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Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics

**Aung San Suu Kyi and the
National League for Democracy**

Gustaaf Houtman 1999

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Preface

This book deals with Burmese ideas about Buddhist mental culture (*samatha* meditation and *vipassana* contemplation) in the 1988 political crisis. It does so at three levels, including the general level of Burmese political terminology, and at the more specific levels of personal practice by Burma's leading politicians and their association with and patronage of particular traditions. It was written during a one-year stay as Visiting Professor at the Institute for the Study of the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, between 1 September 1997 and 30 August 1998. The research involved three separate visits to Burma between July 1997 and September 1998. It was finalised for press in London, January 1999.

The material presented here grew out of two prior research episodes. It originally flows from my PhD thesis 'Traditions of Buddhist practice in Burma' completed in 1990 at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London (funded by a SOAS Postgraduate Governing Body Exhibition), for which I carried out fieldwork in Burma during the academic year 1981–82. My concern with this thesis was twofold. First, I aimed to survey various traditions of mental culture in Burma and how these practices fit in with other Buddhist practices. Second, I aimed to understand how mental culture fits into Burmese ideas about society, history, politics and perceptions of the world in general, and how it accomplishes various kinds of identity transformation.

Biographical summaries of about two dozen Burmese *vipassana* teachers were a major feature, and I analysed in detail the biographies of the Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82) and Accountant-General U Ba Khin (1899–1971). These are two of the most internationalised of about two dozen nationally famous *vipassana* teachers, who played an important role under the patronage of ex-Prime Minister U Nu in his vision of politics and in his attempt to transform Burma's government.

The second research episode that underlies this book is the work I carried out under the Leach-RAI Post-doctoral Fellowship, of which I was a recipient in Manchester during the academic year 1991–92. Having become more aware of its evolving role in the politics of Burma since writing the thesis, at this time I stressed the political relevance of this material.¹ I began to look more specifically at the popularisation of the *vipassana* traditions in the Burmese palace after the Second Anglo-Burmese War as a response to colonialism. I perceived these as a Burmese vernacular parallel to the development of anthropology in the colonial countries of Europe. The increased popularity of *vipassana* in Burma occupies a very similar historical time period as anthropology in the United Kingdom; both seek to come to terms with uncertainty over human and cultural identity. Furthermore, they were part of a response to shifts in colonial boundaries, and both are instruments for coping with the limits of human existence, and recast cultural and even political identities to encompass the foreigner. While one can go too far in such analogy, there is much evidence that these traditions did serve overlapping functions. Indeed, the designation 'hermit country' may have applied to Burma during the time it was sealed off by the Ne Win regime from the outside world, but this did not apply to the *vipassana* traditions, for which Burma's boundaries were permeable, as *vipassana* teachers and their students were permitted to come and go virtually as they pleased. It was through the travelogues of Burmese *vipassana* teachers abroad that the Burmese kept in touch with and learnt about the outside world.

In the course of the second half of the 1990s, evidence emerged that all three senior leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) – Tin U, Aung San Suu Kyi and U Kyi Maung – had indeed been practising the *vipassana* techniques originally taught by the two very same 'international' teachers whose biographies I had already extensively analysed in my thesis.² They did this during their various phases of imprisonment and house arrest. Indeed, as I describe in this book, many political prisoners are finding dignity, even today, in their prison experience through these practices. They are also, at the same time, accused by the regime of adopting 'foreign' ways.

¹ Gustaaf Houtman. 'Between ruler and contemplator: insight contemplation in colonial and postcolonial Burma'. In *Proceedings of the Conference on Religious Renewals in Asia* (ed. Shihegaru Tanabe), National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 24–27 Nov 1992. (published by Kyoto University Press, 1995 – in Japanese).

² Chapter 7. 'Contemporary Burmese hagiography: the hagiographies of the Mahasi Sayadaw and U Ba Khin' in Houtman (1990:195–233). 'Beyond the cradle and past the grave: the biography of Burmese meditation master U Ba Khin' in Julian Schober (ed.), *Buddhist sacred biography in South and Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1997, pp 310–44.

More surprising perhaps, is that it is also the Mahasi Sayadaw methods in particular that are practised by several senior retired members of the military regime, including the infamous General Sein Lwin, known for his cruelty during the uprising as the Butcher of Rangoon. Other members and ex-members of the regime are also known to have interests in various other *vipassana* traditions, including the current strongman General Khin Nyunt, and even General Ne Win himself.

The attention paid to mental culture on both sides of the political divide is in part due to the importance of meditation and contemplation in Burmese political culture since the colonial period. However, in part, this is also a response to the isolation experienced. On the one hand, members of the NLD have experienced severe repression by the regime and were isolated from society by imprisonment and house arrest. Senior members of the NLD and senior monks have appealed to the regime's leaders to rehabilitate themselves through the practice of *vipassana*. On the other hand, the military experienced isolation and fear of mainstream society. To them, these practices represent the last possible instrument for the transformation of the military hierarchy. Contemporary patronage by the military of these traditions is certainly based on its awareness of the powers of these traditions in the creation and dissolution of boundaries and in the legitimisation of state. It is not clear, however, to what extent the practice and patronage of these techniques is the result of its desire to change.

