental change in the economic life of Burma in the wake of the Burmese rice being valued, under a new economic system, as a commercial food –crop, demanded much in foreign markets in the second half of the nineteenth century. This needed the vast cultivable waste lands of Burma being brought under the cultivation for the production of large quantity of rice sufficient to meet the demands of foreign export. The indigenous labour in Burma was neither adequate nor capable and therefore, the government had decided to import labour from India to Burma, since Burma was constituent province of India there³¹. The British wanted to promote migrations because they wanted to balance the population transfer of Indian population from the most densely populated districts to Burma which required population. They also wanted to introduce along with the population new crops and new methods of cultivation. The government not only required labour for the cultivation but also for the clearing of jungles, swamps, building of roads and railways and for the teak trade³². With such intention in mind the British Government passed in 1870 a Labour Act under which a Recruiting Agent was appointed in India and subsidies were given to the shipping companies to transport Indian immigrants to Burma. The condition in India and opportunities in Burma influenced the great influx of Indian immigrants into Delta area of Lower Burma. Most of the Indians were from the province of Madras and Bengal³³.

The various districts of Burma had seen a huge increase in its population. Some of the districts in which the Indians particularly the Bengalis settled were Akyab, Bassein, Kyouk-hpyoo, Maulmein, Mergui, Prome, Thayet, Rangoon, and Henzada. The British Burma Gazetteer mentions that, "A large influx of population took place from Chittagong, Ramoo and Cox Bazar in the Chittagong division of Bengal and from

Mrohung to the town of Akyab rapidly increased in wealth and its importance. There was want of labourers with the increasing size of population and the work of metalling of roads, digging ditches and tanks and filling up swamps and planting trees had to be carried on almost entirely on convict labour. There was migration from Bengal for such work particularly after 1852 as encouraged by the British Government. The population of the district which was 15, 536 in 1868 had increased to 19, 230³⁴. In 1831, the district included the Hill Tracts and a part of Myaiboon township of Kyukhyoo, the inhabitants numbered 95,098 souls, following the year the number had risen to 109,645 and thence forward till 1854 the increase was rapid³⁵. There was a huge increase in population in the district of Akyab which was one of the districts where the Bengalis mainly migrated.

TABLE-2.1**GROWTH OF POPULATION IN THE DISTRICT OF AKYAB(1832-1876)**

YEARS	POPULATION
1832	109,645
1842	130,034
1852	201,677
1862	227,231
1872	271,099
1875	283,160
1876	284,119

Source: British Gazetteer of Burma, Volume -II, p-15

A special census was taken in 1872 which shows the population of 276, 671 and includes the floating population particularly from India, neighbouring Chittagong district for labour and agriculture. There was a large incoming of Bengali labours which is evident from the fact that, "In 1836 the shops of Akyab district were well supplied with the

different varieties of grain which are in use amongst the inhabitants of Bengal, from whence they are imported and the British cloths consisting of price goods, muslins, and broad cloths, cutlery, crockery, glass-ware and native manufacture were exposed for sale³⁶. R.B. Smart, the Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the district of Akyab mentions about the flood of the immigrants from Chittagong district. He categorically stated that since 1879, there was a constant flow of the immigrants from the Chittagong to Akyab. Maungdaw Township was over by the Chittagonians. Buthidaung was not far behind with the men of this race. At first most of the Chittagonians arrived as seasonal labourers but gradually they settled themselves³⁷. R.B. Smart reported that twenty-five thousand of the Chittagonians came as seasonal labourers in the harvest season alone. He mentioned that about the same number came for the work in the plows, trade and in the mills. Annually it comes to the number of fifty thousand which probably changed the population structure of the district. The hunger for land was the main motive behind such immigration³⁸. The colonial masters considered the Bengalis as amenable subjects while they considered the Arakanese as much defiant rising in revolt twice in 1830s. During the colonial rule the Chittagong immigrants became numerically a dominant ethnic group in the Arakan district. The table below shows the various races in the year 1871, 1901 and 1911 as assessed by the Census authorities of the Government of India.

TABLE -2.2
ASSESSMENT OF THE RACES IN THE DISTRICT OF AKYAB,
(1871, 1901, 1911)

RACES	1871	1901	1911
MOHAMMADEN	58,255	154,887	178,647
BURMESE	4,632	35,751	92,185
ARAKANESE	171,612	230,649	209,432
SHAN	334	80	59
HILL TRIBES	38,577	35,489	34,020
OTHERS	606	1,355	1,146
TOTAL	276,671	481,666	529,943

SOURCE: (i) the data for the year 1871 is taken from the Gazetteer of Burma, Volume -II, p- 307
(ii) The data for the year 1901 and 1911 is taken from the Census of India, Burma Volume, 1901 and 1911

It should be noted that all the Muslims including the Mohammedans of the Chittagong and the Mohammedans of the other district and province has been classified under the same group. There was an increase of the proportion of the Muslim population of the district. In the course of time this change in the demographic pattern and composition has led the growth of communal problems and the Rohingya issue in Burma in the post independent period.

The population structure in the district of Bassein had also changed due to the influx of the Bengali population particularly the Chittagonians. The Census of 1876 stated a huge difference in the sex ratio of the district. The Census recorded that there were 157,142 males and 144,715 females in the district in 1876. The ratio materially affected the town and it was largely due to the immigration of the Chittagonians, inhabitants of Bengal, and Madrasis who did not bring their women with them³⁹.

The district of Kyouk-hpyoo in 1872 was found with 144,177 populations as recorded in the census. In 1873-1874 it had risen to 145,665 and in 1876-77 to 149,035. Many of the inhabitants of the district had flocked to Akyab which had cultivable lands. Apart from this emigration from the district there was huge immigration into the district from India as a result of which the number of inhabitants increased from year to year. In 1832 the population numbered 66,712 souls, ten years later in 1842 it was 80,072, in 1852 it was 107,785, in 1862, 122,273 and in 1872 it was 144,177 giving an average of 33.46 per square⁴⁰.

The district of Moulmein also recorded the increase in population in the census of 1872 and 1878 as well as it also depicted the increase in the number of the natives of India in the census records. Bengalis were an important section in the increasing population of the district. The Indians recorded 18,635 in the year 1872 out of 46,478 of the total population while the Burmese were only 11,115. In 1878 the Indians decreased to 11,562 and the Burmese to 9,607 out of 54,336 of the total population. In the district of Mergui the population had increased though not as much as in the other important districts. Yet in 1863-74 it was 10,200 and in 1876-1877 it was 10,731. The population was composed of the mixed races, namely Talaing, Burmese, Malays, Bengalis, Madrasis, Siamese and many Chinese⁴¹. The nationality in 1873 in Mergui was as given in the table below:-

TABLE-2.3
CLASSIFICATION OF RACES OF THE POPULATION IN THE DISTRICT OF
MERGUL, 1873

NATIONALITY	TOWN OF MERGUL	DISTRICT	TOTAL
EUROPEANS	35	7	42
BURMESE	7380	20,930	28,310
CHINESE	1091	1,294	2385
KARENG	-	8328	8328

Immigration of the Bengalis from Bengal to Burma

MADRASIS	23	2	25
BENGALIS	95	-	95
MOHAMMEDANS	1393	1063	2462
SELUNG	-	463	463

Source: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume -II, p-406

The Bengali population also included the Mohammedans who were mostly from the Chittagong district of Bengal.

The district of Prome also attracted Bengalis as well as other Indians. There was increase in the population as in 1864, the population was 22, 243, in the next ten years it increased to 25,959 and in 1877 it was 26,826. In the district of Thayet the number of Indians was higher as 3,458 and the Burman were 137,016 out of the total 156,816 of the population as recorded in the census of 1872⁴².

The district of Rangoon had developed to a large extent after the British possession of Burma. In 1785 there were 5000 houses registered and allowing population would have numbered 25,000 souls. In 1812 there were only 1500 registered houses, which would give a population of 7500. The First Anglo-Burmese war was to give impetus to trade and as a natural result the town increased more rapidly than was expected. Before the coming of the British Rangoon was the asylum of insolvent debtors and of foreigners from of Rangoon's demographic structure consisted of Burmans , Talaing , Englishmen, Portuguese, Madrasis, Bengalis who mingled together and there engaged in various broacher of trade and commerce⁴³. The 1872 census recorded the nationality and races of the population in the district of Rangoon.

TABLE 2.4

CLASSIFICATION OF THE POPULATION OF RANGOON IN RACES, 1872

RACES	POPULATION
EUROPEANS	3786
HINDOOS	15,216
TALAIING	7451
MUHAMMADENS	416
KARENGS	525
SHAN	1,217
CHINESE	3181
BURMESE	56,918

Source: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume -II, p-578

The Bengali population included in the large Hindu and Mohammedan population. The data clearly indicates that there was a huge inflow and outflow from the district including the seasonal workers from Bengal and Madras and the outflow included the seasonal workers and peasants who did not settle permanently in the district. The amount of Bengalis in the district is difficult to estimate in 1872 because it included both the Hindus and the Muslim population of the Eastern Bengal while the Census of 1872 did not make a specified classification of the races.

By 1881 the Indians were 66,000 in number in Rangoon, i.e., approximately 44 per cent of the city's population at that time. In 1901 this number had increased to 130,000 i.e., half of the population of the city. In addition to this, thousands of the Indians passed through the town of Rangoon which was a major port of entry and exit. Thus from 1852 to 1900, Rangoon developed into a town with 2, 50,000 persons were Indians. It became the main base from which the Indians were spread in all over Burma⁴⁴. The Bengali population also contributed to this rise in the population of the district as they immigrated to Burma as agricultural labours and also as white-collared men.

TABLE- 2.5
GROWTH OF THE POPULATION IN RANGOON (1863-1878)

YEAR	POPULATION
1863	61,138
1864	63,256
1865	66,577
1866	69,866
1867	71,186
1868	72,675
1869	96,942
1870	93,163
1871	100,000
1872	77,777
1873	80,096
1874	81,244
1875	80,491
1876	83,222
1877	91,458
1878	110,700

SOURCE: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume -II, p-578

In Henzada district of Burma there was a huge increase in population as recorded by the census authorities. In 1855 the population of the district was 171,601 and in the next year 1856 it increased to 204,747. It was recorded as 246,862 in 1860, as 313,999 in 1864, 347,615 in 1865, 380,505 in 1867, 423,998 in 1869, and 460,020 in 1872. The number of the population had kept on increasing and in 1876 it was 501,213. The rapidity of increase in the early years was undoubtedly due to the immigration consequent on the gradual settlement of the country. The attraction of the fertility of the soil, with the proximity to a ready market and the construction of the dams along the Irrawaddy led to the huge inflow of population in the district ⁴⁵. The balance of the immigration over the emigration during the last ten years has been recorded in the census as given below:

TABLE-2.6
IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION IN THE DISTRICT OF HENZADA
(1867-76)

YEAR	EMIGRANTS	IMMIGRANTS	DIFFERENCE IN FAVOUR OF THE DISTRICT
1867	13,274	20,179	6905
1868	14,572	24,324	9,755
1869	17,843	31,510	13,667
1870	18,812	25,868	7156
1871	19,043	26,215	7172
1872	22,968	30,596	7628
1873	19,948	30,969	11,021
1874	18,285	31,989	13,704
1875	19,871	31,620	11,291
1876	5,420	7718	2,498

Source: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume -II, p-578

The year 1886 further encouraged migration as the famine Commission of India reviewed the position and recommended that Indians from the congested areas in India should be encouraged to migrate to Burma for development of waste and unproductive lands. The year 1886 was also significant in more than one reason as it marked the annexation of Upper Burma by Lord Dufferin after the Third Anglo-Burmese (1885) War the Burmese king Theebaw was deported to India and it confirmed the British rule over whole of Burma. In 1886 Burma became politically and administratively a part of India. Its inevitable result was that the standardization of the Burma's administration according to the Indian model. Up to 1862, Lower Burma consisted of three Commissionerships of Pegu, Tenassarim and Arakan. In 1862 the three regions were combined with head

quarters in Rangoon. After the annexation of Upper Burma and Central Burma in 1886, the entire country was placed under the Chief Commissioner⁴⁶.

The British made conscious and concerted attempts to encourage Indian emigration to Burma while pursuing the goals of expanding and consolidating the empire in this region during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Skilled and Unskilled labours of the Indian origin were taken to Burma for the work of construction projects of roads, railways and public works. In Burma, Indians were taken to work on the rice cultivators and also to occupy positions in expanding bureaucratic and commercial establishments. Businessmen and capitalists also went to Burma along with middle class and labourers under British encouragement. Under such situation in the last decades of the 19th century the number of the Bengalis who migrated to Burma was 30 per cent in 1881 to 25 per cent in 1901. Among the Bengalis 40 per cent were from Chittagong who migrated as cultivators and labourers. Till 1886 most of the migrants were seasonal labours or came as temporary workers in Burma. After the establishment of separate linguistic or vernacular schools for the Indians in 1878 there was a growth of permanent residents of Bengalis in Burma. More after 1886 the British completed their colonial ambition in Burma and the establishment of British rule saw the influx of huge population in Burma⁴⁷.

IV

The first phase of British administration in Burma in 1898-1899 invited the coming to more cultivators and labourers and also the middle class educated migrants for the white collared jobs. The economic activities of the British in Burma such as construction of roads, railway lines, mines, oil fields, etc demanded a huge labour force. The non enterprising Burmese people could not meet the rising demand for the labourers for the much extension of cultivation. This paved the way for the import of labourers from so close to Burma. The economic change of Burma was a stimulating factor in the process of immigration. The main lots of labourers were supplied by the Indian provinces of

Madras and Bengal. Numerous workers moved from Bengal to Burma from Chittagong, Comilla and Dacca chiefly for harvesting rice and rice milling and other jobs in Rangoon. Under the British patronage the middle class intellectuals and professionals like engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, clerks, etc also migrated into Burma. They filled in vacancies in bureaucracy and the expanding social services and professions. In bureaucracy and legal professions the Indian community's prior acquaintances in English language, rules, procedures and practices proved to be of an added advantage. The British could rely upon them and the local Burmese could not compete with. As a result, they soon started dominating in their host societies⁴⁸.

Besides the cultivators and professionals there were also the existence of Bengalis as construction workers, scavengers, rickshaw pullers, domestic servants and others. There was also the migration of Bengali businessmen of timber and teak, rice mills, money lenders, cloth merchants, spices, etc. There were various reasons which led to the immigration of the Bengali skilled, unskilled and white collared job men to Burma⁴⁹. The Report of Philip Nolan, to the Government of Bengal in 1888, placed the high wages in Burma as the reason for the migration and in comparison to the wages the prices of the food commodities for the daily consumption were much less. Philip Nolan was deputed by the Government to study the factors for the huge immigration into Burma from Bengal. In this Report he stated that the wages which were offered in Burma were higher than the wages provided in India for a labourers or a cultivator. The wages as provided in different places of Burma are given in the following table-

TABLE-2.7
WAGES OF CULTIVATOR OR LABOURER AS IN 1887

PLACE	RATE OF WAGES
Chittagong	Between Rs. 9-12
Akyab	Rs. 15-20
Prome	Rs 15
Bassein	Rs.15
Moulmein	Rs.15
Amherst	Rs.25
Toungu	Rs.15
Mandalay	Rs.15
Rangoon	Rs.30

Source: Report on the emigration from Bengal to Burma and how to promote it by Philip Nolan

Though the wage was much higher but the cost of the daily consumable commodities was higher in Burma than in Chittagong in 1887. Philip Nolan has sighted the following prices of the commodities:-

TABLE-2.8
PRICES OF COMMODITIES AS PER PHILIP NOLAN'S REPORT
 (No of seers per rupee)

PLACES	RICE	MAIZE	SALT
Chittagong	17.97	-	9.50
Akyab	14.31	-	32.14
Rangoon	13.06	-	24.35
Prome	14.51	34.42	19.05
Bassein	14.67	-	23.63
Moulmein	-	-	-

Immigration of the Bengalis from Bengal to Burma

Amherst	-	-	25.84
Toungu	15.34	-	17.89

Source: Report on emigration from Bengal to Burma and how to promote it by Philip Nolan

From the above table it is clear that though the price of the commodities was higher in Burma yet the agricultural population had preferred to shift to Burma than to stay in Chittagong. Philip Nolan does not analyze the reasons for the migration though the prices were high of the food materials. He refers to the migration of Chittagonian cultivators and labourers due to the "difference between the wages current in their own districts and the Burma rates means an appreciable in comfort". Probably the balance of high wages to the higher cost of living was not much understood by the cultivators but the attraction had remained for the higher wages which all used them to settle in a land unknown to them⁵⁰.

There was also the prospect of acquiring land in Burma as he could save from his own salary for few years and could buy a land which would give him a relief from rent though moderately charged on the cultivators. The economic development of Burma was necessary after the acquisition of lower Burma which attracted labourers from Bengal. Rice cultivation was not possible without the supply of labourers from India. Rice cultivation was not possible without the supply of labourers from India. The labourers were also required for the reclamation of the wastelands which formed 82% of the total area of the country⁵¹.

The British was interested in raising the revenue in Burma and therefore, the government-encouraged migration. It was decided that a person whether married or bachelor after five years of stay in Burma was required to pay a capitation tax, bachelors was charged at the rate of Rs. 2 – 8 and the married men at the rate of Rs. 5 per head. This tax according to Nolan was a huge source of income for the Burmese Exchequer. Immigration was thus favourable as well as profitable to the government. Nolan also sighted his analysis by a factor that the British wanted to provide a relief to the congested and over populated

districts of India particularly the provinces of Bengal and therefore there was a huge inflow of population into Burma⁵².

The Company encouraged the population to migrate from 1838 through the Labour Act and in 1874 formed the Famine Commission to introduce a scheme of importing men in Burma from the famine hit areas as a relief to the pressure of the population. Thus in 1875 under this scheme which provided a fund of 5 Lakh of Rupees which sought to promote the emigration and by the end of 1875 in December, only 7,392 emigrants had reached Burma from India, out of which only 5,683 were from Bengal particularly from Chittagong, Comilla and Dacca⁵³. Though the State Emigration Scheme did not continue after 1875 but the movement of the Bengalis to Burma continued thereafter and their numbers kept on increasing. In 1881, 102861 persons who were born in Bengal were found in Burma. The emigrants from Bengal were the seasonal workers to Arakan for fieldwork in the rice fields or as labourers who came back by the time of summer⁵⁴. The number of immigrants into Burma in the year 1882 – 1883 from Bengal came to 72,000. In 1884 – 85 it was 83,000 out of which only 43,000 settled in Burma and the rest were seasonal workers⁵⁵. From the report of W. T. Hall a table could be formed for the year 1885, 1886 and 1887:-

TABLE – 2.9
NUMBER OF MIGRANTS TO BURMA FROM BENGAL (1885-1887)

YEAR	NO. OF MIGRANTS TO BURMA	TOTAL
1885	Male – 15,729 Female – 803 Children – 466	16,998
1886	Male – 29,576 Female – 979 Children – 429	29,576
1887	Male – 29,912 Female – 1075 Children – 569	31,556

Source:-W.T.Hall's "Report on the methods which may be adopted with a view to facilitating the migration of the cultivators from the crowded districts of Bengal to Burma, dated 3September 1888"

According to Nolan, these figures do not include the number of persons who travelled by the land route, crossing the Arakan but of those only who were the sea-passengers. There was a huge influx of Chittagonians into Burma in pursuit of agricultural professions by the land route⁵⁷. The Burma Gazetteer writes that, "Burma receives every year after 1878 a huge number of immigrants of whom more than half are coolies from Upper Burma, the remainder being from Madras and Chittagong and it rarely happens that they bring their women with them; of these immigrants many return to their own homes at the end of the busy season. But at least 20,000 yearly become permanent or they stay for some years. There is also a steady increase in the proportion of males to females in the population due to the immigration of male in large numbers than female into Burma in 1826 in Moulmein"⁵⁸. The number of immigrants particularly in 1873 – 74 had increased in Moulmein to 53,873 owing to the influx of Hindus from the famine stricken districts in Bengal and in 1875 – 76 the population was 57,719 souls. Moulmein was a small fishing village prior to the British occupation in 1826. But the discovery of teak-forests in the interior led to increase of the town as well as its importance⁵⁹.

In 1891, 1, 12,084 persons had migrated to Burma from Bengal. After 1891, there was further development in the flow of Bengali labourers and agriculturists from Chittagong to Arakan⁶⁰. After the annexation of Arakan which was an independent principality to Burma in 1784 many of the Arakanese used to escape to the neighbouring district of Chittagong. The Mugs who were the inhabitants of Arakan had often raided the South Eastern parts of Bengal which were almost an annual feature during the Mughal period. They would suddenly land in the coastal areas and carry away everything including men and women. The Mughal government in order to prevent such raids had constructed chains of forts and one such fort existed very close to the town of Chittagong⁶¹. According to O'Malley after the annexation of Arakan by the Burmese about 30 to 40,000 of Mugs had migrated into Chittagong between 1797 and 1800. The Company's Chief Governing Officer of Chittagong, Mr. Bateman encouraged the Arakan hill-men to migrate to Chittagong. Captain Cox was appointed in 1798 to look after the settlement of the Mugs as the inflow of the Arakanese in Chittagong had increased in huge numbers. The Arakanese mostly settled in Cox Bazar and Harbang and as supervised by Mr. Ker,

the Registrar of Dacca in 1798, and 10000 Arakanese were rehabilitated in Chittagong. But after the British occupation of Arakan, there was migration towards Arakan particularly in Akyab. The emigrants were mostly Bengali Muslim agriculturists and labours who moved in to the district of Arakan division for a few months to earn higher wages. The passengers from Chittagong to Akyab and from Akyab to Chittagong during the period of 1867-68 to 1874-1875 on the ships of the British India steam Navigation Company shows that large number of migrants moved into Arakan and also moved out from Arakan into Chittagong⁶². The statistics has been put forth by W. W. Hunter in his Statistical Account of Bengal (as given in the Table No: 2.10) indicates the population which traveled through sea-route to Arakan but there were also a huge number of agricultural populations which travelled through land route. Thus the figures show only a part of the portion of the migrants into Burma or Arakan from Chittagong. The rate of the passage by the steamer is Rs. 5 or Rs. 10per head. But during the months of the March and April there was a competition between the two lines of the steamers operating and the fares were much reduced. The British India Steam Navigation Company from Akyab to Chittagong in the year 1875 March and April carried 5,428 passengers and there was also similar rush of the labourers towards Akyab from Chittagong during the months of January, December and February which was rice harvest season in Arakan. The number of returning passengers was more than the outward passengers; it could have been that the men who saved the money out of their toils preferred to come back by steamers than by land route. Another reason might have been that the seasonal labours after a little savings preferred to return back home from Arakan. The Annual general Report of the Chittagong Division for 1878-79 mentions that the large number of male agricultural labourers migrated to Arakan to work on temporary basis. There were also families who migrated from Central and Southern Chittagong into Arakan on permanent basis. These numbered to 1,130 during 1878-1879. The reasons for migration both seasonally and permanently by the agricultural labourers was to escape paying land rents. It was when a ryot was asked for rent he fled from his land to Arakan temporarily. The seasonal migration particularly in the harvest season was made by the agricultural labourers from Chittagong, Dacca, Noakhali and Comilla. The report also puts that the industrious and

hardworking Bengali workers were pushing the Mugs out of their own country. The prospect of earning high wages for few months lured them towards Arakan and Burma⁶³.

TABLE-2.10
MOVEMENT OF POPULATION BETWEEN AKYAB AND CHITTAGONG BY
SEA ROUTE (1867-1875)

YEARS	PASSENGERS TO AKYAB FROM CHITTAGONG	PASSENGERS FROM AKYAB TO CHITTAGONG
1867-68	2,918	5,298
1872-73	7,498	9,845
1873-74	7,564	8,680
1874-75	8,914	11,109

Source: W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume-VI, P-144

The District Magistrate of Chittagong has out forth that annually 10,000 labourers moved into Akyab by sea-route and Commission of Akyab; Col. Sladen mentioned that more than 1, 00,000 migrants moved to Arakan by sea as well as land. They were paid Rs. 12 per month as wages and many of the agricultural labourers returned home even less than Rs. 20. Col. Sladen gives a calculation that these labourers which numbered to 1,00,000 came back home with the savings of Rs. 50 lakhs of Rupees but if each of them saved Rs. 20 on an average rate as he mentioned earlier than the savings would have been 20 lakhs of rupees. However, the migrant labourers from Chittagong moved into Arakan in November – December for the harvesting crops and returned in January and February. This fact is revealed from a letter written by the Collector of Chittagong in August 1885 to Hunter. The letter further mentions of a scheme called 'Mount Joy Scheme' introduced

in Arakan to provide permanent lease of land at a low rate of rent to the agriculturists. This scheme was started to attract the Chittagong labourers to migrate to Arakan⁶⁴.

TABLE-2.11
RACIAL COMPOSITION OF INDIANS IN ARAKAN IN 1931

RACES	TOTAL POPULATION		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
CHITTAGONGIAN	104,769	81,558	186,327
BENGALIS	10,998	4,588	15,586
HINDU	2,955	632	3,587
ORİYAS	3,809	10	3,819

Source: James Baxter on Indian Immigration, 1941, Government of Burma, department of Commerce, p-49

The labourers from Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla though mainly served as agriculturists but they also worked in the rice-mills, labourers in the port of Akyab, traders, shoe-makers, cart drivers and others. There was a huge migration from Chittagong to Akyab. The year 1891 recorded that 54,734 persons from Chittagong migrated to Akyab while only 6,421 were from the rest of India. There were 61,155 persons in Akyab who were emigrants of British India⁶⁵. About 97 per cent of the Indian population in Arakan in 1931 was concentrated in Akyab. The total population in Arakan was 1,008, 538 and there were 217,801 Indians⁶⁶. The racial composition in Akyab district in 1931 is provided by the James Baxter's Report on Indian Immigration, 1941 as given in Table No: 2.11.

TABLE-2.12
POPULATION SPEAKING INDIAN LANGUAGES IN BURMA IN 1901

LANGUAGE S	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
ENGLISH	18,500
HINDUSTHAN	95,122
BENGALI	204,973
HINDI	28,689
PUNJABI	15,803
TAMIL	99,576
TELEGU	96,601

Source: The Imperial Gazetteer, Volume-IX, P-139

The story of migration from Bengal to Burma reached to a considerable height by 1901 and it is visible in the figures of the Census of 1901 that 1, 57,034 persons had moved into Burma from Bengal. But many of these migrants were seasonal labours. Most of these migrants were from Comilla, Dacca and Chittagong⁶⁷. In the study of population and area made the Gazetteer, it is stated that in 1891 – 1901 the area in square miles in Burma was 236,738 and the population was 7,722,053 while in 1901 was 10,490,624 which was + 35. 8% of increase which was largely owing to the immigration into Burma⁶⁸. The Census of 1901 shows that among the Indian languages spoken in Burma Bengali language was spoken in a large amount. The table (2.12) clearly indicates that the Bengalis were present as the highest number of the Indian immigrants present in Burma.

The Census of India, 1911 records that 1, 34, 985 persons had migrated from Bengal into Burma. Among these huge immigrants the population mainly consisted of the seasonal labourers. The Bengalis from Chittagong numbered to 73,968 and out of this number 64,000 had immigrated to Akyab⁶⁹. However, the Census of India, 1911, Volume –II,

provides the details of the places the Bengalis of Chittagong had immigrated to Burma. Some of the selected towns where they have settled in 1911 are given below:-

TABLE-2.13
DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHITTAGONIANS IN BURMA, 1911

PLACES IN BURMA	NUMBER OF POPULATION
AKYAB	30,521
RANGOON	14,721
HANTHAWADDY	3,760
PEGU	891
BASSEIN	1,927
MYAUNGMYA	1,173
MA-UBIN	1,130
PYAPON	1,510
AMHERST	2,794
MANDALAY	425

Source: Census of India, 1911, Volume -IX, Burma, Part-II, P-123

The Census of 1921 states that 1, 46,087 persons had migrated from Bengal to Burma out of which 26,932 had been to Rangoon and 3584 to Mandalay. The Burma Census mentions the names of places where the people from Bengal had settled in the year 1921⁷⁰. The influx was largely from the Chittagong areas mostly Muslims as paddy field workers either temporary or permanent particularly in the district of Akyab. There was rapid commercialization of rice cultivation in Akyab which led to the development of a well-flourishing port of Burma. This attracted a large number of Bengali Muslims into the area. Though there were Hindu migrants also from other parts of India yet the Muslims came from Noakhali, Dacca and Chittagong as cultivators, labourers and skilled workers were predominant⁷¹. The Collector of the district of Noakhali has mentioned in

his Annual Report for 1874-75, that a considerable number of people from Sandwip, Hatia and Amirgaon emigrate to Arakan, Rangoon and other parts of British Burma and to Calcutta, to serve as boatmen and lascars⁷². The Census of India, Burma Volume 1921 has given the number of emigrants from Calcutta, Chittagong, Dacca and Noakhali migrated as a whole, as given below:-

TABLE-2.14
DISTRIBUTION OF BENGALI POPULATION IN BURMA IN 1921

BORN IN	ENUMERATED IN BURMA
CALCUTTA	11,254
CHITTAGONG	88,345
DACCA	2,720
NOAKHALI	3,977
BENGAL PROVINCE	1,46,058

SOURCE: Census of India, 1921, Volume-X, Burma, Part-II, p-150

The census of 1921 also cited the various places of Burma where the Bengali speaking persons exactly migrated to and it also revealed the importance of the town in Burma in respect of migration. The table below gives the clear outline of the Bengali settlement throughout the various districts of Burma:-

TABLE-2.15
IMMIGRATION FROM BENGAL TO THE VARIOUS DISTRICTS OF BURMA
(1921)

BORN IN	IMMIGRATED IN							
	AKYAB	RANGOON	INSEIN	HANTHAWADDY	AMHERST	MANDALAY	BASSEIN	PEGU
BENGAL PROVINCE	42,903	26,932	4,127	7,866	4,461	5,122	5,253	6,167
CALCUTTA	227	3,583	698	356	294	449	466	562
CHITTAGONG	39,816	16,665	765	5,080	3,316	1,141	2,679	2,040
DACCA	113	1,138	76	3	106	154	138	42
NOAKHALI	381	1,910	—	50	296	8	195	—

Source: Census of India, 1921, Volume—X, Burma, Part—II, P-150

Thus by 1921, the Census provides that the total persons who migrated in Burma were 1, 46,058. In the Census of 1931, there was further growth of Bengali speaking persons in Burma which numbered to 2, 42,415 males and 1, 34,579 females which comes to the total of 3, 76,994⁷³. The migration mostly remained on the temporary basis because there were mainly seasonal labours for the purpose of agriculture and reclamation of waste lands. There was also migration of persons with non-agricultural professions. The agricultural professionals or farmers mostly settled in Akyab, Prome, Bessein, Pegu, Myaungmya, Pyapan, etc. places where agricultural lands were available⁷⁴.

The Census of 1931 stated that total enumerated on the high seas Bengal contributed 6,806 or 54 percent. Amongst those whose returns were sent to Calcutta the percentage of persons born in Bengal were 61 and it was even higher amongst the schedules received in Rangoon where it amounted to 67 percent. Ninety percent of the persons enumerated from Bengal were Muslims and although the district of birth was not separately compiled

it is safe to assume that they came principally from Chittagong and other parts of east Bengal. In the migration table it shows that immigrants to Bengal from Burma in 1931 were 3,791 while emigration to Burma from Bengal was 1, 58,098 and 1, 46,087 in 1921. The increase in number of migrants was 11,997 ⁷⁵. The Census of 1931 provides the classification of the Indian races that went to Burma. The following table shows the main bulk of the Indian population in Burma and the distribution of the speakers of Indian languages in 1931:-

TABLE -2.16

SPEAKERS IN DIFFERENT INDIAN LANGUAGES IN 1931 IN BURMA

LANGUAGES SPOKEN	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
BENGALI	376,994
HINDUSTHANI	192,466
TAMIL	184,104
TELEGU	160,640
ORIYA	60,682
PAHARI	41,340
GUJRATI	17,706
ASSAMESE	1,203
MARATHI	2,003
OTHERS	1,257

Source: Census of India, 1931, Volume-XI, Part-II, p-225-231

Though Chittagong was a part of Bengal and the people of Chittagong was Bengali by race, language and culture but since their huge number of influx they have been classified separately.

Along with the migration of labourers, farmers and other professionals, there was also an influx of Bengalis who came for administrative posts in Burma. The British administration wanted the Bengali English educated men to take the posts in Burma because they were available in abundant as well as they were cheaper to employ than the

British officials. Moreover, due to the spread of English education the newly educated Bengali 'babus' wanted jobs in the administrative posts which was not easily acquired in India. Thus the intellectuals flowed in huge number to fill up the posts in Burma, a virgin land with resources which could be utilized in full extent. The British also found it better to employ the Bengalis instead of the Burmese who had to be trained for such posts and the Business could also not compete with the Indians or the Bengalis who were educated in the British educational system⁷⁶.

V

Burma was included in the Census of India till 1931 but after the separation of Burma in 1937; in 1941 an independent census of Burma was held. The Census or the other data and records were lost in the debacle of the British retreat from the Japanese in 1942. The details of the study of the population were completely lost. By 1931 the exogenous migration which was encouraged by both the British Government had added more than 1 million to the population numbers in Burma⁷⁷. The Census of Burma 1941 does not give the details of the races migrating in Burma but it gives the total population as a whole setting in various districts of Burma. The following table gives the population structure in 1941 in some of the places of Burma.

TABLE-2.17

POPULATION GROWTH IN THE DISTRICTS OF BURMA, 1931-1941

PLACES IN BURMA	TOTAL POPULATION 1931	PERCENTAGE OF CHANGE IN 1931	TOTAL POPULATION 1941	PERCENTAGE OF CHANGE IN 1941
MANDALAY	371,635	0.41	408,926	0.95
KATHA AND RUBY MINES	178,244	0.78	204,168	1.35
SAGAING	355,965	0.27	387,270	1.42
LOWER CHINWIN	372,166	0.81	414,844	1.08

Immigration of the Bengalis from Bengal to Burma

MYINGYAN AND PAGAN	555,625	0.95	632,094	1.28
PAKOKKU	499,181	0.69	559,671	1.14
MAGWE	416,505	0.12	466,899	0.84
KYAUKSE	151,320	0.58	152,506	1.14
MEIKTIL AND PYINMANA	700,819	1.33	807,214	1.41
THAYETMYO	274,177	0.70	297,434	0.81
WUNTHO STATE	47,688	0.93	111,706	1.34

Source: Judith L. Richell, *Disease and Demography in colonial Burma*, Singapore, 2006, p-37

In 1937, after a considerable debate Burma was separated from India following the Government of Burma Act 1935 and Burma started developing its own institutions and political associations. However, the influx of the Bengali migrants into Burma continued but in a limited scale. There was a slight decline in immigration after the 1930s as a result of the economic depression worldwide and also for the Burmese voice for the nationalization of Burma⁷⁸. The increase in population in the above table indicates that with the administrative separation of Burma from India there was a slight decline of immigration till 1942. It is true that the Indian immigration had been effected in the period of 1930s and 1940s. The Indian immigration was regulated by the government of Burma Act, 1935 under the Section 38. Under this Act no privileges were provided to the Indians and their rights were not protected by the Government of Burma Order, 1937.

The new Constitution of Burma under its Section 36 stated that Indian interests could be protected and no bill was introduced in the legislature affecting the immigration into Burma. In the Section 44, the Government stated that, "British subjects domiciled in U. K. and in India would be exempted from any restrictions imposed by reasons by birth, race, descent, language, domicile or residence, and from any disability, liability, restriction or condition in regard to travel, residence, the acquisition, holding or disposition of property, the holding of public office or carrying on of any occupation, trade, business, or profession"⁷⁹. The immigration was also effected by Indo-Burma Draft

Agreement of 22 July 1941 which was based on the principles of Burma determining her own population and Indians who had thoroughly identified themselves with the interest of Burma will enjoy the equal rights like any other permanent member of the country. It thus classified the Indians into two categories. The first category included those who could reside in Burma and the second category was those who could stay in the country only for a certain period. But the clause of determining the composition of her population gave the right to the Government of Burma to restrict the incoming into the state. It also stated that marriage with the Burmese woman, unless specifically permitted, would be grounds for cancellation of permit⁸⁰. Thus the migration of the Bengalis into Burma after 1941 was discretion of the Burmese Government. A Joint Representation was made in 28 July 1941 by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Committee of the All Parties Meeting at Madras, and the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association who protested against the prohibition of Indian labourers into Burma in 1941. In 1945 the Burmese Government also laid rules which stated that immigration from India was too decided by the Immigration Board. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Burma the migration of Bengali in Burma had declined and in fact, it was reversed towards India⁸¹.

But there had been a huge migration of the Bengalis into Burma during the early years of the British rule for which both push and pull factors had worked together. The growth of population, famine, decline of job opportunities pushed the Bengali immigrants towards a new area. There were opportunities, to earn a larger income, new land for agriculture; availability of forest and mineral resources attracted the Bengalis to march towards Burma both from eastern and western part of the province. The Arakanese Maghs often migrated into Chittagong before 1824 when the English captured Arakan. Now the migration was in opposite direction, i.e. to Burma. The attraction of the Bengalis towards Burma also depicted in many literatures both Bengali and English. Rajkumar the leading character of the fiction of Amitava Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* also refers "Burma is a golden land"⁸². The Bengalis thus migrated to Burma to try their fortune in various professions.

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66. Report on Indian Immigration by James Baxter, 1941, Rangoon. p-49
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69. Census of India , 1911, Volume –IX ,Burma, Part-II, p-123
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71. Swapna Bhattacharya, ‘ Imperialist Provocation and Muslims of Arakan /Myanmar’, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Fifty –Fifth Session , Aligarh, 1994, p-544-545
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76. Arjan De Haan , op cit, p-60
77. Judith L. Richell, Disease and Demography in Colonial Burma , Singapore, 2006, p-18
78. S.D.Muni, op cit, p-154-159
79. Haraprasad Chattopadhyay, op cit, p-297-298
80. Ibid.p-318-319; N.R.Chakraborty, op cit, p-54-55
81. N.R.Chakraborty, op cit, p-159; Prof. Sudhansu Bimal Mukherjee, 'Indian Minority in South East Asia', The Modern Review for January 1962, Calcutta, 1962, p-26-27.
82. Amitava Ghosh, The Glass Palace, London, 2001, p-494

CHAPTER-III

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE
BENGALIS IN BURMA

The search of job was the primary motive behind the Bengali immigrants who came to Burma through land and sea routes travelling from their own country to another. The better job opportunities became more prominent after the British capture of Burma. There were seekers of fortune in form of cultivators, labourers both skilled and unskilled, traders, businessmen, and professionals like government officials, doctors and teachers. The British encouraged the immigration of the Indians as also the Bengalis to Burma for different jobs particularly as labourers required for various projects of construction like roads, railways and public works. The Bengalis also took to rice cultivations particularly by the Chittagonians. There were also traders and businessmen from Bengal. They had established big commercial concerns including money lending operations. Some started as shopkeepers or traders and many were mechanics. The Bengalis also worked as construction workers, rickshaw pullers, domestic servants and others. Though there was the settlement of the Bengalis in Burma during the pre-colonial and the Bengalis went for search of jobs in Burma in the pre colonial times. Many of the Ponna Brahmins were come from Manipur and western Bengal as astrologers. They had settled in Mandalay and had expanded their profession¹. The details is mentioned in Chapter II. Further in the medieval times there were the coming of the Muslim traders in Arakan and Rangoon. But the search of the jobs and fortune began with the expansion British Empire in Burma. It is true that Burma was the most important commercial place in the south East Asia. Moreover Burma was looked as the Golden Land in South East Asia.

I

A huge number of Bengalis worked as agricultural labourers or cultivators who came from low-caste peasantry from the labour surplus areas of Bengali. The nature of the agricultural labourers and other unskilled labours were not fixed because most of them were seasonal. The agricultural labourers came particularly in the districts of Arakan during the harvest season. They proceeded principally from Chittagong also from

Noakhali and returned home with quiet an amount of money after three to four months. They were attracted to the fertile land of the district. After the harvest season they worked as labourers in the rice mills and in the part of Akyab. Some of them who settled permanently in Burma and did not return after the harvesting season worked as shoe makers, cart drivers, traders, etc². Most of the agricultural labourers as well as other unskilled labourers belonged to the lower castes or were most oppressed groups in India. Some of them were untouchables and many of these early immigrants to Burma were from the low caste agriculturist labourers³. The immigration to Burma not only provided them economic opportunity but also a chance of social mobility that was denied to them in their home districts. In Burma they could earn high wages as well as found the employment much quickly than in Bengal. The most of the Bengali agriculturists were from Chittagong, north of Arakan on the Burma's Western border. At least 40% of the cultivators belonged to Chittagonian Muslims⁴. The Burma Gazetteer gives the details of the cultivation of the district of Henzada. It states that the cultivated lands had increased from 1868-69 which was 16, 897 and in 1873-74 it was 32, 504 acres. The progressive increase in the price of rice together with a better economic governmental regulations and an increase in population the cultivation had increased year after year⁵. The increase in the number of cultivable land indicates that large number of immigrants from Bengal particularly Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla had come into the work of agriculture in Burma. After the severe cyclone in Chittagong in 1897, large number of emigrants left the district to settle in Burma⁶. They were also attracted to the facility for obtaining land producing remunerative crops, thereby, acquiring security to life and property.

Besides the agricultural labourers, a large section of Bengalis also worked as non-agricultural and wage labourers in the rice mills as well as in the various construction projects introduced by the British Empire. The expansion of British colonial establishment like the building of roads, railways etc. provided opportunities to the labourers from various districts of Bengal to migrate to Burma. There were also huge demand of labours in Burma by the British and the supply was provided by the neighbouring states owing to the great demand for labour in Arakan, the rates of wages

were high and a common day labourer was able to earn six-rupees or 12s a month. The people of Arakan were too indolent to till their own fields, when they can hire others to do the work for them; and the members of Chittagong men go south wards every year for the harvest season and return when it is over. Other, however, stay in Arakan for a number of years and when they return, each man brings with him a large sum of money for a Bengal labourer⁷.

