

## **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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 labourers. 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 agriculture<sup>4</sup>. 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 annually<sup>5</sup>. The cultivators from Chittagong used their own tools and techniques which increased the total area under rice production and also total rice production. The 'tounga' 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 1930s<sup>7</sup>.

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 acres<sup>8</sup>. The increased quantity of grain prepared and exported during the seasons of 1877 and 878 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.<sup>9</sup> 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

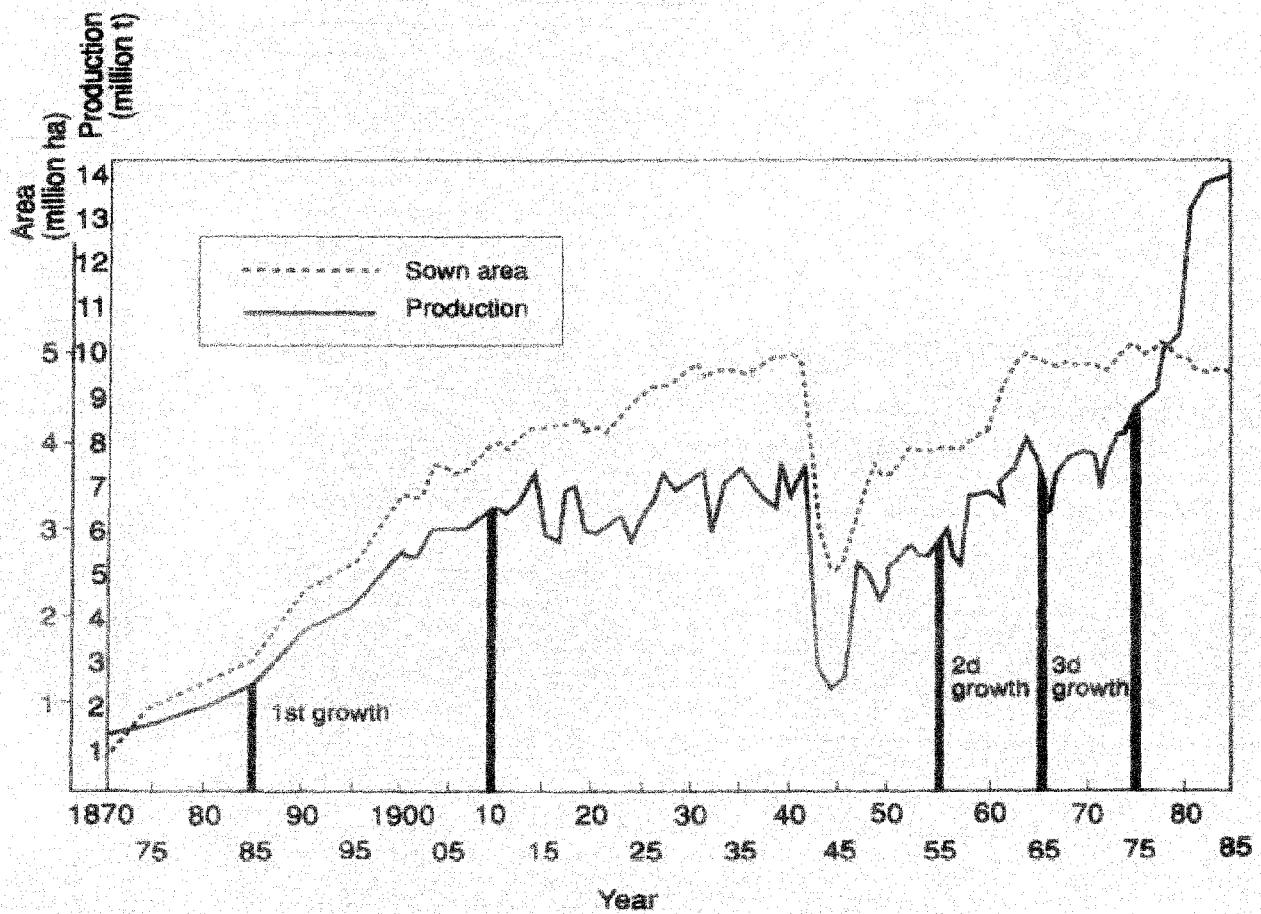
The colonial administration of India regarded the Bengalis as amenable subjects while finding the indigenous Arakanese too defiant, rising in rebellion twice in 1830s. The British policy was also favorable for the settlement of Bengali agricultural communities in Arakan. A colonial record says Bengalis 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 Arakanese<sup>10</sup>. 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 agriculturalists<sup>11</sup>. 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 district<sup>12</sup>.