While I was carrying out my research in Manchester, I was still predominantly focused on the past, as there was scant evidence publicly available of such an involvement in mental culture by the NLD and the contemporary military. Also, the regime at that time had not yet taken such a strong interest in propagating Buddhism as it has done since 1992. So it was not possible at that time to fully make sense of the situation in Burma. The evidence that has become public since that time, and in particular since 1997, however, has permitted me to recast my earlier research to address more specifically the issue of the relevance of Burmese traditions of mental culture to the current political crisis. This book, however, should be seen in the context of my earlier work as not primarily political in nature, but as attempting to highlight the significance of *vipassana* to Burmese society as a whole. My next book will be the volume *Contemplating insight*, in which I expect to provide a more detailed historical analysis of the *vipassana* traditions in Burma dating back to King Mindon in the 1850s until today, and in which I expect to answer the larger question as to how the *vipassana* traditions evolved during the colonial period.

The main subjects of this book, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD leaders, are in a much worse condition in January 1999 than when I began writing this book in autumn 1997. The NLD called for parliament to convene by 25 August, and if the regime was not to facilitate this, it stated it would convene its own. This resulted in a spate of repressive moves in which virtually all elected NLD members were arrested, and NLD offices of one township after another were dissolved in the final months of 1998 and January 1999.

In short, the regime does not tolerate any form of opposition and the prison experience sums up the state of democracy in Burma. Nevertheless, with the Asian financial crisis, the fall of Suharto, China's decision to disengage the army from direct involvement in business, with Thailand and the Philippines now advocating flexible engagement among the members of ASEAN towards Burma, and with the increasing internationalisation of legal procedures and the increasing relevance of the Internet, the political climate outside Burma has also changed much over the last academic year. For example, the application of international laws to violators of human rights, such as Pinochet, demonstrates that those who commit human rights abuses can no longer hide behind the excuse of governing by local laws and local traditions. The implications of this for Burma are now even recognized by Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, one of the prime supporters of the Burmese regime, who recently said in an interview with CNN, 'Let's put the matter brutally. They have seen what's happened to General Pinochet. Some of the things some generals have done in Burma (former name of Myanmar) may well put them into a similar predicament.'¹

The SPDC generals cannot swim against this tide of events in Asia and the international arena. Nor can they turn back the clock. Sooner or later they need to take steps to defuse this political crisis that has now lasted over a decade, or it will be done for them. A first step would be for the generals to understand the ambiguities inherent in the Burmese political vocabulary they are currently employing in their English press-materials. Instead of seeking 'reconsolidation' and 'national unity', the generals should consider seeking

¹ 'Singapore's Lee says Burmese generals face Pinochet-like situation'. AFP, 11.12.1998.

'reconciliation' and 'national harmony'; instead of emphasizing 'national independence' alone, there should also be emphasis on granting 'freedom'; instead of emphasizing 'duties' there should also be 'rights'. Other steps need to be taken to institute humane prisons, and to permit representation and visits to prisoners, including frequent visits from relatives and the International Red Cross. A further step would be to separate the judiciary from the arm of government and to stop treating the law as if it were a form of army discipline or as if it concerned promulgating 'royal orders' (*yaza-that*). Political prisoners should be released, and the generals should begin to work with the instruments of influence (*awza*) rather than authority (*ana*). On the basis of the goodwill thus generated, bi-lateral negotiations with ethnic minorities should be avoided in favour of setting in motion a broader-based nation-wide process of reconciliation in which the parameters should not be placed too narrowly, and during which the generals should indicate their own willingness to change.

To ensure nation-wide co-operation of all Burmese citizens in the development and modernization of Burma, it is vital that mechanisms be instituted that permit informed criticism to be expressed of the regime's policies and actions for the benefit of the country. This should not be treated as 'confrontation'. The regime should not criminalise its critics but listen to them and act upon them for the benefit of the country as a whole. Also, the regime should reduce its military intelligence and its propaganda, and instead invest in education and in equipping people with skills. To do so effectively, it must invite independent civilian intellectuals to question current policies and seriously investigate and research all the problems that face Burma in the Twenty-First Century. For the regime to gain respect, it must be seen to act positively upon their recommendations.

The issue of Buddhism should be treated very carefully, and the turmoil resulting from U Nu's decision to make Buddhism the national religion should not be repeated. The authorities would do well to keep in mind Aung San's distinction between Buddhism as a religion ('Buddhendom', *bokda batha*), and Buddhism as an instrument for attaining to superior ethics in government ('Buddhism', *buddha sasana*); though the role for the latter may be expanded, the former should not become a template for the State.

If these are done then it is possible for 'disciplined democracy' still to evolve into internationally recognised 'democracy'. If, however, reforms are not forthcoming, and the current nation-wide impetus for peaceful resolution is not harvested, then, as one journalist pointed out, the analogy of Burma as 'the Yugoslavia of Asia' that some Burmese army officers sometimes proclaim, may well come true. Burma may yet unfold in the same way as Yugoslavia – into disintegration.¹ It is not too late for the younger generation of generals to salvage some good from the terrible reputation the army earned as the result of its counterproductive initiatives over the last decade. To do so it must engage the international community more constructively than has been done hitherto. Let us bear in mind Aung San's words, who was willing to engage the international community in a constructive way, saying 'let us ... join hands, Britons, Burmans[ese] and all nations alike, to build up an abiding fruitful peace over the foundations of the hard-won victory that all of us desiring progressive direction in our own affairs and in the world at large, have at long last snatched firmly and completely from the grabbing hands of Fascist barbarians, a peace... not of the graveyard, but creative of freedom, progress and prosperity in the world'.²

Though I believe the most important Buddhist dimensions to democracy politics are covered in this book, the time limit on my stay at the ILCAA has not permitted me to cover all the relevant materials as exhaustively as I would have liked. Much material has emanated in terms of speeches and interviews, undoubtedly more than I have been able to cover. I anticipate that the new information and historical interpretations available on this period will at some point necessitate revision of ideas expressed here. For reasons of space, I have left out here chapters on the pursuit of magic by the generals, on the Buddhist dimensions to the concept of democracy and on the overlap between *samatha* and legal discourse in the *Manu-gye*.