After the Second Burmese War, when the whole of Arakan had been annexed, it seems to have been proposed to establish an imperial line of road in continuation of that connecting Dacca and Chittagong, to run straight into Arakan and then further south. During 1854-56 there was considerable progress of the road works but due to the Mutiny of 1857 and the steam navigation the work of road was not paid attention. The connection of parts of Bengal (undivided) was required for the urge to get a steady supply of labourers. The non-agricultural labourers worked in rice mills, factories as porters, carriers, on the construction of rails, roads and other earthwork. The higher wages received by the Bengali immigrants along with non-monetary reward attracted them to Burma. The earnings of the labourers could be used to buy land, to support their families in India and to purchase consumer goods. The labourers generally sent a large portion of their remuneration to their families in Bengal⁸.

The Indian labourers along with Bengali ones were recruited by labour contractors known as maistry. The maistry recruiting system, which dominated Indian labour movement to and supply in Lower Burma in the 20th century, was not as developed or as pervasive in the last decades of the 19th century. Maistries were usually experienced by Indian workers who were hired by the mill owners or the shipping agents in Burma to recruit labourers in India. These maistry moved from village to village attracting and exhorting labourers to migrate by representing in bright colours, prospects of enrichment and advance. The ignorant coolies believe easily and while some volunteer to go to try their

fortune, many are persuaded⁹. In addition to this many of the labourers emigrated because friends or relatives who had previously been to Burma told them of high wages and assured them that employment could easily be found¹⁰. The labourers generally migrated to Burma for better prospects. The maistry served as a middleman between the employers and the labourers. Amitava Ghosh mentions in his book 'Glass Palace' where Raj Kumar, the principal character in the novel went to the remote villages narrating the better condition in Burma thereby attracting the males to come to Burma for work. The maistry would select a village and gather the men of the village. He would speak in a reverential manner just like reciting Ramayana and would describe the riches which a man could acquire from Burma.¹¹ A single maistry usually recruited directed the transportation of and acted as overseer for a gang of workers. The maistry paid the steamship fare and supplied food to the members of his gang during the trip from India to Burma. On their arrival in Rangoon, he provided food and lodging and placed them in positions which had been arranged with the managers of a rice mill or shipping firm. The maistry's advances to his gang were repaid with interest from the wages which they received in Burma. The interest rates were agreed upon before the maistry signed the worker on and were fixed by contract. The maistry also received a commission from the mill or firm which he served which varied according to the number of labourers he provided. He also derived profit from his ability to buy steamship tickets at bulk rates. The maistry charged the members of his gang the full fare and retained the difference as a charge for his service.¹² Along with the maistry the shipping agents of the shipping companies playing steam ships from Bengal to Burma also acted as a campaigner of migrating to Burma. The shipping agents tried to lure as many as possible passengers in the ships and the maistry who also had link with the shipping agents tried to take workers to Burma particularly by canvassing in the distant villages where poverty and distress was more¹³.

According to the India Emigration Act, 1922 information was to be provided to the workers regarding the conditions, working hours, cost of living, remuneration, etc of the work undertaken by him in the foreign land. But this Act, however, had no influence

in the life of Bengali immigrants to Burma. They became a natural prey to the maistry and the shipping agents. The workers were given false information and promises regarding the wages, conditions and employment in Burma. The maistry served as a middleman between the employers and the labourers. The maistry was to contract labourers, arrange for their transport, food, accommodation and small remittance to their families. These were provided on the basis of loans at high interest recoverable from the wages to be earned by the labourers. The employers in Burma also depended upon the maistry for the supply of labourers and paid wages through him. The maistry made deductions from their wages for meeting the expenses of travel and his commission and to recover the loans taken by the labourers and his families while bringing him to Burma. The maistry also looked after the dismissal of the worker. The maistry was the man in between the employer and employee. In this maistry system when the labourers were they commenced with a debt, an advance of Rs. 4 the wage was about Rs. 20 per month. Labour was under the maistry, who controlled the distribution of wages and made 'false deductions' from ¹⁴. In fact, the labourers carried home much less than what they were paid.

The ships also carried huge number of labourers and workers who were in search of jobs in Burma. The ships which carried them were overcrowded and unhealthy. Mahatma Gandhi was travelling in the ship names s.s.Aronda which was owned by the biggest steamship companies in the world. Mahatma Gandhi in his travel to Burma had described the condition of the ships as there are for the use of these 1,500 passengers (or more) two tiny bathrooms and 12 latrines in sets of 4 for men and two bathrooms and 8 latrines for women. This gives an average of one latrine to 75 passengers and one bathroom to 375 passengers. There is a sort of a running corridor in front of each set of latrines Dirty water and urine from the from the latrines flow into this corridor and owing to faulty drainage, instead of discharging itself through the drain, the foul water continues to roe to and fro on the floor with the rolling of the ship. The lower deck has been described by Gandhi as dark and dingy and stuffy and hot to the point of suffocation There is no direct access to the sea air ... The forepart of the main deck is sometimes

partly used –as was the case last time when we voyaged from Calcutta to Rangoon– as a cattle –hold; the space used by the cattle being separated fro the passengers just by a trellised partition . Similarly, at the stern end of the shade deck there is a cage where sheep, goats, ducks and poultry are kept. It is the foul and stinking beyond description, so much so that it is impossible to stand anywhere near it. There seems to be no hospital arrangement for the third class passengers on board this boat. Nor is there any special accommodation provided for patients from among third-class passengers in case of casual illness or an epidemic outbreak. He adds that during the rainy season the deck passengers suffer most and the indescribable hardships lead to illness and even loss of lives. Under such condition the workers had to travel but after reaching Burma their conditions were no better ¹⁵. Sarala Devi Choudhurani in her article ‘Burma Jatra’, mentions about her travel to Rangoon. She writes about the discrimination of the shipping companies against the Indians and the Europeans who were given privileges in the ships ¹⁶. The unhygienic and poor condition of the ships and the passengers travelling in them has also described by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in his novel ‘Srikanta’. He had mentioned about the rush among the passengers from Calcutta going to Rangoon and the congested as well as the unhealthy condition of the passengers in the ships. The Burmese Government particularly the health department had employed doctors and medical officers who examine the passengers willing to travel to Burma and provided passes to those who were free from the germs of plague. This measure was adopted by the Burmese Government in order to prevent the spread of the epidemic or plague in the country from India ¹⁷. There was also a system of quarantine or keeping in isolation to prevent the spread of the epidemic diseases particularly among the deck passengers. They were supposed to live in isolation in a surrounded place of the jungle for seven days after that they were allowed to enter the city of Rangoon. Sarat Chandra himself had gone through this system of the quarantine which harassed the immigrants from India to Burma ¹⁸

Yet the number of immigration between the two countries did not decrease. The number of sea-passengers recorded by the Public Health Department from the parts of Rangoon,

Akyab, Bassein, Moulmein, Tavoy and Mergui shows that and till 1938 the number of incoming passengers were more than the outgoing.

TABLE -3.1
ANNUAL AVERAGE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS AND EMIGRANTS
BY SEA (1871-1938)

PERIOD	IMMIGRANTS	EMIGRANTS	NET MIGRANTS
1871-1875	14200	10300	3900
1876-1880	16700	12100	4600
1881-1885	74200	54400	19800
1886-1890	112000	89200	22800
1891-1895	130800	104400	26400
1896-1900	147500	102300	45200
1901-1905	179800	138000	41800
1906-1910	316800	297800	19000
1911-1915	336600	278700	57900
1916-1920	273500	238100	35400
1921-1925	367100	315200	51900
1926-1930	405800	361500	44500
1931-1935	276600	273700	2900
1936-1938	234400	235800	-1400

SOURCE: Cheng Siok Hwa, The Rice Industry of Burma : 1852-1940, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1968, Table V, p-122

After coming to Burma the condition of the labourers was not better in Burma the living houses provided to them were in no better condition. The Public Health Officer of Rangoon reported in 1926 that, "In one room where we counted 50 coolies, the number allowed by regulation were 9. The conditions was indescribable. Every inch of the floor space is occupied by a sleeping human being and others are to be found on shelves and bunks along the walls. Dark ill-ventilated houses on sites perennially flooded with rain or tidal waters or with stagnant pools of the household sullage waste, with scarcely a ray of direct sunshine in the inner rooms, are inhabited by hundreds of thousands of the poor class..."¹⁹ As a result of such unhygienic living and poor diets the health of the Indian labourers constantly decreased. Most of the beriberi deaths recorded in colonial Burma was associated with poverty induced poor diet. The Hindu coolies were noted to be amongst the worst sufferers. During 1909-1938 there were 19 separate references appear in the annual health reports to the prevalence of beriberi amongst the Indian coolies. In 1931 at Bassein 61 deaths occurred among the Indian coolies. The Hindu coolies in the mining population of Tavoy and Mergui were noted as prone to beriberi outbreaks, which were reported in 1916, 1917 and 1919 and 1920. In 1923 the proportion was much higher. Of 116 deaths in Rangoon, 75% were coolies and in 1929 97 out of the 128 deaths were Hindus. In Bassein the reports note that the deaths were all from the poorest Indian classes. The mortality in the towns continued to show that high proportion of Hindu deaths in Rangoon in the year 1931. There were 55 deaths out of 74 deaths from beriberi in 1931 and in 1932 in Rangoon the proportion of deaths was 81 out of 97 deaths. In 1935, 72 per cent of those affected in Rangoon were Bengali and it was noted that in Pyapon the disease was confined to the Bengalis due to the ill-balanced diet and low standard of living²⁰.

The conditions of working were very poor and the exploitation of the workers under the maistry system continued but the inflow of labourers did not decrease because of the high pay in Burma than in Bengal as well as in India. The colonial Government also encouraged the immigration because the Indian labourers were hardier than the Burmese labourers. They could work for longer hours and were fit as agricultural works,

construction labours, rice mills, and others. Thus the flow of the Indian labours continued till the 1930s and beyond till it was resisted by the Burmese workers. Many were mechanics and mostly from 24 Parganas they were originally technical labours employed in factories and workshops in Rangoon²¹.

The social status of an Indian or Bengali labour can be understood from behaviour of the Burmese towards them as revealed from the figure given below. The figure is an advertisement of Polo Cigarettes published in the Thuriya (The Sun) magazine on 22 January 1937.

FIGURE-3.1



SOURCE: Chei Ikeya, 'The traditional high status of women in Burma: A Historical Reconsideration', Journal of Burma Studies, Volume -10, 2005-2006, Centre for South Asian Studies, p-67

The Bengalis were also free labourers and did not always come under the maistry system. Besides this kind of workers there were Bengali durwans or guards, dhobis or laundry washermen, tailors and barbers.²² Besides skilled and unskilled labourers there were

numerous Bengalis in the business as timber merchants, contractors, ship industry, cloth merchants, tobacco merchants, rice mill owners and also petty businessmen as shopkeepers, medicine dealers, tailors and others.

II

Besides the agricultural and non-agricultural workers Bengalis also took to other professions like establishing rice mills particularly in Akyab district where the Bengali businessmen had in majority engaged in rice mills. The most important of such rice mills was Kelsul and Ghosh Company. In 1832 Shri Ramgopal Ghosh of Kolkata and an European Mr. Kelsul had jointly started the concern. But in 1846 there was misunderstanding between Mr. Kelsul and Shri Ghosh and Shri Ghosh sold his portion to his European partner at the cost of Rs. 2 lakhs. He, thereafter, started a separate concern of rice mill in 1846 at Akyab which was larger than the previous one. In Akyab there was the existence of conspicuous number of rice and paddy merchants and commission agents. The Bengali merchants who existed in considerable numbers and they formed Rice & Paddy Merchants & Commission Agents.²³ The well known rice company of Chittagong named Nityananda Rice Company had opened a branch in Rangoon²⁴.

Timber was an important source of attraction for the Bengali merchants. Moreover, the British Government in 1881 passed the Forest Act for Lower Burma and in 1887 passed a Forest Regulation for upper Burma which was newly annexed. These two Acts amalgamated in the Burma Forest Act of 1902 which clearly defined that forest lands were absolutely the property of the Government and forests which were state property but burdened with private rights²⁵. The company after securing a complete hold over the forests encouraged the merchants to utilize the timber and teak resources of Burma for the railway berths, furniture's, etc. the Bengali merchants mainly stationed themselves at the important parts like Rangoon etc for better transport facilities and easy

communications with India. The Bengali timber merchants had huge profits in the timber business. The British empire in 1920 had 102,000 acres of forests and out of which one half of the area was situated in Burma.²⁶ There were teak, sissu, catechu, catechu, casuarinas, eucalyptus, rubber and deodar. Out of these the most important was teak and many of the Bengali traders worked as timber merchants which seemed to be a lucrative profession. There was also the export of bamboos from Burma. The yield of bamboos in 1901 in British Indian Empire was 185,000,000 out of which one-third was supplied by Burma. Thus Bengalis had taken timber trade as another profession in Burma which required capital which was present and labourers which was cheap and abundantly available due to immigration from Burma. The main work of timber handling was done by trained elephants.²⁷

Bengali timber merchant namely, Shri Shashi Bhushan Niyogi in Rangoon and his eldest son Shri Dhirendranath Niyogi had the most flourishing timber trade in Burma. They were also well known for their charity.²⁸ There was another well known timber merchant among the Bengalis named Sasanka Mukhopadhyay.²⁹

Among the well known Bengali capitalists mention may be made of Gyanendra Lal Chowdhury, the son of the Zamindar of Patiya police station of Chittagong and also Shri Alamohan Das³⁰. In fact, majority of the investors in rice mills were capitalists from Chittagong. Alamohan Das or Surendramohan Das was one of the industrialists in Rangoon. He was honoured by Acharya Prafulla Roy as Karmavir. He started his career with a mere Rs. 25 in hand; Das went to Dhaka and onwards to Rangoon, in Burma, which was then a business hub of South Asian countries. He started a trading company in leaf-tea and soon stabilized in business. He remained in Rangoon eleven years. He came back to Bengal in 1931. He had set up the Howrah Chemical Works in 1920. When he had recovered enough, he repaid his old debts using the earnings from Rangoon and embarked on re-establishing B.W. Scales. In 1934, he set up Pal's Engineering Works which manufactured textile machinery, printing machinery, machine tools and soon.³¹

There was a Bengali millionaire in Burma who resided at Pynmara named Dr. B.K. Haldar. Mahatma Gandhi while his visit to Burma in 1929 had stayed in the house of Dr. Haldar who gave a donation of Rs. 500 to start the Satyagraha movement.³²

Bengalis were also engaged in other professions like metal industries, cotton weaving, spinning, ceramics, and rice mills, dress making, transport business like ships, taxis, motor bus, etc. Burma was famed for the production of high quality of cigars. It in fact started to grow especially after the expansion of the British Empire. Burma cigars were in fact made from the tobacco produced in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Among the various concerns in Burma, Kheezarhee Burma Tobacco Leaf Co. Ltd was in Rangoon but its office was in Calcutta. It manufactured Kohinoor Brand cigarettes and Bengal Club tobacco mixtures. The concern was from Bengal but whether it was a Bengali concern is not known.³³

Due to the huge migration of the Bengalis into Burma the Bengali industrialists particularly after the Swadeshi Movement which gave impetus to the indigenous industries took to start new business. One of such business was the ship industry and the most important was the ships plying from India to Burma as it carried huge number of passengers. The existence of such Bengali businessmen can be traced in July 1905 when the Muslim merchants and Zamindars of Chittagong started the Bengal steam Navigation Company with a capital of Rs. 10 lakhs. It was launched by a number of wealthy merchants of Rangoon. The steamers were built on the most modern lines, fitted with electric lights and it was comfortable for the passengers. It also had separate accommodation for the first and the second classes passengers. The steamers carried both passengers and goods plying between Rangoon and Chittagong, Calcutta and Rangoon, Calcutta and Chittagong. The main office of the company was located at 18, Shark's street, Rangoon though it had branches in Chittagong and Calcutta. Munshi Ishan Ali was the chairman of the Company and Munshi Mohammed Kalamian was the managing director. There were other directors of the Company such as Choudhury Fazlur Rahman,

Choudhury Obeidur Rahman , Choudhury Abdul Bari , Munshi Abdur Rahman and Munshi Inayat Ali. The company successfully ran a passenger service between Chittagong, Akyab and Rangoon. The Bengal Burma navigation Company had put up a stiff competition with the British India Steam Navigation Co Limited which also plied between Calcutta and Akyab via Chittagong and Rangoon. The Company also moved with its agents in the towns of Chittagong and Rangoon to not support the Bengal Steam Navigation Company and charged only Rs.1 instead of Rs.5 of the Bengali ship Company. There were others Bengalis involved in the steam navigation services like Mr. Abdul Bari Chowdhury, owned the Bengal Burma steam Navigation Company. It offered a considerable amount of competition to the British India Steam Navigation Co. It carried passengers and goods from Chittagong and Rangoon.³⁴ The son in law of Abdul Bari Choudhury named Abul Kashen Khan was married in Burma in 1933 to one of the daughters of Mr. Choudhury. He was an advocate of High Court in Burma. He helped his father in law in business in Burma.³⁵ Another well known Bengali industrialist was Tejendralal Ghosh, son of Durgaram Ghosh, one of the most important bankers of Akyab. He had established the national Flotilla Company Limited which carried passengers and goods between Burma and India.³⁶

In the inland water transport some names of few Bengalis can be found. They are R.K. Pal and co. of Rangoon, Malakars of Bassein and Chowdhuris of Akyab. Their steam launches operated within the waters of Tenassarim, Irrawaddy and Arakan Division of Burma.³⁷ Some of the Bengalis worked in the parts and Anil Ganguly while writing about his childhood days mentions that his father Kedarnath Ganguly, originating from Noakhali migrated to Burma and worked in the Rangoon port. Anil Ganguly was born in Rangoon in 1934 and father went to Burma for the search of a better life and prosperity.³⁸ J.N. Ghosal was an eminent Bengali resident of Rangoon who had his own Insurance Company. He took initiative for the foundation of the Theosophical Society of Burma, Brahmo Samaj and the Bengal Club³⁹.

Rangoon or Burma was the industrial hub of South East Asia in the nineteenth and the twentieth century as we see that the Bengalis looked towards Burma to try their fortune. There are numerous Bengalis who left Burma as an ordinary person and seized the opportunity of the country and turned to be a successful person. This was the reason for describing 'Burma muluk' of the Bengalis as the Golden land. One such person was Biswajit Dutta who in 1886 had sailed to Burma as a coolie from East Bengal. He was hardworking and ambitious and took the job of a hangman in the Central jail of Rangoon. In fact he was picked up for the job because of his stature by the Englishman in the boat to Rangoon. He soon became a clerk in the jail and seized the opportunity of the newly colonised Burma by resigning from the post and became an independent contractor building roads and laying railway lines. He also brought his brothers and established the 'Biswajit Dutta & Brothers'.⁴⁰ There are also well reputed names of the contractors of Rangoon namely Mr. G.N. Sarkar better known as Girinbabu was one of the close friends of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay.⁴¹

The middle class Bengalis found Burma a flourishing land to try their future. Jogesh Chandra Banerjee was a contractor of the Rangoon Corporation. He had constructed high roads for the Corporation and thus contributed immensely for the development of the Rangoon town. He was one of the well established Bengalis of Rangoon. He had established the Veena Pani Pathsala. This institution later turned into a high school named Vivekananda Institution⁴². Among the Bengalis who migrated to Burma in search of fortune was Shri. Ramanirajan Choudhury. He came from Chittagong and opened a medicine shop named Unique drug House in Rangoon during the 1944. There were other business men like Shri. Rebati Mohan Choudhury.⁴³ Further references can be made of Shri. Kshitish Chandra De who also owned a medicine shop in Moulmein. He had a partnership with Shri Ramani Ranjan Das in his business. Shri. Das was also the head of an insurance company in Moulmein. After his retirement he took to the business. He was the owner of a lime kiln in Rangoon⁴⁴.

Occupational Structure of the Bengalis in Burma

The occupation of the Bengalis in particular is difficult to seek out in statistics and the actual number of Bengalis involved in different professions is not mentioned in any reports or census. In the census of 1931 the occupation of the Indians as a whole has been mentioned.

TABLE -3.2
OCCUPATION OF INDIANS IN BURMA

OCCUPATIONS	INDIANS, BORN IN BURMA EARNERS AND WORKING DEPENDANTS	INDIANS, BORN OUTSIDE BURMA EARNERS AND WORKING DEPENDANTS
Pasture & Agriculture	66,732 (59,089+7,643)	1,06,323 (97,798+8,525)
Tenant Cultivators	18,341 (16,213+2,128)	22,758 (20,395+2,363)
Agricultural Labouress	28,5000 (25,893+2,607)	49,370 (46,168+3,202)
Forestry	140 (126+14)	1,049 (1,039+10)
Fishing and hunting	634 (577+57)	2,519 (2,461+58)
Metalic Minerals	42 (39+3)	6953 (6870+83)
Non-metallic mineral	360 (357+3)	7397 (7387+10)
Industries (including textiles, hide skin, etc.)	7178 (5,536+1,642)	97,589 (93,479+4,110)
Rice ponders, huskers and flour grinders	1,593 (1,025+568)	32,037 (29,548+2,489)
Transport	5,510 (5,192+318)	96,020 (95,336+684)
Trade	9151 (6,647+2,504)	87,060 (84,010+3,050)
Public force (Army, Navy, Air force and Police)	617 (617+0)	13,378 (13,377+1)
Public Administration	1,012 (993+19)	12,810 (12,742+68)
Professions and Liberal Arts		
Law	176 (175+1)	625 (621+4)
Medicine	408 (347+61)	2722 (26655+67)
Domestic Service	2,339 (1,925+141)	21,987 (21,024+963)
Beggars and Vagrants	617 (201+416)	659(557+102)

Source; Census of India, 1931, Volume - XI, Burma, Part II, Tables -Table - XI, pp- 190-192

The exact number of Bengalis in the different professions is not clear from the above table. But the census of 1931, however, mentions that 3, 76,994 Bengali speaking persons with 2, 42,415 males and 1, 34,579 females were found settled in Burma⁴⁵. From these the exact number of Bengalis in different profession is not easy to locate. But we can come to know the varied professions they had taken after they went to Burma to earn a better fortune than it was available in India.

III

The upper class and middle class Bengalis migrated to Burma in pursuit of jobs particularly after the establishment of the colonial institutions. They were employed in different civil posts as municipality officials, advocates, attorneys, judges, jail officers, doctors, medical officers, surgeons, school teachers, postmasters, railway clerks, etc. This employment of the Bengalis were largely due to the fact that the Bengalis were used to English language as English was introduced in higher education in Bengal in the early years. The educated Bengalis also had the tendency towards white collared jobs and there was also huge number of graduates qualifying from the Calcutta University. Moreover, the colonial masters had also seen the advantage of employing the Bengali clerks which was easily available and with much less remuneration than their European counterpart. While to employ the locals, the British had to take the hardship of providing them training as well as teaching them the new a language i.e., English.

Therefore, a large section of the Bengali immigrants who came to Burma were engaged in the clerical works. Under the British patronage the Bengalis from the upper and middle class families migrated to Burma to fill up the newly developing administrative set up both in civil and legal professions⁴⁶.

The administration wanted the Burma administration according the Indian to model and they started to refashion the set up in Burma. The British after starting the tribunals and police recruited the men also from India. Composition of the police force as recorded in the Burma Gazetteer in 1st January 1876 stated that.

TABLE – 3.3
RACES OF MEN IN POLICE FORCE IN 1876

RACES	NUMBER OF MEN
Europeans	3
Khyoungtha	9
Khamie	50
Khyeng	5
Mro	12
Manipuri	32
Burmese	4
Goorkhas & Tipperah men	81
Madrasis	4
Bengalis	9
Vacancies	6
Total Sanctioned Strength	256

Source: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume-II, p-79

The number of the Bengalis in the police force indicates that the Bengalis formed a significant number in the administrative services of the country.

The names of other Bengali professionals were Shri Kamakhyanath Gupta who had spent six years since 1890 onwards in upper Burma in government service. He was the resident of Hooghly and had published a book named 'Six Years in Burma'. Many Bengalis were in postal department like in Magwe (Upper Burma) the postmaster was B.B. Chatterjee. In the Sadar Municipality of Minbu in Upper Burma, Dr. J. Banerjee was

the vice-chairman and Health Officer. Another civil surgeon of Pokkur was Dr. S.R. Sen. He was the vice-chairman and Health Officer of the local municipality. More names of Bengalis can be found in Thayemoyo, (Upper Burma) Shri M. Banerjee was an advocate; and Shri K.B. Mukherjee (BA, LLB) was a lawyer in the local court of Thatmtyo. Shri K.C. Chakraborty was a postmaster of Mymgyan in Upper Burma. Shri Bipin Behari Chakraborty was the jail superintendent and sub-assistant surgeon of the subdivision of Pagan. There were Bengali lawyers in Pagan namely Shri H. Guha (B. A. LLB). In Yamethin district of Meiktila of Upper Burma there was posted a well known Bengali named Dr. M. L. Basu. He was civil surgeon, jail superintendent, health officer and the vice-president of the local municipality. There were advocates namely S.C. Guha, and B.K. Haldar. Chindwin district of Sagaing had another Bengali as postmaster named S.P. Ghosal. Shewbo district had Rai Saheb N.B. Roy as, the sub divisional officer in the Irrigation Department and the chief jailor of the Shwebo district was Mr. Mukherjee. Shri B.B. Mukherjee was a general contractor of Shwebo and in Sagaing district court Shri S. Mukherjee was an advocate⁴⁷.

Mandalay was an important place of Upper Burma. A large number of Bengalis were engaged in the profession of contractors in government railways and other department in Mandalay. It had Bengalis residing from the earliest times. There is an organisation of the Bengalis named Mandalay Brahmamayee Sevak Sangha associated with the Kalibari in Mandalay. The organisers committee had one the members named Rajballav Chakraborty, whose mentor Shri Madan Gopal Goswami was the court priest during the time of King Mindon, the father of the last king of Burma, Theebaw. Shri Banerjee and P.C. Sengupta were respectively Extra Assistant superintendent and Sub-Assistant superintendent in the survey department at Mandalay. There were advocates named Sarat Sashi Mukherjee and Barister like S. Mukherjee, A.S. Mukherjee L.K. Mitra, P.N. Bose, K. Banerjee and L.M. Mukherjee. At Mandalay there were many businessmen and contractors with firms named J.L. Nandi and sons and Engineering. There are numbers rice mills which did the husking and cleaning of rice⁴⁸. Satish Ranjan Das was the

barrister of Mandalay in Burma. He was married to the eldest daughter of the well reputed barrister of Rangoon named P.C.Sen. ⁴⁹

In Myitkyina Shri J.C. Ghosh was the post master of Michina. In the court of Myitkyina there was Bengali advocate J.C. Banerjee. In the Military Police Battalion of Myitkyina the Nayib Commandant was Shri Nirmal Roy and in the health department was Lieutenant Dr. Kiranchandra Sen. In the district of Bhamo Mr. P. Mukherjee was the post master and J.L. Mitra was the signaller. There were advocates namely U.N. Mitra, B. Dutta and B. Mukherjee, K.L. Sen was also a pleader in Bhamo Dr. Ramlal Sarkar who had settled in China had also spent a few years in Bhamo. ⁵⁰

The name of Shri Shyama Charan Roy is quite known in Burma due to his social activities related to the women's education, education for children and welfare for the poor and needy. He had come to Burma in 1891 and worked as a clerk in the department of military police in Katha of Upper Burma. Later he became an advocate after passing out law examination. Among his philanthropical works includes the organisation of group of volunteers as fire extinguishers called 'Fire band'. The wooden houses in Burma were very much prone to fire and this band helped to extinguish and control fire in the locality. He also taught the needy students and opened a charitable homeopathic centre. He had established a charitable concern named Relief Fraternity. He opened a charitable hospital in various parts of Burma. In the district of Mitkitla, the town of Kyukse was posted another Bengali named Nikunj Behari Roy as the overseer. After the Third Burmese war in 1885-86 many Bengalis had migrated to upper Burma and Majority of them had settled here in various jobs. Some of them are Rai Bahadur Shri Dinanath Sanjal and Rai Bahadur Chunilal Bose ⁵¹.

There is a reference of a Bengali women in professional position in Burma. Shrimati Surabhi Sinha was a lawyer in the town of Bassein in Burma. She practised law in the town. ⁵²

There are evidences and references of Bengali Muslims residing in Burma. Most of them had migrated from Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla and Dacca. One of them was Din Muhammad who was originally from Mednipore and migrated to Burma particularly for business in 1858. He started as a businessman from Mandalay married a Kachin lady and later became a caretaker of the stable British horses and an interpreter (Dobhashi) of Burmese language⁵³.

After occupying the lower Burma in 1852, Rangoon was taken into the process of development. It almost took two decades to develop the central part of the city and all the construction work was done by the Indian contractors and labourers. Among the Indian construction contractors there were many Bengalis namely Sashipada Das, who after taking the engineering Degree from the Rurkee Engineering College moved to Burma. He started his career as an Engineer and contractor in 1888 and retired in 1904. There was also Mr. Roger Bagchi who in 1887 had come to Rangoon and started the Bagchi and Co. Engineers and Contractors. He had received the contract of constructing the railway lines of Mandalay, Mandalay Municipality works and also hospitals, roads, bridges, culverts and municipality housing complexes. In fact, most of the buildings of Mandalay were constructed by him. His company of engineering had also constructed the viceroy's Ghat Road in Bhamo and the General hospital in Rangoon. The Y.M.B.A. was also constructed by him⁵⁴.

According to the census 1921-1931 there were 3, 76,994 Bengalis in Burma. Bengalis settled in different places of Burma. In Burma particularly in Rangoon there were 29,426; Akyab 39,248; Insein 5,513; Prome 1,705; Bassein 7,556; Mandalay 3,854 Pegu 7,497; Hanthawaddy 6,841; Tharawaddy 2142 and in Tungoo 3,522. Thus according to the census there Bengalis were present in large numbers in Rangoon and Akyab⁵⁵. Among the prominent Bengalis mention may be made of Shri Manmathanath Bhattacharyya, the son of well known Maheshchandra Nyaya Ratna. Shri Bhattacharyya had been Accountant General in Rangoon. Col. Priyanath Mukherjee, I.M.S. who was transferred from Madras to Rangoon after it had become the capital of British Burma. He had married a Burmese lady and settled permanently in Rangoon. After the foundation of

Rangoon Chief Court large number of Bengalis settled here as lawyers, barrister and judges. Some of them can be named as Jatis Ranjan Das, Bar-at-Law who was appointed as judge of small cases court in Rangoon in 1902-Purna Chandra Sen, a well reputed barrister Rangoon. He in the early years of his career was a judge of Maulmein. He was also secretary of the local Bengal Social Club. Laxmi Narayan Sen was another established barrister of Rangoon. Debendranath Palit was an advocate at the chief court of Rangoon. Akshaya Kumar De, was a popular resident of Burma, Ahin Chandra Mukherjee, an engineer at Rangoon, Sashi Bhusan Niyogi was a well known businessman at Rangoon. A.C. Dhar was a famous Attorney at Rangoon, married a Burmese lady and settled permanently at Rangoon. There are also names of many Bengali contractors of Rangoon like Sri Jhanendra Nath De, Sibnath Rakshit, Jay Chandra Dutt, Sashi Kumar Ghose and G.N. Sarkar. They all had a very lucrative business in Rangoon and earned a huge fortune. Girish Chandra Basu had founded a public library called Rangoon Vidyasagar Reading Room in 1895 in memory of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. There was Priyo nath Sen and Mr.Mahendranath Mukherjee who were the executive engineers in Burma ⁵⁶.

In Arakan also large number of Bengalis had resided as it was quite close to Chittagong. S.C. Sen was the medical officer of Arakan. In Akyab the number of Chittagonians was much more than other races. S.C. Guha, who came to Akyab in the second half of the 19th century, had been engaged as a lawyer here. Mr. N. Banerjee was the postmaster of Akyab. There were many Bengalis who were rice and paddy merchants and owned rice mills or worked as commission agents. Among them mention may be made of Ramgopal Ghosh and Nityananda Roy. In the medical stream Dr. Jagabandhu Basu, M.D. was incharge of the seaman's Hospital at Akyab for some years from 1854.Sri S.C. Das was the overseer of another district of Burma , Arakan. Rai Saheb S.C. Mukhopadhyay was the sub-engineer of the district of Insein. M.M. Basu was the barrister of Arakan and K.C. Basu was the advocate of the district⁵⁷.

Jyotish Ranjan Das the cousin of C.R.Das was barrister of Rangoon. He was married to the second daughter of P.C.Sen, the reputed barrister of Rangoon. He went to Rangoon at the call of his father in law. He had established himself as a well known lawyer. He lawyers in Rangoon were permitted to open offices like the attorneys of Calcutta. He established a firm in partnership with a lawyer in Rangoon. The firm was known as Cawasji and Das firm. He earned great honour and respect from the Burmese, British, and the Bengalis in Burma. He became the judge in the judge of the Rangoon ig Court. He received great reputation and success in Rangoon.⁵⁸

We have further names of Bengalis from the district of Pegu; M.L. Gosain, B.K. Basu, N.K. Mitra, H.B. Dey, K.C. Sen, L.M. Ghosh, J.P. Addy and P.N. Sanyal were all pleaders at Pegu. Mr. R.C. Chatterjee and Mr. A.K. Sen were all lawyers but they practised law in the local Burmese language. In Tharawaddy there are names of two Bengalis like S.C. Guha and U.N. Chakraborty who worked as pleaders. U.N. Chakraborty was the postmaster at Tharawaddy. At Henzada there were some known Bengalis which is to be mentioned as R.P. Sen, bar at law, he was the president of Bar Association. B.N. Das, who was the secretary of Bar Association, K.L. Mukherjee, P.N. Chowdhury and K.C. Banerjee were the members of the Bar Association.⁵⁹

Dr. S.C. Mukherjee was a physician of the medicine firm called San C. Po and Co in Henzada. Shri B.M. Kundu was the overseer of the northern district of Henzada. There were some lawyers in the court of Henzada namely D.N. Roy, Bar-at Law. He was a government prosecutor, President of the Bar Association. S.C. Lahiri who was the secretary of the Bar Association. The other members of the association are N.D. Mukherjee, S.N. Roy Choudhury, B.K. Sen and H.L. Chatterjee. In Henzada there is a Bengali medicine shop named Star Pharmacy, Chemists, Druggists and optician. K.C. Mitra was the proprietor of the shops⁶⁰.

Among the doctors of Rangoon there was Aburba Kumar Roy who passed LMS exam from the Calcutta Medical College in 1906 and went to Rangoon to practice medicine in 1907.⁶¹

In Maubin, the existence of Bengalis could be traced with the civil surgeon Dr. K.K. Chatterjee. He was the superintendent of the district jail. The jailor of the district was also a Bengali called J.K. Sen. In the Maubin court there are two Bengalis named T.C. Basu and H.L. Chatterjee. Moulmein also had Bengalis in the civil posts. S. Mukherjee was the secretary and Assessor of Moulmein municipality. S.C. Dasgupta was the Advocate at Moulmein court. S.N. Dasgupta was the postmaster at Moulmein. There were two advocates at the Myaongmein court named L.M. Banerjee (advocate) and P.L. Ghosh (lawyer). Names of more Bengalis can be dedicated as Dr. L. Bhattacharya who was a civil medical officer at Salween and L.M. Roychoudhury who was the post master at Tavoy⁶². The General Shri Manoj Banerjee was a bank agent of United Commercial bank in Rangoon⁶³. Shri. Brajendralal Choudhury was the post master of the Rangoon post office. Later he was transferred to Taungzee, and Henzada. He also migrated from Chittagong. The post master of Moulmein was Shri. Gouri mohan Chakraborty.⁶⁴

The great Bengali novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay was also engaged in certain jobs while residing in Burma. Sarat Chandra had been in Burma thirteen years. Within these thirteen years he has spent in one and half in Pegu and Langlabein and the rest of the years he has spent in Rangoon. In 1903 when he came to Rangoon he stayed with his uncle Shri. Aghornath Chattopadhyay. His uncle was a well known lawyer of Rangoon. While staying with his uncle started to study law and Burmese language. His uncle could secure a job for Sarat Chandra by establishing contacts with Shri. Krishna Kumar Basu, who was the Audit & Accounts Officer of the railways in Rangoon. After the death of his uncle, Aghornath Chattopadhyay he stayed in the house of Shri. Annada Prasad Bhattacharya. Shri. Bhattacharya was the overseer of Rangoon. Sarat Chandra went to Pegu with Shri. Girindranath Sarkar. In Pegu he stayed in the house of Shri. C.K. Sarkar, who was the Assistant Engineer of P.W.D. of Pegu. In Pegu he met one of the

lawyers of Pegu named Shri. Abinash Chandra Chattopadhyay. Shri. C.K.Sarkar had provided Sarat Chandra with a temporary job in his office of P.W.D. in Pegu. While staying in Pegu he became friendly with another lawyer Shri. Nripendra Kumar Mitra. Sri Mitra had provided a job in the rice mill in Langlabein of his cousin Shri. P.K.Mitra. He also learnt Burmese from Langlabein. Sarat Chandra also secured a job in the Rangoon Examiner Public Works Department with the help of the Accounts Officer, Deputy Examiner Shri. Munindra Kumar Mitra. We also get the reference of Shri Mitra in the India Office List and India Office. In 1911-1912 the examiner Public Works Accounts Office and Accountant General Office was united and therefore, Sarat Chandra worked in 1912 in the Accountant general office. Trailokhyanath Basak was one of the colleagues of Shri. Sarat Chandra. He had married a Burmese woman. Sarat Chandra remained in the Office till his last days in Burma⁶⁵. The details of the stay of Shri Sarat Chandra in Burma gives the idea of the easy availability of jobs and the names of various Bengalis who migrated to the different places of Burma. It also gives the picture of the integration of the Bengali community and extension of a helping hand for a Bengali in the new land.

Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay went to Maungdaw region of Arakan in east Burma. He travelled in a steamer and mentioned of number of experiences. He took a job of a Marwari firm owned by Kesharam Poddar. He secured a job of a preacher of Go Rakshna Pracharani Sanstha. He was in charge of east Bengal and Arakan. He had to travel in the various places of Arakan. In Maungdaw he met Shri. Surendrantnath Dhar, the well known poet and writer of Chittagong. Shri Dhar often travelled to Arakan by road. He used to walk through the forests of Burma. In his travelogue Bibhuti bhushn gives a lively description of the landscapes of Burma. He had travelled through the teak forests of Arakan Yayomo Range and the nature of Sitang and Mandalay⁶⁶.

IV

Bengalis were also involved in the jobs related to education. Schools were opened by the Bengalis both for the boys and girls in various towns of Burma. Bengali teachers were required to serve in these schools. Bengal Academy was established by the Bengalis as a English medium high school in 1909. Dr. Prasanna Kumar Majumdar and Shri Sashi Bhushan Chakraborty who was a teacher was the primary initiative in starting the school. Mr. J.R. Das who was (Barrister) had contributed immensely in the formation of the school. Mr. J.N. Ghoshal the secretary of Life Insurance Company gave a lot of encouragement to the Bengali students and took lot of initiative. The teachers appointed in this school were Shri Chandi Charan Banerjee, Shri Sushil Kumar Gupta was the head master and Shri Surendranath Sen was the treasurer of the school. Later this post of treasurer was taken by Shri Khirod Behari Roy Choudhury. Later in 1918 under the guidance of Manilal Kundu and few other Bengalis in Rangoon a girls section of the Bengal Academy. Srimati Jyotirmayee Mukherjee, was the Head Mistress of the girls section of the Bengal Academy. The school had a new building of three storeys and many Bengalis had helped in this new endeavour. The names of such volunteers who contributed in financed and efforts are Prasanna Kumar Majumdar, Nux Bux Saheb (Contractor), Bishnu Charan Ghosal, Dr. Manilal Kundu, Surendranath Mandal, Kumundini Kanta Kar, Professor Maulavi Golam Akbar, Sachin Mukherjee, Professor Ramaprasad Choudhury and Mohit Kumar Mukherjee⁶⁷.

After the establishment of the national college at Shwe Kyin monastery in Rangoon on 14 August 1921, a member of Bengali professors taught in the National College. Some of the professors were Prof. Kabyanidhi Bhawmik of English, Professor H.K. Chakraborty of History and Prof. B. Banerjee of Chemistry⁶⁸ and Muhammed Siddiq Khan⁶⁹. The details of the Bengalis in the college are mentioned in the Chapter V. most of the schools in Burma was occupied by the Bengalis namely Shri Direndranath Sen who was a teacher of Dawson's A.V. School in Pazumdaurg. He was appointed in the Government school in

Pegu in 1926. There was another school teacher named Bimal Choudhury who was in Thaten Government School ⁷⁰

The occupation of the Bengalis also consisted of employees in the Government Printing Works in Rangoon and Maymyo. The Bengali intellectuals also owned private printing press. We come to know about Nripendra Chandra Banerjee, who was the editor of the Rangoon Mail. Further Bengali owned newspapers were present like Rangoon Daily New, Bashori, etc. The details of the publications and press activities of the Bengali settlers have been described in Chapter V.

The India Office list and India Office gives a list of Bengalis in service in British Burma. Preo nath Sen was the Executive Engineer of the India Public Works. He was trained in Royal Indian Engineering College. He was appointed as Assistant Engineer on 1st October 1898 and posted to Burma or Rangoon in February ⁷¹. Another Bengali was in the judicial department of Upper Burma as Law Officer and the Official Assignee and Receiver in Rangoon named Purna Chundra Sen. Ahindra Chandra Mukherjee was the Assistant Engineer as the 1st grade in the public works Department. In the Accounts Branch of the Public Works in 1903 Munindra Kumar Mitra was the Deputy Examiner. In the Telegraph Department the Superintendent of Arakan Division was Gyanendro Prasad Roy ⁷².