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.<sup>13</sup>. 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<sup>14</sup>.

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	253,5977	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.<sup>15</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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 Alomohan 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 Agents<sup>18</sup>. 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.<sup>19</sup>

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 Chettiar 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.<sup>20</sup>

**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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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".<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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 farm 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.<sup>26</sup>

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 business<sup>27</sup>. 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".<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 inhibited 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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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. There 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.<sup>37</sup>

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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 Chettiar money lending community from South India changed the whole politico economic semblance within the Burmese territory<sup>39</sup>

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 Chettiar money lenders into reducing the debts owed by the peasants. Those Chettiyars 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.<sup>40</sup>

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. Iyangar 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.<sup>41</sup>

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 31<sup>st</sup> 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".<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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".<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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<sup>46</sup>.

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.<sup>47</sup> 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 Kalam 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.<sup>48</sup>

The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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. Banerjee<sup>51</sup> and Muhammed Siddiq Khan as lecturer in Political Science<sup>52</sup>. 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 80<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

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 Britain .....it has got to be earned by the sheer weight of force.....”<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

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".<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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 make 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.<sup>61</sup>

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 pogyis 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 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.<sup>62</sup> 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<sup>63</sup>.

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 creates 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.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup>

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.<sup>67</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup>

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 member 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.<sup>69</sup>

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 activities.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>71</sup>

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.<sup>72</sup>

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 Dakshineshwar 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.<sup>73</sup>

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 Mandalay .....let 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.<sup>74</sup>

During 29<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup>

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.<sup>78</sup> 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 party<sup>79</sup>

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, 5<sup>th</sup> Street; Editor, Prachi Prakash,38<sup>th</sup> 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. 20<sup>th</sup> Street Rangoon.<sup>80</sup>

Warrants were taken out on 14<sup>th</sup> 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 , 10<sup>th</sup> Street), Residence of N.L.Das ( No 191,40<sup>th</sup> Street), The Bengali Students Association ( No 284, Phayre Street), Residence of M. Chakravarty( No 350-352, Merchant Street), and The Chattal Samity ( No 37 , 45<sup>th</sup> 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 , 45<sup>th</sup> Street. Mr Maung Ohn Khin was a close associate of Kedareswar Bhattacharya.<sup>81</sup>

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. Khitish 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. Trilokhyanath Chakraborty had a close contact with these members but however he was arrested in 1931.<sup>82</sup>

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.<sup>83</sup>

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.<sup>84</sup>

## 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.<sup>85</sup>

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, Moung 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.<sup>86</sup>

Thakin meaning master began to be used as an appellation in front of the names of the members of the Dohama 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.<sup>87</sup> 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 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.<sup>88</sup>

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 chamber<sup>89</sup>. 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, Kedareswar 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.<sup>90</sup>

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.<sup>91</sup>

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),  
Barnarsarthy Dosar (The Burmese literature is our literature),  
Bamarsagarthi 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.<sup>92</sup> Then the motto continued:

Dopyiko Chitpar (Love our country).  
Dosarko Chiihmyintpar (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.<sup>93</sup> 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 a 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.<sup>94</sup>

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 Conferences<sup>95</sup>. 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 revolutionary<sup>96</sup>. 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.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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 Jawaharlal 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 Phonyis (Buddhist Monks) in this section of Thakins. These revolutionaries established many secret cells to organize terrorist activities.<sup>102</sup>

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 groups<sup>103</sup>. 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. Goshal 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, Goshal was marginalized and killed in an inner-party purge. Goshal graduated from Rangoon University. In August 1939, Goshal 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, Goshal fled to India. During the early days of the Communist Party of Burma, Goshal played an important role as a liaison between the Burmese party and the Communist Party of India. After the death of Thakin Ba Hein, Goshal became the head of the All Burma Trade Union Congress. Goshal's activities were mainly concentrated to Rangoon, organizing the largely Indian working class there. Goshal 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 taxes<sup>104</sup>.

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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup>

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.<sup>107</sup>. 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 1935<sup>108</sup>. 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 Bose<sup>109</sup>. 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 Jibon 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 Jibon Lal in learning Burmese.<sup>110</sup> He understood that the pogyis 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.<sup>111</sup>

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.”<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup>

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 the 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.<sup>114</sup>

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.<sup>115</sup> 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".<sup>116</sup>

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. Huge Toye 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".<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup>

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