Gustaaf Houtman, 15 February 1999
(ghoutman@compuserve.com)

¹ Martin Smith. 'Playing the ethnic card: Burma at the cross-roads.' *Burma Debate*, Nov–Dec 1998, p 13.

² 'The resistance movement' (Aung San 1971:22).

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Introduction

The largest popular uprising in the post-colonial history of Burma began in 1988, within weeks of Ne Win's resignation from his position as chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party on 23 July that year. The hard-handed manner in which the regime responded to a conflict between students and the police in March of that year evolved into what retrospectively became known by the date when the major protests began, namely the 'Four Eights Affair' or simply '8-8-88'.¹ Army involvement in politics had produced no measurable benefits over a period of twenty-six years. Indeed, it had produced a serious economic decline, and had not prepared the country in terms of infrastructure, skills and resources to share in the economic growth experienced by most of its neighbours, including Thailand, Malaysia and China. From one of the wealthiest countries in Asia it had fallen to be classed by the United Nations in December 1987 among the ten Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the world. Martial law was declared 3 August 1988, but it was already becoming evident, to the great disappointment of the military, that the single party system Ne Win had built since the 1962 military coup was no more. The people knew that this was the case, and the army was not in a position to assert its authority until mid-1989, when it took the extreme measure of imprisoning and placing under house arrest the leaders of the democracy movement.

This phenomenal crisis the army hoped to resolve by promising (and indeed holding) the May 1990 elections, which it presented as a response to the demands in particular by Buddhist monks. However, the results were not what it hoped for. The elections demonstrated that the National Unity Party had openly supported was extremely unpopular, with only 10 seats against the overwhelming 392 seats for the National League for Democracy (NLD), or 82 per cent of all constituencies. In other words, the army could not rely on the popular vote to stay in power. Not only had the army-dominated political structure thus been dealt a blow, but the army that stood behind this, once popularly portrayed as heroes sacrificing their lives in the fight against colonialists and fascist oppressors, had also been given the thumbs down.

The army desperately held on for life, using martial law and extreme authoritarian measures. Soon after, it decided to reinvent the purpose of the elections, stalled the hand-over of power to the NLD, and referred to the need for a new constitution prior to transfer of power. It also announced the need for a National Convention at which hand-picked members would write the new constitution, a process from which the NLD was expelled by the regime in November 1995 after the NLD had decided to boycott the proceedings. The National Convention still remains to be completed.

In short, the four regimes (see Table 1) that followed Ne Win's resignation continue to be despised, both internationally and within Burma. However, this book, unlike so many recent documents on Burma, does not primarily serve to document the wrongs or the atrocities committed by the regime. Nor does it aim to give a blow by blow account of events. These have been amply documented in the many well-researched reports of organizations such as, among others, Amnesty International and the United Nations, and a number of recent academically inclined publications, such as the edited volumes *Burma: prospects for a democratic future* edited by Robert I. Rotberg (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1998) and *The challenge of change in a divided society* edited by Peter Carey (MacMillan Press, 1997), along with Mya Maung's latest book *The Burma road to capitalism: economic growth versus democracy* (Praeger, 1998) and in the Open Society Institute's journal *Burma Debate*. These are supplemented by the journalism of publications such as *The Nation*, *The Bangkok Post*, *Mainichi Daily News*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, and other publications regularly posted on BurmaNet News. Furthermore, the regime's own versions of events are readily available from its publications, in particular, *The New Light of Myanmar (NLM)*, *Information Sheets (IS)* and *Myanmar Perspectives (MP)*, as well as *Myanmar Monitor* – all of which are posted on the Internet.

The influence of the media and the Internet

This book takes a particular dimension of the current political crisis as its starting point, namely its Buddhist aspects. I must stress that this is only one particular dimension of many. But it is one that has hardly made any headlines and that has been – given the important role of monks in the protests and in the

¹ Supposedly the protests began at 8:08 a.m. The significance of this lies in the magic of numerology, and as a response to the number 9 deemed lucky by the regime.

elections – one of the most ignored aspects of Burmese politics. I also cannot emphasize enough that I focus here primarily on the politics as practised in the areas controlled by the SLORC-SPDC regimes. To have a better view of what is going on elsewhere in Burma, I strongly advise readers to supplement this perspective with those from the point of view of the many other Burmese ethnic and religious groups.

Since the 1962 coup, the military have attempted to keep Burma isolated from the outside world. On the basis of this, Burma received the designation 'hermit state'. Up until 1988, this was based on total isolation of the country, but after 1989 the financial and political turmoil in Burma forced the doors open to businesses, tourists and to a limited number of non-government organisations (NGOs).

It was the conventional media that played a crucial role in waking Burma from its slumber. In particular, new forms of communication technology – including satellite communication and the Internet – have posed a most serious threat to the ways of the regime, since these permit no control.