There were many Bengali civil servants who were engaged in the good positions in Burma but they resigned from their post as a protest against the colonial imperialism. Nagendra Nath Ghosh, the father of the well reputed Bengali poet Bimal Chandra Ghosh was a government employee of Burma. He resigned from the post as a protest to the statement of hang till death of Khudiram Bose, the revolutionary ⁷³. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay was the school inspector of Bengal. He had been to Rangoon to meet the Chief Commissioner Sir Ashley Eden and to protest against the discrimination and injustice done to him by the higher authorities. ⁷⁴ It must be mentioned here that to give special supervision and encouragement each circle of inspection under a Deputy Inspector or sub-inspector with syllabus prescribed by the University of Calcutta. The

schools were inspected by the Education Department and the pupils were to appear at the public examinations held by the Calcutta University.⁷⁵

We get references of the Bengali government officials from the memoir of Smt Nilima Dutta named 'Ujaan Shrote'. Her father was an employee in the Accounts Office of the Military Department of Rangoon. He was later transferred to Myamyo. He had colleagues named Shri. Ramen Bhoumik and Manmohan Sarkar. Shri Ramen Bhoumik also practised homeopathy. She mentions of Shri Bireswar Ganguly as one of the well known advocate of Myamyo. She mentions of another government employee and neighbour of them in Myamyo named Shri. Amar Mitra. The daughter of Shri Mitra was the reputed Bengali film actress Srimati Manju De. They migrated to India during the Second World War.⁷⁶

The majority of Bengalis who migrated from Bengal to Burma were employed as clerks in government offices, railways, ports, post offices, telegraph services, hospitals, or other services or offices. The posts created by the British were filled up by them because they well knew English language. Some of them permanently settled in Burma. Liberty, the Daily newspaper reported that "There are not less than twenty thousand Bengalis earning a decent living in Rangoon". Some of them were reaped golden harvest in Burma⁷⁷. The approximate salary of the varied occupation can be summed up from the Budget Estimates of the Government of Burma and from the Gazetteer of Burma for the year 1931. The following remuneration has been given below: -

TABLE - 3.4

OCCUPATIONS AND SALARIES OF THE INDIANS IN BURMA

OCCUPATIONS	APPROXIMATE MONTHLY SALARY
1. Unskilled Labourers – agricultural & construction labourers	Rs. 15 to 30
2. Skilled Labourers	Rs. 40 to 60
3. Drivers, Jail wardens, police constables, etc	Rs. 30 to 40
4. Lower division clerks, surveyors, sub-overseers supervisors, etc	Rs. 40 to 80
5. Upper grade clerks, accountants, surgeons, engineers	Rs. 80 to 160
6. Head clerks, High School teachers, government lawyers	Rs. 160 to 275

Source: N.R.Chakraborty, *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an immigrant Community*, London, OUP, 1971, p-40.

The salary was higher than the offered salary in Bengal therefore the Bengalis migrated to Burma 'the golden land' for making a shining fortune. But in their process of migration and taking professions they had carved out a significant place in the life of the unknown place. They showed considerable mobility in their occupation. They did not hesitate to adapt to new jobs and took the risk of new trades and business in a new country. Numerous Bengalis started migrating to Burma and took to various professions.

V

The introduction of western system of medicine required doctors who had been trained at government recognised institution. With the establishment of hospitals in the districts and sub-divisional level, there were posts created for the posts of medicinal assistants and surgeons. They were to be filled up and the easiest option available was the Bengali doctors who had studied in Calcutta Medical College. There was absence of local Burmese men in such posts which led to the doctors. There were names like Dr. B.L.

Bhattacharya who was born in Calcutta but his schooling was in Bengal academy in Rangoon, and ISC in Rangoon. After that he joined the Rangoon Medical College and got his M.B.B.S. immediately after graduation he was posted in the Burma front during the Second World War ⁷⁸. Dr. N.M. Bhattacharjee, was the sub- assistant Surgeon in Rangoon in 1867-68. His name has been mentined in the vaccination report of 1867-68 of Burma ⁷⁹ Another well established doctor of Burma was Dr. Nilmadhav Basu. He was in Rangoon and immigrated in the early twentieth century. He had earned a good name and fortune from Burma. He came back to Bengal before the Second World War. ⁸⁰ Dr. Motilal Dutta was a physician in the Rangoon district hospital .Besides doctors the western medicinal practises brought forward other professions like compounder, medicinal shops and nurses. Shri. M. De was a compunder in Moulbein Government hospital. ⁸¹

Along with the Allopathic medicine; western education also introduced Homeopathic system of medicine. In Burma Bengali Homeopathic doctors were also present. It is very interesting to note that Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay practised homeopathy while residing in Burma. Dr. Ghosh had established a homeopathic medicine shop named Sultan Medical Hall in Rangoon. Bengalis also practised the system of Ayurvedic system or Kabiraji in Rangoon ⁸².

The profession of law was very popular among the Bengalis. The British rule had introduced its code of law with laws, regulation and rules which was required to enforce in the colonial country. To implement the new legal system it was necessary to have men who were well-versed with the legal system and languages there men could to put forward the claims of their client in English language before British magistrate and therefore, the British government opened the gates of migration for the Bengali lawyers. In the town of Pyiumara, Shri Shantimoy Roy Choudhury was an advocate. He knew to converse in Burmese language. ⁸³ Among the other Bengali lawyers were Kunjabehari Bandopadhyay and Justice P.C. Sen. Another well known was Atalbehari Bandhopadhyay. Shri Sisir Kumar Lahiri was an advocate of Rangoon High Court. He

contributed immensely to the study of the Burmese Buddhist laws⁸⁴. Keshab Chandra Mukherjee was a barrister in Burma. He came back to India during the Second World War. Rajmohan Das and Sarada Ranjan Das also practised law in Rangoon. They came back to Bengal during the Second World War.⁸⁵

Bengalis residing in Burma had rose in high positions and occupied important posts in Burma and Burmese administration. They not only made themselves known but they also contributed to the country's welfare and development. Such Bengalis included names like Ram Brahmoo Sanyal. He was the first superintendent of the Alipore Zoological Gardens in Calcutta. He was a pioneer in captive breeding and was one of the first zookeepers with training as a biologist. He became widely known in zoological circles on account of his work and publications. He travelled to Rangoon to plan the zoo facilities in 1902. In June 1902 Sanyal was finally made a member of the honorary committee. He returned to India in 1906⁸⁶. Haridas Bhattacharya, the second husband of Kanan Devi, the most famous Bengali film actress was the A.D. C. of the Governor of Bengal. He was posted in Rangoon during the early part of his life as Customs Preventive Officer. Later he became a lecturer of the Scottish Church College.⁸⁷ Dr. Nalini Ranjan Chakravarty was born in Mogoke in Burma and became one of the highest ranking civil servants of Rangoon. He was the part of the team of the General Aung San and Prime Minister U Nu which negotiated with Clement Attlee the terms for the Burmese independence. As adviser to the Cabinet he was in an anteroom waiting to be called by the Chair when some gunmen entered and murdered Aung San. At Pundit Nehru's invitation, Dr. Chakravarti came to India to be the financial adviser to the DVC. While in India, he was involved in the resettlement of the people displaced from Burma after the end of the colonial rule. In his later life he took to research in London for a PhD on the Indian minority in Burma⁸⁸.

Among the Bengalis in high posts in Burma was Dr. R.M. Sen who went to Burma in 1904. He was the first superintendent of the Zoological garden in Rangoon. His son Dr. S.S. Sen was a civil surgeon in Burma. He was posted in Pegu and Mandalay. During the

Second World War he left Burma and settled in India.⁸⁹ Another well known Bengali was Shri Shrisranjan Das , the superintendent of Lands in the office of Rangoon Port Commission. It was a high post. While residing in Rangoon he had spent a lot of money on his own to build a laboratory for the Ramakrishna Mission.⁹⁰

The Bengalis, thus, immigrated to Burma for several reasons and they took to various professions in the country. Since Burma was closer to Bengal geographically and administratively under the same colonial master, the British, the Bengalis never considered it as a separate land. Moreover, the Bengali fortune seekers particularly the business class and capitalists took the opportunity of the newly developing land and the upcoming commercial centre, Rangoon. The agricultural labourers, skilled and unskilled labourers mostly from Chittagong and Noakhali and Comilla had migrated for higher wages and better living. In fact, it has been well described by Abdul Haque Choudhury⁹¹ that Burma had become the *lalanbhumi* or rearing ground of the Bengalis from Chittagong and Comilla. The educated Bengalis from the western part of Bengal also found a challenge and security in Government jobs in Burma.

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CHAPTER-IV

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OF THE BENGALIS IN
BURMA AND ITS EFFECT ON BURMA

The modernisation of Burma had begun with the British annexation of the country and the establishment of economic institutions. In colonial times Burma's economy undoubtedly made substantial progress due to the growth of exports. After Burma was put under the British rule it underwent drastic economic change particularly in Lower Burma.

I

From 1824–1886 Burma was on her journey towards modernisation. In her this journey the main contribution was made by the imported seasonal labourers particularly the Chittagonians and the Indian contractors which also included the Bengalis. The financial assistance for developing Burma came largely from the sale of building sites for which the Indians were the main buyers. In fact, Burma's rapid development within a very short space of three or four decades was her favourable trade balance with other countries particularly India. The development of agriculture, forest and mineral resources were largely carried out by the Indians and British.¹ The economic policy in Burma was primarily commercial like in any other colony. Before 1890, the British attention was mainly drawn to the export of rice. The British were not yet concerned about the exploitation of natural resources in Burma. In fact, from the year of the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 to the World War I witnessed the high tide of the British commercial agricultural expansion in Burma and the fashioning of an administrative policy and programme to serve growing economic needs. It was a period of seeming tacit recognition by Burmese generally of the advantage inherent in stable government and in the country's vigorously expanding economy."²

Burma was basically an agricultural country. The colonial Government also felt the necessity to develop the Irrawaddy delta, because it was an important task to increase the fiscal revenue through economic development in order to cope with the growing colonial

expenditure. Moreover, this was intensified by the political incidents such as Sepoy Mutiny in India in the latter half of the 1850s and the Civil War in United States of America in the first half of the 1860s which made the colonial authorities to recognise Burma as one of the major food producing bases for India and the European countries.³ The economy of the country mainly depended upon agriculture. The agricultural development of the country began with the influx of Indian and British capital along with the Indian labourers particularly the Chittagong labours. The immigration of labourers from Bengal as well as the capital for agriculture was invited by the fact that the British had commercialised the rice cultivation by opening new paddy lands in the undeveloped Irrawaddy valley. The Bengali Chittagong labourers were encouraged by the British to come to Burma as seasonal labourers to work in the paddy fields. Due to the commercialization, agriculture had spread with the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 and also the immigration policies of the British there was large number of influx of labourers which increased the population of the country. Very soon due to the country of the agricultural labourers mostly from Chittagong, Comilla, Noakhali and Dacca there was the spread of agriculture⁴. According to the Gazetteer of Burma there was then an annual inflow of 80,000 to 100000 into Lower Burma, about half of them were from Upper Burma and the remaining half was from Madras and Chittagong. It is said that 20,000 settled in Lower Burma annually⁵. The cultivators from Chittagong used their own tools and techniques which increased the total area under rice production and also total rice production. The 'tunga' system of cultivation called jhoom in Chittagong Hill Tracts was extensively adopted in the hills of Burma by the Chittagongians labourers. The British Government also encouraged modern techniques in agriculture. These thrifty and hardy workers from Bengal were the ones with whom the local Burmese who were timid, lethargically and lacked the initiative to work. The labourers from Chittagong implemented their ploughing techniques and skills which soon converted Burma into one of the largest rice producing nation of the world. During 1896-97 Burma was not affected by the famine (except a few districts in upper Burma) and had acted as a supplier of grains to many parts of India. The quantity of rice exports had also arisen in the same proportion as to the growth of the immigrants. The immigrants from outside the province about 4, 75,000 are more numbers by nearly 50% than in 1891. Cultivation had expanded

enormously, especially in the rice growing districts in the Irrawaddy delta.⁶ There was a striking expansion of paddy field in Irrawaddy delta. The delta was mostly of the waste land covered with swamp and jungle when the British had annexed Pegu in 1852, it swiftly transformed into a paddy field. As a result, Lower Burma was changed into one of the most affluent rice bowls of Asia, with more than 10 million acres of paddy field by 1930s⁷.

Since the occupation of Burma by the British the restrictions on trade were reduced and a demand grew for the export of agricultural goods, and to fulfil this demand there was a vast increase in the area brought under cultivation with increased population mostly migrants particularly the Muslims. The cultivated lands in 1868-69 were 16,897 acres and in 1873-74 are increased to 32,504 acres⁸. The increased quantity of grain prepared and exported during the seasons of 1877 and 1878 are given in tons of various places in the following table:-

TABLE-4.1
PRODUCTION OF RICE IN 1877-1878

Places	Year	
	1877 (grains in tons)	1878 (grains in tons)
Rangoon	394,229	490,256
Moulmein	49,479	5,270
Bassein	97,548	130,673
Akyab	106,052	111,127
Total	647,308	738,326

Source Gazetteer of Burma, Volume-I, p-423

Akyab was important rice exporting part and also a producing area. There was also creation of job opportunities in part and other profession related to rice production invited large number of Bengalis in this field of economy. A large number of Chittagonians came to Arakan as it was separated only by the Naaf River. There was constant immigration of the Chittagonians in Arakan and it is interesting to note that Akyab became one of the busiest centres of rice export in the world. There was no natural boundary between the two countries. There was increase in the rice production cultivated in the extensive plain stretching from the foot of the northern hills towards the sea-coast. The British wanted to do an experiment in the delta and it led to a huge economic success for the Indian capitalists, labourers, businessmen and also for the Chinese and British. The delta was transformed into the largest exporter of rice in the world and the richest provinces of the British empire.⁹ The following table shows the growing expansion of paddy cultivation in Burma.

TABLE - 4.2

EXPANSION OF PADDY LAND IN BRITISH BURMA (1852-1937)

YEARS	ACRES SOWN WITH PADDY
1852-53	6,00,000
1872-73	1,871,542
1882-83	3,466,439
1892-93	5,086,853
1902-03	6,712,719
1912-13	8,081,677
1922-23	8,870,342

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1932-33	9,711,396
1936-37	9,855,258

SOURCE: U.Mahajani: The role of the Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya, Bombay,1960, p-5

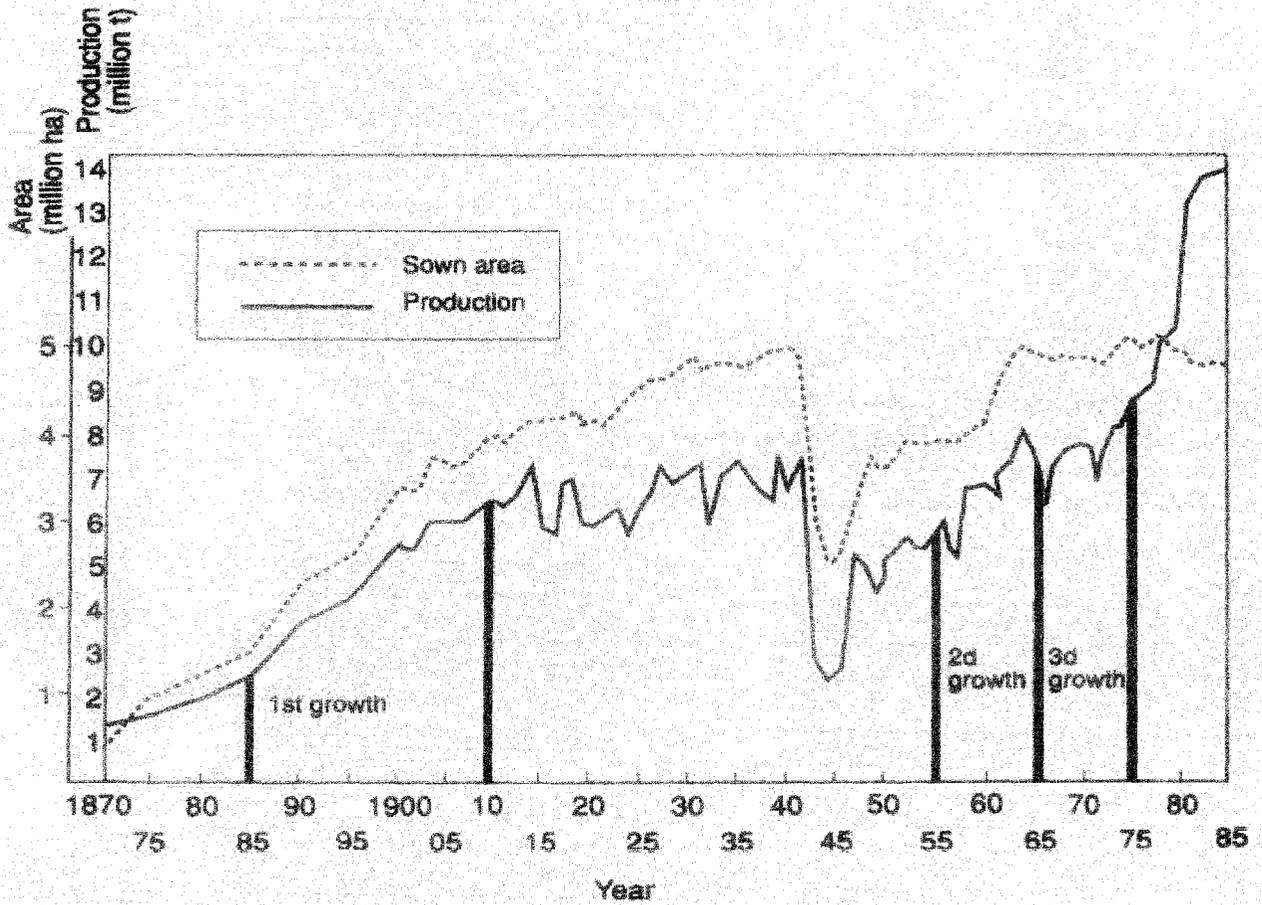
The colonial administration of India regarded the Bengalis as amenable subjects while finding the indigenous Arakanese too defiant, rising in rebellion twice in 1830s. The British policy was also favorable for the settlement of Bengali agricultural communities in Arakan. A colonial record says Bengalis are a frugal race, who can pay without difficulty a tax that would press very heavily on the Arakanese....(They are)not addicted like the Arakanese to gambling, and opium smoking, and their competition is gradually ousting the Arakanese¹⁰. The flow of Chittagonian labour provided the main impetus to the economic development in Arakan within a few decades along with the opening of regular commercial shipping lines between Chittagong and Akyab. The arable land expanded to four and a half times between 1830 and 1852 and Akyab became one of the major rice exporting cities in the world.

A considerable portion of Arakanese population was deported by Burmese conquerors to Central Burma. When the British occupied Arakan, the country was a scarcely populated area. Formerly high-yield paddy fields of the fertile Kaladan and Lemro River Valleys germinated nothing but wild plants for many years . Thus, the British policy was to encourage the Bengali inhabitants from the adjacent areas to migrate into fertile valleys in Arakan as agriculturalists¹¹. As the British East India Company extended the administration of Bengal to Arakan, there was no international boundary between the two countries and no restriction was imposed on the emigration. A superintendent, later an assistant commissioner, directly responsible to the Commissioner of Bengal, was sent in 1828 for the administration of Arakan Division, which was divided into three districts respectively: Akyab, Kyaukpyu, and Sandoway with an assistant commissioner in each district¹²

Burma was converted into an important rice producing nation. In 1855 – 56 it was 154,520 acres, in 1859 – 60 it was 162,983 acres, in 1864 – 65 it was 186,729 acres, in 1869 – 70 it was 220,160 acres, and in 1874 – 75 it was 305,920 acres. The cultivable lands kept increasing with the growth of immigrating population. The amount of rice cultivated also increased year after year.¹³ This change in the rice production can be studied well in the following figure.

The Gazetteer mentions that there was a noticeable decrease in 1868 in the rice production and its recovery was not complete even by 1871 in Akyab. The production in 1867 was 268,014 and it decreased in 1868 to 238,438 and again in 1871 it was 258,444 and the rest of the years it kept on increasing. This was due to the loss of cattle from the widely spread and persistent cattle disease in the two previous years. The production of rice has been also affected by the fact that the large number of labourers could not be brought from Chittagong and number of them had fled to their country during the prevalence of the epidemic cholera or epidemic.¹⁴

FIGURE- 4.1



Source: A Century of Rice Production, p-3

It is revealed as given in the figure that there was a tremendous production in the colonial period but the production decreased with the development of the anti-Indian riots in the year after 1938. In fact, there was a steady downfall of the rice production after the Saya San Rebellion of 1931. The downfall of production was due to the strict immigration laws imposed on the Indians and the Chittagong labourers after the separation of Burma

from India in 1935. With the shortage of labour supply and the political instability led to a distinct reduction of the production of paddy in the year 1948. Further, it should be mentioned that the Chittagong labourers who were the backbone behind the production and in the extension of the sown area mostly came back to India in 1948 and after.

TABLE-4.3
PRODUCTION OF RICE, COTTON, TOBACCO, SUGAR (1867-1877)

YEAR	RICE	COTTON	TOBACCO	SUGAR
1867-68	193,713	132	26	412
1868-69	202,391	110	20	46
1869-70	201,610	83	2	51
1870-71	206,370	85	33	224
1871-72	222,423	206	67	160
1872-73	212,884	235	39	93
1873-74	239,362	303	100	100
1874-75	289,395	96	40	67
1875-76	253,597	209	34	40
1876-77	----	----	66	201

The crops cultivated in the following years are calculated in tons. Source : Gazetteer of Burma, Volume-I, p103.

The production of rice depended on the Chittagong cultivators can be seen in the production of the other crops as specified in the table below that the production of other crops were reduced and more importance was given to rice cultivation and its production. The colonial policy was directed to the increase in production and export of

rice for that they attracted labours as well as the rice cultivation was facilitated by the fact that the Chittagong labours were used to the cultivation of rice and not to the other crops.

The growth of rice industry became the most important aspect of modern Burma. In 1930's there were 19.5 million acres under cultivation in Burma; of this total, over 11 million were situated in lower Burma and 10 million acres were used to cultivate rice. Burma in 1855 had 993,000 acres under cultivation; in 1875 it was 2,379,000 acres; in 1915 it was 8,285,000 acres and in 1930 it was 9,911,000 acres. The introduction of commercialization of agriculture and the export of rice also increased the price of the commodity.¹⁵ The price of rice before and for a year after the second Burmese war was, per 100 baskets, in rupees:

TABLE-4.4
PRICE OF PADDY IN LOWER BURMA FROM 1848-1856

YEAR	UNHUSKED RICE	CARGO RICE	HUSKED RICE
1848-49	8	22	31.5
1849-50	12	28	60
1850-51	15	35	75
1851-52	18	40	75
1852-53	35	65	100
1853-54	40	65	100
1854-55	45	70	128.5
1855-56	53	95	132

Source: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume-I, p-441

There was a great increase in rice export in the latter half of the 19th century. Its sustained growth brought about the continual rise in the paddy, because presumably the situation of excess demand was expected to last for a long time. The paddy price was Rs 8 per 100 baskets in 1848, but it jumped to Rs. 40 in 1853. During 1857 the price of rice had rose to

Rs. 350 to 400 per 100 baskets. During the second half of the 19th century, the paddy price continued to rise and reached to the level of more than Rs. 100 at the turn of the century which made rice cultivation lucrative. The growing external demand for rice as well as high price of the paddy stimulated the production of surplus rice for export, and hence the vast waste land in the Irrawaddy delta was increasingly brought under cultivation. In this way, Burma was developed as one of the major rice exporting countries, the quantity reaching more than 3 million tons at its peak. In the pre-war period Burma turned to be the largest rice exporter in the world. In fact, in the world Burma was the leading nation which was 54 percent of the net rice exports of Asia. The flow of rice from Burma to India was 90% of India's rice exports. The economic development caused by the exports created an economic structure that corresponded closely to the needs of export demand. Due to the increase in export demand for Burmese rice, there was a quick change from the primitive autarkic economy to a market economy under the framework for the development laid down by the Government. Prior to the colonial rule, in Lower Burma people grew paddy for their own consumption and there was no demand for the surplus production. However, when the export of rice and other products was commenced the farmers increasingly expanded its production for the export market rather than for home consumption. It was rather a change or transformation from domestic to commercial agriculture.¹⁶ In these huge exports there was a large contribution of the Chittagong labourers in the production. The Bengali Chittagong labourers contributed not only in the production of rice but also in the establishment of rice mills in the various towns of Burma.

One of the most important effects of the increased rice production was the development of the rice mills and industry. Rice mill factories were built in the main ports of Rangoon, Bassein, and Moulmein after the annexation of Pegu. Twenty rice mills were set up by 1870 and mostly the big rice mills were owned by the Europeans but the small mills with the milling capacity of 10 to 75 tons per day were also built. Rice from these mills was for local demand and was sold in the local market. By 1900, there were 27 small mills, all located in Hanthawaddy district adjoining in Rangoon. After that they spread over the

main rice producing districts in the Lower Burma, such as Myanmya, Pyapon, Henzada, Thaton and Pegu. Many were built near the railway stations and piers of river banks. The rice mills were used to husking, cleaning and thrashing of paddy.¹⁷ Bengalis who were rice and paddy merchants and owned rice mills or worked as commission agents. Among them mention may be made of Ramgopal Ghosh and Nityananda Roy. Among the other Bengali rice traders mention may be made of Gyanendra Lal Chowdhury, the son of the Zamindar of Patiya police station of Chittagong and Shri Alamohan Das. In fact, majority of the investors in rice mills were capitalists from Chittagong. The Bengali investors in Akyab district were mostly from Chittagong. The most important was Kelsul and Ghosh Company established in 1832. Shri. Ramgopal Ghosh later started a separate concern in 1846. The Bengali Paddy merchants and owners were in considerable numbers and they formed associations like Rice and Paddy Merchants and Commission Agents¹⁸. The details of which is already mentioned in Chapter III. The number of Bengalis who were the owners of the rice mills is difficult to find out but the number of rice mills owned by the Indians increased greatly from 61 in 1921 to 186 in 1936.¹⁹

Rangoon had the principal rice husking mills. In fact in Rangoon one-ninth of the population found their livelihood in the rice mills. Though the capital for agriculture was predominantly provided by the Madrasi Chettiars but many Bengalis worked in the rice mills and in the parts which developed largely due to the British commercial policy. The Indians were the second largest community engaged in rice trading and rice business. They owned one-fourth of the number of rice mills in Burma and formed one-fifth of the workers in the industry. In fact, the rice mills had a significant impact on the economy of the country. The rice mills were the biggest industry in Burma, employing one third to one half of the workers in the industry.²⁰

TABLE-4.5
THE GROWTH OF EMPLOYEES IN THE RICE MILLS 1870-1935

YEAR	RICE MILLS	EMPLOYEES	AVERAGE NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PER RICE MILL
1870	19	4-5000	210-263
1880	49	9,500	190-200
1890	--	-	-
1900	83	-	-
1910	165	-	-
1920	353	36,486	103.4
1925	543	41,000	-
1930	613	42,137	68.7
1934	637	42,555	66.8
1935	647	44,944	69.4

Source: O.H.K. Spate, *Beginning of Industrialisation in Burma*, Rangoon, 1958, p-4

The table itself indicates that the number of employees engaged in the rice mills and it became one of the most developing sectors for the working class in Burma. The social and economic impact of the growth of the rice mills was the employment provided to a large section of the population and it gradually led to the development of a working class as a separate community. Though mostly composed of immigrating population yet these rice mills were the places from where the formulation and development of industrial working class began to grow in Burma. The growth of the rice industry made a considerable impact on the economic development of Burma.

The transport facilities introduced by the British had played a key role in the development of Burma. The railway was the major transport system but the inland river transport and the shipping industry had contributed immensely in the export of goods and in transporting the passengers. The British Companies had the monopoly in the shipping

Companies and inland river steamers but they were faced with stiff competition from the native Companies. Among the native Companies there were Bengali owned Companies namely, Bengal Steam Navigation Company which had Munshi Mohammed Kalamian as the Managing Director. It was launched by many Bengali wealthy merchants of Rangoon. The steamers were built on modern lines, fitted with electric lights and spacious areas for all classes of people. The company successfully ran a passenger service between Chittagong, Akyab, Rangoon and Calcutta. It also carried goods between Rangoon and Chittagong, Calcutta and Rangoon as also Calcutta and Chittagong. The Company had its office in Rangoon, Calcutta and Chittagong. The chairman of the Company was Munshi Ishan Ali and the other directors were Fazlur Rahman Choudhury, Obeidur Rahman Choudhury, Abdul Bari Choudhury, Abdur Rahman Munshi and Inayat Ali Munshi.

There were others Bengalis involved in the steam navigation services like Mr. Abdul Bari Chowdhury, owned the Bengal Burma Steam Navigation Company. Another shipping company which operated was Messrs. Sonatan Nityanunda Roy which had both sailing and steamships plying between Chittagong and Rangoon. Mr. Roy was basically from Chittagong. It carried passengers and goods between Rangoon to Madras, Calcutta to Madras, and Madras to Calcutta, etc. The other name to be mentioned as an entrepreneur in the shipping industry of Rangoon was Tejendralal Ghosh, son of Durgaram Ghosh, one of the notable bankers settled in Akyab, Burma. He established the National Flotilla Company Ltd. to carry the passengers and cargo between Burma and India.²¹ In the inland water transport some names of few Bengalis can be found. They are R.K. Pal and co. of Rangoon, Malakars of Bassein and Chowdhuris of Akyab. Their steam launches operated within the waters of Tenassarim, Irrawaddy and Arakan Division of Burma. Most of the investors in the shipping industry were held from Chittagong.²² The shipping industry contributed for the flourishing export business of Burma to the various countries. It also provided job opportunities to a lot of port workers, clerks, administrators and others. The ports of Burma particularly Rangoon, etc. developed because the ports were required to export goods to Europe and India. In these ports many Bengalis were posted as officers and different administrative services. The labourers working in the posts also included Bengali. Some of the Bengalis worked in the ports and Anil Ganguly while writing about his childhood days mentions that his father Kedarnath Ganguly, originating

from Noakhali migrated to Burma and worked in the Rangoon port. He also mentions of Abdul Karim, Gagan Das and Muhammad Hussain worked in the Rangoon port as clerical staffs and non clerical staffs. There were Bengalis as port labours.²³

The Bengalis as timber merchants did a profitable job as the demand for teak timber in the Burmese and Indian markets were increasing rapidly. Teak was also sent to United Kingdom and largely to India for the purpose of construction, railway berths, furniture's etc. The British saw the teak as the useful substitute for oak. Teak even proved superior particularly in the ship building because unlike the oak it contained oil that prevented metal corrosion. At first India's Malabar forests supplied teak but by 1920s that supply were exhausted and teak supplies from other sources were looked for. When the British annexed Tenasserim they sent Nathaniel Wallich, the superintendent of the Botanical Garden at Calcutta, who reported on Tenasserim's teak forests that the resources were "not only ample but of superior quality".²⁴ The trade of rice and teak timber of Burma with India well understood in the table 4.6.

The Bengali timber traders had collected a lot of profit from this trade. There were well established timber merchants from Bengal in Burma. The Bengali timber merchants utilized the new forest policy introduced by the British. The British administrators divided the Burma's forests into unreserved and reserved tracts and this was also matched with the significant growth in administrating machinery devoted to maintaining the forests. At the same time, the British also expanded the process of 'shifting cultivation' or Taungya, a forest system deployed in order to create teak plantations. This jhoom or shifting cultivation utilized labourers and combined partial forest clearance, shallow cultivation, multiple cropping and field rotation in order to produce food and cash crops. Raymond L. Bryant has defined that this type of plantation forestry was also a mechanism of political and economic control of other hardwoods. Teak was mainly used in Indian railways, shipyards, building and furniture industries. In the timber trade Burma exported 70% of her production to India.²⁵

TABLE-4.6
VALUE OF PADDY AND TIMBER EXPORTED FROM BURMA (1855-1876)

YEAR	VALUE OF GRAIN EXPORTED (Rs.)	VALUE OF TIMBER EXPORTED (Rs.)
1855-56	435,053	2505
1856-57	363,987	1861
1857-58	1,165,542	2359
1858-59	1,437,025	5017
1859-60	258,731	2645
1860-61	584,589	---
1861-62	1,010,568	---
1862-63	1,087,116	---
1863-64	1,133,351	---
1864-65	2,677,822	7956
1865-66	1,306,960	3520
1866-67	1,542,646	1160
1867-68	2,619,524	2516
1868-69	2,16524	7455
1869-70	2,160,514	1055
1870-71	1798648	210
1871-72	2135371	
1872-73	280770	
1873-74	3,765,640	303
1874-75	4,057,845	3327
1875-76	4,820,860	-
1876-77	5,000,426	11,447

Source: Gazetteer of Burma, Volume-2, p-103

Sir Dietrich Brandis was the person who brought the theme of scientific forestry and showed the British Indian Government ways towards future. Forest Management in form was initiated by Mr. McClelland but it was Brandis who turned it into science. In Burma, he proposed a system of valuation surveys, so eminently adapted to the circumstances, that with but slight modifications is still in force to the present day in Burma. Under this method the whole of the seasoned timber was sold to the highest bidder and thus giving opportunity for the timber merchants to utilize the policy for profit. There was pruning, plantation nurseries in 'toungyas' or hill plantation, scattering seed in cleared portions of the forests and consolidation of teak forests. There were constructions of roads to facilitate the commercialization of forests. Besides these, the British administration under the suggestion of Sir Brandis started a central timber depot in Rangoon. There were also division of forests and 'working plans' was made for future forest operations. The wealth of the forests of Tenassarim were used for military and commercial carriages, country boat, naves and charcoal for gunpowder, posts of house building, planks, burning bricks, railways, furniture's and as mere article of fuel. The river system, streams and nullahs (river lets) of the area were used to transport timber from the jungles of Burma.²⁶

The Bengali merchants used elephants and labours for the heavy work of the forests. They had to pay revenue to the Government License System was brought into account. Burmese bamboos were quite highly rated in the market. Bengali timber merchant namely, Shri Shashi Bhushan Niyogi in Rangoon and his eldest son Shri Dhirendranath Niyogi had the most flourishing timber trade in Burma. There are more names in the timber business²⁷. The timber became a resource for the exploitation of the colonial Government and a rich export product. Tenassarim after its occupation was altered into a source of income. "A small and non-descript village had been replaced by a prosperous lumber town and Tenassarim's forests became a valuable economic resource".²⁸ The Bengali merchants had a share among the native businessmen but large Companies were mostly owned by the Europeans. Predominantly, the wealthy merchants and capitalists of Rangoon seasonally went to the teak forests with hired labourers and elephants. It was a

lucrative business and brought quick gains can also be assessed from the writings of Amitava Ghosh's *Glass Palace* where the principal character started a timber business and earned a lot of money.²⁹ The Bengali merchants and their activities were a part of the economic and forest policy adopted by the British Government in Burma. After the establishment of a forest department in 1856 the British introduced reserve forest for timber production. The British forest officials excluded fire from these forests believing that fire retarded teak growth and in this process, they imposed restrictions and obligations on the villagers, who in turn, resisted such control through the illegal use of fire, labour strikes and others. These forests were inhabited largely by the Karens who participated as labours, managing logging, and managing timber exportations and also as elephant mahouts (riders) but the colonial Government imposed certain restrictions on them giving no priority to their rights. The Karens were the people who lived from the pre-colonial days in these forests and enjoyed freely the forest lands and resources. But the restrictions deprived them of their rights and therefore after the independence of Burma the Karens demanded a separate state for themselves within Burma.³⁰

The most of the Bengalis were engaged in white collared jobs particularly in the governmental service as surgeons in governmental hospitals, Municipalities, courts, land surveys, schools, etc. They were also lawyers, doctors, teachers, accountants and others. The Bengalis mainly were skilled as clerks and administrative staffs. These Bengalis had in fact, monopolized the jobs in governmental services in Burma. They drew salaries, bought movable and immovable property in the state of Burma and many of them settled themselves. One important aspect of the life in Burma of the Bengalis was the purchase of land. The *Gazetteer* says that waste lands were by the customary law of the country open to all comers; any one can select piece of such land at his pleasure and clear and cultivate it paying his tax upon it when the time for the annual assessment of land revenue arrives.³¹ This tradition of the Burmese law naturally attracted the immigrants from Bengal and they occupied lands. The *Settlement Report* of district of Bassein illustrates how an agricultural worker could become a land owner. At first he worked as an agricultural labourer for a few years to buy a pair of cattle and then if he worked for a

few years more as a tenant, he could buy a land. Land rent was low at usually ten per cent of the yields plus the land revenue, because there were plenty of waste lands. Land prices were low, so tenants could save money easily to buy cattle and a piece of land or to be used for land reclamation. The existence of vast amount of waste land was a main factor in keeping rents and prices of land cheap.³² The Government further took measures for attracting the cultivators from India by providing them with favourable conditions for example; they tried some land tenure namely squatter, patta, lease and grant. The squatter system later proved to be most effective of the above systems, people were allowed to take unsettled land freely and hold it as long as revenue due it was paid. Moreover, by the Land and Revenue Act in 1876, private ownership was granted on squatted on the condition of satisfying the regulations of law.³³ Quite significant portions of the Burmese lands were occupied by the Indians, which also included the Bengalis. It is difficult to make an assessment of the real value of assets owned by the Bengalis in terms of lands, buildings, plants, factories flourmills, machinery, transport systems like slips, cars etc., working capital and others. But out of 1,031 factories in Burma in 1939-40, Indians had owned as many as 303, in which the Bengalis had also a share. There were Bengali renowned industrialists of Burma who invested and owned number of factories and mills. The largest sugar factory of Burma was owned by the J.K. Sinha family in Zewaddy, 140 miles in the north of Rangoon, employing about 1000 workers; three flour mills were owned by A. P. Neogy and family which employed more than 3000 workers mostly Burmese. The other names have been mentioned earlier in Chapter III.³⁴

Bengali participation in the local or domestic trade of Burma was also very extensive. The population of Indians in Rangoon in 1931 was 53% of the total population. In the Census of 1931, there was further growth of Bengali speaking persons in Burma which numbered to 2, 42,415 males and 1, 34,579 females which comes to the total of 3, 76,994 and owned the valuable lands, residential buildings and places of business.³⁵ Apart from the Bengalis community, the Chettiar community of South India also had a great influence on the economic life of Burma as they provided money which greatly financed the agriculture. They also occupied large extend of land which they acquired through the

non-payment of loans charged from the peasants and also from the wealth earned in the new country. Of all the foreign capitalists in Burma, the Indian middle class entrepreneurs had the strongest hold on foreign trade in the country. Bengali business middle class also controlled almost trade in all commodities except in oil, mineral and rubber. The total exports of trade in Burma reached a value of Rs. 4800 lakhs before the Second World War, the Indians controlled the trade of the value of Rs. 2500. Rs.974 lakhs of trade were controlled by the Bengalis.³⁶

There was large participation of the Bengalis in the economic restructuring of Burma in the form of change in the rice production and in the forest with the introduction of British policies; the Bengali timber merchants could utilize the forest resource of Burma. Many of the Burmese nationalist politicians have claimed that the exploitation of Burma was also conducted by the civil servants who were mostly Bengalis. These professionals as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and other government services took their salaries from Burma and had sent an amount of it to India. They have claimed it to be 'drain of wealth'. But this can be denied with the view of Dr. N. R. Chakraborti that the service holders as well as the labourers had sent money orders to India to their families. But it cannot be considered as drain of wealth because only a part of their salary were sent while the larger part of the salary was spent in Burma. Such remittances did not impoverish Burma. Moreover, standard of living in Burma was higher than in India. The Burmese also invested their capital in land, agriculture, trade and industry. But the amount of foreign investors was high and among them the portion of Indian investors was of lion's share. The Bengalis were also important investors. The New York Times of 12 March 1949 stated that Indian owned rice lands valued at rupee equivalent of about U.S. \$300 millions and that Indian interest in banking, commercial and industrial enterprises were estimated at the rupee equivalent of more than U.S. \$ 600 millions. The Burma Reconstruction Department in Simla in 1944 placed the value of Indian privately owned assets in Burma at between \$125 million and \$150 millions on a conservative basis.³⁷

The outstanding feature in the history of Burma under British authority has been rapidity with which they entered the world market. Half a century ago Lower Burma was sparsely populated region, covered with swamps and forests. Early in the 20th century it became one of the principal rice exporting areas of the world. Lower Burma eventually became the heart of Burma. The economic gains realized during the first two decade of British rule were impressively gratifying. The economic development in Burma under British rule were sponsored or controlled by Europeans, Indians and Chinese. She depended for her agricultural development largely upon the Indian and British capital and largely on Indian particularly on Bengali Chittagong labourers. Economically, Burma thus became more a colony of India rather than that of Britain. The inclusion of Burma within the British Empire resulted in on influx of Indian moneylenders and Indian labourers in agriculture as other labours. The Indians including the Bengalis participated in the commercial life as merchants, retailers and timber businessmen. The traditional Indian moneylenders, the Chettyars, found Burma a land of great opportunity and made profit in their trade. It eventually added to the economic discontent in Burma.³⁸

The economic activities of the moneylenders, low wage labourers and the authority wielded by the Indian officials employed by the Government in Burma generated animosities between Indians and Burmese. This anti-Indian feeling was expressed in the Saya San Rebellion in the villages of Burma. With the commercialization of agriculture, especially in the field of rice cultivation, a dramatic and systematic transformation took place in the life pattern of the peasantry in Lower Burma affecting badly the pre colonial self sufficient Burmese village communities. The participation of the Chettyar money lending community from South India changed the whole politico economic semblance within the Burmese territory³⁹

In the Tharrawaddy District there are instances of Indian boycotts in 1924. In 1924 Sibwaye athins (development associations) were organized in Tharrawaddy district to intimidate the Indian Chettyar money lenders into reducing the debts owed by the peasants. Those Chettyars who resisted were boycotted, so were the villagers who refused

to join the sibwaye athin. The athins sometimes used violence to enforce the boycotts. The Saya San rebellion had begun in Dec. 22, 1930 over a large part of Burma including Tharrawaddy, Pegu, Henzada, Insein and Prome Districts and Shan states in Upper Burma. It took over a year to suppress the rebellion and Indian soldiers and arms provided by the Central Government were extensively used against the rebels. Many historians are of the opinion that the British Government had followed the policy of 'divide and rule' and used Indian soldiers to suppress the rebellion who were also used in conquering the country. The Punjab Rifles, Maratha and Gurkha soldiers were employed to brutally crush the revolt against the colonial power.⁴⁰

There were anti-Indian outbursts in the form of assaults, burning of huts and places of business in the districts. Many Indians were killed. Though the official view was that the Saya San rebellion or Burma rebellion was mainly political against the directed colonial government but there were also economic causes against the both the Indians and British. The peasantry considered the Indians as their immediate oppressors and the British as their friends and masters of the Indians. Thus Mr. R. G. Iyengar and S. N. Haji, Indian members of the Legislative Council in 1931 told to the viceroy "The present position of Indians in Burma is entirely satisfactory and insecure. In the massacre, which took place in May last year in Rangoon, the Indian did not receive the protection to which they were legitimately entitled. The carnage lasted for three days not a single assailant was arrested for assaults on Indians. The conduct of police was criticized even by the official enquiry committee. A certain section of the Press had been indulging in anti-Indian propaganda couched in the most insulting language... The recent outrages against the Indian agriculturists in several districts of Burma are the direct results of the belief created among the Burma by the massacre (in Rangoon, May 1930) that Indians could be maltreated with impunity ... Indian agriculturists have not only suffered heavy monetary losses, but there have been cases of Indians being killed or wounded."⁴¹

The government did not take any steps against the misdeeds of the police and the poor law and order condition. On the other hand, the Governor Sir Charles Innes promulgated an ordinance on 31st January 1931 for a speedy trial of the captured leaders and mention was made of the association of Bengal revolutionaries with whom contact had already been established. The Viceroy addressed in the Legislative Council on 12 February, 1931 stating the Bengal Revolutionary Party in Burma responsible for the rebellion and anti-colonial outbursts. He firmly claimed that, "All I need to say in this speech is that for the years past we have been aware of the existence in Burma of a small section of Bengali Revolutionary Party, and we have contented ourselves with keeping a careful watch upon them. Recently however they have increased in numbers, and some time ago we received warning that they were contemplating outrages in Burma..... We have also reason to believe that during the past few months, they have set themselves to the task of trying to corrupt the younger generation in Burma".⁴² As a result of the passing of the bill twelve Bengalis were arrested from different parts of Burma of whom two were clerks from the office of Port Commissioner's, two school teachers, six at Rangoon and one each from Insein and Yamethin. In April 1931 a young Bengali was sentenced to 3 years hard labour for distributing inflammatory leaflets urging the people to get rid of the British by all means. Investigations disclosed close connections between the young man and Bengal revolutionaries. There are opinions that the Bengal revolutionaries had nothing to do with the Tharawaddy rebellion, which was an entirely indigenous happening. But this proved that the revolutionary activities and anti-colonial political connections of Bengal was a nightmare to the British rulers and caused constant fear.⁴³ While the passing of the Burma Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 1931 in the Legislative Council in February 1931 to an act. The Honorable Home member stated in the house: "The Bengalis are efficient people and very highly intellectual. They are ill-mannered people and well disposed as a rule... Bengal has given us Rabindranath Tagore, Jagdis Bose, Vivekananda, Ram Mohan Roy, Rash Behary Bose and many other distinguished people in different professions... but some Bengalis have a kink in their brain, that is, they desire to remove all persons who do not see eye to eye with them".⁴⁴ The name of a Bengali revolutionary, Bhupendra Kumar Dutta is associated with the Saya San Rebellion and he though did not take part in the rebellion directly but he had close ties with the monks who were the leading the

movement. Bhupendra Kumar was arrested and deported to Mandalay jail in 1923 and even inside the prisons he had contacts with the Burmese monks and other Bengali revolutionaries who were absconding in Burma. Subhas Bose also joined him soon after and offer him *Memories of a Revolutionist* by Kropotkin that he had got for Bhupendra Nath during his last trip to Europe. In 1931 on the outbreak of the Sayasan rebellion they were arrested along with Jiten Ghosh their leader.⁴⁵ The involvement of Bhupendra Nath Dutta in the Saya San Rebellion was as an advisor to the Burmese monks who were in the forefront of the rebellion. Bhupendra Nath Dutta's book *Bilaber Padachinha* gives a clear picture of the organized network of the revolutionaries and the gaps of security found by them to conduct contacts from the prisons.⁴⁶

There was much controversy to the causes of the rebellion. To the officials and the government the main cause of the rebellion was "Political and not economic". But to the Burmese leaders the main cause of the rebellion was the crippled economic condition of the Burmese people and their inability to pay the taxes. But a detailed study will reveal that both the causes were responsible for the rebellion because politically, there were activities of GCBA, GCSS and the growth of national political consciousness. In the economic too, there was deep economic depression, heavy taxes with the fall in the prices of rice and the role of the Indians, as immediate oppressors, Rangoon to Bengal. Akyab and Rangoon were the main centers of revolutionary activities in Burma. The rebellion was, however, crushed within one year with all possible means of brutal methods. Saya San was hanged in August 30, 1931. Saya San rebellion had thus established itself as an anti-colonial rebellion trying to restore Burma's ancient monarchy. The peasantry, who were the exploited class had come out of its old social order and expressed itself against their exploiters i.e. the British and Indians.⁴⁷ The Saya San Rebellion though anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement but it had in fact prepared the stage for the separation of Burma administration from India in 1937.

IV

Bengal had been the center of political activity since the second half of the nineteenth century. Bengal was the main area of the political activities and Bengal was the first province to go ahead of other provinces in political consciousness. Maulana Abul Kalan Azad also expressed the same view about Bengal that, 'Bengal was politically the most advanced part of India and the Hindus of Bengal had taken a leading part in Indian political awakening'. The immigrant Bengalis experienced the Burmese nationalism while residing in the country.

There were various forces which contributed to the growth of nationalism in Burma. The Burmese peasants became aware of the world beyond his own geographically isolated land after Burma was being attached to India as a province. National awareness, together with hatred and distrust to the foreigners were also joined with western ideologies and institutions to act as important factors for the growth of national movement in Burma. The experiences of other Asian people in colonial countries were another influence in the growth of the nationalist movement in Burma. The Russo-Japanese War 1905 and the Sun-Yat Sen Revolution of 1911 in China aroused the self-confidence in Burma. The most significant political activities in India in the form of Swarajya, non-cooperation and swadeshi movement had a tremendous impetus on the growth of nationalism in Burma.⁴⁸

The early years of the 20th century Bengal witnessed the anti-partition and swadeshi movement in 1905-06. There was the use of political techniques like boycott, picketing and swadeshi. There was the movement of national education for which national schools were set up in 1906 under Arobindo Ghosh. Rabindranath Tagore also made a successful attempt in establishing the Viswabharati Shantiniketan. The national education in Bengal had influenced the Burmese people as they had kept 'national education' always as a prime agenda in the nationalist movement of Burma. The Rangoon College was

established in 1878 as an affiliated college of the University of Calcutta. The Rangoon College was operated and managed by the British. It was opened by the Education Syndicate which was established by the colonial Government to manage educational institutions in Burma.⁴⁹ In 1904 it was renamed as Government College and the University college in 1920. The Rangoon University was opened in 1920 and the national college was opened at Shwe Kyin monastery, Bahan, Rangoon in 1921. In its opening ceremony a call was given to support the national education system. The Council of National Education (CNE) was constituted in 1920 and was registered under the Act for the Registration of Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies, 1860. By 1921 there were more than 80 national schools, which enrolled at least 15,000 students.⁵⁰ There were 70 students in the national college and Professor of English was Bhaumik Kabyanidhi, Professor of History, H. K. Chakraborty Professor of Chemistry, B. Banerjee⁵¹ and Muhammed Siddiq Khan as lecturer in Political Science⁵². The national education movement in Burma as a central force gave an impetus to the national movement. It must be mentioned in this connection that prior to 1920, i.e. before the establishment of the University and national schools in Burma, most of the Burmese youths who wanted to be educated in western lives came to Calcutta University for the completion of their education. The Calcutta University mention in its 80th anniversary that it is for the people of Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Chota Nagpur, Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Agra and Oudh, Punjab, Central Provinces and Berar, Burma and even remote Ceylon. It should be further mentioned that the Calcutta University in its prospectus stated that it allowed candidates for its matriculation to pass their vernacular language examination in any one of the vernacular languages i.e. Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Oriya, Burmese, etc.⁵³ This indicates that students from Burma must have been present in the University and it is not unlikely that these students were influenced by the political upsurge of Bengal. They were inspired by the swadeshi and boycott movements in Bengal. The Calcutta University was the centre of anti colonial protest and the youths of the University became the future leaders of the nation later. The Rangoon University which was founded later in the year 1920 also followed the tradition of students protest against the British. They protested against the centralized policy adopted by the British Government and its refusal to give affiliation to other colleges. In the same year of the Swadeshi movement there was the formation of

the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) and it was for a number of years had been only widespread public organization in Burma. It had accepted boycott, hartal (cessation of commerce) and the legislative walkout as techniques of political agitation from India. The principal members of this association were U. Ba Pe, U Maung Gyee, Ba Yin, U Sein Hla Aung and others. Young officers and clerks were also the member of this association. It was a non-political organization but soon it became associated with national activities. It played an important role in arousing the national conscious in Rangoon and other towns. It had its branches in district towns and villages.⁵⁴

The Rangoon College became a centre of national movement. Sachin Guha, one of the front ranking figures from Bengal who maintained close contact with Burma states his official programme was to study in Rangoon College in 1928. He while studying there met two Burmese fellows named Maung Gyi and Ma Gyi. He remembers that Ma Gyi showed great interest in books like Revolutionaries of Bengal and they had several discussions regarding the revolutionary movement in Bengal. Guha also mentions that he met U Saw, the ultra nationalist leader of Burma who admired the courage of the Chittagong Armoury Raid heroes. U Saw was running the Thuriya magazine which was one of the most nationalist organs of Burma. The press of Thuriya was near Kamandine station where the Bengali and Burmese revolutionaries met.⁵⁵

V

The introduction of Morley-Minto reform in India in 1909 helped in the growth of nationalism in Burma. It did not provide reforms in Burma in an adequate form and did not provide the Burmese any share in the legislation. Before the First World War, the voice of the Burmese was taken up by the most active nationalist Bhikhu U. Ottama. He was in his early years studied in Calcutta as well as Europe. While in stay in Bengal in 1905 he joined the anti partition movement and Swadeshi & boycott movements. He came in contact with Bipin Chandra Pal & Aurobindo Ghosh and become a subscriber to

their paper the 'Bande Mataram'. He also became a part of Indian national movement. He took keen interest in the activities of the Burma Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) and moved throughout the country explaining the congress movements, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, etc. he could converse in Hindi and established contacts with the Anushilan Samiti and the Bengal revolutionaries during 1922. He was responsible for making the congress slogans and movements in Burma popular. He not only imparted the congress ideology, but also the tools (no tax, boycott, satyagraha, national school, etc. movements) to launch mass movements in Burma and inspired many Burmese nationalists to be associated with the congress.⁵⁶

He also came in contact with the Indian revolutionaries in the Far East, Japan and China. In Japan he stayed with Rash Behari Bose and with Ishwar Singh in the Far East. He also met Subhas Chandra Bose. His connections with Bengal was further established by his visits to the active places of revolution namely, Dacca, Chittagong, Barisal and others. He was highly influenced by the ideas of revolution and supported the extremists. He participated in the Martyr's Day celebrated in Chandannagore of a Bengali Terrorists named Kannailal Datta in 1930. In the commemoration he stated in favour of the political assassins and the revolutionary terrorists. He opposed the moderates and spoke that "Swarajya is not to be attained as a gift from Britainit has got to be earned by the sheer weight of force....." ⁵⁷ His speech was published at Sree Saraswati Press, Ramnath Mazumdar Street, Calcutta, by Kalicharan Ghosh of Chandannagore. It was in a booklet form. This revealed a relation being established with Burma and Bengal politics. After he returned to Rangoon on July 4, 1930 he started a mission to recruit large number of Burmese youths for the revolutionary work. Under his influence several phonyis turned towards anti-British movements and they also helped in recruiting students and youths in the revolutionary works. He thought in the lines of the Bengal politics and the guiding inspiration came from the anti- Government attitude of Gandhi as well as the revolutionaries of Bengal with a spirit of fighting the British with arms. This attitude therefore, acted behind him to be one of the links between Rash Behari Bose in Japan and

the Bengal Revolutionaries in Burma and Bengal. He played a significant role in arranging arms and ammunitions for the Bengal revolutionaries in Burma from China, Japan, and the Far East. Besides his contact with the revolutionaries in Bengal and the Indian National Congress he was closely related with the Hindu Mahasabha and was the elected President of the Kanpur session of the Mahasabha in 1935. He tried to influence the Burmese youths to become the members of the Bengal Burma Revolutionary party sponsored by the Bengal revolutionaries in Burma. Under the encouragement of the Bengal Burma revolutionary Party U. Ottama formed in 1930 the new organization called Dohbama or We Burmans. It looked to attract the Burmese youths to become the members of the revolutionary party.⁵⁸

The contribution of Bhikhu U. Ottama is very significant as it tried to enhance the friendly relations with Bengal and India in the broader perspective. It is true that the Bengal influence acted throughout his political career which further inspired the youths of Burma in the anti colonial movement. Before the First World War Bikhu U. Ottama was the "first bold radical voice in Burmese politics".⁵⁹ Later he took much an active part in the anti-colonial movements any activities like in Bengal. U. Ottama was well acquainted with the Bengali language and the Bengali culture.⁶⁰ His touch with the culture was because he was from Arakan which had a historical connection with Bengal and large numbers of Bengalis reside in the area. His travel throughout the villages of Bengal gave him a base in the political ideology of Bengal.

VI

The First World War provides to be a definite landmark in the growth of nationalism in Burma. It brought about remarkable change in the outlook and thinking of the Burmese people. There was growth of political consciousness and nationalism in Burma. The rise of nationalism in Burma was much late than in India. The First World War had led to remove the concept of provincialism in Burma and widened the political outlook of the people of Burma. The Young Men's Buddhist Association during 1916-1918 became

linked with political activities. It came involved in the 'Footwear Controversy'. It was an agitation carried out against the wearing of shoes at Pagodas by the Europeans. It was first popular expression of protest against the British and ultimately the Burmese demand was accepted by the British. This was historically, the first clear victory won by means of mass protest and action in Burma and it gave a great impetus to the growing national awareness. The growth of national movement was felt first in the demand of national schools and colleges and Universities by the political activists. The growth of any activities made in Bengal, national schools which would one of the agenda of the Swadeshi movement has a deep influence in the political movement of the Burmese. The details of the development of national education and the influence of the Bengalis have been mentioned earlier.⁶¹

After the Montagu – Chelmsford reforms of 1917, the Burmese nationalism developed in an organized and articulate form. There was rapid development of political activities in Burma from 1920 – 1923. In the twentieth century Bengal became the primary centre of nationalist movement. The Burmese youths and the Buddhist pongyis established a close contact with Bengal. The common spirit of Buddhist tradition had helped to strengthen the bond. During the 1920s there was the appearance of Bengal revolutionaries in Burma. The Anushilan Samiti of Eastern Bengal and Chittagong took initiative to build up revolutionary secret societies on their lines in Burma. The history of Bengali revolutionary terrorists in Burma began in 1920s because of the release of hundred of Bengali revolutionaries in 1919, many fled to Burma in order to avoid detainment. In Burma, the revolutionary organizations established new chapters of Bengali secret societies and created an infrastructure that was intended to avoid police surveillance and support the violent movement from outside Bengal. Their secret societies also played an important role in any activities like in Bengal, in influencing the Burmese youths in joining the national movement of Burma. Burma had acted as a strategic place to regroup and respond to British efforts to tamp down violent resistance. Driven underground by a series of repressive measures instituted by the colonial government in the 1920s, Bengali terrorists used imperial networks to expand their influence, particularly in urban parts of

Burma where many found clerical work in British offices and where new branches of anti-colonial political parties were founded.⁶² The route to Burma from Chittagong through Arakan was used by the revolutionaries. Sarat Chandra mentions about this route in *Pather Dabi* where Sabyasachi, the principal character and hero of the fiction, came to Burma crossing the hills of Arakan. The only objective before him was the independence of India and he considered Burma been exploited by the British similar to India. . It provided a naked criticism of British and Indian capitalists in Burma. Sabyasachi, the main character of the novel became a role model of the Bengali youths. It describes the sacrifice and dedication of the freedom fighters and it also confirms the activities and involvement of the Bengal revolutionaries in Burma.⁶³

The Anusilan Samiti of Eastern Bengal and Chittagong took initiative to build up revolutionary secret societies on their lines in Burma. Chittagong Samiti opened its branch in Rangoon in 1922 and Eastern Samiti in 1923. In 1924 both these samities joined their hands together to form the Burma Jugantar Party. The Jugantar Party sent its agents in different districts in Burma to organize the district units and to build up secret cells. Burma provided them a strategic place to regroup and respond to British efforts to tamp down violent resistance. The revolutionaries were suppressed by the British representative measures in 1920s, yet they were successful in expanding influence particularly in urban parts of Burma where many found clerical work in British administrative offices and where new branches of anti-colonial political parties were founded. The Calcutta Jugantar Party, Prabartak Sangha of Chandannagar founded their branches in Burma. However, the Burma Jugantar Party remained as the most active revolutionary organization in Burma. These revolutionaries organized a Bengali Students' Association on the lines of the youth association of the then Bengal. It wanted to foster unity among the students and teachers throughout the province to create a cultural atmosphere by encouraging physical, intellectual and moral education to enable the students to be in touch with the cultural movements at home and abroad and to have debating competitions.⁶⁴

The Bengal revolutionaries in its early stages showed that the party had four primary aims: (1) to provide help with arms smuggling from Japan, Singapore and China, (2) to raise funds and awareness of the difficulty of the Indians (3) to recruit new revolutionaries in Burma, particularly among the large groups of Bengali clerks who worked in British administrative offices, and (4) to provide shelter to the able absconders. But soon the policy and strategy of the revolutionaries changed and they started working for revolution in Burma and India too. They established contacts with the Burmese revolutionaries active at that time and started to be friendly with Burmese youths with a view to encourage them to undertake revolutionary activities. Secondly, they started revolutionary activities like in Bengal, for e.g., killing of top officials and British personals, robbery for funds etc. Bhiku U. Ottama also joined hands with the Bengal revolutionaries to induce the Burmese youths to adopt the path of revolution. Through him the Bengali revolutionaries had established contacts with the Burmese youths. He was related with the revolutionary extremism of Bengal. He took part in the anti partition movement. He worked to involve large number of youths for revolutionary work. Under his initiative a number of young phongyis started to recruit school and college students for revolutionary work.⁶⁵

The Prabartak Sangha was an association whose headquarters was in Chandannagore and was directly under the leadership of Motilal Roy. Enquires show that seventeen branch organizations have been established at different places in Bengal, principally in the district of the 24 Parganas, on the line of the Hooghly between Fraserganj and Budge Budge, and the districts of Howrah and Chittagong. There was a scheme to smuggle arms through Burma into Chittagong and Assam and with this intention there were two local organizers who moved from Akyab to Rangoon.⁶⁶

In 1926, over 25 high levels Bengal terrorists, including Surja Sen, came to Burma seeking shelter, showing that the Burma organization was closely connected to branches in Chittagong, Dakhineswar and Bhawanipore. The organization had spread itself in various parts of the country like Namtu, Mandalay, Insein and became involved in the

national movement of Burma and the national leaders.⁶⁷ Towards the end of 1925 there were leaflets and booklets which were distributed among the students and youths of Bengal and also circulated in Burma. An English pamphlet appeared under title "The Revolutionary, An Organ of the Revolutionary Party of India. Volume-I, No-1, Dated India 1st January, 1925". The Pamphlet purports to set forth the political programme of the revolutionary party and to justify their methods and ideas, while it threatens the onset of a remorseless campaign of terrorism. This pamphlet was clearly the work of Sachindra Sanyal and was widely circulated not only in Bengal but also in Burma. During the period from the beginning of 1924 to the close of the 1925 there were circulation and publication of leaflets by the Bengal revolutionaries. The "Arise, Awake" leaflet and Sachindra Sanyal's "Desha -Bashir Prati Nibedan"(Appeal to my Countrymen) was found all over Bengal and in Rangoon.⁶⁸

In the Tharrawaddy rebellion or Saya San rebellion in 1930 the Bengali revolutionaries had also contributed and supported the rebellion. Leaflets were issued by them to popularize the movement. In the leaflets they appealed to the Burmese youth to support and join the rebellion. The leaflets spoke of British as a common enemy of the Indians and Burmese. They also urged the Indians in Burma to come forward against the British to be grateful to the country of Burma. Besides publishing leaflets they also organized public opinion in favour of the rebellion, participated in the rebellion and sought to fight against the British. Many of the Bengal revolutionaries were arrested and put to jail during the suppression of the Burmese. In the first quarter of 1931 the government founded large number of 'seditious and very inflammatory' leaflets in Rangoon, Akyab and various other town of Burma. Rangoon University and other educational institution were filled with the leaflets which were distributed by both Burmese and Bengalis. There are various instances and incidents which prove the existence of Bengalis as revolutionaries and their influence in the political life of Burmese.⁶⁹

By this time the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) turned to GCBA or General Council of Burmese Association. Though there was a split within the GCBA. The 21 party, named after the numerical strength of the 21 groups of political activities within the party. U. Ottama and Maung Chit Hlaing took up the agitation against the British with the techniques of non-participation in the election, boycott of British goods and boycott of capitation tax. There were other leaders from lower Burma namely Says San and U Soe Thein. The General Council of Sangha Sametggi (GCSS), organized in 1922, was the principal coordinator of Pongyi political activities⁷⁰

After the mid – 1920s the Mines and Railways were largely employed with Bengali men from Chittagong and Khulna, which were the chief centers places of Bengal terrorism. The revolutionaries were engaged in various works in Burma to camouflage their activities in Burma. The British police to track down the Bengali revolutionaries was difficult in Burma than in Bengal because many of them disguised themselves as labourers in Burma. Although the intelligence used photographs but there were useless detentions and arrests. They also captured many Bengali youths who were found with *Pather Dabi*, an officially banned novel of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. In trying to track down alleged terrorists, British officials found themselves confronting well known Bengalis, who were established well in colonial administration like judges, lawyers, doctors and whom the Police suspected of helping and nurturing the youth towards political violence. In contrast to Bengal, where political leaders publicly distanced themselves from the movement while privately supporting it, the higher-status Bengali population in Burma was much more open in harboring absconders. In Burma, this group was also much more central to British interests and stability, comprising a putatively loyal group of men on whom British rule relied for control over the native population. Thus, officials repeatedly warned that breaking into the homes of respectable men in efforts to contain terrorist activity was a risky strategy.⁷¹

After the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Acts in 1924 – 1925 was passed, the Bengali revolutionaries turned to Burma as alternate site of reorganizing. The Anushilan Samiti moved towards a closer connection with the New Violence Party. The object of the party according to the documents seized at the Sova Bazar house in November 1925 is to secure the independence of India by all means, including armed revolution, the requisites being secret organization with ramification all over the country. The party had its branches all over United Provinces, Bihar, Assam, and Burma. From Burma communication was maintained through Debendra De alias Khoka at Singapore with Rash Behari Bose in Japan.⁷²

The New Violence Party was formed in 1925 after the passing of the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act and was probably an affiliated group under the aegis of the Anushilan Samiti. The Party smuggled arms from the Far East via Rangoon and had connections with Rash Behari Bose. After the Chittagong train robbery in December 1923, Rajendra Das Gupta went to Rangoon, where he stayed with Nripendra Chandra Banerjee, the then editor of the Rangoon Mail. Shri Nripendra Chandra Bannerjee started a party with Rajendra Dasgupta, Nirmal Sen of Chittagong and a boy of Karimganj, Assam. The latter was sent to Rangoon by Hari Narain Chandra and thence on an unsuccessful mission to Siam and Singapore to arrange the smuggling of arms. There are correspondences and documents which prove that connections were there between Rash Behari Bose and Nripendra Chandra Banerjee. After the Dakshineswar raid, there was a plan to send arms to Bengal via Rangoon, where a member of the party known as “head Clerk” would get in touch with lascars on steamers. In Calcutta the plan was set up an outfitting shop through which contact could easily be maintained with the lascars. How far the plan was successful is not known but with men like Rash Behari Bose in Japan and Debendra De in Singapore there can be no doubt that determined efforts were made. Rash Behari Bose had offered to extend financial help to Nirmal Sen’s Rangoon Party with one lakh and half lakhs of rupees, provided the Indian revolutionaries in Burma set up an important port between Singapore and India. He was in communication with a

member of the party called Kedareswar Bhattacharjee in Rangoon and was looking for a new method of sending arms to India by replacing the set up of Sudhangshu Choudhury. The main function of the party was to smuggle arms and its chief leaders were Nirmal Sen, Kedareswar Bhattacharjee and Nagendra Das of Chittagong. Chittagong was the district to which all the members of the New Violence Party belonged.⁷³

Letters containing plans and programmes were exchanged between revolutionaries of Burma and Bengal. In July 1926, the Burma police intercepted a letter sent a leader in Rangoon by a leader of Bengal Party who signed himself as "Prafulla". The passages in the letter showed that the party was inclined to avenge for the sentences passed against the assassins of Rai Bahadur Bhupendra Nath Chatterji, the Superior Officer of Bengal Intelligence Branch in Alipore. The letter said that, "The perusal of the judgment of the Alipore case has convinced me of the necessity of changing our principle. Great injustice has been done. Nothing will be achieved except by violence. In this matter an opinion from Mandalaylet me know the opinion of the leaders of Insein and Mandalay on our new policy.....Datta Babu (Bhupendra Datta, State Prisoner) will approve it, I am sure". In the same month another letter was written to another Rangoon leader by a Bengal leader, probably Surya Sen , who signed himself as 'Amar'. It explained the Bengal party was looking for an opportunity to murder a newly joined superior officer of Bengal Intelligence Branch, probably Rai Bahadur Nalini Majumdar. In July 1926 and August the Burma Police intercepted three interesting letters of which one of them was addressed to "Prafulla" to Nagen Das , a leader of the Rangoon Party who was also referred as "Head Clerk". The other two were to another leader of Rangoon Party named Kedar Bhattacharjee by one Amar who was Surya Sen. The letters spoke of arms smuggling being carried on from Singapore had been received from Shan States, that there were arms in deposit in Burma. Some arms had been collected in Singapore which was to be sent to Bengal through someone employed on one of the BISN Company's ships. A consignment of pistols and revolvers had actually reached Burma from abroad. There was a close connection and exchange of information was conducted between the

revolutionaries of the two sides. Surya Sen received information from Burma in 1926 that Rash Behari Bose had promised to send 10,000 Mausers and one lakh of Rupees for the use of terrorists.⁷⁴

During 29th July 1926 Nirmal Chandra Sen, a member of the Chittagong group was arrested. At that time he was a leader of the Burma Party. The Burma branch of this party consisted of largely of the Bengalis from Chittagong and was an extremely dangerous group. There were branches of the party in Burma where recruiting and the collection of money was on rigorously conducted. The party had sent Rs. 2,800 to the Bengal Party on June and August 1926. They also corresponded with the State prisoners in Burma jails. This can be corroborated with the information received from secret agents in Bengal. The Bengal leader requested the Burma Party to assist the detenu Narendra Nath Sen to escape if he wishes so.⁷⁵

The Bengali revolutionaries undertook many terrorist activities on Bengal lines in Burma. Before his arrest in July 1926, Nirmal Sen had made arrangements to rob the Burma Corporation of a large sum of money during its transit to a mine at Namtu in the Shan States. His arrest caused the plan to be dropped but in December the Burma leaders had again thought to give it effect. They were expecting to collect some arms from Rangoon Fort through a sympathizer employed there. The Bengali revolutionaries remerged in 1930, where the Civil Disobedience movement was on its way. The famous Chittagong Armory Raid by Surya Sen or Master da on April 18, 1930 had his followers; many of whom were drawn from the party's network in Rangoon.⁷⁶ On 1st September 1930, the Bengali Revolutionary Party attacked the clerk of the Bengal Academy of Rangoon who had encashed a cheque of the Rs. 2, 968, 20. They were in military dress but they were arrested and punished. Again on 28th October, 1930 they derailed the Down Mail train at Nyaungchidank of the Toungoo district in which the British Officials like the Home Member, the Finance Member of the Governor's Council and the Chief Secretary to Burma Government were travelling. The derailed train incident did not bring success to

the Bengal revolutionaries. Using flyers titled, "Indian Republican Army," followers of Surja Sen posted at schools in Rangoon, Barisal, Calcutta, and Chittagong, urging youths to follow the examples of their counterparts in Germany, Russia, and China to protest the practices of an unjust government.⁷⁷

The period 1930s seem to be politically significant in the history of nationalism in Burma. The outbreak of the Saya San rebellion against the colonial policy was important step towards the foundation of the nationalism in Burma. Saya San was a leader of the GCBA but he represented the masses and the peasants who were exploited by the British as well as the Indians, the protégés of the colonial masters. Moreover the British in order to suppress the rebellion used Indian forces. The Galon Army of Saya San was armed with primitive weapons and had resorted to charms; amulets which were suppose to confer immunity against the bullets of the British soldiers. The rebellion was an act of great faith and courage. Most of the organizers of the revolt were political phongies or Buddhist monks who had local and grassroot connections. They had influenced the Wunthanen Athenis or the village Councils. Saya San was an Ex-phongyi and knew the problems of the people. He had considerable influence on the in Tharrawaddy and the Lower Burma. From 1928 he had close connections with the GCBA. Like any other revolutionary movement or activity particularly of Bengal it was suppressed by the British Government by 8000 arrests and 128 hanged. Saya San was arrested and the Tharrawaddy Case continued which was defended by Dr. Ba Maw like Dr. C.R.Das defended the cases of the Bengal revolutionaries.⁷⁸ The significance of the Saya San rebellion was that it was first outburst of the Burmese anti colonial rather anti -alien protest. It provided the inspiration to the Burmese in the future struggle against the British. Saya San's followers styled themselves as 'galons' after the garuda, a powerful bird in Hindu mythology and believed that their tattoos and their amulets would make them invulnerable to the British bullets. During the rebellion many Bengali Revolutionaries were arrested from Rangoon. In February 1931, three Bengali Revolutionaries were arrested and convicted. One of them was attempting to shoot the

Magistrate of Rangoon. A telegram was sent to the Home Department from Rangoon that the Saya San Rebellion was not local revolt it had relations with the Bengali revolutionaries. There were agents of the Jugantar Party namely Paresh Chatterjee, B.B. Roy and J.K.Ghosh. It claimed that there were evidences which establishes connections of U.Ottama , GCBA , Thoe Soe and Bengal Revolutionary party⁷⁹

The residing Bengalis in Burma had taken part in the revolutionary activities. There are reference of the addresses where the British Government had raided in Rangoon in 1930-31. They were Rangoon Daily News and the house of the Editor Nripendra Chandra Banerjee; Bengali Club ,Phayre Street; Swadeshi Paripalini Press, Lewis Street; Hindu Social Club, 5th Street; Editor, Prachi Prakash, 38th Street; Bengalipara Club, Ponabasti; Ramkrishna Mission Free Library, Dalhousie Street and The Bengali Social Club, Lewis Street. The police had also raided the houses of the Burmese who had connections with the Bengali revolutionaries namely U Ba Pe, M.L. C. and U Kin M.L.C. 20th Street Rangoon. ⁸⁰

Warrants were taken out on 14th May 1930 from the office of District Magistrate, Rangoon and District Commissioner , Insein , to search the following places in Rangoon town: Residence of K. Bhattacharya B.A.(No 57 , 10th Street), Residence of N.L.Das (No 191, 40th Street), The Bengali Students Association (No 284, Phayre Street), Residence of M. Chakravarty(No 350-352, Merchant Street), and The Chattal Samity (No 37 , 45th Street). The warrants were issued in the names of the Burmese in contacts and collaboration with the Bengali revolutionaries namely, A Burmese Munshi residing in No 354 Merchant Street , a Burmese house of a Government employee in No 222, Lewis Street and Residence of Maung ohn Khin , a clerk in the Income Tax Office in No 37 , 45th Street. Mr Maung Ohn Khin was a close associate of Kedareswar Bhattacharya. ⁸¹

The Jugantar Party had its organization in Burma with its members namely Jitendra mohan Ghosh of Dacca, Khagendralal Mukherjee and Sukumar Sengupta. Sukumar

Sengupta was a student of the medical college of Rangoon. There were S. N. Deb and Parimal Mukherjee who were also students in Burma. Jiten Ghosh had a shop named 'Students own Store' located in the Fraser Street in Rangoon which was suspected to be the hub for the revolutionaries in Burma. The Bengal Academy was also an important center of the Bengal Revolutionaries in Burma. There were many students from the school who were engaged in the nationalist activities. Kshitish Chakraborty a student of the Bengal Academy was an assistant of the Jiten Ghosh. There were numerous students in Rangoon who were involved in the revolutionary activities. Trailokhyanath Chakraborty had a close contact with these members but however he was arrested in 1931.⁸²

In 1931 three Bengali Revolutionaries were arrested and convicted. One of them was arrested when he was attempting to shoot the magistrate of Rangoon in day light. The same year the revolutionaries had raided the Burma Government Secretariat. They wanted to kill the CID officer and other top officers which led to the arrests of the number of the Bengal revolutionaries. The Bengal revolutionary so active in Burma had inspired the Burmese movement. In 1930 the Burma Jugantar Party, the primary organize of Bengal revolutionary in Burma member, Kedareswar Bhattacharji to organize the Burman youths with an objective to send them abroad by ships with the cooperation and assistance of U. Ottama, the radical leader of the Burmese nationalists. Kedareswar was also given the responsibility to spread revolutionary literature in Burma. Kedareswar Bhattacharjee was with the help of U. Ottama, organize the Burmese youths formed the organization 'Duo-Burma's meaning' we the Burmans' in 1930.⁸³

In 1934 the Bengal revolutionaries formed a new organization called New Victory Party which aimed to recruit young student, the commission of armed robberies, dacoities, and raids on banks, the association of high Government officers, and the financing of the revolutionary party in Bengal. During the same year two more revolutionary groups became active in Shan States and Bassein. There was existence of Arms smuggling

groups who had close relation with their main organization in Bengal. In 1934 Mokshada Chakraborty, an important member of the revolutionary organization called Anushilan Samiti of Bengal visited Burma. The government soon discovered a 'nest of Anushilan members in Akyab'. In the smuggling of arms there was another group of revolutionary party called Jugantar Party. The activities and influence on the politics of Burma continued from Bengal and their Bengalis in Burma. In 1938 many of them joined the Thakin movement. Some of them were B. B. Bose and M. B. Barua.⁸⁴

VII

There was anti-war movement in Burma before the Second World War. All the nationalist political groups in Burma urged the people not to cooperate with the British war efforts. Burmese nationalists thought that Britain's difficulty was the opportunity of Burma to gain political freedom. They aimed for constitutional reforms to establish the country as a self-governing and equal member of common wealth. With these common objectives three organizations came in the forefront in Burma namely Sinyetha Party, the Dobama or Thakin Party and the student's organization formed the Freedom Bloc in October 1939.⁸⁵

The Thakin movement was in fact one of the effect of the Indo-Burmese collaboration made by the efforts of the Bengal revolutionaries for the political development in Burma. The Thakin movement started in 1930 – 31. In July 1930, Moun Ba Thaung in collaboration with the Burmese youths and Bengal revolutionaries active in Burma founded the political institution of the Thakins or Dobama Society. Young Burman intellectuals formed the Dobama (We Burman) Movement which demanded that its members be addressed with the salutation, Thakin (master); advocated the revival and

updating of the Burmese language; and quickly transformed the cultural message to a political nationalist one by advocating, "Burma for the Burmese." In addition to newspapers in Burmese, Western novels were adapted to Burman locales and given a local veneer. They gradually gave way to Burman stories, characters and issues. By the end of the 1930s, novels, critical of foreign rule, modern Buddhist monks who cloaked violation of vows under their yellow robes and other local subjects indicated how widespread freedom of speech had become.⁸⁶

Thakin meaning master began to be used as an appellation in front of the names of the members of the Dobama Society (We Burmans). The use of the word master to each other was probably a sarcastic expression against their colonial master who was considered as superiors. It was an expression of aversion for the Englishman. The use of this appellation earned a great deal of ridicule and contempt for the older generation of politicians as well as the people of Burma.⁸⁷ The Thakins were highly influenced by the Bengal revolutionaries took up the objective of the use of Burmese language, inspire national and to work in the ideals of non-violence like non-cooperation, ahimsa, and boycott. The Indo Burmese riot served as a powerful medium to expose the deplorable social and the economic conditions in Rangoon. The young Thakins seized the opportunity of the situation to make a political debut. But it has to be noticed that though the Thakins had unveiled itself during the riot but they did not the take an anti-Indian stand in the incident. In fact within a few days of the riots they issued a manifesto, the Dohbama Sadan, also known as the Reform Series No-1 and distributed it free of charge. There they declared openly "not to hate the Indians but to love one another more". They had viewed the incident as a manifestation of capitalist maneuvers rather than a racial strife.⁸⁸

In 1935 Thakin Ba Sein was elected as the first president. He had a close association with the Bengal revolutionaries and changed the name of the organization as 'Dohama Asi-Asyaon' or 'We Burmans Society'. They also contested the elections under the 1935 Act with the objective to wreck the government like the Swarajya Party. They were inspired by Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru. The Party opened its branches

throughout Burma. The organization was mainly led by student's leaders, like Aung San, U Nu, U Ne Win, M. A. Rashid, Thakin Soe, Than Tun, etc. The Thakins formulated a revolutionary parliamentary programme. Their objective was complete independence. They aimed to divide their objective that while their representatives fought the within the councils the others organized militant mass action outside the council chamber⁸⁹. Actually the Bengal revolutionaries were active in Burma which inspired the Burma youths to establish such a movement Sometime in 1930 the Burma Juganter Party , the Central revolutionary organization of the Bengal revolutionary organization of the Bengal revolutionaries active in Burma ,deputed one of its executive members , Kedareshwar Bhattacharjee , to organize the Burmese youths with a view to send them abroad by ships with the assistance and cooperation of U.Bhikhu Ottama ,the radical leader of the Burmese nationalists. Bhattacharjee was also given the responsibility to spread revolutionary literature in Burma. With a view to organize the Burmese youths and the monks he with the help of Bhikhu Ottama started an organization –Duo Burman. Therefore the Bengali influence was clearly present in the Thakin movement.⁹⁰

The Thakins consistently maintained close relations with the mainstream of the Indian national movement. In 1935, some leading Thakins had come to India and came in close contacts with various revolutionary organizations in India. They toured in Bengal and also established contacts with the communists. In the coming years many more communists came to India for the training in the revolutionary activities. A certain section of the Thakins drew their inspiration from the Indian National congress and attended the sessions of the Indian National congress regularly. This influence was felt in the Fourth Annual Conference of the Thakins in 1935 where they adopted the programmes of the Indian national congress in totality. They had welcomed Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the INC president to Burma in 1935.⁹¹

The most important feature of the Thakin movement was similarity with the swadeshi movement in Bengal as there was active participation of the students. In their manifesto Dobama Sadan they cited the motto of the part on the front page as follows:

Bamarpyithi Dopyi (Burma is our country),

Barnarsarhi Dosar (The Burmese literature is our literature),

Bamarsagarhi Dosagar (The Burmese language is our language)

The first line was the outright claim of the younger activists that this is our land. According to the context of the time, its hidden meaning would be this land is ours, neither Indians' nor British even though it is ruled and manipulated by them. The second line would remind the people (particularly the bilingual elite) who overestimated the world-imperial language and literature not to forget their own. The third line would be the alarm for the people (especially the Commoners) not to forget the inferior status of their language and of themselves in comparison even with Indians and Indian languages. In those days, the natives of Yangon necessitated understanding and speaking some Hindustani, Urdu and other Indian regional words for their daily survival because much of the skilled and unskilled works, as already described, were monopolized by the Indians. Thus, it can be assumed that the motto not only claimed the ownership of the country but also reminded the fellow people about their inferior status through the conspicuous channels.⁹² Then the motto continued:

Dopyiko Chitpar (Love our country).

Dosarko Chihmyintpar (Cherish our literature) and

Dosagarko Laysarpar (Respect our language)

It can be seen clearly that the first line was to uplift the patriotic sentiments of the people. The rest lines were to promote the inferior vernacular language and literature. Thus the latter three lines supported the former three. The whole motto would be an effort to promote the patriotic sentiments by reminding the inferior status of the country, language and literature. Nevertheless, the nature of this six lines motto in Myanmar

language was strong, persuasive and very easy to memorize for the fellow people and it became the slogan of DBA movement during the ensuing years. The second page of pamphlet described the phrase that "Do Barnar Asiayone ei Taiktunchek" (The urging of the Do Bamar Asiayone) as the title of the main text.⁹³ The attitude of the movement was similar to the swadeshi, boycott and the nationalist movement in Bengal as they both took to the spirit of glorification and to rise from the inferior status. In India there was also a struggle with the colonial rulers for the acceptance of a national language and a national educational policy. The swadeshi movement led to the development of the indigenous languages, literature, drama, theatre, music and also gave an impetus to the indigenous industries. The Thakin movement had also a deep impact on the minds of the Burmese and in fact the Thakin movement had touched the lives of the Burmese.

The Thakin movement led to the growth of an organized student's movement in Burma. The Rangoon University became one of the burning centers for the freedom struggle in Burma. The Thakins had formed in 1930 the All Burma Youth League and was closely attached to the Rangoon University Students Union. The Dobama Conference of 1935 which was held in Prome was jointly addressed by the Rangoon University Students Union and All Burma Youth League. In the conference one of its leaders Thakin Hla Pe was entrusted with the task of reorganizing the Dobama Yetat.⁹⁴

The Thakin movement organized a strike on 25 February 1936. The strike served as a rallying point for the Burmese sentiment. Thakin Nu and Aung San became the general secretary of the Thakin party after leaving the university. The party could secure three seats in the General Elections of 1936 in the House of Representatives. They provided nationalist political direction to labour and peasant groups and organized All-Burma Labour Conferences⁹⁵. The swadeshi and the freedom struggle in Bengal were mainly executed by the youths of Bengal in the University of Calcutta. The youths of Bengal were in fact the back bone of the movement and the future leaders of the country. Similar picture was evident in the political scenario of Burma along with another feature that is the active involvement of the religious leaders in the politics of the nation. The Thakin movement led to the rise of the patriotic songs similar to the swadeshi songs of Bengal.

Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, (the national poet of Burma) composed many swadeshi songs which were song in gatherings of the Thakins. Thakin Kodaw Hmaing is one of the most respected nation builders, the father of the Burmese Peace Movement, and patron of the Burmese Nationalists for the independent struggle. For the new generation democracy fighters, Hmaing is a legend as the great father of Burma revolution. His image is remembered together with the revolution even though he himself was never an armed revolutionary⁹⁶. His words, wisdoms and works were as much influential in the pre-independent or colonial periods as today in the post-independent era and the struggle against the military junta. As an advocate of human rights, a fair and just ruling system, and a symbol of liberty and freedom, the military rulers are very cautious about his publications, articles written about him, or even his portraits hanging on public places or being printed. During colonial rule, Hmaing joined in 1934 the nationalist Dobama Asiayone ('We Burmese Association', the first nationalist association) and quickly rose to become the leader of young Thakins (i.e. master) – a title that proclaimed they were the true masters of their own land, not the British who had usurped the title. He thus came to be known as Thakin Kodaw Hmaing (Master Lord Hmaing) and later Sayagyi (great teacher) Thakin Kodaw Hmaing.⁹⁷ The growth of nationalist songs, literature and theatre was the characteristics of the society of Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. He inspired political change through his career as a playwright, journalist, and editor as well as through being a teacher and a member of Dobama Asiayone. His genius in poetry and playwriting was a major support to the young Thakins and he influenced the general population through his wisdom and creativity in literature. There were newspapers who patronized the national movement cause like *The New Light of Burma* by U Chit Maung.⁹⁸ Thus the Thakin movement was strong force against the colonial power in Burma and there was a united platform of the labourers, students and Buddhist monks, the active participation of the religious men was absent in the independence movement in India.