The 1988 street battles were reported all over the world. Information was fed back to protesters via the Burmese language services of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA). Soon the Burmese military was acutely aware that the international media had considerably strengthened the resolve and efficacy of the protesters. Without the BBC and VOA reporting through 1988 and 1989, the protests and election campaigns would not have been as persistent and effective as they were, and without this media pressure it is possible that the authorities would have simply omitted the May 1990 elections.

Given its earlier policy of isolation, therefore, it is no surprise that the foreign media had been identified by the regime as one of the principal causes of the unrest in Burma. General Saw Maung repeatedly attributed blame at their door for the unrest in Burma.¹ Next to his dislike for party politics, General Saw Maung greatly disliked the 'journalistic technique', as 'all such writings are insidious propaganda'.² Saw Maung desired to dominate the agenda of the international media by conducting press-campaigns so that it might open the eyes of the world to the truth about Burma. The first press-campaign since 1962 was Saw Maung's briefing of journalists on 16 January 1989, and since then the regime has repeatedly organized press conferences to present its point of view. Though initially it thought this would change world opinion, it soon learnt that international media attention is a much more complex issue to manage, in which the possibilities for legitimizing authoritarian measures are very limited indeed. General Khin Nyunt has continued these press-campaigns, complaining that 'every time an anti-government movement occurs, the foreign news media take the opportunity to write and broadcast exaggerated versions of the events or outright lies and rumours of all kinds'.³

In the course of 1989, Burma lost much media attention in favour of greater international concerns. The world press diverted its attention to China between end April and June 1989 leading up to the Tiananmen Square incident. Michael Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) precipitated the spectacular fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, and culminated in the disintegration of the Soviet Union by the end of 1990. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 were added elements competing with Burma for international attention.

Burma was resuscitated in the news when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi in July 1991. However, the Burmese cause was not advanced until 1994, when the political struggle moved from the jungle to the Internet, transforming the army of students into an army of cyber-activists.⁴ This opened up a completely new kind of boundary along which the regime had to defend itself from attack. Burma was the first Asian country for which the Internet made such a significant difference, at around the same time as it was being used in Mexico to wage 'Net-war'.⁵ It is upon BurmaNet that other country-focused Internet sites, including Singapore and Indonesia, were later modelled.

BurmaNet was founded in January 1994 by Doug Steele, a student who had just finished his

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:13,77,105,147,152,242,253).

² Saw Maung (1990b:259).

³ 'The clarification by Secretary-1 of the State Law and Order Restoration Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt at the special press conference held in the hall of the Ministry of Defence on 31 December 1996'. *၂၀၁၇ ခုနှစ် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော် အစိုးရ၏ ဖြေဆိုချက်* 1997, p. 21.

⁴ Grant Peck. 'Internet used in fight for freedom'. Associated Press, 23.04.1995; Philip Shenon. '2-edged sword: Asian regimes on the Internet'. *New York Times* 29.05.1995; Nigel Holloway. 'Caught in the Net'. *Far East Economic Review*, 28.11.1996; 'Myanmar rebels armed with Net'. CNET News (Reuters), 11.03.1998; Peter Eng. 'On-line activists step up fight', *Bangkok Post* 29.04.1998; Win Htein. 'Burma: from bomb sites to websites, the struggle for democracy. Burma discovers modern communications technology.' *The Bangkok Post*, 29.11.1998. See also Alden M. Hayashi. 'The Net effect'. *Scientific American*, January 1999.

⁵ 'Netwar could make Mexico ungovernable.' Pacific Rim News Service, 04.04.1995.

undergraduate philosophy degree at Georgetown University, and who had arrived in Thailand in October the previous year. In January, he was hired by Maureen Aung Thwin from the Open Society Institute (OSI), a foundation created by the financier George Soros that aims to prise open centrally planned societies. Initially, he was hired to train people to use modems so that communication costs among Burmese exiles abroad could be cut. However, as part of this he felt he needed to give an incentive for the Burmese community to have a reason to log on. He therefore began to spend time reporting information relayed by the refugees on the border with Burma from Bangkok on an almost daily basis, under the Strider synonym and under the banner 'Appropriate Information Technologies, Practical Strategies'.¹ This evolved into a comprehensive news service, containing eventually not only published materials from newspapers, magazines and newsletters, but also reports from wire services and much unpublished material, including sometimes intelligence reports. BurmaNet collected in one place all possible facts and opinions about the situation in Burma. It expanded its readership so that not only activists read it, but diplomats, journalists, academics and, indeed, members of the regime.²

One journalist put it that 'in just a couple of years, Internet activists have turned an obscure, backwater conflict into an international issue and helped make Rangoon one of the world's most vilified regimes.'³ The Internet put a world-wide community of political refugees and exiled students world-wide in search for political causes in touch, and it resulted in enormous pressures on companies, politicians and humanitarian organizations. Campaigns led to consumer pressure on consumer brands, shareholder pressure on companies, and voter pressure on governments. Within two years, these led to major consumer companies ceasing or withdrawing investment in Burma and the placing of Burma high on the political agenda of governments around the world, leading to the European and American boycotts of Burma.

The Free Burma Coalition played an important role in raising international awareness. Founded in September 1995 by Zarni, a Burmese activist studying at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, this organised one of the first political cyber-campaigns focusing on any one particular country. It rapidly became one of the world's largest international on-line human rights campaigns covering more than 150 university campuses. It delivered some remarkably speedy results. Using the lessons learnt from the South Africa boycott, with the added benefit of the Internet, student campus activities were organized throughout the United States. Their activities contributed within months to Berkeley passing a resolution in that year prohibiting business with Burma.⁴ Boycotts by different states were called, culminating eventually in the April 1997 ban of all new American investments in Burma by Bill Clinton. In March 1997, the former EEC suspended Burma's privileged trade relationships.