It is interesting to note that the Thakins had annoyed the colonial rulers with their nationalism and many of them were arrested. A protest meeting was organised by the the

leaders in Rangoon and it was attended by students. The Thakin leaders and GCBA members had met the barrister Dr. Ba Han to plead for the Thakins. It was Justice J.R.Das who passed the orders for the release of the Thakins. Thus the Bengali settlers had helped and cooperated with the Burmese nationalists in the anti colonial struggle.⁹⁹

The Thakin movement began to be influenced by the Communist movement of the India and particularly of Bengal. The Communist Party of Burma was founded on August 15, 1939 when a group of young Burmese intellectuals met in a small flat in Barr Street, Rangoon. Among them were several students' leaders from Dobama Asiayone or Our Burma Association, the most militant nationalist political party in Burma before World War II. Thakin Aung San, Thakin Thein Pe, Thakin Ba Hein and Thakin Hla Pe later Bo Let Ya. In fact, Aung San a popular student's leader believed in violent method of achieving freedom under him there was the rise of another section of Thakins as communists.¹⁰⁰ The Bengal revolutionaries and Aung San formed a popular party with the objectives to the welfare of the students, peasants and workers. He was assisted by many Bengali communists namely Harinarayan, Ghosal, Madhav Munshi, Subodh Mukherjee, Amar Nag, Barin De, etc. Their objective was to free the country from British yoke. These leaders decided to meet the nationalist leaders both Congress and Communists before the formation of a larger political platform.¹⁰¹ Thus in 1938 Harinarayan Ghosal, Madhav Munshi and Amar Nag came to Calcutta via Dacca. They met Latika Das, the first woman communist in Dacca and in Calcutta Dr. Ranen Sen who advised them to leave for the Tripuri Congress session of INC. There they had a meeting with Jawarharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, Jayprakash Narayan and P. C. Joshi. After returning to Burma, the communist Party of Burma was formed in 1940. Aung San was the first secretary of the party and the pioneer leaders were Amar Nag, Madhav Munshi, Gopal Munshi, Harinarayan Ghosal, Thakin Soe, Than Dun, Ba Hien, Amar De, Subodh Mukherjee, Binoy Sen, Arobindo Dutta, etc. It kept contact with the Indian communist leaders as well as the Indian National Congress. There were also extremist Phongyis (Buddhist Monks) in this section of Thakins. These revolutionaries established many secret cells to organize terrorist activities.¹⁰²

There is also another story of the originator of the Communist party of Burma. According to British documents, the father of the Burmese communism was Oo Kyaw, the son of a big landowner in Henzada district. After passing his school finals in Burma and the London Matriculation, he went to London in 1927 to study for the Bar. Already strongly influenced by the Bengali revolutionaries and the India based League Against Imperialism, he travelled widely in Europe where he contacted Communist groups¹⁰³. However, Burma's first Communist cell included Thakin Aung San, Thakin Soe, Thakin Ba Hein, Thakin Hla Pe(Bo Let Ya), and H. N. Ghosal. Ghosal was one of the foremost leaders of the Communist Party of Burma and the most prominent theoretician of the party for several years. During the height of the Cultural Revolution, Ghosal was marginalized and killed in an inner-party purge. Ghosal graduated from Rangoon University. In August 1939, Ghosal took part in the founding of the Communist Party of Burma. He was a member of the Bengali cell of the party. During the Japanese occupation, Ghosal fled to India. During the early days of the Communist Party of Burma, Ghosal played an important role as a liaison between the Burmese party and the Communist Party of India. After the death of Thakin Ba Hein, Ghosal became the head of the All Burma Trade Union Congress. Ghosal's activities were mainly concentrated to Rangoon, organizing the largely Indian working class there. Ghosal edited a political and strategic document, calling for the Communist Party of Burma to prepare for armed struggle. The document would be nick-named the 'Goshal Thesis'. The Goshal Thesis was adopted by the Communist Party of Burma at a mass meeting in Pyinmana on March 14, 1948. In the rally of the peasants there he promised to provide the peasants free land and no taxes¹⁰⁴.

After the Japanese attack in 1941 of Burma, the Indian communists joined the Burmese Do-Bama Party through which the Burmese Communists carried their activities. The British during this period carried on searches and arrested a number of Indian Bengali communists from Burma. After the Japanese imperialist rule in Burma, many of the Bengali communists had broken the prison and came to India. But many of them stayed

back to serve the motherland because for them Burma was no less than their own country. The poor condition of the Burmese peasants and workers touched their heart. Thus even after independence in 1948 many Bengali communists stayed back in Burma. After the association of Aung San, in 1949, there was a split in the communist party of Burma. Aung San and several of the initial founders of the party had drifted away because they were basically nationalists influenced by the Marxist ideas rather than hardcore communists. But there were some of the Burmese intellectuals were still upholding the banner of the Communist Party of Burma and they gradually emerged as a distinct grouping. Among them were Thakin Soe , a fiery young radical who had participated in "the 1300 movement". H.N. Ghosal alias Thakin Ba Tin and Dr. Nag alias Tun Maung , another Bengali revolutionary who had lived in Burma for a long time.¹⁰⁵ There was a civil war in Burma between the two groups of the political party. Than Tun and Harinarayan Ghosal wanted to bring about a Mass revolution like in China but in their similar to struggle, which continued for two decades, led to the loss of lives of many Bengali communists namely, Harinarayan Ghosal, Subodh Mukherjee, Gopal Munshi, Amar De and Amar Nag. The Communists were in the forefront of armed resistance which subsequently became a national uprising on 27 March 1945 led by the BNA under the command of General Aung San.¹⁰⁶

The Communist Party of Burma was in fact an organization of the radical Thakins and some Bengali communists in Burma. There was also the formation of another socialist party by Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein named the Burma Revolutionary party which later came to be known as the Burma Socialist Party.¹⁰⁷ Beside the Thakins there was the growth of another party called Freedom Bloc in 1939. Ba Maw was the prime leader of this party. The main objective of this party was independence, Constituent Assembly and cabinet supervision of the special authorities of the governor. The Freedom Bloc was an ultra nationalist organization. It derived its name from the Indian 'Forward Bloc' led by Subhas Chandra Bose. The Burma Revolutionary Party, Dr. Ba Maw's Sinyetha group

and Buddhist groups had become the members of the Forward Bloc. It was modeled on the Bose's party in India. The forward Bloc in Burma made a mass demonstration in Burma demanding the abolition of the Constitution of 1935¹⁰⁸. Aung San had also met Bose in India when he visited the INC session held in Ramgarh in 1940. Aung San and the Thakin leaders met him in the Anti Compromise Camp held in the Indian National Congress session of 1940. The Thakins admired and revered the courage of Subhas Bose¹⁰⁹. It is impossible not to be influenced by the charismatic personality of Subhas Bose whose presence in Burma was very conspicuous.

The British police suspecting the Subhas Bose to be one of the conspirators engaged in the assassination of police officers and also the smuggling of arms he was arrested and kept in the Calcutta jail. Later he was transferred to Rangoon and ultimately to Mandalay jail. Subhas Bose thus had his early connections with Burma in the year 1925-27 when he was imprisoned in the Mandalay jail. He was imprisoned along with Trailokya Chakraborty, Satyendra Chandra Mitra, Surendra mohan Ghosh and Madanmohan Bhaumik. Subhas Bose has mentioned about his experiences in his book *The Indian Struggle* which was banned in India and also in Burma. There were other political prisoners namely Jiban lal Chatterjee and Bhupendra Kumar Dutta who were present in the Mandalay jail prior to the arrival of Subhas Bose. In the jail he took lessons from Jiban lal in learning Burmese.¹¹⁰ He understood that the pongyis who were nationalist followed the Indian National Congress in their tactics and policies. He mentioned that the uncrowned prince of Burmans was Bhiku U. Ottama, a priest. He describes one incident which occurred in the Legislative Council of Burma. One of the Home Member of the Council, a Burmese himself when asked about the whereabouts of Bhikhu U Ottama, felt annoyed at the questions, replied that U, Ottama is one of the ten thousand criminals in his jails and he could not be expected to know where he was confined at that time. At this insulting reference to U. Ottama, all the non-official members of the Legislative Council walked out as protest. They resolved to dissolve their separate parties and started a united party –called the People's party. He had great respect for Rev. U. Ottama. The priests had boycotted the Burma Legislature since 1920 and did not have any representatives in

the Assembly. He was aware of the nationalist party named G.C.B.A that is – General Council of Buddhist Association. There was another politically important party named Twenty –One Party. Thus he was a keen observer of the Burmese politics and appreciated nationalism growing within Burma. He was well informed about the political conditions in Burma and supported the Burmese nationalist struggle. Further, the Calcutta session of 1928 was a significant event in the history of the nationalist movement in India. Burma – Bengal ties were further tightened by the fact that Subhas Bose had won the election for the seat in the Bengal Legislative Council while he was in the Mandalay jail.¹¹¹

His connections with Southeast Asia was further established in the years from 1941-1945. After the break with INC Subhas Bose decided to take a different path, i.e. the path of armed struggle for which he required to organize an army. Thus while he was in Rome in 1941, he transmitted a message to his contact man for communication with Indian revolutionaries at home, Bhagat Ram Talwar alias Rahmat Khan, who had escorted him from Peshawar to Kabul. Talwar took the task of maintaining contact with the leader and transmitting his instructions to other revolutionaries in India by transelling between Kabul and various parts of India. In the message Bose mentioned “Please ask Calcutta friends to send out emissaries to Burma to make contact with DOBAMA and other revolutionary parties there and bring back correct information for me regarding the political situation there and possibility of revolution.”¹¹² This clearly reveals that Subhas Bose was interested in Burmese politics, as Burma would provide the nearest base to attack the British in India. His political career was closely related to the South East Asia particularly between the years 1941-1945.

The Indian Independence League, an organization committed to the cause of Indian freedom, was active in East Asia under Rashbehari Bose. Subhas Bose made a contact with Rashbehari Bose, a great revolutionary and a meeting was called in March 1942 where the idea of Indian National Army emerged. Netaji also took tour to Thailand, Indo – China, Burma and to all parts of Malaya to establish new branches of Indian Independence League, to collect funds, to open new recruitment centers for the army and

enroll voluntary workers and soldiers in INA. Netaji in his fund collecting campaign gave a call "Karo sab nichhabar bano sab faker" sacrifice you're all and be penniless mendicants for the sake of the country. It opened the floodgates of donations. Beggars also gave their life – long savings. Big industrialists and businessmen gave their profits and thousands of money. Women gave their ornaments Netaji collected from Burma alone the sum of rupees twenty – five crores. A Muslim of Bengali origin had offered 30 lakhs to Netaji. The major portion of it was used in the making of the cooperative bank. Subhas Bose wanted to join hands with the Axis Powers particularly Japan who had a good hold over South East Asia. In 1943 he took the charge formally of Indian Independence League and the Indian National Army or the Azad Hind Fauj.¹¹³

In Rangoon training institutes for INA were established. It was named as Swaraj Youngmen's Training Institute (SYMTI) at Thingangyun, which was started by Baba Hari Singh @ Osman Khan towards the end of 1942. The first course of this institute commenced in January 1943 and lasted till April 1943 with about 90 volunteers. The SYMTI had branches at Kanbe and Myamyo in Burma, of which Kanbe branch gained more importance. The intelligent and educated volunteers of the Kamayut school, which was a fresh recruiting centre known to be functioning from September 1943 were transferred to Kanbe centre. The less capable ones were sent to Goashala to train for general service in the INA. There were recruits from civil volunteers which included the Bengalis. The lists of the volunteers in the school included the names of Birendra Dey, Jagannath Roy, Shibu Nandi, Amrita Ghosal and others. They were the Bengali residents of Burma.¹¹⁴

Aung San the Burmese nationalist leader who often met Subhas Bose was inspired by his political ideas and charismatic leadership and inaugurated the Burma Independence Army. Similar to INA volunteers from the Burmese communities in Bangkok and Chiangmai flocked under its banner. Like the Azad Hind Fauj of Netaji, the BIA made an attempt to liberate Burma from the British control with the help of a foreign power i.e., Japan. After the upheaval in 1940 there were arrests of the nationalists by the colonial Government on the basis of Defence of Burma Act. Aung San along with Hla Mya left

for Amoy and made contacts with Japan. In 1941 even General Aung San had a strong conviction regarding Bose deemed Subhas Chandra Bose as a sincere friend of Burma and Burmese people. Netaji and Aung San came into close and frequent contacts during the last World War. During a speech at the City Hall Rangoon on July 24 1946, General Aung San said, *"I knew Netaji, even before I met him for the first time in Calcutta in 1940, by reading various accounts of his life of sacrifice and struggle and last of all, his own book 'The Indian Struggle 1920-42' which was in those days banned in India and Burma."* Bo Let Ya, one of the followers of Aung San has described that Aung San had held Bose in high esteem.¹¹⁵ Aung San had described to Bo Let Ya while staying together during the University Strike in 1936 that how Subhas Bose had qualified successfully the Indian Civil Service examination and did not join the British Indian service to join the Indian freedom struggle. Aung San had a great respect for Subhas Bose and as Bo Let Ya describes in his account that Aung San said, "After I had passed I would then throw away as Subhas Chandra Bose did, and go into politics. Then the country would look up to me for my education as well as my dedication".¹¹⁶

Netaji, however, was also invited to Rangoon for the ceremony of inauguration of Burma's independence. On 1 August 1943 the Japanese and Burmese leaders made a stage show in which the power was given to the Burmese. Ba Maw became the head of state in independent Burma which declared was on Britain and USA. Before the Independence Day celebration in Burma it must be mentioned that the BIA or Burma National Army were trained by the Japanese and it had helped the Japanese forces against the British forces to occupy Burma. Hume Toyne mentioned about Subhas Bose that he had refused to allow the INA to be used against the BNA of Aung San after its revolt from the Japanese on 25 March 1945. Aung San the president of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League had also mentioned in 1946 on the occasion of welcoming Sarat Chandra Bose in Rangoon that "Between him and myself, there was complete mutual trust; and although time was against both of us so that we could not come to the stage of joint action for the common objective of the freedom of our respective nation, we did have an understanding in those days that, in any event, and whatever, happened, the INA and the BNA (Burmese

National Army) should never fight each other. And I am glad to tell you to day that both sides did observe the understanding scrupulously on the whole, during the days when we were up in the arms against the Japs".¹¹⁷ Though the INA received success in Manipur and Andaman and Nicobar islands but ultimately in the month of November 1944 the military situation deteriorated and it led to the end of the War in Burma.

It was Ba Maw who also held Subhas Bose very high as he considered that Bose was no puppet in the hands of the Japanese; he stood head and shoulders above the others even the Congress leadership. Bose was the personification of what Ba Maw called as a symbol of a clarion call of a grown up and equal to former master to pack and go because he is now redundant. He was highly inspired by Bose and named his last child as 'Neta' after Netaji Subhas Bose.¹¹⁸

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CHAPTER V

**Bengalis in Burma: The Cultural development
and impact on the Burma.**

The Bengali community who formed a large portion of the population in Burma had carved out a separate cultural identity of their own. With the Bengal renaissance in the nineteenth century the Bengal community's attachment to the cultural activities had become more strong and clear. The Bengali residents in the province of Burma, who were already learned in English education, actively promoted the cause of English education along with the vernacular education in the province. In this process of the spread of western education, the British were the first to start schools and educational institutes. The Bengalis took jobs in these schools as teachers and also took the initiative to open up Bengali medium schools.

The cultural development of the Bengalis led to the formation of various social clubs, vernacular schools, celebration of different social and religious occasions, and opening of branches of various religious reform organisation like Brahmo Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission who also took up many the humanitarian and charitable works. The educational and other social activities of the Bengalis did influence to an extent the newly enlightened Burmese youths who were being imbibed with the spirit of nationalism and western education. The activities of the Bengalis also included social programme on special occasions, literary activities leading to the publication of various little magazines, etc.

I

The cultural connection of Bengal and Burma had been there since the ancient times. There had always been a cultural tie with India but the connection with Bengal had been on religious line. The Buddhist religion had been always a source of inspiration for the Bengali population particularly the scholars, political leaders and also to the common people. It did not matter whether they went to Burma or the 'Golden land' but the people of Bengal always felt attached to 'Bromhodesh'. The Bengal -Burma friendship or Hindu-Buddhist ties had been seen in the history of both the countries. Before the coming

of Islam in the 13th century, Bengal was a Buddhist kingdom and during the entire period from 5th -12th century Bengal became a strong centre of Buddhism. Furthermore, there existed a number of small kingdoms throughout Chittagong and Comilla districts of Eastern Bengal now in Bangladesh namely Khadgas, Chandras and Devas¹. Most probably the rulers came from their original home located in Arakan. The Chandras of Bengal are related to the Chandras of old Arakan (Mrauk-u) has been well- established. A large part of northern Bengal and Bihar (Pundravardhan) was under the Pala dynasty. The Sena dynasty particularly before the Islamic rule was not Buddhist yet Buddhism played an important role in the life of the people of Bengal². The people of Bengal also considered Buddha as one of the incarnation of Lord Vishnu and at a time Vaishnavism played a significant role in the social and religious life in Bengal. However, there remains a political, religious and cultural connection of Burma with Bengal. There are evidences of the Brahmanical traditions existing in Burma with the traces of the Brahmanical gods in various places. A link of the cultural and religious life of Burma and Bengal existed not only through the Buddhist religion and tradition but also through the existence of the Brahmanical gods namely Shiva, Durga, Brahma, Surya, Ganesh and others³. The inscriptions reveal that along with Buddhism there was importance of the Brahmans and the kings of Burma had patronised the Brahmans of the Northern India, Manipur and Bengal. They have gradually turned into Ponna or Ponnya of the Burmese religious society. Ramayana is also a religious treasure for the Burmese⁴. Burma and Bengal has a spiritual bond. Burma was never a foreign land for the Bengalis.

In Arakan the Vishnu coins of the Chandra dynasty has been found with a trisula in one hand and the conch in the other hand. The Chandras ruled from the 5th and 10th century. In their coins the script of the Northern India is found and possibly they were in Chittagong and the nearby areas of eastern Bengal.⁵ The Ananda Buddha Stupa has been considered by many of the archaeologists as similar to the Paharpur structure of the Varendrabhumi. The ancient Buddhist architecture of Burma reflects the influence of the architectural styles of the Pala period. In many of the writings of the Burmese ancient

literature there is a reference of the word 'gol' in connection with the migrants to Burma, which is the corrupt version of the word 'Gour'⁶. Thus cultural relation of Burma with Bengal was established and existing during the ancient and also in the medieval times with Chittagong being a part of the Arakanese kingdom in the early seventeenth century. In the colonial times the connection was further strengthened with the influx of a huge number of Bengali immigrants in Burma. They established a rich cultural life in Burma and their influence was also felt in the life of the Burmese.

The most significant feature of the life of Bengali community of this period was founding a social club or an institution for recreational purpose and also the establishment of a library along with a reading room. Wherever they migrated the Bengalis founded a club or a library. The idea of a club was probably taken from the British, their colonial master. But along with the club they always attached a library which demonstrated their love for learning. Rangoon being the capital of Burma attracted more of Bengalis than any of the other towns of Burma. Thus the community which numbered 3, 76,994 in 1931 according to the census in Rangoon had formed a Bengali Social Club⁷. These were purely a non political organisation with cultural aims. Almost every evening there were cultural programme like music, drama, literary discussions, recitation, etc. The club encouraged education and patronized the members in sports and games. The famous Bengali litterateur Shri Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay who resided in Burma for a long time had been an active member of this club⁸. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay regularly visited the club and he also joined musical programmes in the club. His musical skills were appreciated by the Bengali community in Rangoon. He was an excellent singer of various Bengali songs like Rabindrasangeet, kirtans and bhajans. Nabin Chandra Sen, the famous patriot poet of the nineteenth century had visited Rangoon in 1905. His poem 'Palasiryuddha' is considered as an epic poem of that period was felicitated by the Bengali Social Club. In this programme Shri. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay had presented a song. Nabin Sen was mesmerised by hearing such a voice and the song. He later praised the vocal talent of Sarat Chandra and bestowed him with an honorary title of

'Rangoon Ratna'. The musical programmes included Rabindrasangeet, Kirtans, bhagans, etc. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay is always identified as a novel writer but his interest and talent in music came to the forefront for the first time in Rangoon. Sarat Chandra developed a special knack in cultural aspect while staying in among the workers and labourers in Rangoon. He had organised a theatre group with the daily wage labourers⁹. Jogendranath Sarkar has mentioned in his book 'Brahmo Probasi Sarat Chandra' that the members of the Bengali Social Club later had a differences among themselves and some of them came out of it to form the Bengali Club in Rangoon. This club helped the Bengali group to cultivate the literary activities in Rangoon¹⁰.

Beside this there were two more clubs of the Bengali community in Rangoon. There also existed a Bengali Yuvak Samiti (Bengali Youth Organisation) and Bengali Sporting Club which organised sport activities of the settlers in the country¹¹. There were clubs who organised Bengali drama namely Banga Natya Samaj. There were three to four such drama and theatre groups in Rangoon among the Bengalis. The Rangoon Jubilee Hall was the centre for the recreation of the Bengalis. The Bengalis generally organised dance, drama, music and other recreational programmes in this hall. In 1332 B.S. famous dramatist and actor Ahindra Choudhury and other actor and actresses of the Art Theatre of Calcutta had come to Burma. They had become very popular in Burma and performed in Jubilee Hall in Rangoon. This Hall had witnessed the welcome of the national poet of India Rabindranath Tagore. Jubilee Hall, in fact, served as a centre for all social functions of the Bengalis¹². One of the brightest stars to shine over the Bengal stage, was Niharbala. She performed in different theaters of Calcutta and in 1923 history was created with her role as Niyoti in the play Karnarjun. Her songs like Kalprabaha Chale Dhire, Ami Kakhan Bhangi Kakhan Gari and Pran Heena Putul Samaan were great hits and the songs published as gramophone records. In 1925, Niharbala went to Burma as part of Star Theatre group. Karnaarjun and Iraner Rani were the two plays staged in Rangoon in Burma¹³. The recreation of the residing Bengalis were, moreover, not restricted to Theatre but it included the screening of films which was brought from Bengal. Madan

theatre which started in 1919 and produced the first Bengali film *Bilwamangal* also spread in Burma. It screened films like *Bishbriksha* (1922), *Durgesh Nandini* (1927), *Radharani* (1929) and *Giribala*(1929) in Rangoon¹⁴.

The Bengalis in Myamyo had organised themselves into a social club known as Friends Union Club. There were sports activities in the club namely volley ball and others. The club was centre of the Bengali activity in Myamyo¹⁵.

II

The Bengalis who migrated to Burma maintained a separate racial identity which influenced to a large extent their day to day living. As a community they preserved their identity by establishing separate schools of Bengali medium both for boys and for girls. Bengali schools were established almost every part of Burma where ever Bengalis had settled. The most well known Bengali medium school were situated in Rangoon. It had separate branches for boys and for girls. The most well known school was 'Bengal Academy' established separately for the boys and the girls¹⁶. The Governor of Burma, Sir Charles Innes had also given financial assistance for the building of the school. Important and influential Bengali personalities of Burma took active part as the member of the management Committee of the school. The school was patronised and provided with the financial assistance by the renowned barrister of Rangoon Shri. J.R. Das. He also later became the judge of the High Court of Rangoon. It was started by Prasun Majumdar and Shri Shashi Bhushan Chakraborty in 1909. Initially it had only eight boys. It virtually took twenty long years to develop into a full-fledged high school and in 1929 there were more than 500 numbers of students¹⁷. This number also indicates the increasing number of Bengali families and population in Rangoon. There was also assistance on the part of the British Burma Government which clearly explains that the British wanted to make the Bengalis an ally of their colony. They wanted the spread of western education among the Bengalis who would serve them and help them to run the administration in Burma. Prior to the establishment of the Bengal Academy there was also initiatives and interests were

shown for the foundation of an English medium school to provide education to the children of Bengali families. In 1307BS there was the foundation of Indian Seminary School under the supervision of the Babu Jashodananda Sen in Rangoon. Schools providing education separately for the Bengali children were opened in various other places of Burma particularly in Moulmein, Pyapon, Bassein, Michigan, and other towns of Burma where the population of the Bengali settlers were in considerable number¹⁸. Jogesh Chandra Banerjee, who served in Rangoon Corporation also established a big school, Veena Pani Pathshala, which turned into Vivekananda Institution¹⁹.

Though there were several schools which provided education for the Bengali boys separately but there was a problem to obtain Bengali teachers who would reside and teach the students in Burma. The Bengali settlers of Burma had approached the education department of Government of Burma to assist them with a teacher and the solution which was given by the government was to submit a sum of 12000 rupees with the department of education of Burma. The interest of the said amount would help to bring the Government a Bengali teacher to Burma. But such proposals were not accepted by the settlers. The Bengal Academy in its initial years had Shri Nishi Bhushan Mitra as their main teacher but within a couple of months he was arrested by the Bengal Government on being involved in the Dacca Conspiracy Case. Thus there was again a crisis of teacher which was to be brought from Bengal. Shri Chandi Charan Bandopadhyay was appointed as the next teacher and he continued for ten long years. There were more teachers from Bengal who came on being provided with a handsome salary with residential facilities. There are various other names of Bengali teachers who served in the schools and dedicated their best years to the betterment of the students. The Bengal Academy had been a primary school for four years, seven years it was a mid-school and in the next ten years it became a high school. A new building was erected for this purpose which was inaugurated by the Governor of Burma, Innes. The fund for the building was donated by the affluent Bengalis of Rangoon namely Shri. Sashi Bhushan Neogi(merchant), Justice

J.R. Das, P.C. Sen(Barrister), K.C. Basu(Barrister), S.P. Das and Gyan Chandra Basu (contractors). The Governor of Burma also provided funds for the school.²⁰

The necessity of a school for the Bengali girls of the town was first felt in 1918. Dr. Manilal Kundu and other members of the society of Bengal Academy initiated to open a girls section attached within the boys' school of the Academy. Prior to this endeavour Shri Prasanna Kumar Majumdar and Shashi Bhushan Chakraborty had taught girls in the in the early morning, before the day school within the same building of the boys school. He had started informally and many other teachers served this section voluntarily. Later Shri Majumdar had opened a co-educational school in 1910 named Rammohan Academy. This institute worked smoothly for six years. Later on the request of the managing board of the school of Bengal Academy Shri Chakraborty agreed to in cooperate it with the Bengal Academy. In 1918 Smt. Jyotishmayi Mukherjee was formally brought from Bengal as head Mistress of the Girls section of the school of Bengal Academy. In 1922 within the compound of the Bengal Academy a new three storied building was constructed as the separate girls' school. Number of well known personalities of the town of Rangoon had contributed money. Mention may be made of a few like Shri Kumadini Kar, Professor Maulavi Gulam Akbar, Shri Sachin Mukhopadhyay Doctor Prasanna Kumar Majumdar, Professor Ramprasad Choudhury and others²¹

There were many competitions which were held in these schools among the students. These competitions were not only of academic in character but also of outdoor activities. One such reference is available where the students took part in a continuous cycling race in Rangoon. The participator has to cycle continuously day and night. The person who won the race was S.N. De who cycled continuously for 40 hours and 50 minutes. This was an event for the Bengalis of Rangoon. The boy could have continued his endeavour for few more hours but he was stopped by a policeman. Since the organisers did not take

the permission from the police department to hold the competition in the main road the competitor had to stop immediately with the instruction from the police²².

It is necessary to mention here that that the chief educational institutions of Rangoon is the Rangoon College and Collegiate school established in 1874 administered by the Educational Syndicate from 1886 and placed in 1904 and 1902 respectively under the direct control of the Government and the secondary schools were affiliated to the Calcutta University. The St. John's College founded in 1864 was affiliated as high school to the Calcutta University²³.

The Bengalis are music lovers with a knack to listen, perform and patronise music. It is a general trend among the community to listen and make their girls and daughters learn music. This attitude of the settlers is reflected in the establishment of the music schools namely Arya Sangeet Vidhyapeet and Arya Sangeetalay in Rangoon. These music schools provided the Bengali students with standard Bengali music and songs²⁴.

Bengali vernacular schools developed in the various towns where the Bengalis had settled. In Myamyo there was a Bengali vernacular school (B.V.School). There was a system of providing scholarships to the students in the schools. The examination for the scholarship was held in their respective mother tongue of the student. The memoir of Nilima Dutta who was residing in Myamyo describes her success as she received General Proficiency Award of the School of Myamyo, a small town of Burma. She also received the Anukul Chandra Memorial Silver Medal and the All Round Best girl Award. Her name was remembered in the Rangoon Gazette of the year. In this occasion of the school annual function and distribution of the scholarships there were the presence of few important personalities of Myamyo named Mr. Bireswar Ganguly, Mr. Banerjee and his wife Mrs. Parul Banerjee, Shri. N. N. Majumdar, the first Bengali Chief Military Accounts Officer and his wife Smt. Nilima Majumdar and Captain Basu. Mrs Nilima Majumdar was well known singer among the Bengali world of Rangoon and she used to record songs in Rangoon. One of her popular song was 'Aaj Rajani uttal holo chander Madhu Kheye' (Free translation: The night has become crazy for the light of the moon)²⁵.

Further to mention there were also schools in the form of madrasas which were opened by the Bengali Muslim community. There was the existence of Khatim-ul-Islam madrasa.

The community also established Khatun Rangoon School for the Muslim girls in Rangoon. In addition to this there was a madrasa which was operated in the Botatang mosque of Rangoon. The Muslim girls of the Bengali settlers in Burma were thus provided with education and many of them had achieved success in their academic life. Mosmat, who was the daughter of Abdul Majid, the Government Interpreter of Arakan had successfully qualified in the Matriculation examination in Rangoon. She had come out in flying colours by securing the first position among the women of the Muslim community. Janab Abdul Bari Choudhury, an affluent person of the Mussalman community of Burma had taken an active role in the establishment of the madrasas, schools, supervision of the mosques and other social works. He has also taken initiative to start a movement to eradicate gambling, selling and use of liquor as well to restrict the performance of 'poya' dance of Burma in public. He has been successful to some extent²⁶. There were also chances to study Bengali in India Matriculate College'. But after the process of nationalisation started in 1941 in Burma the chances faded out for the local Bengalis in Burma²⁷.

III

The cultural life of the majority Bengali Hindus was affected by the religion. Religion had occupied an important place in the lives of the Hindu Bengalis in the first half of the 19th till the second half of the 20th century. The religious outlook of the Bengalis was guided by the emotional and the imaginative nature and their preference to Mother Goddess which represented female energy. Due to the imaginative power they made Gods more humane and closer to the day to day life of an ordinary man. Goddess Durga is transformed into Uma or the daughter coming to her parent's home with her four children once a year. This humane transformation of the Goddess founded its expression in the Bengali Durga Puja, which is unique and is not found in any other part of India. Another important feature of the Bengali religious belief is the worship of Goddess Kali,

which was the outcome of the growth of Tantrism in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. The worship of the Kali or Shakti, the goddess of the destruction which grew in Bengal led to the development of the Shakti cult. The expansion and growth of the worship of Shakti is typical to Bengal. Goddess Kali became another symbol of fearlessness and strength in the Bengali mind.

The Bengali settlers of Burma brought these religious traditions with them into the new land and the founding the Durga Bari and the Kali Bari became an essential part of their community life. There were establishment of the temples of Durga, Kali, Shiva, and other popular gods and goddesses of Bengal near about the residential areas of the Bengalis. Rangoon also witnessed the foundation of the Durga Bari in 1296 BS under the initiative and enthusiastic work of Nimai Sinha. He was the employee in the office of Rangoon Accountant General. Durga Bari was a place of social gathering, where Durga Puja was held annually and it served as a guest house for the Bengali Hindus visiting Rangoon. It is been said that the idol of Goddess Durga was brought from Banaras in the inaugurating year of the worship of the goddess. The place provided night stays for few days to the tourists, fortune seekers and travellers²⁸.

The Durga Bari became the part and parcel of the Bengali life in this period. These temples not only became venues of the religious festival during the Durga Puja but it served the purpose of the social get together. Durga Puja for the Bengalis was more than a religious festival. There were social programmes like the community lunch (bhog), mela or exhibition, drama or theatre and other recreational programmes. Durga Bari was not only typical to the living of the Bengali settlers in Rangoon but also to the other towns of Burma where the Bengalis had settled²⁹. Michkina another important town where considerable number of Bengalis had settled also celebrated Durga Puja. There were celebrations in the town in the form of theatre, drama, musical and dance concerts. The much notable Bengali film actress Smt Supriya Devi was born in the small town of Michkina in 1935 and had spent her early days in Burma. Her father Gopal Chandra

Bannerjee was a successful advocate. Her mother Kiranbala Devi was a housewife extremely interested in music and dance. Supriya Devi herself was a keen dancer since her childhood even receiving an award from Mr. Thakin Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma, who was moved by one of her dance recitals. She has described how the Bengalis had celebrated Durga Pooja with various recreational activities, theatre, and drama. Under the direction of her father the Bengalis of the town had staged three dramas namely, Naranarayan, Shahjahan and Alibaba. She had also participated in one of them and it was her first stage performance at the age of eight³⁰. In Myamyo the Bengali Vernacular School was the centre for the social activities for the Bengalis in the town. The Bengalis used to gather here for the celebration. There were cultural programmes for the occasion. The school also organised Saraswati pooja. The other members of the family had also participated in the various programmes arranged for the social gathering³¹. Such social gatherings during the time of the Durga Pooja are typical to the Bengali settlement in any particular place. Thus the migration of the Bengalis in Burma was not only a process of political or economic in character but it was a settlement with a separate identity and cultural development which also had an everlasting influence on the Burmese western educated youths.

The Durga Pooja is so attached with the life of the Bengalis that it is reflected in the observance of the festival by Subhas Chandra Bose even when he was a political prisoner in the jail of Mandalay. It was the same jail where Lokmanya Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai were imprisoned for seven and one year consecutively. Subhas Bose describes the Mandalay prison structure which is recorded in his collection works. The structure was built of wood. Bose states that "The buildings looked exactly like cages in the zoo or in the circus. From the outside and especially at night, the inmates of these buildings appeared to be like animals prowling about behind the bars. Within these structures we were at the mercy of the elements. There was nothing to protect us from the biting cold of winter or the intense heat of summer or the tropical rains of Mandalay"³². In the jail he also developed a liking for the Burmese men. With the coming of the month of October 1925, Subhas Bose appealed to the Superintendent of the jail to grant the prisoners the

permission to perform the festival of Durga pooja as similar facilities were given to the Christian prisoners. The superintendent agreed to provide the facilities but the Government had not only refrained but also censured the Superintendent Major Findlay for taking decisions disregarding the authority. As a result of such a step by the Government Subhas Bose and other Hindu prisoners went on a hunger strike in February 1926. After three days of hunger strike a newspaper named Forward published the news of the hunger strike in Mandalay as well as the reports of the Indian Jail Committee of 1919-21. It also revealed the false health reports of some prisoners which replaced the true ones by Lieutenant Col. Mulvany. He was instructed to do so by his superior, the Inspector General of Prisons of Bengal. The reveal of this fact led to a protest and uproar among the people of India and also T.C. Goswami, who was a Swarajist, took up this issue in the House of Legislative Assembly. The Home Member found the situation uncomfortable and beyond control and promised to look into the matter to remove the grievances of the prisoners. Thus the Government without delay provided some funds for the observance of the religious festival of Durga Pooja. The facilities and other necessary requirements for the festival would also be given by the Government. With such an order from the Government and having won their point Subhas Bose and other prisoners including Mr. Jiban lal Chatterjee gave up the hunger strike. Thus in 1926 October the prisoners of Mandalay jail had celebrated the Durga Pooja. Bose always considered that Burma and Burmese had a close affinity towards India culturally³³.

In the prisons of Mandalay Subhas Bose was practising the concepts of Vaishnavism and Saktism, the two predominant religious traditions of Bengal. Along with this he also sang devotional songs like kirtans, songs of D.L. Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam. He was joined also by other prison inmates. There are even some songs in his prisons notebooks which may have been his efforts or fragments of song by others. These songs expressed the growing love of the bonded, earthly believer and his surrender to the divine. They also contain many images of imprisonment and passion for freedom. Though the religious ideas were predominant but it was inter- mingled with the idea of

patriotism. There was love for the Infinite and the Mother both the religious and the country³⁴.

Several other prominent temples with appropriate resources had also been holding religious and language instructions on an informal basis as a part of their religious activities which also include regular Pooja or religious sessions and festivities on auspicious days associated with the principal deities of the temple in Burma. A few groups endeavouring to perpetuate the traditional Gita and Bhajans also existed. There were also three Hindu Dharmashalas or guest houses in the downtown Rangoon under the management of the temple trust for the Sri Kali Temple and Shri Satyanarayan Mandir. These were the places where the visitors could secure temporary lodging. The mandir or temple maintained a free dispensary on its premises³⁵.

An important aspect of the Bengali cultural life was the establishment of libraries or reading rooms. The attachment to the libraries developed from the British who started many reading rooms and libraries in Calcutta their early capital. The Bengali settlers had formed as early as in 1895 the Rangoon Vidyasagar Reading Room. This library was named after the educationist Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. It was opened under the initiative of a wealthy businessman Girish Chandra Basu who bought books worth Rs. 2000. There were books both in English and Bengali language. Besides this, library and reading rooms were further opened by the Chittagong Muslim community in Rangoon. Sheik Muhammad Israil Khan and other learned Muslims had opened the Moslem Pustakalay or library. This organisation had Maulavi Muazzim Ali Khan as its secretary. He was a native of Manikganj in Dacca. He was an academician and a regular reader of Bengali literature. This organisation also functioned as a club for the residing Muslim community in Burma³⁶.

There were various other organisations which were opened by the Bengali settlers of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities. Such organisations were mostly centred near

and in Rangoon as that was the capital of the country and also large number of the community were engaged in numerous activities in this area. There was Rangoon Brahma Samaj, Shri Ramkrishna mission, Bengal Mohhamedan Association, Chittagong Moslem Samiti, Burma Provincial Khilafat Committee, Rangoon District Khilafat Committee, Chittagong Buddhist Samiti, Bengal Co-operative Credit Society, Bengal Labour Organisation, Rangoon Maiyat Sahajya Tahbil, Bengali Samabay Rindan Samity, Chittagong Samity and others. 'The important among the associations formed by the Bengalis were Milan Mandir, Bengal Social Club, Bengal Club, Brahma Samaj, Bengal Academy, Chattal Samiti and Ramakrishna Mission. The Bengali settlers gathered in these places and they were the meeting grounds for them'³⁷.

The Hindu revivalist movement in the nineteenth century culminated in the preaching's of the mighty and modest Shri Ramkrishna Paramhans (1836-1886) and his disciple Swami Vivekananda who revitalised the Hindu religion and brought it before the world. Swami Vivekananda established the Ramkrishna Mission, as a social, cultural and spiritual organisation. The institution believed in charity, service to man and welfare to the people. It was their duty to look after the sick and the poor and take them back to health particularly in the times of epidemics. They provided services to the people without discrimination of sex, religion, caste and economic status. Thus with the numerous existence of the community in the Burma there was the foundation of the Rangoon Ramkrishna Mission. The Rangoon Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram was a philanthropic institution and by the Bengali in particular, as the Indian labourers in and about Rangoon, when they fall ill, are treated and taken care of her alone practically³⁸. The Ramakrishna Mission was started and organised by the Bengali sanyasis(sages) of the Mission namely Swami Shyamananda and others. But here all communities irrespective of class, creed, religion and sex received services. They particularly provided medical assistance to the people of Burma. The monthly expenditure of the mission is approximately 3000 rupees and it takes real toil and hardship to acquire the amount to run the mission. Some of the owners of the factories of Rangoon rarely donate funds to the organisation but no other source of income was available to them. The government of

Burma also provides some financial assistance but it is not enough to run such a work and the mission deserves much more. The principal of the Madras Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Sarbananda had established the Ramakrishna Sevak Samiti and Shri Ramakrishna Society in Rangoon³⁹. This organisation would deliver a proper spiritual guidance to the settlers. The organisation continued with its own mission of providing service to the needy and poor which was recognised by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru after the independence in Burma. Pandit Nehru accompanied with Mrs. Indira Gandhi visited Ramakrishna Mission Hospital in Rangoon on June 22, 1950. He was received by the secretary of the mission, Swami Nichkamananda and Mrs. Aung San and also Dr. Hariharan the Chief Medical Officer of the Mission. Welcoming Pandit Nehru the Foreign secretary Mya Bu thanked Pandit Nehru and the Government of India for their munificent capital grant of Rs. 120000 and recurring grant of Rs. 250,000 for the rehabilitating the hospital which was destroyed in the last war. Pandit Nehru personally donated Rs. 2500. Nehru paid warm tribute to the silent and unostentatious work of the Ramkrishna Mission not only in Rangoon but everywhere else where they functioned. He urged the Indians to take pride in this institution and help it to the best of their ability and make it a notable instance of cooperation between the Burmese and the Indians living in Burma⁴⁰.

Swami Atmasthananda who received diksha or spiritual initiation from Swami Vijnanananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in 1938 and joined the Ramakrishna Mission at the Belur Math January 3, 1941. He was sent to Rangoon Sevashrama as its secretary in 1958. He soon developed the Sevashrama hospital into one of the best hospitals in Burma or Myanmar. When military rulers took over Rangoon, he returned to India in 1965. Atmasthananda was elected a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1973. In 1975, he was appointed an assistant secretary⁴¹. Swami Ranganathan the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order who served the mission from 1933-42 had been to Rangoon as the librarian of the Ramakrishna Mission. He made important contributions for the improvement of the Ramakrishna Pustakalay in Rangoon⁴².

The Ramakrishna Mission society which had enjoyed a long intellectual tradition since its inception in Burma or Myanmar more than 80 years was converted into the Ramakrishna Temple Trust in 1977. The Ramakrishna Temple Trust maintaining the reading room and the library which is the part and parcel of the organisation devoted to the comparative study of all religions. The Ramakrishna Temple Trust conducts daily sessions for worship. A guest house for the travelers and destitutes has also been functioning under the supervision of the board of the trustees. Several prominent Burmese socialites have served on the board of the trustees and the Ramakrishna Temple trust has been steadily carrying on its task to fulfill its principal aim and objectives of serving the needy before self⁴³.

The Brahmo Samaj was the first movement which sprang up as a result of the socio-religious reform movement in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Under the impact of the western education and culture Brahmo Samaj was "the earliest form of Protestant Hinduism in Modern India." Since there was the existence of large number of Bengali settlers in Rangoon in fact all major socio-religious organisation had sprang up in the area. Gradually, there was the foundation of Brahmo Samaj in 1880 in Rangoon. Two more branches of the Samaj were further opened in Rangoon in 1883 and 1884. Ramananda Chattopadhyay in his visit to Burma mentioned that there was a Brahmo mandir (temple) in Rangoon. There were religious ceremonies held every week⁴⁴. From the Census of the Brahmos in 1911 it indicates that there was not a single person who was a Brahmo in Burma but there were considerable amount of Brahmos existing in the country. This indicates that there are, as late Mr. S. Fletcher Williams of the British and the foreign Unitarian Association used to say during his period of sojourn in India, more Brahmos outside the Brahmo Samaj than within it⁴⁵. Furthermore, it also shows that The Census of the Brahmos was not accurate but there are many within our own personal knowledge. The expansion of the Samaj started during the zeal of Keshab Chandra Sen. Under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen and Bijoy Krishna Goswami, a religious scholar named Bhai Girish Chandra Sen became a Brahmo in 1871 and

travelled to Burma. He stayed in Rangoon to propagate in 1880 the new faith. He is the first religious scholar who has translated Quran into Bengali. Initially he worked at Dhaka Prakash and later as Assistant editor at Sulabh Samachar, Bangabandhu and editor of the monthly magazine Mahila⁴⁶. Nagendranath Sen, an employee of the Rangoon Accountant General Office was one of the leaders and active member of the Brahma Samaj in Rangoon. There were regular prayers and Brahmosangeet was sung in the Brahma Samaj. Interestingly Nagendranath Sen was a colleague of Sarat Chattopadhyay in Rangoon. His son Dr. Amiyo Kumar Sen was born and brought up in Rangoon. He had practised medicine in Burma for thirty years and had spent 65 years in Rangoon. He came back to Calcutta in 1965⁴⁷. Another Brahma member was the well known barrister Shri. P.C. Sen who became judge and Administrator General of Rangoon. He was the father in law of Smt. Sujata Devi, the youngest daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen⁴⁸.

A number of associations and missions of Islam had also entered into the arena of Bengali Muslim life in Burma. One of the missions was started by Anjuman -i- ulema-i- Bangla. They had sent out preachers to various parts of the country including Burma. These preachers had devoted their life to the cause of Islam. Moulvi Muhammad Akram Khan, the founder of the Anjuman had devoted his life for Anjuman and the cause of the mission. The work set before the mission was a big one and it required also a huge fund. The Anjuman had secured a fund in the form of permanent grant of Rs100/- per month from two devoted persons of Rangoon namely, Mr. A. K. S. Jamal C.I.E., the merchant prince of Rangoon and Moulavi Abdul Karim, the retired inspector of schools. Besides this there were other donations and funds were also collected from the subscriptions. The mission had crossed the boundaries of Bengal and Assam and reached in Burma where Anjuman had permanently placed a preacher who worked for the organisation in Burma⁴⁹. One of the renowned businessmen of Rangoon from Chittagong was Abdul Bari Choudhury who helped the organisation to run smoothly in Burma. He also enthusiastically took many works of the mission and under his financial support the organisation had expanded to an extent in Burma. The success of the mission was largely due to the presence of a huge number of Bengali Muslims who came from Dacca,

Comilla and Chittagong⁵⁰. There were other Islamic organisations namely Bazam-e Gulshan- e -urdu, Zafar Shah Dargah Trust , The Muslim Central Fund Trust and The Islamic Religious Affairs Council which was visited by the numerous Bengali Muslims who lived in Burma⁵¹.The Ahmediyya movement also took a shape in Burma by the Islamic organisation named The Ahmediyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam under the initiative of Captain N.A. Khan, a retired captain and owner of a Burma Pharmacy in Yenangyaung in Burma⁵².

IV

The immigrants from Bengal were mostly middle class educated and they were related to a large extent to the development of literature and journalism of this country. They contributed definitely to the progress of the Bengali language which received vital literary thrust during the nineteenth century. The impact of western education and ideas along with the change in the social, political, and intellectual thinking of the Bengalis was reflected in their literary and journalist efforts. The rising nationalism and anti colonial feeling among the Bengalis after the anti partition movement acted as another force to the growth of vernacular literature and journalism. The educated middle class in Bengal who earlier had faith and was loyal to their colonial masters soon they lost their confidence. The medium to express their grievances was seen through the literature in the form of novels, newspapers, weekly journals and others. These social and educational ideas brought an upsurge in the minds of the Bengalis. The Bengali settlers were not untouched by the new ideas of the nineteenth century and therefore they also ventured into the realm of literature and journalism. But at the same time they were careful enough to preserve their language, literature and culture from the Burmese who differed from them in many respects. They on the other hand had influenced either consciously or unconsciously the Burmese youths who came in touch with the spirit of Bengal renaissance.

The Bengali settlers in Burma had thus published newspapers, journals, weekly magazines, and other form of printed material. The well known Bengali authors, intellectuals, writers, thinkers had visited Burma either as invited guest or as travellers or seekers of job. An important section of the Bengali literary personalities had visited Burma and they have left some account of their experience in the country in their writings. Thus their newly acquired experiences also enriched the Bengali language and culture.

There were three monthly journals and a weekly journal which was published by the Bengali settlers of Burma. Rangoon Mail was an English newspaper. It gradually took the shape of a national newspaper. The editor of this important journal of Burma was Shri Nripenchandra Bandopadhyay. Nripendra Chandra Bandopadhyay through his newspaper could publish the latest of the Bengal politics which could reach the people of Burma⁵³. He had a cordial relationship with Bhikhu. U. Ottama. The British Government was concerned about the presence of Shri Nripendra Chandra and due to the pressure of the Government of Burma he could not survive much long in the country. But under his editorship the newspaper Rangoon Mail had reached its zenith and it was politically as well as socially the most awakening newspaper of the period⁵⁴. The paper and the editor both faced problems from the British strong censorship and this led to protest from the Indians in Burma against the British government. On 18 November 1920, the Rangoon Mail had reprinted a number of articles from another source. Two of these detailed British atrocities around the Empire, in places such as Egypt and Fiji. Two book reviews also attracted the attention of British censors: published in Manchester, described the merciless exploitation of the "coloured people of the world" and World Supremacy debate claim that "no good can come to the human community on this planet save through the whitest type of white man." Within days the editor and manager of the Rangoon Mail were respectively sentenced to four months and two months imprisonment for sedition. The British authorities handled the court case clumsily. In court the editor and publisher of the Rangoon Mail were handcuffed and had their coats and shoes

forcibly removed. Again, there was a public outrage at the press suppression and the treatment of the criminals. The Indian Independent described the editor as being “incapable of hurting even a fly” and called his treatment “barbarous and humiliating.”⁵⁵

There were the existence of other newspaper and journals published by the Bengalis settlers. The ex-students of Bengal Academy organised and published a journal called Dipali. The editor of this journal was Babu Paresh Chandra Deb. This journal was published after every three months. Shri Shashi Bhusan Chakraborty who was also the founder member of the Bengal Academy took the initiative to publish a journal named Swabhilambi. It was a weekly journal. There were a number of printing presses in Burma which belonged to the Indians among whom Bengalis had owned them in a large number⁵⁶

The Bengali Muslims had equally contributed to the growth of literature in Burma. Moulavi Mohammad Didarul Alam an educated and enthusiastic youth had taken the task of publishing two journals in Burma for the community. He was the editor of the Bengali journals named ‘Juger Alo’ and ‘Sammelani’ which were monthly and weekly journals respectively. The importance of the journal Sammelani was that it was a joint effort of both the Muslim and the Hindu Bengalis residing in Burma. The history of the publication of the journal was of great importance regarding the communal harmony of the Bengali community in Burma. In 1331BS the Bangla Sahitya Sammelan was organised by both the Hindu and the Muslim.⁵⁷ One of the popular news papers of Burma was the Rangoon Daily News which was edited by a Bengali Muslim. A weekly periodical named Bangla Gazzete was published by the Bengali settlers in Rangoon. It was launched in the year 1929 and its office was in the Strand Road, Rangoon. Farooq Ahmed Nizampuri was its editor. The weekly had published the news of ill-treatment of the Bengali passengers by the British steam Navigation Company who used to board the ships from Chittagong to Akyab and Rangoon⁵⁸. Quite a large number of magazines and

periodicals were published from Burma by the resident Bengalis. More than hundred such periodicals and magazines were published from all over Burma by the Bengalis⁵⁹.

The cultural and literary connections with Bengal and Arakan existed in the early times. During the 17th century AD when Muslim in Arakan nurtured Bengali Literature, the Muslim poets of that time identified the country as "Roshang" (corrupt Bengali for "Rakhaing"). The study of Bengali literature that the Muslim initiated reached perfection under the aegis of the courtiers of the Roshang kings. It is needless to say that the Kings' Court of Roshang got filled up with Muslim influence long before this. From the beginning of the 15th century AD the Kings' Court of Roshang by luck was compelled to heartily receive the Muslim influence. Roshang king Meng-tsau-mwun (1404 -1434 AD) known as Naramaikhla in the Burmese history ascended the throne in 1404 AD forcibly gained possession of a lady named Tsau-bongyo, the sister of the chief called Ananthiu. In the King's Court of Roshang during seventeenth century there were Muslim courtiers who appointed their own poets to uplift Bengali literature, Roshang King, Thiri thu-dhamma Raja (1622 -1638 AD) was as greatly powerful as his father, Meng Kha Moun or Hussein Shah (1612 -1622 AD).. He ruled a vast area from Dhaka to Pegu. During his rule, Poet Daulat Qazi, with orders from Ashraf Khan, while living in King's Court of Roshang, started the poem Daulat Qazi. He wrote Sati Maina Lor Chandrani in local Bengali language in 1622. Mardan also appeared in the court of Thiri Thu-dhamma. He wrote Nasib Nama . Alaol , one of the Bengali poets living in Mrohaung in the seventeenth century contributed remarkably for the development of Bengali literature in Arakan. The other was Qureshi Magan who wrote a book named Chandravati. The influence of Bengali literary culture began to grow in the medieval period and the literary connection was further strengthened with the Bengali settlers in Burma⁶⁰. Among the Bengali settlers there were many well known literary personalities who had produced masterpieces from Burma. Their literary works were held in high esteem by not only the Bengalis but also the Burmese in Burma.

The most important literary personality who resided in Burma for a longer period from 1903 to 1916 was Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. He went to Rangoon in 1903 and started to stay with his uncle Shri Aghornath Chattopadhyay. His uncle was an established lawyer. He started to learn Burmese and law while staying with his uncle. He also secured a job in the Burma Railways in Rangoon. But the sudden death of his uncle changed the life of Sarat Chandra. The details of his professional life have been provided in chapter II⁶¹. His stay in Burma had opened a new chapter of mental awareness and outlook towards imperialism and the society which came in the forefront in his writings. In fact the literary qualities of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay were nurtured in Burma. He frequently changed his residence while residing in Rangoon. While residing in Rangoon he started visiting the Bernard Free Library regularly. He had a great pleasure in reading the European classics. He read books on Spencer, Zola, Tolstoy, Kant, Dickens and Bernard⁶². These readings had led to the definite shape of his writings from Burma. In 1912 he for the first time sent a novel from Rangoon named Ramer Sumati to Phanindranath Pal, the editor of the Bengali periodical Jamuna in Calcutta. It was published in 1319B.S. It was in Burma he started writing short stories like Chabi(portrait). In the short story all the characters were Burmese. He portrayed the hero Ba Thin in a period before the colonial rule when Burma was a free country. It was in Burma he started writing the famous novel Charitrahin(characterless). It was in the flat of Botataung that the manuscript of Charitrahin was completely burnt and he had to rewrite it. Interestingly Sarat Chandra resided in the Mistri Palli of Rangoon with the Indian coolies and countrymen⁶³. This stay gave certain values and observations which in future made him the most popular writer of Bengal. Burmese background was provided in the novel Srikanta. While residing in Burma he had gathered the idea for his novel 'Pather Dabi' which was banned by the British Government .Pather Dabi was written in the background of the Burmese jungles, social and economic exploitation of the Burmese poor labourers and its main character Sabyasachi , became a national hero. Pather Dabi had become a bible for the Bengal revolutionaries. The novel reflected the views and activities of the Bengal revolutionaries residing in Burma. His book made a naked criticism of the Burmese imperialism in India and Burma. The book was equally banned

in Burma and in India⁶⁴. Sarat Chandra was impressed by the Burmese women. In his Presidential Address of the Congress session of the Howrah Zilla Committee that on 14th 1922, entitled Swaraj Sadhanay Nari, he mentioned the active role played by the women in society, religious and economic field of Burma. He also mentioned about the high literacy rate among the Burmese women⁶⁵. Therefore, the writer rather began his literary career in the plains of Rangoon. He had number of Burmese friends⁶⁶ and it is understood that the effect of the Pather Dabi was equally felt in Burma and with the Burmese. May be that was the explanation for the ban on the book in Burma too.

Nabin Chandra Sen another important personality of Bengal literary field came to visit Rangoon. He was greeted by the local residing Bengali community in Rangoon which also included Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay⁶⁷. The detail of the visit and felicitation has been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Nabin Chandra Sen also began to reside in Burma in No.11, Yark Street, Rangoon during 1906. He maintained a close connection and association with Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous theatre personality. He wrote letters to Girish Chandra Ghosh appreciating and congratulating the nationalist play Sirajuddaula⁶⁸. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee while giving his presidential address in the Nikhil Brohmo Probashi Bangiyo Sahitya Sammelan held in 1937 has mentioned the name of Nabin Chandra Sen as an important Bengali personality present in Burma. The poet's son Nirmal Sen was a famous barrister of Rangoon⁶⁹. Sita Devi, the daughter of Ramananda Chattopadhyay, the famous editor of Probasi and 'The Modern Review' came to Burma in 1923. She was married to the renowned writer Sudhir Kumar Choudhury. She had spent six years with her husband at Rangoon. In her novels namely Parabhritika she had referred to the Burmese life and the beauty of the landscape⁷⁰.

The most significant of the visits of the poets was by Rabindranath Tagore in Burma. He visited for three times in 1916, 1924 and 1927. When the poet had visited Burma for the first time observed himself that as the ship moved up the Irrawaddy towards Rangoon, he

could see the row of kerosene-oil factories with tall chimneys along its banks as if Burma was lying on its back and smoking a cigar. Closer to the city, the long line of jetties were clinging to the body of Burma like so many hideous, giant, iron leeches. Other than the Shwe Dagon temple, Tagore did not find anything in the city that was distinctively Burmese. He lamented the cruelty of the goddess of commerce. 'This city has not grown like a tree from the soil of the country,' he wrote, 'this city floats like foam on the tides of time...Well, I have seen Rangoon, but it is mere visual acquaintance, there is no recognition of Burma in this seeing...the city is an abstraction...'. From Burma the Tosamaru traveled further east towards Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong. He was on his way to Japan⁷¹. He was greeted by the all races of Indians including the Punjabis, Gujratis, Bengalis, Biharis, and South Indians in Burma. There was also the presence of the Burmese too. Tagore was given a warm welcome by the residing Indians and Burmese in the Jubilee Hall of Rangoon. A huge crowd had gathered for the meeting. Among the Bengalis the well known was Shri. Ghosal, Dr. Raibahadur Sen who was the founder of the Bengal Social Club. Dr. Sen had been residing in Burma for at least thirty years. The gathering was emotional and joyful. One of the organizers of the meeting was Abdul Karim Jamal. A Burmese barrister U Ba Thein presented the Certificate of Honour and the Bengali presented version of the certificate of honour was read by the barrister and son of Nabin Chandra Sen, Nirmal Chandra Sen⁷². An enormous amount of letters and telegrams came to the poet and the most notable was a telegraph from the governor of Burma, Sir Harcourt Butler. Butler expressed his disappointment for not been present in the reception of the laureate⁷³. When Rabindranath Tagore visited Burma in 1916 Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay was residing in Burma. It was for some unavoidable reasons he had to come back to Calcutta and could not attend the felicitation programme of the laureate. It is been claimed by, Sri Girindra nath Roy , the biographer of the Sarat Chandra that Sarat Chandra had drafted the Certificate of Honour but it is not mentioned in any of the other biographies of the literary personality⁷⁴. In Rangoon he resided in the house of the barrister Shri. P.C. Sen who later became judge and Administrator General. The daughter in law of P.C. Sen, Smt. Sujata Devi was the youngest daughter of Keshab

Chandra Sen. Rabindranath Tagore had acquaintance with them for a longer period of time particularly during his visits in Calcutta⁷⁵.

U To Kyi was one of the important Burmese admirers of Tagore. The Burmese nationalists in fact admired the effort of Tagore in the creation of national education in Shantineketan. The Chinese settlers of Rangoon had also organized a reception of Tagore in which Taw Sein Ko, the Chinese littérateur projected Tagore as the source of inspiration for the education of humanity and Asian unity. Bhikhu U. Ottama was an ardent admirer of Tagore and considered him as the supreme personalities of the mankind⁷⁶. The visit of Rabindranath Tagore can be found in the book of N.C. Banerjee 'At the Crossroad' and also in the article published in the magazine Bashori by Jogindra nath Sarkar. Jogindra nath Sarkar had emphasized on the cultural activities of the Bengal Social Club in Burma and also that Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay as an admirer of Tagore. While promoting the Bengali culture and literature among the Bengali settlers in Burma Sarat Chandra had donated a copy of Rabindranath Tagore's Chayanika to the Bengal Club⁷⁷.

Tagore's visit in 1916 was not much of significance as he could not spend enough time in Burma. As he was on his way to Japan so his visit to Burma as he described that it as 'hurriedly visited'. The most important description given by him was that in the streets of Rangoon he saw the presence of the Bengalis, South Indians, Gujaratis, Punjabis and a very few number of Burmese. It seemed to him that the Burmese were the foreigners in the land. Rangoon to him was purely a commercial town and it did not impress him. But he found peace in the Shwe Dagon Temple as he felt it was a symbol of happiness, prosperity and luck of the Bengali household. He was highly impressed by the Burmese women. He compared them with the Santal women who are hardy and tough. He considered the men as lazy and dependent on the women. The women are powerful and free⁷⁸.

In 1924 he again planned to visit China and on his way he came to Burma. The Rangoon Mail, one of the leading newspapers of Burma gave the coverage of his visit on 23rd March 1924. The paper appreciated and praised all the literary works of Tagore and also the social works namely rural development, social reformation and national education. It stated that 'may we in India and Burma rise to a proper comprehension of Rabindranath's message and his work. In honouring such a personality, in helping the cause which he holds so dear, Burma will only be honouring the best in her own soul.' Three meetings were organized in Burma namely All Party Meeting in the Jubilee Hall, a Bengali Reception at the Sooneram Hall and a Chinese reception in Kemmendine. All the reception had the hall fully packed. The poet was honored not only by the Bengalis but by all races of Indians including Punjabis, Gujaratis, South Indians, and others which highly impressed the poet. He was named as the cultural exchanger between the Indians and the Burmese. The Bengalis gave a reception in Soonaram Hall and it was arranged by Shri Mohit Kumar Mukhopadhyay, the head master of the Bengal Academy and the literary personality Sudhir Choudhury, the son in law of Shri. Ramananda Chottopadhyay. The president of the reception was Shri Nripendra Chandra Banerjee. The girls of the Bengal Academy had presented an inaugural song and the Certificate of Honour was presented by Mr. Moazzam Ali. The Rangoon Daily News has given the description of his visit in details on 28th March 1924. The third visit of Tagore was in 1927 while going on the voyage to South East Asia, Java, Bali, and Borneo, etc. his companion was the linguist Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay⁷⁹.

The visit of Rabindranath Tagore in 1927 was a story of dishonour and humiliation. It revealed the inner feuds of the local Bengalis in Burma. There was an association named Indo-Burma Federation which had handful of Bengalis, Burmese and other races of Indians as members of the organisation. Tagore was supposed to be the honoured guest of the Federation. But when the ship named Avamaru which was boarded by Tagore appeared in 1927 in Rangoon none of the members of the organisation was present. Though there was a huge gathering of men, women and children of other races and

nationality. There were also Bengalis who did not belong to the Federation. Since there was unavailability of proper host in Rangoon Tagore had to spend his nights in the ship. The Federation invited well known personalities of Rangoon to tea with the laureate. In that occasion the poet spoke on 'Greater India' (Brihottoro Bharat). He spoke in Bengali but the gathering mostly consisted of non- Bengali men. It is interesting to note that most of the Bengalis present there were well versed in English. However, the Bengali students of Rangoon had organized a reception and gave opportunity to the masses to see the poet. Tagore spoke on unity, brotherhood and condemned the internal feuds and conflicts of the Bengalis. The present crowds were disheartened with the poet's speech. The poet left Rangoon the next day. The poet's visit revealed shame for the Bengali settlers in Burma⁸⁰.

Sudhir Chandra Sarkar mentions in his memoir *Aamar Kal Amar Desh* about his visit to Burma. He visited in Rangoon in 1920-1921. By that time Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay had left Burma. He was accompanied by Charu Bandopadhyay and Sudhir Choudury. He mentions about the large number of Bengalis present in Burma. The Bengalis of Burma had organized a reception in favour of the literary personality Charu Bandopadhyay in Bengal Academy. Sudhir Chandra Sarkar was also invited. The arrangements were made by the local Bengali settlers. It is evident that the Bengali settlers had often organized programme in the Bengal Academy⁸¹.

Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay, the well known writer with the pseudo name Banaphool has given a description of his visit to Rangoon in his autobiography titled 'Paschatpat'. He was invited by the Bengali settlers of Rangoon to honour the writer as the President of the Bengali Cultural Conference, 1957. He was received by Shri Manoj Mukhopadhyay, a relative of the writer and an agent in the Rangoon United Commercial Bank. The Conference was presided by Shri. Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay. There were two other sections particularly the literary section was presided by Shri Probod Kumar Sanyal and the other was the musical section which was presided over by Abbasuddin Ahmed, the

eminent Bengali folk singer. He was a representative of the East Pakistan Government of 1957⁸². Shri Suniti Kumar Chatterjee was also invited as an honoured guest by the Bengalis of Rangoon in the Sahitya Sammelan . He had emphasized on the need of the translation of the Burmese books into Bengali particularly of History, art, drama and religion ⁸³. The Bengalis organized such programmes were most probably annually. In Rangoon there also took place Banga Sahitya O Sanskriti Sammelan. The Bengalis and other communities in Burma did not hesitate to spend money and the tickets though priced high from Rs 10 to Rs. 101 were mostly sold. The halls were always fully packed with the lovers and admirers of Bengali culture and literature⁸⁴. It seems that the Bengalis in Burma had crossed the political boundaries while preserving the culture of the country in the far off lands. Moreover, there was also a presence of a huge number of Bengali populations from East Pakistan particularly from Chittagong, Noakhali and Kumilla. The Bengalis remained tied up with the same bond of oneness irrespective of the political separation after 1947.

The Bengalis in Burma thus maintain a strong cultural group in Burma. They had successfully cultivated the cultural hold in Burma celebrating the main religious activities as well as the literary and artistic doings. Bengal had been in the nineteenth and the twentieth century at a time the main cultural hub of India and the Bengal reflected the growth of literature, drama, music and other cultural activities during this period. Sociologists generally believe in the trend of the migrant or diaspora community to cling to their culture more strongly in the foreign land than in the motherland. In cultivating the culture the migrant Indians cling to their culture so ostensibly that sometimes it seems that they are more Indian in their cultural orientations and practices than resident Indians in India. This was also reflected in the activity of the Bengali community in Burma but there was a healthy cultural impact on the Burmese culture due to the presence of a large number of Bengalis in Burma. The impact seems to be on the literary, artistic and also on the religious side.

V

There were cultural exchanges and the western educated nationalist Burmese drank the spirit of cultural renaissance of Bengal. They read books and took ideas from the educated Bengalis in Burma. These middle class Bengalis were present in Burma in various works particularly Government services and as lawyers, doctors, engineers and other professionals. They discussed the problems of the colonial rule and the rich cultural heritage of both countries. The Burmese intellectuals were equally eager to receive and organize get-together for the reception of the Rabindranath Tagore when he visited Burma. It is more likely to mention that there a huge flow of the Burmese youths in Bengal particularly in Calcutta for the study of medicine in Calcutta Medical College and also in the Calcutta University. This flow for education continued till 1920 when the Rangoon University was established. In 1911-1921 the Burmese immigrants into Bengal was 2,361 and out of that 952 were in Calcutta⁸⁵. It increased slightly in 1921-31 when the Burmese people were 2381 with 1,461 in Calcutta. There was further increase in 8,152 in 1931. The Burmese immigrants were present in other districts but it was much high in Calcutta as the Burmese youths mainly came to Calcutta for higher education. There was presence of Burmese youths particularly for the purpose of higher education and they were not only influenced by the political ideas but also in the intellectual awakening of Bengal. These Burmese youths after they arrived in Burma became the educated middle class and were influenced and inspired by the Bengali culture. The University of Calcutta started its Pali course. Satish Candra Vidyabhusan, a pupil of famous Sarat Chandra Das, the writer of the famous book about Tibet, *The Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, was the first scholar to obtain the M.A Degree in Pali at Calcutta. He assisted Sarat Chandra Das in making *Tibetan Indian Dictionary*⁸⁶. Other names of Bengali intellectuals who vigorously promoted Pali were Haraprasad Shastri, Benimadhav Barooah, B. C. Law and Nalinaksha Datta. Benimadhav Barooah visited Burma in 1920s⁸⁷. Professor Stella Kramisch, eminent art historian, who taught in Calcutta University, also visited Burma⁸⁸. Calcutta during this period also experienced a new age

in her relation with Burma. It was Sir Asutosh Mukherjee who promoted the Calcutta University as one center of Buddhist studies.

It is further interesting to note that the cultural influence was also felt in the Rangoon University. The Rangoon University was in fact a branch of the Calcutta University until 1921 and remained an off shoot of the Indian Education Service till 1937. Even then half of the students who attended were from Myanmar or Burma and none of the senior faculty was from the country⁸⁹. Most of the teachers were Indians and a large number of Bengali teachers came to Rangoon University to take classes either as permanent teachers. There were numerous professors namely Professor of English was Bhaumik Kabyanidhi, Professor of History, H. K. Chakraborty Professor of Chemistry, B. Banerjee⁹⁰ and Muhammed Siddiq Khan as lecturer in Political Science⁹¹. There were many visiting professors for the purpose of imparting knowledge in the Rangoon University. Niharranjan Ray, the professor of Fine Arts and Culture and the Professor of Ancient Indian History had spent 1927-1933 in Burma working with his teacher Benimadhab Barua on the Buddhist architecture and Burmese temples. It was in Burma he did his groundwork for the integrationist approach to history which he perfected in his *Banglar Itihas* published in 1949⁹². Further Professor Ashutosh Sen, the Professor of Chemistry at the Dhaka University was a visiting professor in the Agricultural College in Mandalay while taking a leave from the Dhaka University. Amartya Sen, a well known economist and the noble laureate wrote about Burma that "It is difficult for me to talk about Burma without a deep sense of nostalgia. My memories are all of Burma, where I grew up between the ages 6 to 13. My father was a visiting professor at the Agricultural College in Mandalay, on leave from the Dhaka University. My first memory of striking natural beauty is that of sunrise over the Maymyo hills seen from our wooden house at the eastern edge of Mandalay. It was a thrilling sight even for a young boy. Mandalay was a lively city in the 1930s and Burma a magically beautiful country. The richness of the land and the Burmese people to be happy and friendly shone brightly the restraining lid of British colonialism".⁹³ It is not unlikely that these educated teachers have not influenced the newly western educated

Burmese youths. Shri. Harinarayan Chattopadhyay in his book named Arakan has described that the principal character of his novel Lun Pe who was a student of Rangoon University and was inspired as well as close with Bengali teachers and friends. The relationship was strong and healthy but soon the Thakin Dobama movement changed the scenario of the Bengalis who utilized the English language as the official language of Burma. But the Dobama movement wanted the Burmese to be the national official language and therefore, they fought for the cause. These led to the tensions between the Bengali settlers and the nationalist Burmese youths⁹⁴.

Rabindranath Tagore had inspired almost poets all over the world and Burmese poets were no exception. The Burmese poets and intellectuals had a relation with the Bengali intellectuals. They were guided and moved by the great personality in their literary life. The visit of Tagore in 1924 had an immense impact on the poets of Burma. Tagore had a talk with Jaiya, one of the Burmese poets. In the meeting there were forty Burmese monks. There were journalists and many other important Burmese personalities namely U Ba Chow, U Pakhau Cha, E Ba Khayin, U Ba Pakhyi. Jaiya wrote in his memoirs about the interaction with the poet that he did not know any of words spoken by him but he could understand everything. The Burmese writer Min U Bhei wrote in his book 'First Burmese' that the students of Rangoon University read the writings of Rabindranath Tagore with much interest and attention. The contemporary students of the university were Taipan Mauyun, Bha Jodathein, Mintu Tu Bhun. When the poet received the Noble Prize the Burmese too expressed that they were proud that a poet from Asia has received the highest prize. The Burmese poets namely Chi Paun and Maun Thai have considered Tagore as a shining star in the sky of Asia. Tagore is a symbol of power and knowledge⁹⁵.

The national education of Rabindranath Tagore was a great inspiration for the Burmese. They supported national college and education. The young poets and literary personalities, artists like Kodaw Hmaing, socialists like U Pakhau Cha and many others. The Dobama movement also adopted national education as one of their agenda for the

national cause. The writings of Kodaw Hmaing had similarities with Rabindranath Tagore. The principles of the both personalities had many similarities and Hmaing was known as the Tagore of Burma. Hmaing supported the Tagore's decision to give up the title of knight as he was against imperialism⁹⁶.

The influence and popularity of Tagore can be further understood when in 1948 his writings were translated into Burmese. The most notable among the translated works were *Gitanjali*, *Sonartari*, *Spulinga*, etc. These were translated by Maung Pakhaung and Niyun Chu. In Burma the Mandalay Poets Association with members like Tin Maw, Maung Thein E, Chi Aung, were also influenced by the poet. The poets of Burma used names in the novel of Tagore in their works. Chi Aung has used such names in her novels. The romanticism and realism of Tagore were reflected in the writings of Dawgon Tai, Min U Bheiya, Tin Maw and others. The ideals of humanism and politics had influenced the modern women Burmese writers like Nag Bheiya Tabir. However, the influence of Tagore was felt not only in the literary field but also in education and idealism. The Burmese artists and painters were similarly attracted to Tagore and Shantiniketan⁹⁷. The Rangoon-based artist Bagyi Aung Soe (1924–1990) has been regarded by fellow artists as a pioneer of modern art in Burma. Influenced by precepts practiced at Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan, he elaborated an original painting approach and style synthesizing diverse artistic approaches, which neither adhered exclusively to the European or Burmese artistic tradition nor regurgitated twentieth-century Western artistic innovations. Min Thu Wun. This leader of khitsan movement was inspired by the renaissance of Indian art at the beginning of the twentieth century driven by artists like Abanindranath Tagore. Having met Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and learned of the Nobel laureate's vision for his Shantiniketan he sought a suitable candidate who could bring about a similar revival in traditional Burmese art to send to study Shantiniketan. In July 1951, a young illustrator from Rangoon, Aung Soe (1924–1990), left for the Shantiniketan with a scholarship from the Indian government after a farewell party held in his honor and attended by prominent figures of the literary circle such as Zawgyi. Aung Soe was enrolled at the Kala-Bhavan (Department of

Painting). His gurus included Nandalal Bose, Abanindranath Tagore (who died a few months after Aung Soe's arrival on campus, in December 1951) and Ramkinkar Baij (1906–1980). Despite his ultimate signature style resembling little of his teachers' work, not only is the Bengali spirit constant throughout Aung Soe's writings, he continued to quote or reminiscence on specific aspects of the Shantiniketan in exchanges on scrap papers with friends and students right into the last decade of his life. He also signed "SANTINEKETAN" in Burmese and Roman letters on both his illustrations and paintings⁹⁸.

The Burma muluk was very dear to the Bengalis who in fact did not consider the land as a foreign place. A large number of Bengali writers and poets were present in Burma and they included Burma in their writings and literary works. Shri. Prabodh kumar Sanyal had been in Burma for along time⁹⁹. Burma was very loved by the Bengalis particularly for the literary class. Banaphul or Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay has described in his autobiography the visit to Burma. He has written about the pathetic and painful travel of the Bengalis from Burma in his novel 'Dana'¹⁰⁰. We further have literary personalities like Sailesh De's Tin Adhyay which describes the painstaking and dangerous travel of the evacuees from Burma to India¹⁰¹. Hironmoy Sen's film 'Burmar Pathe' gives a better picture of the Bengalis in Burma. The film was released on 29th August 1947. It had in casting Ahindra Choudhury, Chaya Debi, Sailen Pal, Samar Roy, and Kali Bandopadhyay. It was produced by Universal film Corporation. The story was set in the backdrop of the Second World War and the attack of the Japanese bombers. It truly revealed the problems of a Bengali family while returning from Burma through the jungles of Assam. The story was written by Hironmoy Sen¹⁰². Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay had visited Arakan which he has described in his writings¹⁰³. These literary personalities had engraved a cultural development of the Bengali settlers in Burma and it is not unlikely that they have placed an impact on the lives of the Burmese in Burma. U Nu, the prime minister of the Burma had visited Calcutta in 1960. He was accompanied with his wife. He stated about the Bengalis that in his school and college days there were many Bengalis residing in Rangoon. Many of them were teachers in the

schools. He had Bengali teachers in schools and colleges. His wife had Bengali friends and got together with the Bengali girls. She could read Bengali. She was closer with some of the Sengupta families in Rangoon. These were the days before the Second World War. He was very close to the Bengali population influenced by the Bengali culture and residing Bengalis in Burma¹⁰⁴. The influence of the Bengalis who were mainly the literary class of the period in India had a deep influence on the educated people of Burma. The result of such sway on the life of the educated Burmese was the growth of the Khitisan movement, a literary movement among the Burmese in Burma. The Burmese movement though not successful but it definitely led to a change in the literary world of Burma. The 'renaissance' if it is stated in a limited sense then it can be studied that the Burmese literary change took place much late than the Indian. While the Indian intellectuals were caught up in an accelerating attempts to master, adopt ideas imported from the west to meet the needs of their own country, the Burmese were still seeped in their traditional ways. The second half of the 18th century and the greater part of the 19th century was a period when the Burmese literature flourished in traditional forms and contemporary imports adapted into classical mode. Therefore, there always remained in Burma a traditional process which had used elements from neighbouring culture specially India to diversify and enrich the Burmese culture. As a result the spirit of the 18th century social liberalism and intellectual skepticism which had triggered of renaissance in India passed to Burma and is still proudly attached to her tradition¹⁰⁵.

The main reason for delay of the renaissance in Burma was the absence of the harmful practices and crippling inhibitions of Hinduism that had driven some of the young groups in Bengal in the total rejection of the religious practices and heritage in India. The Burmese society on the other hand, imbued with the spirit of Buddhism was considerably free from social injustices. It had no rigid caste or class stratification. Moreover, women enjoyed rights and privileges. The practice of monastery education provided a basic education for all the people and therefore there was a high percentage of literacy. An important development in Burma was the foundation of the Young Men's Buddhist

Association in 1906 by the group of students in Rangoon College. The founder of the Y.M.B.A represented the early generation of the Burmese who had grown up after the fall of Mandalay and received their education in the English oriented schools. Just like the Young Bengal in Bengal .This group of the Burmese began to despise and drop the Burmese ideas. One such Burmese was May Oung whose lecture 'The Modern Burman; His Life and Nation' had not only assimilated and adopted the new ideas but substituted them for the old ones .¹⁰⁶

Round about 1930 there was the first modern literary movement in the history of Burmese literature, which began at the University of Rangoon, which came to be known as the Khit-san Sarpay Movement (Time-Testing Literary Movement). The platform of the movement was the Ganhta-lawka magazine ("The World of Books"-1924) that was published and edited by retired commissioner Mr. J.S. Furnivall (1878 – 1960) under the slogan "With bricks fallen, we shall rebuild with stone," with the help of his scholar friends at the University of Rangoon, aiming to encourage young Burmese writers and scholars on the campus¹⁰⁷ Kodaw Hmaing well known poet of the Burmese has been compared to Tagore of India by the Burmese. Such comparison is valid if nationalism is defined in its political sense of the term. Tagore inherited much of the renaissance quest for the social spiritual values which could ensure India's integrity in the modern world. Hmaing was closer to Tagore being a man of thought and his writings were on the contemporary events which had any bearings on the nationalist developments in Burma¹⁰⁸

Another epoch making development was the foundation of the Burma Research Society at the stance of J.S. Furnivall in 1910. A similar case can be sighted in Bengal which led to a large extent the growth of the Bengal Renaissance was the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal which later became the Asiatic Society of India. This organisation had immensely contributed to the growth of the cultural movement in Bengal. The Burma Research Society wanted to create such a situation in Burma that the

heritage of the country could be examined in the light of modern leadership¹⁰⁹. The Khitisan writing however represented the fusion of the Burmese and western scholarship achieved by the teaching of the Burmese into the westernized higher education system. But the renaissance in the true sense could not take place in Burma. Aung San has rightly commented that, "There were no Ram Mohan Roys, no Tagore, no Nehrus, people with the wealth and leisure to peruse knowledge, to travel to set standards cultural refinement and intellectual excellence"¹¹⁰. However, there were not only similarities with the Burmese literary awakening with the Bengal renaissance and the adoption of the Burmese in the western style, practices and inhibitions were due the presence of the Bengali educated class in Burma.

The Bengali immigrants in Burma thus craved out for themselves a separate identity in Burma particularly in their cultural aspect. There were important developments of the Bengali population residing in Burma in the cultural field due to the presence of important and strong personalities like Rabindranath Tagore's visit which created a strong bond between the Bengalis and the Burmese who equally and eagerly organized the reception of the poet. The presence of the personality like Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay gave a special and powerful cultural foundation of the Bengalis in Burma as there were regular cultural programme and he resided among the working population of the Indians. He also had Burmese friends. Moreover, the frequent visits by the Bengali theatre and writing personalities gave a new enthusiasm to the local Bengali residents. Durga Pooja and the establishment of temples were the other features of the cultural aspect of the Bengalis in Burma. However, the educated Bengalis in Burma had an influence on the lives of the Burmese in Burma. An interview with Indrajit Ganguli says that the Burmese also accompanied the local Bengalis in the ceremony of the idol immersion of Goddess Durga and they also went to the temples of the Bengalis¹¹¹. The cultural ties led to a strong bond between the both countries and the both communities.

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CHAPTER-VI

THE NON –BENGALI INDIAN COMMUNITY IN
BURMA: THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND
CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPACT
ON BURMA

The story of the immigration of the Indian community other than the Bengalis in Burma had begun from the pre colonial times. The inflow and outflow was continuous process in the pre-colonial phase. In Burma there is evidence of the Indians from the East and the West Coasts, establishing trading ports as early as 3rd century A.D., traveling through sea-routes¹. But a steady inflow of Indian immigration began from 1852 after the signing of the treaty with Burmese monarch. By the treaty Lord Dalhousie got the right over the province of Bago. Rangoon became the de facto capital of the British Burma. Thereafter, full scale Indian immigration began into Burma. The steady flow of Indian immigration began from 1852 onwards. The Indian immigration into Burma was largely owing to the geographical location, unified and closely intertwined historical processes. In the nineteenth century the British encouraged and made conscious effort to transfer the Indians into Burma. The details of such British policy have been discussed in Chapter II. Thus the migration included skilled and unskilled labourers for rice cultivation, construction projects like roads, railways and other public works. The Indian labours were required for clearing of jungles and expanding the British Empire.

I

With the passing of the Labour Act in the 1870s, the Recruiting Agent appointed in India and the subsidies provided to the shipping companies to transport. The prospect for employment and trade soon became so attractive that Indians no longer needed Government assistance to transport the Indians. In 1886 the Famine Commission of India reviewed the position and recommended to transfer Indians from the congested areas to the unproductive and waste lands². The Indian community was very less before 1838 increased during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus by 1881, Indians were 66,000 in number in Rangoon i.e., roughly about 44 per cent of the city's population at that time. In 1901, the number of the Indians in Rangoon increased to 130,000 i.e., about half of the population of that city. In addition, thousands of Indians, migratory or

seasonal labourers, passed through Rangoon which was their main port of entry or exit. During the period 1852-1900, Rangoon became a city with two and a half of Indians and soon it looked more of an Indian city. It became the main centre from where the Indians moved to different places in Burma³. It eventually surpassed the 100,000 mark in 1901, constituting nearly half the total occupants of the city. The free and unregulated immigration of Indians during the entire period of British administration resulted in the steady increase in the absolute number of Indians in Rangoon⁴.

With the Government's encouragement and the recommendation of the Famine Commissioner the British Government had sent two zamindars from India to Burma to establish estates where their own people could take up as agriculturists. The lands would be given to them. Two such estates were by Mylne at Kyauktaga in Pegu district with 27,506 acres of land and the other by Jai Prakash Lal Bahadur at Zeyawaddy in the Toungoo district with 15,000 acres of land. In Kyauktaga at least 10,000 agriculturists were settled most of them went from Fyzabad of Uttar Pradesh and in Zeyawaddy 3,500 agriculturists settled mostly from Shahabad in Bihar⁵.

The immigration went unchecked in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. The table below clearly indicates the growth of the Indian population in Burma. The Indian immigration was high in Burma as the Rangoon became the world's second largest migrating port. The Indian immigration to Burma was also depended on the harvest season of both Burma and in India. The immigrating population to Burma was most of the times seasonal as the agriculturists migrated during the harvest time to earn a bit of higher wages in the foreign land. Sometimes there was semi-permanent migration. This population did not remain permanently in Burma but they maintained a steady contact with their homes in India and they came back to their homeland at irregular intervals.