What this development meant was that not only had the Internet contributed a forum in which some form of dialogue could emerge between various interest groups in full public view, but it had contributed to facilitating the damaging blow to the regime's hopes for foreign investments and to its international standing. The regime monitored the Internet campaign with some trepidation. It was a thorn in its side from the very beginning.⁵ Indeed, ASEAN member governments – and in particular those seeking to keep a local sense of Asian values (in particular Singapore) – are watching developments on the Internet in relation to Burma with great worry.⁶ General Khin Nyunt was to later complain that 'some major Western nations

¹ At that time there were already Burma-related Bulletin Boards in operation (soc.culture.burma), but BurmaNet permitted anonymity of subscription as long as one did not post a message for others to see. It also prevented junk mail as the recipients are not known outside the listserv itself. This received a more versatile permanent gopher and ftp site in early 1995 by means of a donation by Sun Microsystems of a Sun Site at the University of North Carolina. In April 1995 a separate news service (BurmaNews-L) was split off from the discussion group (BurmaNet-L). A full www service was set up under the umbrella of the Free Burma Coalition founded by Zarni at the University of Wisconsin. The mailing list is operated and maintained by the Institute for Global Communication (IGC).

² I am grateful to Doug Steele for much of this information.

³ Peter Eng. 'On-line activists step up fight'. *Bangkok Post*, 29.04.1998

⁴ Ann Scott Tyson. 'Political activism on campus takes on a cyberspace twist.' *Christian Science Monitor*, 31.10.1995; Joe Urschel. 'Internet links campuses in 90's-style protest, college cry: Free Burma'. *USA Today*, 29.04.1996; T. T. Nhu. 'Web cloud: online networking helps unite pro-democracy efforts.' *San Jose Mercury News* (California), 06.01.1997.

⁵ 'Clarification on how the NLD Party in the country has been conspiring with Myanmar Expatriate Groups and some international organizations to destabilize the situation and incite anarchy and uprising within Myanmar'. (<http://www.myanmar.com>)

⁶ During a meeting between Southeast Asian officials and broadcasters it was decided that the Internet needed policing, and it 'affirmed the importance of having safeguards against easy access to sites which ran counter to our cherished values, traditions and culture. ASEAN would encourage other nations, especially the West to understand its concern.' 'ASEAN Forum agrees to police the Net'. Reuters, 04.09.1996.

are attempting to destabilize the political situation, creating financial problems and difficulties for the ruling governments in the developing nations', and that they 'have the use of the Internet at their disposal to have any desired impact around the world within seconds'. His view was that instead, 'the use of the Internet should conform to the political, economic and social policies being followed in the country and serve national interest' and should be used to 'prevent the penetration of decadent culture, enticements to copy the Western traditions and styles and unchecked inflow of information'.¹ Furthermore, the Burmese ambassador to America said that 'allegations abound mainly because of the fodder fed into the Internet by armed expatriate groups and those who have an axe to grind. But those who know Myanmar well and are not gullible, will find that the allegations of widespread human rights abuse have never been substantiated'.² Though Zarni assures me that the Free Burma Coalition is an entirely independent initiative, the regime traces their woes ultimately back to Maureen Aung Thwin, Director of the Open Institute's Burma Project, as the one causing the greatest damage in terms of opposition funding.³

The regime simply had to respond. It was within months of the launch of the Free Burma campaign, namely on 8 October 1995, that the regime formally launched its own Internet site. Though this was presented as preparation for the new tourism campaign 'Visit Myanmar Year 1996', it was clearly intended as their Internet corrective to international criticism. Three media features were part of this site, namely the regime's *Information Sheets*, the *New Light of Myanmar* and *Myanmar Perspectives*. The NLM is available online also in French and German.

The change of battlefield from jungle to Internet also meant a change in the departments attaining power and the qualifications needed for promotion to high office. The ascendance of the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS) and of men such as the Internet savvy Colonel Kyaw Win, also indicate a major change of direction for the regime.

Unocal which has a billion-dollar natural gas pipeline investment in Burma, largely financed the Washington-based Burma/Myanmar Forum, a non-profit organization set up in 1996 aimed at 'educating the press, Congress and the public about American foreign-policy issues'. It paid for high-ranking American government and ex-government officials to visit Burma.⁴ This had collapsed by October 1998 because of the regime's hard-line treatment of the democracy movement.

In 1998, the regime made an attempt to redress the negative international image of Burma. Military leaders eventually decided to give interviews from April 1998 onwards, immediately prior to the NLD's announced celebration of their electoral victory.⁵ Furthermore, through its commercial front in the United States, the regime hired Jefferson Waterman International, an expensive American public relations company. Apparently this company was preferred because Ann Wroblewski was associated with it, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Narcotics control, just as narcotics exports from Burma had seen a major increase.⁶ Jefferson Waterman began, among other campaigns, to publish *Myanmar Monitor* on 13 May 1998, providing up-beat commentary on the potential of investment in Burma. The first paragraphs of the first issue said that 'recently-imposed US investment sanctions on Myanmar (Burma) are based on politics and are short-sighted with only short-run benefits, according to some in Myanmar itself'. The second paragraph says that Myanmar leaders have been quoted as

'feeling sorry' for US companies, which will lose out on future returns from investments, soon to be prohibited by US President Bill Clinton's decision to punish Myanmar for alleged abuses in human rights and lack of co-operation in narcotics enforcement. These men are frustrated because they say they have worked hard to steer their country towards being attractive

¹ 'Burma: Khin Nyunt: West uses Internet to destabilize countries'. Rangoon TV Myanmar Network, 30.06.1998.