TABLE -6.1
GROWTH OF THE INDIAN POPULATION IN BURMA

YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION OF BURMA	INDIANS IN BURMA	PERCENTAGE OF INDIANS IN BURMA
1872	2,747,148	1,36,504	6.9
1881	3,736, 771	2,43,123	6.5
1891	7,722, 053	4,20, 830	5.4
1901	10,363,613	6,05,619	5.4
1911	12, 115, 217	7,45,425	6.1
1921	13, 177, 855	8,81,357	6.7
1931	14, 667, 497	1,17,825	6.9

Source: Census of India, 1921, Volume -X, Part II, p-6; Census of India, 1931, Volume-XI, Part-II, p-260; W.S. Desai, India and Burma: A Study, Calcutta, 1954, p-23

Most of the cases they did not take their families. Such instances can be found among the Bengalis and the upper caste strata of Uttar Pradesh ⁶ The Indian population mostly migrated including Bengal from the states of Uttar Pradesh (United Province), Bihar, Orissa ,Tamil Nadu(Madras)and Andhra Pradesh ⁷.The presence of the Indian population was more in the Lower Burma than the Upper Burma. Probably the reason was due the expansion of the colonial rule was first felt in Lower Burma than in the upper Burma. Moreover, lower Burma had access to the sea ports than the upper Burma. Another probable reason was the growth of the rice cultivation in the Lower Burma made it a rich province than the Upper Burma which attracted larger number of the Indians to the country. The Indians made Rangoon the centre of their settlements but gradually they had spread to the other provinces of Burma. Rangoon became virtually an Indian city and this was felt by Rabindranath Tagore when he visited Rangoon. The table below will clearly indicate the number of the Indians present in the city of Rangoon.

TABLE-6.2
THE POPULATION OF THE INDIANS AND BURMESE IN RANGOON
(1872-1941)

YEAR	NUMBER OF INDIANS *	INDIANS AS A PERCENT	NUMBER OF BAMAR*	BAMAR PER CENT
1872	16,000	16	70,000	70
1881	66,000	40	67,000	41
1891	87,000	48	73,000	40
1901	119,000	48	81,000	33
1911	165,000	56	90,000	31
1921	187,000	55	105,000	31
1931	212,000	53	128,000	32
1941	280,000	56	160,000	32

* The numbers have been rounded to the nearest hundred

SOURCE: Data for the years 1872-1931 are from W.S. Desai, *India and Burma: A Study*, Calcutta, 1954, p-31. For the year 1941 see Them Maung, *History of Rangoon*, Rangoon, 1942, p-193

The Indians immigrated to Burma in large numbers and mostly they were from Madras, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. The large part of the immigrants was skilled, unskilled and agricultural labourers. There were also Indian immigrants in the civil services, government jobs, businessmen and other works. Particularly after the establishment of the vernacular schools in Burma the Indians started to settle down permanently in Burma. The immigrants were given protection from the colonial rulers. Those working on the plantation estates were paid more and enjoyed comparatively better health and educational facilities. Burma was as Indian province under the British rule. Until its separation in 1937, the Indian community in Burma was legally not even an alien community and enjoyed all the privileges and rights of full citizenship. The situation had changed after 1937 as a result of the growth of anti-Indian sentiment in

Burma since 1930⁸. Ethnically the Indians became strong group in Burma by 1931. The following table indicates the ethnic composition of the population in Burma.

TABLE 6.3
POPULATION OF BURMA BY ETHNICITY, 1931

ETHNIC CATEGORIES	POPULATION
INDIGENOUS (including Mon, Burmese, Karen, and Others)	12,680,052
INDIAN	1,017,825
CHINESE	193,589
INDO-BURMAN	182,166
EUROPEANS AND ANGLO-INDIANS	30,851
OTHERS	3,039
TOTAL	14,647,756

Source: Government of Burma Handbook, Simla, Government of India Press, 1944, Table -A, p-6

The Indian immigrants to Burma other than Bengalis were the Chettiars from Madras and other traders and businessmen from Bihar and Orissa who went and established big commercial establishments including money lending operations. They invested in the expanding economy of Burma, like rice cultivation and made huge profits. They established a considerable control over the economy of Burma. Traders and investors from Gujarat, Madras and Orissa went to Burma. Socially the majority of such immigrants were high caste Hindus but some Muslim immigrants also belonged to this group. There was another section of the immigrants who were the middle class

intellectuals and professionals like engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, clerks etc. They filled the vacancies of the colonial bureaucracy and the expanding social services and the administration. Their familiarity with the English language, rules, procedures of law, and practices gave them an added advantage and they dominated the administrative services. Moreover, the Burmese were not used to the English rules and languages. It is to be noted that there no English education in Burma before the nineteenth century and therefore the Burmese could not compete with the Indian middle class educated gentlemen. But even after the expansion of the university in the 1920s and 1930s the Burma did not have a strong and vigorous middle class as in India. There was another class of immigrants from India which consisted of the skilled and unskilled labours. They were largest in number and lowest in their economic and social status. They mostly belonged to the lower castes of the peasantry from the surplus labour in South India and Bihar an of course, Bengal. Besides agricultural labourers, they consisted of scavengers, construction workers, rickshaw pullers, domestic servants and others. Their numbers fluctuated according to the economic condition in India⁹.

The Indian immigrants dominated in their respective economic activities in the countries settlement. This was because they received protection and privileges from the colonial masters and they had better skills and expertise as India was developed earlier and in higher levels. There was not much superiority in the Indians as compared to the native Burmese but they had to survive in the new land for further economic development with limited opportunity and therefore they were more sincere in their work and took to hardships. Thus they became more capable and efficient than the Burmese¹⁰.

II

The Burma provided opportunities which led to influx of a large number of Indians in Burma. Among the Indians other than the Bengalis it was 60 per cent from Madras from the period 1881 to 1901. Relatively a small amount of people migrated from Bombay,

North Western Provinces, Oudh, The Central Provinces and Punjab. Indian immigrants from Madras were from the districts of Thanjavur, Ganjam, Godavari, Vizagapatnam, Madras City, South Arcot, and Krishna. There were also migrants from Puri in Orissa, from Shahbad, Patna and Saran districts in Bihar.¹¹ Bhagalpur, Gaya and Nilgiri were the places from where the migrants came to Burma. From Orissa the migrants were mainly from Ganjam, Cuttack and Puri. United Provinces the migrants came from Benaras, Gorakhpur, Agra, Allahabad and Lucknow.¹²

The Indians took to various professions like the immigrants Bengalis. The kayasthas from North India and the Brahmins held a large share of the posts filled by the Indians in the provincial government. Rajputs and the Sikhs were the prominent in the Indian regiment of the army and the police force. Members of the professional classes were drawn from the numerous caste groups from among especially the Brahmins. The financial and mercantile sectors of Burma's economy was shared by the Tamil Chettiyars, Telegu Chettis from the South India and Marwari banias from North India. The Indian agriculturists in Burma were men of the low caste mostly the Kurmis from Bihar. There were Ahirs and Gwalas from U.P. and Bihar. A large number of the low caste Tamil and Telegu took the work of the labourers. The low caste Hindu women were found in Burma particularly from Orissa. The high caste group monopolized the bureaucratic professions and the white collared jobs were monopolized by the high caste Hindus. The agriculturist of Tamil and Telegu districts of south India were the most oppressed in India. They were the early migrants in Burma. These low castes received economic opportunities and social mobility in the new country. They could earn much higher wages in agriculture and industry. Moreover the Indians could get jobs easily. With the high wages they could buy land, support their families and purchase cheap consumer goods. Most of the Indians remitted large sums of money to their relatives in India. In the 1930s remittances by money order averaged to 3 million rupees annually¹³.

With the growth of the rice cultivation and rice industry it was found that the Burmese labourers were scarce. Burmese cultivators turned to Indian labour to carry out tasks such as the construction and repair of bunds, ploughing, transplanting of seedlings, harvesting and threshing. The cultivators also increasingly became reliant on the Indian Chettiar money lenders to finance their activities ¹⁴ Apart from the fact that the Burmese peasants were unwilling to work under harsh conditions for meager wages in towns, Indians preferred. It was largely the South Indian labours who carried the harvests, manned the industry, cleared the forests, built roads and constructed the sewage system in Burma. The vast majority of the Telegu labours were engaged in the ninety per cent of the unskilled jobs in Burma. In fact they had formed the single largest group of the unskilled labourers in Burma. The south Indian labourers mainly worked in the oil refineries, rice mills, ship industries, saw mills and harvesting. The Rangoon Gazette wrote Rangoon alone has 80,000 labours out of which there were 55,000 Telegu workers. They works as sweepers and mehters. This class was absolutely necessary as under no conditions the Burmese would work as dhobis, sweepers and mehters ¹⁵. It is necessary to mention that the agricultural and other construction and industrial labourers were under the maistry system. But there were also free labourers who were not under any kind of the contract. The details of the maistry system have been given in the chapter III. It is interesting to note that among the south Indians there were women who migrated to Burma. They largely belonged to the Bhogam or Kalavantulu Caste of the devadasis of south India. These Telegu speaking women were prostitutes who dwelt in the slums of Burma and survived there because of the single men who received recreation after long hours of hard labour in Burma. ¹⁶

Further South Indians were as financiers playing the role of the money lending caste. They were primarily important for the regional supplies of credit in the expansion of export production in Burma. The Chettiyar financial networks were based on a complex structure of the independent family firms that under took money lending and commodity trading activities. in this flexible partnership structure, members of the family could hold the partnerships in many different firms. Each partnership operated through a system of

overseas agents who were usually young partners. In Burma the chettiars were the wealthiest of the Indian groups.¹⁷ Also see Like the Chettiars, the Gujaratis also developed a financial trading system throughout Burma. They operated as bankers and merchant bankers and their letters of credit (hundi) issued in one region could be cashed in another. The Gujaratis were traders in textiles, silk, and cotton from Ahmedabad and Baroda and in exchange for rice and teak from Burma. Ibid p-82-83 The Parsis also migrated into Burma from Gujarat. They were prominent ship builders and set up merchant houses in Burma.¹⁸

James Baxter provides a list of the occupations which the Indians were engaged in Burma in 1931. He has classified the Indians in 1941 as working dependents and earners. The earners were defined as persons whose income represented a considerable portion of the amount required for their maintenance and included members of an earner's household whose time was largely spent in assisting him in his work such as a son who habitually helped his father in the fields. Working dependents were persons who returned an occupation but whose income did not represent a considerable proportion of the amount required for their maintenance¹⁹. The table 6.4 gives a picture of the distribution of the Indians and Burmese in the various occupations. Baxter provides the details of the percentage of the Indians and the indigenous people in the various professions in Burma. However, we find the Indians engaged in metals i.e. tin mines in Namtu, northern Shan States and Mergui and Tavoy. The Indians were in the various oil refineries. Indian owned spinning and weaving mills. The Indians were also labours in the transport and loading or unloading of goods in the mills. They were engaged in the wood industry as businessmen and labours. The Indians were also metal workers, in ceramics industry, chemical products, oil refinery, rice industry, food industries, dressmaking and tailoring, as carpenters, electricians, security personnel like guards or night watchman, in domestic services as cooks, butlers, water carriers, leather workers, barbers, washer man, milkmen, printers, gardeners, shoe-shiners, baby-sitters, bookbinders, printers, jewelers, and sweepers.²⁰

TABLE-6.4
THE PERCENTAGE OF THE INDIANS AND THE INDIGENOUS RACES IN
THE VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS IN 1930

OCCUPATION	PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF INDIAN	PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS RACES
Ordinary	3.9	-
Cultivation of special crops	5.1	88.2
Food industries	26.0	70.9 (100, 416)
Metal working	28.7 (6,202)	59.7 (12, 886)
Industries of dress, toilet	26.1 (19,957)	68.3 (52,103)
Trade	17.3 (96, 211)	73.3 (408,445)
Road Transport	35	58.4
Labourers on roads, and bridges	37.5 (11, 764)	49.9 (15, 688)
Building industries	400.9 (5,381)	50.9 (6,699)
Exploitation of minerals	41.6	55.0
Ceramics industry	6.5 (812)	92.9 (12, 505)
Those occupied in toilets, cafes, restaurants, including hawkers of soft drinks and foodstuff	26.4 (19,735)	61.6 (46, 145)
Banking insurance and exchange	57.6 (6,290)	29.6 (3,226)
Post offices, telegraphs, and telephones	57.5 (20, 311)	21.9 (6,072)
Labourers (excluding sweepers) on railways,	69.3 (9, 4680)	29.4 (4, 024)
Transport by water	51.3	45.1
Rice pounders	53.1 (33, 630)	44.0 (27, 982)
Occupation dealing with chemical products	53.7 (9,802)	43.4 (7,916)

Source: James Baxter Immigration Report, 1941, p-145-146.

There was a class of white collared men who took up the services in Government department as clerks, jail wardens, trained accountants, postmen, telegraphers and postmasters and in railways. The Indian were also doctors in the Government and private medical centres allover Burma. There were Indian teachers in the schools and university of Rangoon as the educated class of Burmese was not adequately available in Burma²¹. The details of the amount of salary received by the Indians have been discussed earlier in the Chapter III.

There are references of important Indians as capitalists and well known businessmen. Among the Indians in shipping industry there was the Scindia steam Navigation Company which traded along with the British India Steam Navigation Company. Factories were also owned by the Indians. N.R. Chakraborty names a few Indians owning factories in Burma. He mentions of Indians owning five engineering factories, 51 saw mills, 190 rice mills, 3 vegetable oil mills, 24 cotton ginning factories, and 28 other factories. The biggest hosiery factory of Burma was owned by an Indian Muslim, Jewanalal owned the aluminum factory at Insein, and Adamji Haji Dawwodd owned the largest match company in Burma. Nath Singh Oil Company had oil installations and refinery at Yenangyaung and many more Indians were present in Burma as important businessmen earning a huge profit.²² Thus the Burmese failed to compete with the Indians in trade and business. The Marwaris were very successful in Akyab, Moulmein who were engaged in shops, cloth trade, rice and flour mills, timber and wholesalers. Bhagwan Das Bagla was a millionaire who went to Burma and settled in Rangoon.²³ The most important was the Chettiars of South India who are the banking community took the role of local financiers. They became the money lending class in Burma. The Chettiars first settled in Moulmein and gradually spread their activities in the other parts of Burma.²⁴ Gradually they became one of the richest communities of Burma. The Indians were successful in petty jobs too. Moreover, the Indians filled the posts in the expanding British administration. The offices of the Public Works department, Accountant General, Railways, Post Offices, Hospitals, were mostly filled with the Indians of Bengali and

south Indians. A list of names has been provided by the India List and India Office List of Great Britain, 1905. It names Khan Bahadur Cowasji Jamshedji Lalkaka as the postmaster General in Rangoon in 1895. He had entered the service in 1871. The record of services of India office mentions the name of Sorabji Hormasji Dantra , the M.D. Lieutenant Col. Indian Medical Service , who was in service as civil Surgeon in the Medical Department in Burma in 1876. He was the civil surgeon in Tharrawaddy in 1878 and as a surgeon in Mandalay from 1890 -1903. It also mentions of Godrezji Dorabji Pudumji who was the assistant Accountant general in Rangoon in 1898. Govind Dinanath Madgavkar was in Burma as the Assistant Commissioner as Indian civil servant in 1897. Mr. K. Anwar hussain was a temporary engineer in the Public Works Department in Rangoon in 1903. Major Bawa Jewan Singh was the superintendent and Medical Officer of the jail in Rangoon. We have another name of Edulji Planji Frenchman, the Lieutenant Col. who was the inspector general of jails in Burma in 1879. He retired in 1881. He held various civil surgeons in Burma. He was the Inspector general of jails in Burma in 1920 and remained till 1903. Under the medical department as on 1903 there were Indian surgeons named Kanta Prasad M. B. Indian medical Services in Rangoon.²⁵

Burma was very dear to the Indians as there are numerous references of well known Indians in Burma namely C.V. Raman first started his research work at Indian Association for Cultivation of science while he was still working in Indian Revenue services in Burma or Rangoon²⁶ . We get further names of some well known Indians namely Mr. Makhan Singh, the proprietor of the Pegu Medical Hall, Pegu. There were Ganga Singh, the Government Contractor, Dhana Singh, the managing Proprietor of the Indian Engineering Co. Builders and Contractors in Rangoon and Hazara Singh the Assistant engineer of P.W.D. of Mandalay in 1930s.²⁷ Bhavani Joshi was taken to Burma by their uncle. He studied in Bengal Academy and Rangoon University. In 1936 he was appointed as civil assistant Surgeon in Burma Medical service. He was posted as assistant to the first surgeon and Professor of surgery during the raids in Rangoon in 1941 and 1942. He married Ratna Sundari Misra , one the first female doctors of Burma . He was

appointed as the officer in Nyanglabein, Mandalay and Moulmein. He became a surgeon of Rangoon in the general hospital in 1942. In 1948 he was appointed as General Surgeon of Union of Burma.²⁸ Dr. Veraswami was a medical doctor in the jail in 1911 when Bal Gangadhar Tilak was imprisoned in the jail²⁹. In 1897, Lala Parabh Dial was an Accountant on permanent and pensionable establishment. He worked in the Rangoon and Toungoo Divisions, passed an examination in the Burmese language and got a reward of Rs 180/-. He was admitted to the exclusive Freemasons Lodge at Toungoo as a member, and later promoted to Master mason and elected Secretary and Treasurer of Rangoon³⁰.

There were innumerable Indians of the other communities had been in Burma in various professions like the Telegus, Tamils, the Hindusthanis (including the people of the United Provinces, and Bihar) and the Oriyas were a large part of the Hindu community in Burma. They were sixty percent of nearly 1, 80,000 Indians in Burma. The rest of the Indians were Gujaratis, Marwaris, Mohammedans, Punjabis and Sikhs³¹. The Indians who came to Burma invested in the expanding economy of the country and contributed immensely for the development of the country's economy.

III

The economic development of the country of Burma was largely the contribution of the Indians. The Indians were the largest alien community in Burma. The Indians settled in the expanding rice cultivation, construction works, public works and others. Under the British control the industrial expansion was so rapid that it attained prominence as centre of great industrial and commercial activity. During the period from 1900 to 1930 the number of the factories had increased by 65 per cent, while the number of persons had gone up to 43 per cent.³² Rice fields, paddy processing industries, mineral oil and refineries, saw mills and timber yards, ports and harbours became the main source of employment for the Indian labours. The Indian labours were found as the toiler and

drudge in those occupations which were labeled as disagreeable and disrespectful and mostly forsaken by the local Burmese. The Indians could take up work uncomplaining and the hardships but the Burmese could not. Burma could not have built her splendid railway systems, cleared her inaccessible forest domains and transformed them into smiling fields, operated her factories amidst fumes and high temperature but for these patient, long suffering, obedient, faithful and grateful but much maligned sons of India. Indian labour was much more in demand than the Burmese labours and therefore, the Indians dominated in the labour market of Burma. The labours were mostly from Tamil Nadu, Madras, United Provinces and Bihar³³.

The Indian immigrants namely the Punjabis, Gujaratis, South Indians, Marwaris, invested their capital in the establishment of the factories, industries, rice mills, shipping industries, and others. In turn they helped in the urbanization of the country and development of the country of Burma. Rangoon a developing city of the British colonial period was largely the work of the Indians. The properties sold by the colonial masters were bought by the Indians and it is seen that 27 per cent of the Indian population was in Rangoon. The lingua franca of Rangoon was Hindustani. They bought the rice mills, shipping companies, industries and became one of the flourishing communities of Burma. As there were large opportunities in Burma even the petty businessmen and the middle class entrepreneurs went to Burma to try their fortune. The Indians had the strongest hold on the export trade in the country. The Indians controlled almost trade in all commodities except minerals, rubber plantations and oils. The exports of the trade in Burma had reached to the value of Rs. 4,800 lakhs before 1942 and the Indians controlled Rs. 2,500 lakhs. By 1940 the share of the Indians in the import trade had also increased by 50 per cent. The Burmese merchants could not compete with the Indians in business and capital investments³⁴. During the years 1931-1938 Burma exported 214, 000 tons of teak annually and the Indians were owners of the saw mills, labourers, agents and capital investors of the timber trade. Besides the prominent capitalists, businessmen and the workers and labourers there was another class who contributed immensely for the

modernization of Burma namely the white collared job holders like the clerks, doctors, engineers, teachers and other servicemen in the railways, banking, insurance and postal and telegraph services. They also contributed for the growth of the British rule and the expansion of the process of modernization in Burma. Rangoon in fact turned into an Indian city with Indian languages spoken as the local language. The establishment of the various vernacular schools was the most important reasons for the settlement of the Indians in Burma permanently.

The Census of India 1931, Volume XI, Part II shows that 4 per cent of the total working force in agricultural and its allied fields constituted Indians. In exploitation of minerals, Indians were about one third of the total work force. In industry they occupied about one sixth posts. In transport about 50 per cent places were held by them. In trade Indians' position was slightly less than one sixth. There were 13,995 Indians out of 30, 816 in the public force which included army and police. In the sphere of the administration there were 13,822 Indians out of 44,867. In professional lives which included medical, law, teaching, etc. out of 1, 98,890 Indians were 90,418. In domestic services Indians occupied 60 per cent positions. It shows that with the exception of agriculture, Indians in other fields as a single community were the biggest. In comparison to the Burmans their position was much better. In rice industry which was the main stay of the Burmese economy only 34.8 skilled and 22.1 per cent unskilled positions were occupied by the Burmans whereas the Indians constituted 50 per cent. The picture in the saw mills, engineering and the textile industries was also better.³⁵

Out of the total 511 establishments Indian ownership and managements were on 109 establishments. There were 43 saw mills, 61 rice mills, owned by the Indians in Burma. In the rice industry, the larger mills were owned by the Europeans with an ownership of 500 employees. Medium sized with 50 employees were owned by the Indians. In the export and import trade it was the same picture and in the timber trade it was the similar. The Indians generally owned the Medium and small sized firms and the large ones owned by the Europeans.³⁶ In agriculture the picture is not clear as there are not much sources

to define the position of the Indians but in Pegu more than 36 per cent and in Insein 44 per cent agricultural lands were under the Indians. This shows that in general there was a strong position of the Indians in agriculture.

The most important of the Indians in Burma was the Chettiar community. They were the Banking community originally from the Chettianad of Madras. They took the role of the local financiers of Burma. The newly occupied and developing industry in Burma needed capital and it provided a great opportunity for the Chettiars to play as the financiers. They saw for good business and profit and greatly encouraged finance agriculture. Most of the chettiars until 1930 were spread over Burma, Malaya, Ceylon, and Indo-China. The Chettiars were operating in Burma through their organisation named Nattukkotai Chettiar Association. The Association was a member of the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Chettiars in 1826 were informal moneylenders among their compatriots in small Burmese towns. Their operations were not properly organized and were on a very small scale. In 1929 there were 1650 Chettiar firms operating all over Burma. There was highest concentration of the firms in the Lower Burma which came to 1443. The concentration in the Lower Burma indicates their involvement in the financing in the rice cultivation. The agricultural loans provided by the Chettiar firms were principally the crop loans and the long term loans. According to the Burma Bank Enquiry Committee Report, the total amount of crop loans required annually for the whole of Burma was around Rs.20 crores and this amount Rs.16 crores were utilized in Lower Burma while the 4 crores were required in Upper Burma.³⁷

The financing of the agriculture being the major occupation of the Chettiars and rice being the major agricultural product of Burma, the Chettiars naturally banked on the paddy lands. Most of the 1,100 Chettiar firms in the districts were therefore, located in the 13 main rice growing districts of Burma. The non -Chettiars could also open accounts in the Chettiar banks. The banks could transfer the money into the accounts of the Imperial Bank, Lyods Bank of New York and other European Banks. By 1930 they had 1650 representatives' offices in Burma. The Chettiars also gave lend to the Burmese

lenders in less rate of 2% per month which was in turn given in lent to the peasants at a higher rate of interest of 3% to 4%.³⁸

The money which was collected as capital by the Chettiars was spending on financing the agricultural products. The rate of interest was 12% in case of gold. In cases of land mortgage it was 24%. The rate of interest was higher in Burma. Besides the Chettiars there were the Telegu Chettis, Gujaratis, and Marwaris who were also engaged in the financing business. The Chettiar firms used to honour cheques, changed money and accepted documents and valuables for the deposit. Actually, the farmers needed money for the expansion of cultivation and seasonal requirement. The prices of rice and other products were high so borrowing was profitable. The credit standing of the borrower was high to qualify for fresh borrowing and both the outflow and inflow of the business being high both the borrower and the lender was happy.³⁹

Up to 1930 the Chettiars were interested in the lending business but not in the acquiring of land. But after the depression world wide the Burmese lands were acquired by the Chettiars. The Chettiars also established saw and rice mills.⁴⁰ But after the depression particularly from 1930-1942 a large amount of lands went into the hands of the Chettiars. The agricultural land in Pegu and the Irrawaddy Divisions held by the Chettiars rose dramatically in the depression years. In the following year 1931-1932, the Chettiars foreclosed on perhaps a further 440,000 acres and in 1932-33 it was 320,000 acres of lands which kept on increasing in the following years.⁴¹ It needs to be pointed out that the process by which the Chettiar moneylenders became landlords was not pure chance or accident, as is quiet often made out by works on the Chettiar classes, but the result of the logic inherent in their credit system. Since the bulk of Chettiar operations were in the Irrawaddy region, it may be reasonably assumed that they loaned against the best land and when the repayment was defaulted, the Chettiars took possession of the lands⁴². Though the Burma Legislative Council passed various relief measures and a land Alienation Act was also passed 1939-40 which prohibited the transfer of the lands from

the farmers to non farmers. But it was too late The Land Purchase Bill further created confusion which was passed in 1940 for compulsory acquisition of lands from the landlords and opposed by the Chettiars. The Chettiar investment was not \$57 million in 1941-1942 which was a great loss as the Japanese nor the British allowed them to function in the preoccupied lands.⁴³ During 1942 they left their lands and went back to India. But the Burmese nationalist leaders and the newspapers were directed against the Chettiar class as the blood sucking leeches that deprived the Burmese indigenous classes from their lands. Moreover, they have been projected as the class who deteriorated the Indo-Burma relationship. They have been considered as Indian colonial exploiters within the British colonialism. But the fact remains that without the financiers like the Chettiars it would be impossible to bring the agricultural development in Burma. The rice boom created in Burma was largely the contribution of the Chettiar class and their banking system. The amount of the wealth possessed by the Indians can be understood by the tax paid by them as given in the following table:

TABLE-6.5
ETHNICITY AND INCOME / SUPERTAX PAYMENT IN RANGOON, 1931-32

ETHNIC GROUP	TOTAL TAX PAID IN PER CENT
BURMESE	0.52
INDIANS (NON-CHETTIARS)	10.70
CHETTIARS (URBAN)	2.70
CHETTIARS(RURAL)	12.09
CHINESE	3.49
EUROPEANS	70.35
OTHERS	0.23

SOURCE: Robert Taylor, the State in Myanmar, Singapore, 2009, p-126

Thus the Indians had a larger share than the Burmese and they contributed for the modernization of Burma in the colonial period.

IV

The political development of the Indians in Burma can be studied in the presence of the Indian revolutionaries and their close contacts with the Indians in Burma. The Burmese looked towards Indians and the Indian National Congress for the inspiration and the techniques to be used in the national movement. Many of the Indian nationalist leaders were highly popular in Burma. The presence of the Bengali nationalist in Burma has been discussed in the earlier in chapter IV and their contacts with the Bengalis in Burma. The presence of the Indian revolutionaries other than the Bengalis is mainly the presence of the Ghadrites in Burma. The Ghadr had organized its secret cells spread over the country to direct the revolutionary activities. They were the first batch of the Indian revolutionaries who planned an outpost in Burma. The Ghadr movement started to develop with the beginning of the world War I. The ghadrites moved to various places in the Far East including China, Japan, Siam, and Burma. They preached the about the oppression of the British rule and in doing so some of them took jobs in the country. By 1912 they formed associations and subscriptions were collected. They published a mouth piece named The Ghadr or the Mutiny. It was published from San Francisco. The Ghadr members appeared in Burma particularly in Rangoon, Mandalay, Maymyo, Pyawbaw and Hanza a station near Thози. They operated from these places against the colonial rulers⁴⁴.

The presence of the Ghadrites was known in 1915 through a letter in Singapore from Mujtaba Hussain. The letter contained the address of a Ghadrite. There was another person named in the Report was Mulchand. He had been given death sentence in the Mandalay Conspiracy Case. In June of 1915 a big bundle of Ghadr literature was discovered in Burma. The addresses were of Ali Ahmed and Fiam Ali. They were engaged in organizing secret societies. There were also other revolutionaries who escaped

from Singapore and came to Burma was Sohnlal Pathak. They came from Siam to Burma and settled in Rangoon. They used a Post Box of Rangoon G.P.O. and the number 340.

The Ghadr parties in Burma were engaged in the tampering with the military police. The Ghadr paper used as the cover of the Jehan -I-Islam .Abu Saiyad , one of the teacher in Rangoon in 1912 had prepared the Urdu version of the Jehan _i_Islam .The paper was prohibited in colonial areas as it was anti -Christian and anti colonial. The paper was prohibited under the Sea Custom Act. There was a close connection between the Ghadr and the Jehan I-Islam. The Mandalay conspiracy Case of 1916 showed a close connection between Hardayal , Rashbehari Bose and Barkatulla Khan. .⁴⁵ Mohanlal one of the Ghadr was accused of the Mandalay and Burma Conspiracy Case in 1916. He was hanged in 1916.⁴⁶

There were a Sikh community who migrated to Burma for the purpose of military and police service, business and private firms. They had close contacts with the Ghadr party in Burma. They also gave support to the I.N.A. movement on Subhas Chandra Bose. The Sikhs in Burma formed Khalsa Diwan in 1917 in Myamyo under Ganga Singh who worked in the Jail Department. The Sikhs had relations with the Ghadrities in Burma.⁴⁷

Besides the Sikh community the Gujaratis and the Oriyas and the Telegus also were involved in the national movement of Indian and they also supported the cause of the national struggle in Burma. There was an Afghan group residing in Burma particularly in Rangoon. They had cooperated with the Ghadr members. Bhupendra Rakshit Ray mentioned in his book that Khirodgopal Mukherjee was given an important task and this could be done with the collaboration with the Afghans residing in Rangoon.⁴⁸ Khirodgopal was given the work of receiving letters from an advocate in Bangkok named Kumud Mukherjee and in turn he would send it to Bhupendra Ray in Calcutta . Jadugopal

Mukherjee was arrested for having contacts with one of the Afghans named Masidi , who was involved in exporting arms and ammunitions from the far East. It is to be noted that Khirodopal Gopal was the elder brother of Jadugopal Gopal Mukherjee, who was went to Rangoon and had a close tie with Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay.⁴⁹

There was a Muhammedan secret society which planned a rising on the occasion of the Bkhr-Id in October 1915 when the English were to be killed 'instead of the goats and cows'.⁵⁰

Besides the influence and contacts with the revolutionaries the Indians in Burma had also followed the non violent path of the Indian National Congress and the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. The Burma Provincial Congress Committee was formed in 1908 under the leadership of Dr.P.J.Mehta with the support of some of the Indians in Burma. There was a relationship of the Burmese nationalism with the Indian nationalists. U.Chit Hlaing the mentor of the Burmese nationalist maintained association with Dr. Mehta. The Provincial Congress Committee in Burma was formed with a view to harness the Burmese and Indian nationalist sentiments for a common struggle.⁵¹ The visits of Mahatma Gandhi for the three times had also cultivated the political lives of the Indians in Burma .His visits were significant in the way that they gave an impetus to the national movement in Burma and the growth of nationalism among the Indians in Burma . On 10 March 1929 while a visit in Rangoon he gave a speech to the Gujaratis to open a Khadi Bhandar and to use khadi clothes. He urged them to open schools. He wanted the Indians of Burma to be just like Andrews who being an European had got intermingled with the Indians and took the cause of the Indian welfare in the similar way the Indians in Burma should take up the cause of the welfare of the Burmese. They should be like the sugar in the milk dissolving with the fluid and be one with the Burmese nationalism. He also came for the raising funds for the poor and starving Indians in Burma. He went to Rangoon, Moulmein, Thaton , Paungdau, Prome, and Mandalay. He was welcomed by the U Paw Tun in the reception given by the pongyis in the Shwe Dagon temple and U Chit Hiaing who was also a Congress member by the Congress Committee in Rangoon. He also gave a speech

to the students in Rangoon where a purse of Rs 1000 was presented to Gandhiji. He urged the Burmese while a letter to a friend in Burma that the Burmese to seek out the supplementary industry to agriculture and revive the lost industry of swadeshi. Gandhi preached swadeshi urging of the boycott of cloths of foreign manufacture, he addressed women in particular urging them to discard foreign silks and English umbrellas for homespun longyees and paper parasols. In a speech to the students in Rangoon he told them to be the real patriots.⁵²

Gandhi recognized the Burmese women as the producers and consumers of Burmese made cloth and parasols by the time third longest and last visit to Burma in 1929. The Burmese nationalists were inspired by the ideal and message of Gandhi and after his visit U. Ottama urged a boycott on the foreign cloth and promoted homespun clothing in counter point barrister who dominated the Burmese nationalism in the 1910s and this tactic was adopted by the Thakin movement. Gandhiji had himself adopted a kamauk , a hat wore by the Burmese farmers s a symbol of swadeshi.⁵³ Two prominent traditional nationalists named U Ottama and U Wisara aroused the discontent of the people over the taxes they had to pay to the government and over the presence of rich foreigners in Burma. U Ottama preached the concept of non-cooperation and the boycott of the reforms on the on the pattern of the Congress. With the support from the Indian nationalists from India the Indian settlers in Burma cooperated with the Burmese people. Thus by the 1930s the Burmese nationalists had taken inspiration from the Indian nationalist and the Indian settlers in Burma belonging to the various communities had cooperated and taken part in the nationalist movement in Burma. The Indians in Burma had a connection with the Congress and they contributed to the raising of the funds in Burma by Gandhiji for the Daridra narayan seva in India. During the Burma's struggle for independence after the war, Indians who remained in Burma and the people of mixed percentage sided with the Bamar majority and supported all civil disobedience campaigns led by the independence movement, the Anti Fascist People's Freedom League. The national leader, Aung San, himself recognized the contribution of the Indian community and promised equal opportunities for all citizens in independent Burma.⁵⁴ Thus the Indian

settlers not only inspired the Burmese but also cooperated with them in this freedom struggle.

V

The cultural development of the Indians other than the Bengalis in Burma is a very significant chapter in the history of the Indian immigration and settlement. The various communities namely the Tamils, Telegus, Gujaratis , Sikhs , Punjabis, and others had developed a separate identity of themselves in Burma. The Indians had formed separate schools, clubs, social get together and various places of worship. The important associations in Burma were Arya Samaj Temple in Rangoon, All Burma Hindu Central Board in Mawlamyine, All Burma Hindu Central Board in Kyauktaga, All Myanmar Hindu Religious Society, All Burma Tamilian Association , Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, Bazam-e- Gulshan –e- Gulshan –e-urdu, Burma Muslim Organisation , Purohit Mandal, Sikh Temple , Sanatan Dharma Sevyam Sevak, Geeta Pracharani Sabha , Lathia Sevashram, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Trust, Mahatma Gandhi Prayer hall, Mahatma Gandhi Prarthana Sabha, Sri Hanuman Temple, Zafar Shah Dargah Trust . The Islamic Religious Affairs Council, The Andhra Mahajan Sangham, The Muslim Central Fund Trust and The Jamait Ulema El- Islam. The Hindus and well as the Muslims had established associations all over Burma from Rangoon, Mandalay, Zeyawaddy, and other places where their number was quite high. The Tamils from the South had also organized a library named Vemana Library. There was the Christian and the Parsi community in Rangoon. A Parish Council was established upper Phansodan Street in Rangoon.⁵⁵

The first Arya Samaj was established in Mandalay in 1897 followed by Rangoon in 1899. The work of Sanatan Dharma Swayan Sevak Sangh was inaugurated in Burma in 1950. Both are formed in all Burma contexts with branches all over Burma ⁵⁶. The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Rangoon was formed in 1930; there were twenty-two Arya Samajs in Burma. The separation of Burma from India in 1937 was a setback for the Arya Samaj

and the onset of the Second World War completely disrupted its activities. On 14 April 1952, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Rangoon was revived by Pandit Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya who was visiting Burma from India. Other Arya Samaj preachers came to Burma and the Arya Samaj was reinvigorated. In 1959 the Satyarth Prakash (Light of Truth) was translated in Burmese language together with other Arya Samaj literature. The Annual conferences started to be held in different centres where Arya Samajs were based

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There are many temples in Rangoon built by the Hindu Indians particularly by the Tamils who established a Kali temple in Rangoon. There were Hindu Dharmasalas which provided temporary lodging to the Hindus. There was a Satyanarayan Mandir which organized a free dispensary in its premises. There were regular pooja sessions and traditional bhajans and Gita were sung and read in the temples which were generally under the super vision of the trust.⁵⁸ The affluence of the Tamil population was felt in the presence of Dandayuthapani temples in Burmese towns, primary schools and the circulation of two newspapers named 'Rasika Ranjani' and 'Thondani' in Burma. These magazines were banned by the Burmese Government in 1966. The Tamils had two Catholic parishes. The Chettiars maintained Thendayuthapani temples in 32 towns of Burma. The Tamils also imported Tamil movies and screen them in Burma.⁵⁹

Another milestone in Rangoon was Khalsa A.V. School whose foundation was laid by Dr. Randhir Singh, a Sikh philanthropist on February 24, 1934. Most of the Sikhs belong to Punjab. They are engaged in import and export of textiles and other consumable goods. Mr. Hundal was a family who worked as ship building contractors and owned some shares in Burma oil Company. The Gurudwara of Rangoon is built by a group of Sikh soldiers in the British army. They approached the British Government of Burma in 1893 and in 1897 the foundation stone was laid in the presence of Rai Bahadur Jhanda Singh, Sarmukh Singh and Krishan Singh of the 7th Burma Battalion. The Sikh community maintains its own temple and a free dispensary at Theinbyu Street in East Rangoon.

There were All Burma Sikh Religious Council and Central Sikh Missionary which worked as the primary organizations in Burma ⁶⁰

There is a Bhagwan Das Cementry at Hledan which provides essential services to the community. There is also a gaushala or cattle sanctuary at Bauktaw, where a sanctuary for cows and other animals has been maintained with public support. The All Burma Hindu Students Society based in Rangoon with a membership of several students stresses the need to foster the religious and cultural awareness, unity and mutual understanding and promote the welfare of the Hindu students. A house for the Hindu orphans has been operating from Thingangyun with the public support and encouragement from the The All Burma Hindu Students Society. It has been instrumental in setting up this ashram. ⁶¹

There was The Burma Hindu Religious Organization and The Burma Hindi literature Organisation which organized various programmes on literature. They sometimes organized recitation of poems. After independence these institution continues to function with practically no change in its structure but the names changed from Burma to Myanmar. The Indian embassy often helps to organize such programmes of the Hindi Literature Organisation in the post independent period. There is Burma Hindi Sahitya Sammelan which organizes the literary programmes in Burma ⁶².

A little Bihar was created by the Biharis in Zeyawaddi , a heartland of Myanmar between the city of Mandalay and Rangoon. The Biharis are at present the resident of the area. The area has the posters of the Hindi film actresses and actors. The Nam Phar Lon in the Zeyawaddi is occupied the Tamils and Nepalese. They are mostly the descendants of the Indian soldiers of the Second World War. Many of the areas of Mandalay and Rangoon was inhabited by the Indians. There is a Gandhi Hall in the area where Hindi lessons are been given to their children so that they do not forget the language of the ancestors. Every year they celebrate the religious festivals like Dussehra, Chat Pooja , and Diwali.

Janmashthami and Holi is also celebrated with all the residents from India namely the traders, owners of small restaurants and road side stalls, jewelers, and professionals such as doctors and teachers. The chairman of the town committee named U Aung Myint said that there is a cordial relationship with the Burmese and local people with the Indians even after the nationalization and anti Indian sentiments in the post independent period. In Mandalay, there is the presence of a small Manipuri community. The Indian Consulate was set up after independence in 2002 with Mr. O.P. Bhutiani as the head. This in a new step towards filling the gap which existed after the 1960s.⁶³

The Oriyas or the men from Orissa generally migrated as skilled labours or as bureaucrat in the Government offices. They also maintained Hindu temples and organized get together among themselves. Much recently, the department of history at Ravenshaw University, released the book *Memory, Images, Imagination: An Anthology of Bangla and Oriya Writings on Colonial Burma, 1886-1948*. The anthology has been edited by Jatin Nayak of Utkal University and Parthasarathi Bhaumik of Jadavpur University, and published by Jadavpur University, Kolkata. The book focuses on the relations between Orissa, Bengal and Burma and how Burma was an important destination for Oriyas, who went to improve their lot, during colonial rule. Some of the Oriyas who settled in Burma created a little Orissa and they published books and magazines in Oriyas. The book speaks about the happy as well as bitter experiences of these people, which found expression in autobiographical accounts, travelogues, stories, poems and novels. The book helps us to construct the history of the Oriyas in Burma in the colonial period.⁶⁴

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CHAPTER VII

IMPACT OF THE POST INDEPENDENT POLICIES ON THE
BENGALIS IN BURMA (MYANMAR)

The independence in Burma in 1948 is a significant event for the Burmese as it brought freedom from the colonial rule but it was equally important for the Indians who were residing in Burma. It was a time to come back home. The relationship of the Burmese with the Indians had begun to deteriorate with the anti-Indian riots of the 1930s and the separation of Burma from India. Further, the fear of the Second World War with the occupation of Burma by the Japanese provided the message to the Indians that it is the time to go back home. There was a huge exodus of the Indians including the Bengalis from Burma to India during the period of the Second World War. Some of the Bengali families remained back in Burma adapting them in the process of nationalization. But the establishment of the military rule after the assassination of the Aung San, then U Nu and the coming of General Ne Win in 1962 the Bengalis went into a period of insecurity without any protection of their rights and privileges. There began the second exodus of the Bengalis to India during 1964. A large section of the Bengalis came back to Bengal and resettle in Bengal.