² 'Open letter from Myanmar Embassy in Washington, D.C., to Mr Derek Fatchett, MP, Foreign Office Minister of State of Britain', 16.10.1998. Published in *IS*, 19.10.1998.

³ Byatti. 'A wrong move and one could lose the game.' *NLM*, 14.10.1996.

⁴ 'Former U.S. officials discuss investment in Myanmar'. Kyodo News, 10.10.1997; 'Oil and politics'. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 30.10.1997.

⁵ Interviews with General Khin Nyunt, Ohn Gyaw and Brigadier General Able were published in April-June 1998 issue of *Leaders Magazine* Vols. 21, No. 2 (republished as 'The facts as we see them'. *IS*, 22.05.1998 and *MP*, May 1998; 'Myanmar's Foreign Affairs: an interview with His Excellency U Ohn Gyaw, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Union of Myanmar', *IS* 23.05.1998; 'Investment opportunities: an interview with His Excellency Brigadier-General D.O. Abel, Minister, State Peace and Development Council, Union of Myanmar'. *IS*, 24.05.1998; 'Report on exclusive Than Shwe interview.' *NLM*, 14.06.1998). Excerpts from these were republished: 'On-the-record with Myanmar's leaders'. *Myanmar Monitor*, Vol. 2.14-2.16, 26.06-24.07.1998. For General Than Shwe this was the first time he addressed the press.

⁶ 'Burma's image problem is a moneymaker for U.S. lobbyists.' *Washington Post*, 24.02.1998. On the drug issue see Leslie Kean & Dennis Bernstein. 'The Burma-Singapore Axis: globalizing the heroin trade'. *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring 1998.

to foreign investors. They say they have a long-range plan which encompasses a strong economic development program as a foundation to democratic political reforms, planned to follow the unification of some 16 Myanmar ethnic states.¹

By the end of 1998, Jefferson Waterman International increasingly faced the impossible task of defending a regime that was gradually being abandoned by companies world-wide. Not only American and European finances were withdrawing, but Asian companies were also leaving as the result of the Asian crisis.² In January 1999, in a desperate bid to reverse the tide of world-opinion, the regime announced it was receiving the editors of *Leaders Magazine*.³ It believed this magazine would influence leaders and opinion-makers world-wide, for the magazine is 'circulated to distinguished leaders of the world', circulation 'is strictly limited', and to receive it, 'one must be the leader of a nation, an international company, a world religion, an international institute of learning or an international labour organization, or a chief financial officer, a major investor on behalf of labour or corporate pension funds, a chief information officer, a Nobel Laureate, or a leader in science or the arts.'⁴ The regime's understanding of Western media is evidently extremely limited, for this magazine has no impact on Western opinion makers.

Internet limits and local debates

There are several points to note about Internet development in relation to Burma *vis-à-vis* countries such as Indonesia. In Indonesia the process of encouraging foreign businesses to establish in the country had been much more gradual, taking place over a longer period. However, Burma was opened up to foreign business suddenly only in 1989, and it has a very rudimentary communication infrastructure. When the 1997 Indonesian protests precipitated the downfall of Suharto, large numbers of people within the country already had access to the Internet and participated in e-mail lists in the Indonesian vernacular, so that information was freely distributed there. By contrast, though BurmaNet is known to be smuggled into Burma in encrypted form, and though some are surprisingly able to receive an Internet connection at a price,⁵ the Internet had not significantly penetrated into the country. Second, unlike the Indonesian Roman script, Burmese script has not been sufficiently standardised on the computer to permit easy communication in Burmese. Keyboard and character identity assignments are incompatible.

In sum, the Internet has undoubtedly created extraordinary channels of communication and has permitted discussions to take place on the situation in Burma beyond expectation. It has changed the way we think about Burma and I am myself deeply indebted to those who have contributed to this development, and I know that most scholars of Burma feel the same way. Also, the Burmese people will eventually be able to communicate their ideas more effectively on the Internet, and I am waiting for the time that there will be a cross-over between Burmese and 'foreign' debates.

However, as for the period up until now, developments on the Internet so far hardly penetrated this barrier – Burmese vernacular ideas are not picked up, thus leaving the 'hermit' country separation intact. This divide plays into the regime's hand, for it proclaims to represent the internationally 'misunderstood' forces of tradition, portraying the NLD as co-equivalent with foreign interests. The regime repeatedly appeals to local customs and traditions as justification for its rule, and since it criticises foreign reports about the situation in Burma as ill-informed, it is extremely important for any analysis of Burma, if it is to have any effect *within* Burma, and if it is to fill out gaps in the debates *outside* the country, to deliver as much information about local debates as possible. This is vital to advance our understanding of Burmese politics and to address the fundamental underlying cultural and religious perceptions of this political crisis.

The aim of this book is twofold. On the one hand, it is to inform a non-Burmese readership about some of the local cultural debates that underlie the stand-off between the two, which are about local concepts and local practices that have a long local historical tradition. However, the aim is also to address the regime and to try to make them understand that emphasis on local values is not a substitute for a rational government. This local historical tradition is more complex than the regime's depiction of 'Myanmar civilization' in the singular, and the army has no monopoly over it. In this respect at least, the NLD is no less 'Myanmar' and no more 'foreign' than the army itself, which has not been beyond using outdated language, expressions and

¹ *Myanmar Monitor*, Vol. 1.01, 13.05.1997.

² 'Hard to spin this one'. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15.10.1998.

³ 'Secretary-I receives *Leaders Magazine* Chief Editor' *NLM*, 08.01.1999; 'Chairman of State Peace and Development Council Senior General Than Shwe receives Chief Editor of *Leaders Magazine*'. *NLM*, 09.01.1998.

⁴ 'Interview with Gen. Than Shwe.' *NLM*, 14.06.1998.

⁵ Matthew McAllester. 'A whisper from Burma ...'. *Newsday*, 19.11.1997.

ideas about culture and race as inherited from the British during the colonial period.

Mental culture and politics in Burma

This book aims to shed light on selected long-term operative vernacular ideas that have hitherto enjoyed little or no consistent exposure either in the media or on the Internet. A seasoned observer on the relationship between politics and religion in Burma, and in South and South-East Asia in general, once commented that ‘the diversity, range, and inherent importance of the problems connected with this interaction [between politics and religion] in Burma are unequalled elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia. In no other country of this region has there been such a dramatic religio-political development...’.¹ Though he referred in particular to the period of U Nu's premiership, he summed up a general situation in Burma that has excited intellectuals attracted to the heady mix between Marxism and Buddhism. These include the founding father of alternative economics, namely E.F. Schumacher who, after practising *vipassana* in Burma, developed his theory of Buddhist economics (in which the economy should work to reduce rather than kindle desire) and founded the Society for Intermediate Technology in 1965.² I would also count among them the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, for whom Buddhism provided an alternative idiom for structuralism, and for whom the Burmese experience of Buddhism represented a sense of freedom not permissible to Western society. Indeed after his deliberations on Buddhism, he concludes his book on an anthropology that is ‘entropology’, the ‘name of the discipline concerned with the study of the highest manifestations of ... [the] process of disintegration’. This questions the self at the basis of what he considered old-fashioned sociology and old-fashioned anthropology.³ Other authors for whom Burmese Buddhism was a subject of extreme interest include Trevor Ling, Winston King, Michael Mendelson and Manuel Sarkisyanz, and converts to Buddhism such as Nyanatiloka, Ananda Mettaya and Francis Story.

This book is also a product of intellectual excitement at discovering such radically different ways of perceiving and organising the world. There is no doubt that Burmese society and political thought have many unique features. In this book I work out in what ways mental culture – which incorporates a wide array of practices usually identified as ‘meditation’ and ‘contemplation’ – is at the heart of Burmese politics. I demonstrate that it is not a coincidence that mental culture has provided an important key to government reform. The logic of this is primarily set out in Appendix 1 – mental culture has taken on the ritual efficacy

¹ Smith (1965:307).

² Fritz Schumacher's experiences in Burma are of interest. This is described in *Alias Papa: a life of Fritz Schumacher* (Oxford UP, 1984) by Barbara Wood, his daughter. Though he was sought out to advise the British government of Burma as early as November 1944, he ended up in Burma at the invitation of Prime-Minister U Nu between early January and early April 1955. A threat of the American-sponsored Kuo Mintang forces to Burma on 30 June 1953 had resulted in the breakdown of the USA aid programme. U Nu searched specifically for a non-American economic adviser and wanted Schumacher, who was by then known as an economist with Fabian and Buddhist sympathies. For Schumacher this appointment coincided with a period in his personal life of increased interest in religion after 1950. He frequently met Buddhologist Edward Conze during 1953, whose lectures on comparative religion he attended. Schumacher's experiences in Burma are described in chapter 17 ‘The breakthrough’ and chapter 18 ‘I am a Buddhist’. Schumacher initially wrote a paper called ‘Economics in a Buddhist country’. He viewed Burma as ‘a country with aspirations and ideals traditionally opposed to those of Western civilization, deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of Buddhism’ and he realized that ‘economic development in Burma was not a question of matters such as trading arrangements, as he had advocated in the days of the Wilson Committee, it was far more fundamental, it required a different kind of economics altogether, a “Buddhist economics”’. Though he conceived this Buddhist economics initially in terms of the Gandhian spinning wheel, his experiences in Burma resulted in a more specifically Buddhist chapter on ‘Buddhist economics’ in his book *Small is beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered*. (Blond & Briggs 1973), orig. published in *Asia: a handbook* ed Guy Wint (London: Anthony Blond, 1966). See also H. Henderson. ‘The legacy of E.F. Schumacher.’ *Environment*, May 1978.

Schumacher's Buddhist experience in Burma is described in U Thet Tun's ‘A Buddhist economist’ (*In honour of Mingun Sayadaw's 80th birthday*, Tipitaka Nikaya Ministrative Organization, 1991, pp. 91-99). He begins this article describing the ‘Age of refugees’, including ‘political refugees’, ‘economic refugees’, ‘boat people’ (from Vietnam), ‘culture refugees’ (Americans to old Europe), and finally ‘spiritual refugees’. The latter are ‘the Western individuals seen at various meditation centres in India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand’ who are ‘the people who in economic language are not satisfied merely with the material infrastructure of their lives in their developed countries but seek the spiritual superstructure in the East.’ He concludes his work saying that ‘Buddhist Myanmar should be proud to have received such a discerning spiritual refugee as E.F. Schumacher and to have relaunched him as the world famous Buddhist economist.’ (p. 99).