I

The split in the relationship between the Indians and the Burmese began with the anti-Indian riots which took place in Burma. The strikes of the Indian labours in the Rangoon Port in 1930 are the beginning of the anti Indian strike in Burma. There were about 5000 Indian labourers employed in the port and they wanted the rise in the wages paid to them and called a strike on 8 May 1930. The stevedores brought the Burmese labourers as a substitute to the Indian labourers. The Burmese were not employed because they were not inclined to do such work and they also could not take the hardships like an Indian labour. They did not find their work satisfactory, the Burmese were not so expert and the port remained congested with the ships as the cargoes could not be cleared soon. Thus the stevedores settled with the Indian labours in a rise in wages. And the Burmese were dismissed with the calling of the Indian labours in the work. But the Burmese workers

were enraged and humiliated and they came and attacked the Indian workers. Soon the violence took the shape of an anti –Indian character capturing the whole of Rangoon. It led to the killing of a large number of Indians.¹ The anti –Indian riots and the anti – Chinese riots took place in Southern Burma in the 1930 and 1932 were later mixed up with the Saya San Rebellion and further the anti –Indian riots took place in 1938. Partly as a result of this the volume of the Indian immigration fell off sharply from 777,000 in 1929 to an average of 483,000 in 1933- 38.²

It was the Depression that brought matters to boiling point. In 1930 and 1931 many Burmese peasants, artisans, and small traders lost their livelihoods. They were forced on to the labour market to compete for jobs with low paid Indian labour. Many had their lands in the hands of the rich Indians or the 'kalas'. Others resented the way in which Indians were marrying the Burmese women.³ The Bengalis were identified as the exploiters and severe competitors of the Burmese in the white collared jobs, as teachers , doctors, clerks and others. The Chittagonian Bengalis were the hardy workers who often married Burmese women. Their off springs were known as the zerbadis. The Indo-Burmese marriage first emerged as a public concern in the early 1920s as an agenda of the leading women's nationalist organization, Wunthanu Konmaryi Athin ,a subsidiary branch of the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA).⁴

The Burmese considered the Bengalis particularly the Bengali Muslims as the exploiter of not only the riches and wealth of the land but also the betrayer of the Burmese women. There is a song, Dobama (We the Burmese) said ' , The Chinese and the Indians are fortune hunters, not content with our money and lands, they have gone off with our mothers and sisters too". The law of the Burma protected the Burmese women's property rights but if the Burmese women married an Indian Muslims, then the male members of the husband's family inherited the property under the Indian law. This led to savage inter community hostility. Tensions had gradually developed in the 1930s. There were fierce anti –Indian riots in 1930 and scuffles and outbreaks throughout the decade. There are evidences that the Buddhist priesthood and the sleazy politicians who held the office in the late 1930s encouraged their supporters to attack Indians. .⁵The circumstances in

which the two Indo-Burmese riots were precipitated were different from each other. The first broke out as the result of an emotional outburst from unlettered and ignorant classes of manual labourers of both nationalities. The Second one resulted from religious controversy. Among the instigators were the free lancer writers, a moulvi, and supporter of the Islamic faith, a press owner and some fanatical Buddhist monks.⁶

The immediate occasion of the outbreak of hostilities between the two communities was the publication of the novel, *The Abode of Nats* by Maung Htin Baw in July 1938. The Buddhist monks also took the suggestions seriously and they met in a meeting on July 26, 1938. There were speeches delivered at the meeting and focus was made on the Burmese-Muslim marriages. There were processions and some started throwing stones in the Soortee Bara Bazar. The first clash of the Indo-Burmese riot occurred between the Burmese and police rather than the Muslim and Buddhist fanatics.⁷

The riot raged in Rangoon for a week. By August 1938 it had died down but terrorism had spread to the districts. By the August 17 it was officially announced that rioting had ended. But the fresh incidents of riots broke out in September 2, lasting until 9 September. The areas most affected by the riot were from Mandalay to Rangoon. Deaths totaled to 1,227 with about three million rupees worth of property destroyed at Rangoon and over 2 million in the districts.⁸ These riots definitely had an impact on the Bengali settlers in Burma. They understood that the Burmese aim was to frighten the foreigners away and get their jobs in the mines, docks, and rice fields. The Burmese ministry was bent on setting a limit to the immigration. A system of registration was started particularly for the workers who had lived in Burma for some years. The anti-Indian riots gave a warning to the Bengalis to return to their homeland. The estrangement of the Indo-Burmese relationship was the declaration of the separation of Burma from India by the Act of 1935 which came into effect from 1937.

II

The ethnic Burmese waged their struggle for the state through the Dobama Asiayone (Our Burma Association) founded in 1930 in the aftermath of the four days of anti-Indian rioting in Rangoon.. As this group moved to the forefront of the nationalist, anti-colonial movement in the 1930s, it targeted a new foe i.e. the Indians and the Chinese groups who collaborated with the British imperialists. It also collaborated with the indigenous class who were also friends of the British.⁹ The separation of Burma from India is an important chapter in the growth of nationalism in Burma. The good days of the Bengali immigration soon faded out with the development of the slogan 'Burma for the Burmese'. In 1929 the Simon Commission recommended the separation of Burma from India as the only solution. Dyarchy was established from 1923-1937. The British suddenly realized that Burma was not a part of India in culture, food, language or dress. In 1934, a joint select committee was formed for the purpose of preparing a constitution on the basis of the recommendation given by the Simon commission. The Select Committee recommended that the Burmese were different from the Indians and therefore a separate constitution was drawn in 1935 and it came into force on 1 April, 1937.¹⁰

The nationalist leaders of Burma were divided among themselves over the separation question in 1929. Some of the nationalist leaders regarded the separation as a step that was to retard the constitutional progress of Burma. A loudly vocal section led by Dr. Ba Maw proclaimed that if Burma was separated from India her rate of constitutional progress might be slower. The G.C.A.B.A (General Council of All Burmese Associations) wrote a letter to the British Prime Minister, Secretary of State for India , and Chairman of the Round Table Conference protesting against the recommendations of the Simon Commission. U Thein Soe , the President of the G.C A.B.A pleaded that Burma would be benefitted from the being a part of India .¹¹ The British officials and non-officials and the Burmese separationists have tried their best to convince the world that the Burmans are unanimous in demanding the separation from India. The nationalists

like Bhikhu Ottama have all along opposed the separation. The G.C A.B.A also condemns any scheme of the Government which does not satisfy the majority of the masses whose ultimate goal is independence. The G.C A.B.A and the other nationalist organizations were against the separation and issued pamphlets in order to educate the masses. The Europeans wanted to separate Burma from India in order that it may be exploited and domineered over by them, unchecked by Indian public opinion.¹²

There was another group mainly the Separation League consisting of the representatives of the Karen National Association, People's Party and British Burma Association wanted the immediate separation of Burma from India. They had submitted a memorandum for the separation. They considered that the Burma should be for the Burmese and they showed the loss of the Burmese lands to the Indians, the Burmese women to Indian Muslims, employment of the Indians in the Government services and the financial loss in terms of tariffs and overseas payments. The Burma Round Table Conference was held in 1931 in which the Indians particularly S.N. Haji demanded for the minority member of Burma should have the right to make an appeal to a Judicial Tribunal and final appeal to the highest authority in Britain against any decision of the Indian executives, including the Governor. N.M. Cowasjee wanted the prevailing system of communal electorate should be continued. In the Conference there were six delegates who supported the separation and five were against separation. So nothing could be done to check the separation.¹³

The Indians resented the separation of Burma from India. In 1935 the first All Burma Indian Conference was held which was presided by M.M. Rafi, an ex Mayor of Rangoon. The Conference vigorously protested against the Separation. This further alienated the Burmese. The Dobama by this time changed into anti-Indian and aggressive nationalist party. The leadership was now in the hands of the new generation namely Thakin Nu, Thakin Mya and and Mr. Raschid. They called a strike in the Rangoon University in 1936

and the president of the Students' Union was Thakin Nu and the vice president was Aung San.¹⁴ Thus the story of the migration of the Bengalis in Burma started to wear out in the 1930s and 1940s. The Bengalis came in Burma for financial fortune and to try their luck in Burma now thought of coming back to Bengal. The anti Indian feeling was reflected against the Indians in Burma and the effect was seen in the immigration of the Indians. The number of the Indian immigration started to decrease. The Bengalis also decreased from 1930 to 1940. Moreover those Bengalis settled in Burma soon realized that it was not safe and secure to remain in Burma with their rights not protected. Their interest in Burma started to decrease. The Government of Burma Act 1935 and the Order in Council passed an order which came to be known as the Government of Burma (Immigration) Order 1937. This regulated the Indian Immigration into Burma. Moreover the Indians were not given the any special electorate in the Burma Legislative Council. The Rangoon Municipal Bill 1940 proposed that 50 per cent of the Councilors of the Rangoon Corporation should be Burmese. But the Indians were paying 50 per cent of the taxes of the Corporation. The Burmese nationalist parties considered the Indians as the prime enemy in the share of their development in their country. After the anti-Indian riot in Rangoon in 1938 the Burmese and the Indians residing wanted the immediate solution but Dr. Ba Maw, the heading the ministry in 1940 was not very keen over it. Therefore his popularity faded out and U Saw stepped into Premiership. He took a narrow and aggressive nationalist view of things. In November 1941 he captured the sentiments of the country by his vigorous anti- Indian measures such as Land Alienation Act, Tenancy Act, Buddhist Women's Marriage Act and ultimately the Indian Immigration Act of 1941.¹⁴

The nationalists cited the records of the Burma that the share of the Burmese, the sons of the soil in the country's economy was negligible. The Burmese also occupied much less lands, government services and primary business.

The Baxter Report was another step forward towards the alienation of the Indians. The Baxter Commission took the work to look into the volume of the Indian immigration, to what extent it was seasonal and temporary; whether in such employment Indians either displaced the Burmans; occupations of the Indians and the light of the statistics obtained or other relevant factors any system of equating the supply of Indian unskilled labour to Burman requirements is needed. The Baxter submitted the report that there was and there is no danger of the Burmese to be washed away from their country by the Indians. He further added that the Burmese fear was due to the competition from the Indians¹⁶. The Baxter Report was soon followed by the Indian immigration agreement signed in July 1941. It is also known as the Indo – Burmese agreement or U Saw – Bajpai Agreement. The agreement received severe criticism from all the corners of India. The immigrating Indians to Burma needed financial guarantees and literary qualifications were one of the clauses in the agreement. The Indo –Burmese Agreement of 1941 divided the Indian immigrants into two categories namely A and B. The category A could stay permanently in Burma while the category B could stay for a short period. It was the beginning of a controlled immigration. The Marriage Clause also put restrictions on the Indian who need to have prior sanctions otherwise his visa would be cancelled. He was required to submit before marriage should submit his economic and social eligibility to keep the woman permanently. The marriage clause had an impact on the region of Arakan where the Muslims from the Chittagong area had settled with the Burmese women.¹⁶

These clauses were a reaction to the general opinion of the Burmese masses that the marrying an Indian and a Muslim degrades the woman. Newspaper articles published in the wake of the riots indicate that an Indo-Burmese marriage was perceived not only as the woman's decline in status but furthermore as her violent physical oppression. A report published April 21, 1939, in the *Toetetyei* (The Advance Monthly), entitled "Burmese women meet with troubles," gave an account of a Burmese woman, Ma May Myit, who married an Indian man about fourteen years earlier. According to the report, Ma May Myit was taken to India by her husband in November 1938. Upon her arrival,

she found herself ill-treated at the hands of her husband and his first wife before she was ultimately kicked out of the house. Ma May Myit went to Calcutta where she found Burmese residents who financed her passage back to Burma (Toetetyei April 29, 1939). A Burmese woman who married a Muslim not only dragged herself down, but more generally, she denigrated Burmese society at large. An article in the November 27, 1938, issue of *Seq-Than Journal* (Ten Million), published under the heading, "Burmese women who took Indians," blamed Burmese wives of Indian Muslims for ruining Burma's race and men¹⁷

The Burmese Nationalist pointed out to the statistics of the Indian share in the country. The following data reveals the situation in Burma.

TABLE-7.1

PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS BY THE ETHNIC GROUPS IN 1931

ETHNIC GROUPS	LAWYERS		DOCTORS	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Burmese	1617	10	250	8
Other Burmans	146	-	60	6
Indo-Burmans	110	-	37	-
Indians (A)	62	1	88	3
Indians (B)	245	3	677	3
Europeans	33	-	60	7
Eurasians	42	-	69	15
Others	42	-	35	1

Note: (A) Born in Burma, (B) Born in India

Source: Compiled by Teruko Saito and Kin Kiong Lee, *Statistics on the Burmese economy: the 19th and 20th centuries*, Singapore, 1999, Institute of South east Asian Studies, p- 19.

Thus a large share in the professional services was taken by the Indians and among them the Bengalis were the race which occupied a big portion in the professional jobs and government services. There were many Bengali families who continued with their positions in civil services, government jobs and in business. The separation and the anti-Indian riots was a warning to the Bengalis to prepare them to return to India. The final blow to the Bengalis was the occupation of Burma by the Japanese in 1942. The fear and panic of the Second World War coupled with the Japanese occupation gave a severe jolt to the Bengali settlers in Burma and a large number of them started immigrating to India particularly to Bengal. Their emigration to India was not very easy.

III

Rangoon was occupied by the Japanese on May 15th 1942 and continued till 1945. It gave a final blow to the Bengalis in Burma. Subhas Chandra Bose gave an uncompromising call for the united India and the establishment of an independent India by the I.N.A. There was a close cooperation of the political leaders of Burma with the Indian leaders. There were many Indian families who cooperated and contributed for the call of Bose who was with the Japanese. In fact, Burma was an important centre of South East Asia and it was one of the focal points in the Second World War. In fact from the moment that the first bomb fell on Rangoon on 13 December 1941 there began an exodus from Burma of the Indian origin. By the autumn of 1942 in the region 600,000 people fled from Burma into India by land and sea. As many as 80,000 had perished while coming back to India due to diseases and exhaustion or malnourishment traveling from different parts of Burma.¹⁸

The Burma Refugee Organization was established in 1942 as Major General Wood as its administrator. The organization opened camps at the Assam border in order to assist the

refugees by providing them food and transport. The huge exodus of the Indians including the Bengalis led to the deaths and tragedy of many of the families. Actually there were two conditions which contributed to the scale of disaster. First, the immigration population of Burma was very large on the eve of the Japanese invasion because coolies, plantation workers and merchants were all anticipating the Burmese legislation which restricts the number of the new immigrants. Second, the vulnerability felt by the whole of Indian population. When they fled from cities many of them perished in air raids. The Chinese had their own associations, the Burmese could go to their relatives in the villages and Buddhist monasteries. But the Indians did not have any option, as the shelter i.e., India was also too far. Moreover with the collapse of the industry and agriculture it was difficult to get food and livelihood. They remembered the riots of 1930 and 1938 when large parts of the Burmese population turned on them with savage hostility. The British would not help. The economic affluent civil servants fled earlier. The only thing the ordinary Indians could do was therefore, to tie up their pathetic possessions in a bundle and get on the road or make for the ports where they might at least be able to squeeze on a boat as a deck passenger.¹⁹

A large number of the Bengali families came back to India from different parts of Burma. The wealthy and rich could afford to get back through air or by buying tickets in the steamships while the poor families did not have any other option but to walk back to the country crossing the mountains, forests and the rivers. They went through the hardships and faced problems of security. But the panic of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation did not give them the courage to stay back in Burma. There are numerous names of the Bengalis who came back in 1941-42. One of them was Prof. Prasad Khastagir who was born in Rangoon in 1937 but his family came back during the Second World War in 1941 first to Calcutta and later to Varanasi.²⁰ Ardhendu Chakraborty, one of the Bengali poets was born in Burma on 20 November 1934 at Rangoon. His father Shri Bimal Chakraborty left Rangoon in 1942 and came to Chittagong. In 1950 he came to Calcutta.²¹ Binay Majumdar, a Bengali poet who received the prestigious Sahitya

Akademi Award in 2005 was born in Rangoon in 1934. His family came back to Bengal during the Second World War.²² There many more names of the Bengalis who traveled back to Bengal carrying the hardships and the loss of the property and the lives.

The British administration in Burma could not establish proper roadways between India and Burma. Though the annexation of Burma was in 1824 but no such effort has been made to set up proper roadways. Burma was in fact covered by forests and mountains on three sides and the rest sea. Moreover it can be state that it was the conspiracy of the British shipping companies who never supported the roadways as it would lead to the loss of their passengers. Therefore, the transfer of the evacuees from Burma was more difficult. The Indians residing in Burma were in trouble and the Burmese government had adopted an indifferent attitude towards the Indians. They did not provide enough respect and honour to the evacuating Indians and also created hazards and problems for them.²³

There was every section of the Bengalis namely the teachers, doctors, writers, social workers who joined the march of the Indians back home. In 1941 the Rangoon Indians set up a Committee for Evacuation with S. A. S. Tyabji , a prominent Indian politician as Secretary. An evacuation scheme was worked out but the Burmese prime minister gave no support on the grounds of the expense. When the air raids came to Rangoon in 1941 Robert Hutchings calculated that 15,000 left Rangoon through Prome. Over the other side of the Irrawaddy River, a track wound through the one pass in the jungle hills of Arakan to the Bay of Bengal. There at Taungup , a small fishing village it was possible to find local country boats which plied to the port of Akyab and from there big coastal ships were on regular service to the port of Akyab and from there big coastal ships were on regular service to the port of Chittagong. But many of the Bengalis returned back to Rangoon because of the appeal from the Governor Sir Reginald Dorman –Smith , Robert Hutchings , the Agent in Burma cajoled the Indians including the government service holders to return to their jobs and promising them security in Government organized

camps. To make sure that they did not leave by sea, the Burma Government issued orders that no adult Indian should be allowed to depart to any ship as deck passenger. This was because Rangoon was depended upon the Bengalis so the Indians in the agricultural work, municipal services, doctors, teachers and other services.²⁴

There were two main steamship companies in Rangoon, the British owned British India Steam Navigation Company and the Indian owned Scindia Steam Navigation Company. The B.I.S. N. largely confined itself to the Europeans and the Scindia company stopped its services to the port and the manager, Mr. Bakshi departed to India. H.K. Mukherjee, a clerk who tried to get his mentally ill son to India wrote his experience in one of the Calcutta newspaper that, 'big merchants Chettis, Gujarati Bhatias, paid huge bribes to get themselves on the steamships but poor men even with families were refused tickets by the steamship companies. It thoroughly explains that wealth and strength generally won out.'²⁵

Hutchings had set up an organization for the evacuation of the Indians by the sea on the Rangoon race course. He persuaded the Indian Government to send special ships, and allow the civilians to travel on transports on returning ships. During 1942 about 70,000 were shipped out to Madras and Calcuta. Since the evacuation of Rangoon was delayed for one month Hutchings moved the refugees to Prome, hoping to find safety via Taungup pass. The Burma Government made no effort to countermand the previous instructions. The local Burmese police officers refused to allow the Indians to cross the Irrawaddy. They relented only when given two rupees. Nobody was allowed to start for the Taungup pass without an inoculation certificate which could be available with the payment of Rs 2 to Rs 6. Finally, those who reached Taungup had to pay Rs 3 before they allowed to get into the boat.²⁶

The distance between Prome and Taungup was 110 miles with only one British officer to help the evacuees. P. Burnside, the officer in Service took the work to provide aid. There were more than 200,000 Indians who passed over the Taungup pass and entered India at Chittagong . By 1941 Rangoon, Bassein , Moulmein , Pegu and Toungoo seemed to be empty of the Indians and of course Bengalis too.²⁷ But soon the evacuees realized the importance of the Manipur route and navigated through the Chindwin river upto Kalewa. From there they moved through a road upto Tamu on the Burma –Manipur border. After Tamu they took the old mule track to Palel. From Palel they took another road to Imphal , the capital of Manipur; through the country of the Naga tribes via Kohima , down to the rail head of the Assam railroad (Dimapur) .Almost 30,000 refugees crossed into India through Manipur. There was no proper drinking water, food supplies or proper camps between India and Burma through this route. At least 5000 people died of cholera or exhaustion on the high mountain passes into the town while innumerable perished unnoticed and unattended at the outskirts. Similar scenes were in Akyab where dead lay buried in the streets. At the hospitals the doctors were left without nurses or servants and health officers had ran away. Chaos reigned in the town and men from the neighbouring villages came to steal what they could.²⁸

A camp for the refugees was arranged by the British Government for the evacuees in Mandalay. After the Japanese captured Moulmein many of the Bengalis left Rangoon and Moulmein and came to the camps of Mandalay. There were many outbreaks of epidemics like cholera, dysentery, small pox, and others. Moreover, bombardment from Japanese continued. There was terror, panic, diseases, looting, ill-treatment and violence for the evacuees.²⁹ Nilima Dutta describes in her memoir Ujaan Shrote that the family with children had to cross the river Chindwin upto Kalewa and through Tamu . In Tamu there were evacuee camps but it was unhygienic and no drinking water and health facilities. Many of the evacuees had expired on the way. From Tamu they crossed the mountainous roads of Arakan to Manipur. They had to walk 96 miles. They crossed Manipur and came to Hairak , the border of India and Burma. There were Ramakrishna Mission workers

who provided dry foods, medicine and drinking water to the people. They further came to Dimapur, then to Laming and to Badarpur. From Badarpur they came to Chittagong. On the way her sister had caught severe fever and she expired after coming to Chittagong.³⁰

There were help provided by the non government organizations. The first aid was provided by the Assam tea planters. Their organization was The Indian Tea Association which mobilized 25 lorries to bring supplies to Imphal. They brought labour to build temporary accommodation or basha huts of bamboo. Evacuee camps were opened in Lekhapani, Nampong, Tipong, Margareta, and other places. The other organization was Ramakrishna Mission who provided medicine, food, and clothes to the evacuees³¹. During this time the evacuees were protected from the clothes of anti social elements and women traffickers by the Ramakrishna Mission under the Swami Bhuteshananda.³² The British Governor of Assam, unable to arrange relief during the war, requested the Ramakrishna Mission to help and the then head of the Shillong Math and Mission, Swami Bhuteshananda, moved to the borders of Burma, established camps and brought about a rapport between the local population on the both sides of the border.³³ Shrimati Supriya Devi refers to the journey back to India with her father Gopal Bandopahyay, a barrister in London. They had lost their clothes in Burma. She refers to the loot and theft by the Burmese anti-socials during the evacuation.³⁴ In fact many Bengali families had emigrated from Burma during the Second World War. Jugantar Chakraborty, the renowned poet had been born in Rangoon in 1933 but had come to Malda in 1942 with his grandfather³⁵ Anil Ganguly who writes in his memoir that he and his family had left Rangoon in 1942. His father was an employee in the port so they could come back in ships to Bengal. His father remained in Rangoon as he was a government employee. Later his Father had to walk for two months to Chittagong through the jungles of Arakan. But soon after the Second World War Britain again established its control over Burma and called back its employees so his father had to again leave for Burma. Again he came back to Bengal after 1962.³⁶ Thus the Bengalis had to evacuate Burma for two times. First was during the Second World War when the Bengali families emigrated from Burma due to Japanese occupation and panic of the war. Some of them remained in Burma and

secondly, some of them returned to Burma to retrieve what they have lost. Many of them came back after the war and reestablishment of the British rule in Burma. Some of them remained in India.

A large number of Indians including Bengali government employees were brought from India to provide labours, work and assistance for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of administration, trade, industry, transport and communications in reoccupied Burma. All the essential goods, supplies and services were brought from India.

IV

The independence of Burma in 1948 was a significant event in Burma as it would mean for the change in the policies of the Government in Burma. The Burmese Government started its process of nationalization. In Burma a strict control was put over the immigration, foreign trade and foreign exchange remittances. All the major sectors of the economy like transport, communication, civil supplies, industries, mining, agricultural production were placed under Government control. There were passing of Land Nationalization Act 1948, Agricultural Bank Act 1948, Burma Foreigners Act 1948, and others which completely destroyed the Bengali and Indian interests in Burma. During the post war period there was a serious unemployment problem. Large scale influx of agricultural labourers came into the urban areas from the villages in search of security and employment. Many of the mills were closed down in the post war period and the employees had lost their jobs. A drastic curtailment of the mining and petroleum industries and reduction in the transport services threw thousands out of employment. At least 5000 Indians became unemployed in May 1949. The leadership of the Burma labour passed into the hands of the Burmese from the Indians. The Burmese government announced that the number of foreigners in the government establishment should be reduced. A large number of Bengalis who were employed in the Burmese services were given notice to leave. There were drastic measures for nationalization and the Bengalis mostly came back to

India if they had any means of subsistence in their motherland. The petty shop keepers and businessmen remained in Burma and a few employees.³⁷

In 1951 a treaty was signed between India and Burma of everlasting peace and friendship but no measures were taken on the behalf of the Burmese Government looking into the rights and security of the Indians in Burma. A large number of Bengalis immigrated as the Burmese Constitution did not recognize the Indians with any provision for representation or any safeguard. It was decided that those who resided for eight to ten years in Burma were eligible for citizenship.³⁸ Since the naturalization process was time consuming therefore only a small amount of Bengalis so the Indians were given citizenship. The speed of Burmanisation was very high and the impact of independence was too deep for the Bengalis and so the immigration was in opposite direction towards the motherland.

The process of nationalization became further intense with the establishment of the military rule under General Ne Win. Ne Win's Socialist Republic in 1962 Government finally nailed down the Indian future in Burma. The Bengali middle class with small scale businessmen and employees did not have any option but to return to India. There was Burmanization of the trade. All bars and liquor stores and restaurants owned by the foreigners in the city and its suburbs ceased to function. It was decided that from 1 January 1963 there was Burmanization of all enterprises.³⁹ The Government of Burma in 1962 nationalised all banks and business. On the home front the Government had taken all the imports, exports, retail trade, commodity distribution, transport and Burmese owned banks.⁴⁰ The Controller of Immigration had announced new regulations, effective since January 2 1964 to limit the duration of the stay of a foreigner to 24 hours as against 72 hours in the past. Permits to foreign doctors to practice were withdrawn by the Director of the Health Services from December 31, 1963. Foreign clinics and hospitals and those who have completed 15 years of service under the Government was allowed to continue practice. Thus many of the Bengali doctors who were in Burma decided to come

back to India.⁴¹ The Ramakrishna Mission hospital was taken over by the Government after 1963. The Revolutionary Government announced on March 19, 1964 that there would be an immediate nationalization of all businesses, together with goods of wholesalers, brokers, departmental shops and stores within Rangoon city limits. Nationalization also extended to cooperative stores.⁴² Further nationalization was carried out by the Ne Win government as the Rangoon Radio broadcast on April 9, 1964 declared the Government decision to take over all the shops and business houses throughout the country.⁴³ The Government placed restrictions on the Indians by declaring that non diplomatic foreign residents must obtain permission to move from one place to another or the near by towns or to the country's border.⁴⁴ Life for the Bengalis residing in Burma became very restricted and difficult. The nationalization led to the nationalization of the education. The Education ministry had made Burmese as the sole medium of instruction in schools and colleges. Indian students who are in sizeable number face problems of further education and are leaving Burma in increasing number. While the Indian students were going to India, the services of Indian professors in the colleges were terminated.⁴⁵ Thus the Bengalis were given option to adopt Burmese nationality, Burmese language and the new conditions of service or to leave Burma to their own motherland. The second evacuation of the Bengalis had thus started after 1962. This time the evacuation was more organized than the earlier one. Nevertheless they had to travel over the land as they had lost everything and had no place in the ships. The second exodus brought almost all the Bengalis except those who were the poor classes of labourers and the families who had settled in Burma for a long time and had no where to go in India. They survived adjusting to the local conditions. The Bengalis had to learn the language Burmese in order to survive and save their jobs in Burma. For the Bengalis the problem was not the language nor the nationality but the fear of discrimination and insecurity in the new system of state. There were many families who had been in Burma for generations and they did not hesitate to accept the nationality of Burma but very less time was given to deal with the new situation and to the adjustment of the Bengalis. Thus they felt insecure and disheartened in the country which was so dear to them. But the Ne Win's government in a special broadcast on August declared that it was not communist

and that it recognized the people's right to freedom of religion.⁴⁶ The religious freedom was granted to the citizens of Burma. The process of nationalization made the Indians as well as the Bengalis paupers overnight.

Several hundred Indian families returned to their motherland from Burma in July. These families had long since had settled in the country as small traders, cultivators or office employees. They had lost their means of livelihood as a result of the Government measures towards Burmanization and state management of trade and commerce. Even for returning to India they experienced considerable hardship. Many did not have funds and had to leave their belonging behind. The Government of India arranged ships for repatriation. The number of reluctant repatriates was expected to reach 100,000. The Indian Government made efforts to ameliorate the harshness of the regulations which the Burma Government at first applied to those who, finding their livelihood gone and decided to return. The Burmese Government allowed those leaving to take out about Rs. 75 for each adult and Rs. 15 for each child and allow each family to take out up to about Rs. 250 of gold. Otherwise the evacuees had to leave all their assets in Burma and they reach India for the most part not far short of destitute.⁴⁷ These migrating Bengalis had to pick up new threads of life. The Government of India and the State Government has provided with loans and jobs when possible.

There was a huge migration of the Indians from Burma to India. A large number of evacuees were also to Pakistan. There was in fact evacuation from Burma since 1950 when the Government of Burma started its process of nationalization and the replacement of the Indians by the Burmese. The following table shows the movement of the population between Burma and India from 1950 and 1962.

TABLE-7.2
MOVEMENT BETWEEN INDIA, BURMA AND PAKISTAN, 1950-1962

YEAR	ARRIVAL	DEPARTURE	BALANCE
1950	29670	34070	-4400
1951	23056	21905	1151
1952	29412	24767	4645
1953	21174	18567	2607
1954	17795	19552	-1757
1955	14579	18738	-4686
1956	14052	17009	-2430
1957	11626	12421	-795
1958	9784	14139	-4863
1959	9276	16396	-6612
1960	7260	12823	-5563
1961	6211	7715	-1504
1962	2799	4168	-1369

Source: Compiled by Teruko Saito and Kin Kiong Lee. Statistics on the Burmese economy: the 19th and 20th centuries. Singapore, 1999. Institute of South east Asian Studies, p- 13.

The table clearly indicates that there was a huge immigration from Burma to India during the post independent period. The Indians including the Bengalis were eager to come back to India with their identity and livelihood at stake.

The Government of India in 1964 under the leadership of Sardar Swaran Singh, the minister for External Affairs had visited Rangoon to continue the friendship treaty of 1951. They wedded to the principles of equality, mutual respect, non alignment and peaceful coexistence. They also studied the various problems of the departure of the Indians from Burma and exchanged views on ways of settling these problems. The Burmese Government assured that the security and dignity of the Indians would be the responsibility of the Burmese Government. There would be no discrimination but the Indians would be treated as the other foreign officials. But there was action on the part of the Burmese. The visit and agreement of Sardar Swaran Singh had been subject to several questions in the Lok Sabha in New Delhi on September 5, 1964. There were questions regarding the arrangement of the evacuees, whether there was any discrimination and about the Indo-Burmese trade relations. Mr. Dinesh Singh, the Deputy Foreign Minister said that agreement had been reached the Burmese Government on several questions connected with Indian nationals returning home. The procedures regarding departure formalities had been straightened out and various documents required by foreigners wishing to leave Burma were now being issued to them expeditiously, particularly in case of persons not paying any income tax.⁴⁸

The Government of India had arranged additional flights between Calcutta and Rangoon. Three ships were also plying between Madras and Rangoon. Several ships were plying between Madras and Vishakhapatnam. By the first week of December of 1964 these ships had made 28 trips and further sailings were envisaged. About 28,755 Indians left Burma by 1964.⁴⁹ (Asian Recorder, p-6064) A large number of Indians had come to Calcutta in 1961. The Census of West Bengal says that 3,434 persons had enumerated in Calcutta with 1,724 men and 1,710 females.⁵⁰

There was also well number of Bengali families who chose to remain in Burma. The Bengali community maintained the Kalibari and Durga of Rangoon. The religious life of

the Bengalis are unaffected by the military rule. The junta does not interfere with the religious life of the people. But in the other spheres they had to conform to local ways such as the attire, language and names of the persons also changed with the addition of a Burmese as suffix or prefix of the name.⁵¹ There are almost 50 to 60 families of Bengal who cling to their culture. They speak Bengali with a Burmese accent. Some of their children cannot speak Bengali and are inter- married with the local population. Yet they remain stateless and need special passes to go out of the country even for short visits.⁵² There were a number of Indians and Bengalis who were residing as foreigners under the foreign registration. The following table shows the number of foreigners residing under foreign registration from 1960-1969:-

TABLE – 7.3
FORIGNERS RESIDING UNDER FOREIGN REGISTRATION (1960-1969)
SELECTED YEARS

YEAR	INDIAN	PAKISTAN	CHINESE	OTHERS	TOTAL
1960	120,447	28,334	91,715	7276	247,772
1964/65	80,235	20,577	80,723	11,888	193,423
1968/69	51,632	16,986	80,909	11,117	160,644

Source: Compiled by Teruko Saito and Kin Kiong Lee, Statistics on the Burmese economy: the 19th and 20th centuries, Singapore, 1999, Institute of South east Asian Studies, p- 15.

The number of Indians therefore started to decrease gradually as the above table shows. The Bengali families had to undertake enough hardships to come to India. Overnight they had become paupers. The evacuee families had to settle in Bengal and in different places with the dream of establishing a new life. They lost property and money and establishment. Live became unsettled and disrupted. Many of them had sent money through the hundi system from Burma to India. They also could not carry enough gold so like losers they came to India.⁵³ Colonies were established in different parts of Bengal.

There is existence of such a colony of evacuees in Barasat, Kamarhati, Kajipara, Kalyani and Garia near Calcutta, Surya Sen Colony in Siliguri and many other places. It is true that the Bengalis who emigrated from Burma had lost everything. The Government of India under Indira Gandhi had provided ships to bring the evacuees in Calcutta from Rangoon. In Kajipara at least 500 families from Burma had come to live and therefore the colony came to be known as Burma Colony. Most of them are originally from Chittagong. There are 15 families who are Buddhists and the rest are Hindus. The government had given each family a house in the colony and Rs. 5000. The members of the colony had gradually established them in India. The residents of the colony still cling to their memories of Burma and they celebrate the Water Festival of Burma. The colony was renamed as Subarnapattanam.⁵⁴ It took a long time for the Bengalis to come back to the main stream of life. Interesting to note that many of the families had evacuated twice from Burma and some of the families had evacuated once from Burma during the Second World War and second time from East Pakistan after the partition of India.

V

Arakan was one of the centres of Bengali Muslim immigration. There was influence of Sanskrit culture in Arakan. The Northern part of Arakan had been for many years before the 8th century the seat of Hindu dynasties. In 788 A.D. a new dynasty, known as the Chandras, founded the city of Wesali. This city became a noted trade port to which as many as a thousand ships came annually. The Chandra kings were upholders of Buddhism and their territory extended as far north as Chittagong. Wesali was an easterly Hindu kingdom of Bengal - "Both government and people were Indian."⁵⁵ The Arab Muslims first came in contact with Arakan through trade and commerce during the 8th century A.D. and since then Islam started spreading in the region. After the advent of Islam in Arabia, the Muslims followed the footprints of their fore-fathers in trade and commerce. These Muslim Arab merchants made contact with Arakan. In those days the Arabs were very much active in sea-trade, they even monopolized trade and commerce in

the East. On the way to the east Muslim traders gave a stoppage in Arakan, particularly Akyab its port. The province of Chittagong was closer to Arakan and the in the medieval times it became a strong centre of Bengali culture and literary bases.⁵⁶

In the 19th century the port of Akyab gained importance and it became one of the largest rice exporting ports of the world. The migrations were mostly motivated by the search of professional opportunity. During the Burmese occupation there was a breakdown of the indigenous labor force both in size and structure. Arthur Phayre reported that in the 1830s the wages in Arakan compared with those of Bengal were very high. Therefore many hundreds, indeed thousands of coolies came from the Chittagong District by land and by sea, to seek labor and high wages.⁵⁷ R.B. Smart, the deputy assistant commissioner of Akyab, wrote about the 'flood' of immigrants from Chittagong District as follows: Since 1879, immigration has taken place on a much larger scale, and the descendants of the slaves are resident for the most part in the Kyauktaw and Myohaung (Mrauk-U) townships. Maungdaw Township has been overrun by Chittagonian immigrants. Buthidaung is not far behind and new arrivals will be found in almost every part of the district.⁵⁸

At first most of them came to Arakan as seasonal agricultural laborers and went home after the harvest was done. R. B. Smart estimated the number at about twenty-five thousand during the crop-reaping season alone. He added that about the same number came to assist in plowing operations, to work at the mills and in the carrying trades. A total of fifty thousand immigrants coming annually were probably not far from the mark.⁵⁹ Moreover, hunger for land was the prime motive for the migration of most of the Chittagonians. The British judicial records tell us of an increase in the first decade of the twentieth century in lawsuits of litigation for the possession of land. The Akyab District Magistrate reported in 1913 that in Buthidaung Subdivision, the Chittagonian immigrants stand to native Arakanese in the proportion of two to one, but six sevenths of the litigation for land in the court was initiated by the Chittagonians.⁶⁰ Another colonial

record delivers about a striking account of the settlements of the Bengali immigrants from Chittagong District as: "Though we are in Arakan, we passed many villages occupied by Muslim settlers or descendents of the settlers, and many of, and many of them were Chittagonians"⁶¹

The Hindus took to the clerical jobs and business but the Bengali Muslims took to agricultural works. There was 33 per cent of Chittagonians of the total population. The townships of Buthidaung and Maungdaw were the strongholds of Muslim culture and Muslim population. The Baxter Report also speaks that 97 per cent of the total population in Arakan were Indian which numbered to and out of that the Chittagonians were 186,327 in number. The total population was 1,008,538 and the Indians were 217,801. They have been classified as a separate head due to the large numbers.⁶² The table below indicates the distribution of population in the Akyab in 1931.

TABLE-7.4
THE RACIAL COMPOSITION IN AKYAB DISTRICT IN 1931

RACES	POPULATION		
	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
CHITTAGONIANS	104,769	81,558	186,327
BENGLIS	10,998	4,588	15,586
HINDUS	2,955	632	3,587
ORİYAS	3,809	10	3,819

SOURCE: James Baxter Imm-p-49

There are areas which gradually developed a mixed culture, language and tradition of Persian, Bengali and Burmese. Ba Tha mentions that this led to the growth of a mixed race which is known as Rohingya⁶³. The term Rohingya is highly debatable and

controversial. It is said by the historians that the Chittagong Muslims integrated into the local Rohingya community by means of intermarriages between Chittagong and local Buddhists.⁶⁴ The Rohingyas are the largest group, descending from the Arab traders who have settled in Arakan for centuries and are ethnically the same group as the people of Chittagong.⁶⁵ The distribution of the Muslims in 1931 shows that 68 per centage of the Muslims in Burma were of Indian origin in 1931. The rest of the 30 percent of the Muslims belong to the various categories mainly zerbadis and Arakan Muslims. The increase in Burman born Muslims had gradually risen owing mainly due to the large number of Indian Muslims settling permanently in the Akyab district, which amounted to 78 percent of all Burman born Muslims. The steep rise in the number of Burman born Muslims was mainly due to the intermarriages.⁶⁶ Most of the Chittagong Muslims came from the south for work and married the local women. The Baxter Report says that eight of Arakanese witnesses, seven of whom were the members of the Legislature maintained that Chittagonian penetration in Arakan is steadily continuing and is resented not only by the Arakanese but by the settled Chittagonians. The witnesses say that these classes could not compete with the cheap labour supplied by the new entrants whose standard of living was lower and who were extremely hardworking folk. The view was expressed that it inadvisable to let the Chittagonian immigration to go unchecked as it contained the seeds of the future communal troubles. All the witnesses agreed that immigration from Chittagong should be restricted.⁶⁷

However, the Muslims of the Arakan came under the leadership of the Mujahids dreamt of creating a free Arakan. The Muslim movement in British India had a great impact upon the Muslims of the Burma. With the outbreak of the Second World War divided Arakan into basically two sections, the Northern Arakan which was Muslim majority area and the southern Arakan which was Buddhist majority area. The Buddhist Arakanese was the followers of the nationalist movement, the Thakin movement. The British government taking the advantage of the situation backed the Muslims of the Northern Arakan. The Arakanese of the north also paid respect and loyalty to the British.⁶⁸

In 1946 the Arakanese Muslims had joined the Pakistan movement under Muhammed Ali Jinnah. In July 1946 they formed the North Arakan Muslim League in Akyab with the objective to be attached with the Pakistan movement after the formation. The motivation of a separate state led to the movement during 1948-54.⁶⁹ It is not wrong to see the Mujahid movement as a continuation of the struggle of the Muslim League which was successful in creating a Muslim state in the name of Pakistan. Muslims inside Arakan were stimulated and patronized by the Muslim League and Pakistan. They wanted to form a country under the name of Arakanistan. They believed that the Maungdaung and Buthiadaung townships could be separated from Burma and annexed to Pakistan.⁷⁰ But this was an unrealistic dream that they held. This development was never supported by General Aung San and the Vice President of Burma Muslim Congress, Aung Sein. U Saw, the most ardent nationalist who also did not support this cause of creating Pakistan within Burma pointed to the fact that large number of Buddhists live in Chittagong area and these Buddhists went to Chittagong from Arakan.⁷¹ But in the 1950s the Mujahids could establish control over the Buthiadaung and Rathedaung area of northern Arakan. The ethnic violence between the Buddhists and the Muslims of Arakan had brought a great deal of bloodshed during the Second World War and after independence. During the transition period of British evacuation and Japanese occupation there was an outburst of tension of ethnic and religious cleavage.

Subsequently, the Mujahids had failed after the establishment of the rule of General Ne Win in 1962. According to Shwe Lu Maung states that there was infiltration of population from East Pakistan to Arakan and the rise of the Muslim population was highly alarming for the government. As a result the Ne Win Government imposed restrictions on the movement of the Muslims especially prohibiting the movement out of Akyab district towards eastwards. The authority could not effectively check the immigration but it is true that Arakan became the poorest district of Burma. Gradually the Muslims formed the Arakan National United Organisation in 1967. Similarly the Arakan National Liberation Party was formed under U Maung Sein Nyunt. At present they form the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation and Rohingya Patriotic Front.⁷²

At present there is regular immigration across the borders of Burma. The military Government has left no space for bilateral talks with the Government of Bangladesh. But it is true that huge number of people has become homeless and stateless because of the ethnic rights and the policies adopted by the military Government of Burma. There is denial of the citizen rights and absolute statelessness with no help from any of the Government. There are non-governmental organizations and UN bodies to help these people. In future we hope a change in the policies would be made with friendly talks with the neighbours namely India, Bangladesh and Thailand.

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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 19th and the first half of the 20th 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 20th 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 a 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 out 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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