³ Lévi-Strauss's interest in Buddhism is clearly evident in his *Tristes Tropiques* (Penguin, 1976). Though on the subject of the Amazon, this book ends with the final two chapters on a Buddhist note – on his return from the Amazon in chapter 39 he visits Taxila, the Indian centre of Buddhist learning, and chapter 40 culminates in his recounting a visit to a Burmese Buddhist monastery along the Burmese frontier with Chittagon in September 1950. (See also I. Strenski. Lévi-Strauss and the Buddhists. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22, 1, 1980, pp. 3-22).

of sacrifice, the method *per se* of confronting disorder, evil and embodiment. However, it does so by uprooting certain impure qualities in the mind, namely by 'self'-sacrifice. Indeed, I demonstrate here that vital political concepts such as 'national unity', 'national independence' and 'freedom' are all conceived of, ultimately, as products of mental culture. This relationship is cemented by identification of mental culture and political order at various levels. For example, 'Burma' is popularly derived from Brahma, the entirely spiritual beings in the upper heavens, and their lives and attainments are identified with mental culture. Furthermore, given the importance of mental culture in politics, I am presenting the institutions that teach *vipassana* as perhaps the only institutions in Burma that have the potential to transcend the current entrenched political divisions. Exponents on both sides accept its importance, and both sides patronise its traditions. I hope this book will alert policy makers on Burma to the relevance of these Buddhist concepts and institutions in Burma for developing conciliatory politics. In Burmese political tradition, the neutrality of the renouncer competes favourably with the neutrality of the United Nations and NGOs.

The Internet and the foreign media have challenged the military concept of 'self' and stretched it to the limits. In this context the techniques of self-investigation have begun to play a role in Burma that goes back to the beginnings of British colonial occupation of Burma. The politicisation of mental culture goes back to the foundation of the Burmese Buddhist state as celebrated in the encounter between Anawratha and Shin Arahān (see Appendix 1.2). Burmese rulers have historically been legitimated, in part at least, by demonstrating support for Buddhist saints, in particular forest monks. The primary duty of the king is to provide for the Buddhist order, and Konbaung kings were known by the epithet 'benefactor to the Buddhist realm' [*qacqanāyika*].¹ Since Anawratha's rule, arhats have been consulted by rulers at moments of crisis and such encounters have retrospectively been construed as having had implications for changes in the shape and structure of, not only the political, but also of the Buddhist order. Thus, Anawratha's encounter with Shin Arahān in 1056 supposedly resulted in the introduction of the Theravada Buddhist monastic ordination tradition to the Pagan dynasty by forcible appropriation from the Mon (Thahton) in the south, but it also marked the beginning of a new Theravada Buddhist monarchic system in Upper Burma. This system lasted until the British put an end to it in 1886. As I will show, the idea of national unity that developed under the monarchy was originally conceived in terms of the unity of the Sangha, but after 1988 it came to be expressed as the unity of the army.

A decisive shift took place during Mindon's reign (r. 1853–78), after the second Anglo-Burmese War.

Men of prowess tend to be fascinated by severe ascetics. In Mindon's court there were some people who wielded influence not because of official position but because of their 'spiritual power'. Those ascetics included Htuthkaung Sayadaw and the Shwegyin Sayadaw, holy men, the nun Mai Kin, and a Manipuri Brahman. Interested in the occult, astrology, and alchemy, King Mindon supported all these ascetics.²

In his history of Buddhism in Burma, Ferguson observed that 'after King Mindon ... many lay people, particularly in Lower Burma, began to honour meditating forest monks, and some of these developed the belief that meditation was superior to textual memorization as the means to nirvana.'³ There is a substantial body of vernacular Burmese literature arising in the course of this period that points at Buddhist mental culture as the highest form of Buddhism. Dozens of these point at historical evidence of the practice and teaching of *vipassana* (ဝိပဿနာ, or insight contemplation, in the 19th century that have not so far been explored by Western scholarship. A number of such works originated in the middle of the last century, but most are of 20th century origin. This literature reveals how *vipassana* practice was subject to debate from the second quarter of the 19th century onwards, roughly coterminous with the British encroachment on Burmese territory and the loss of self-esteem this brought to members of the royal family. It involved monastic personalities such as Thilon Sayadaw (1786–1860), Htuthkaung Sayadaw (1798–1880), Shwegyin Sayadaw (1822–93), Hngetdwin Sayadaw (1831–1910), and Hpondawgyi U Thila (1832–1908), at least one nun, namely Me Kin (1814–82), and members of Mindon's Court, such as his queens and the Minister of Interior Affairs Yaw Atwin Wun U Hpo Hlaing (1829–1883), Minister of the Interior under the last two kings of Burma. This minister was himself a practitioner of *vipassana* and author of three books on the subject. He furthermore advocated 'traditional democracy' back in the 1870s.

In supporting these personalities Mindon raised the profile of the Burmese *vipassana* traditions more than any king before. Furthermore, his personal practice and encouragement of these techniques between

¹ Maung-daung Hsayadaw (1961:110, 457, 462); Toe Hla (1987:173n11).

² Myo Myint (1987:124).

³ Ferguson (1975:257).

1840–70 sets him apart from his predecessors in Burmese history. During his rule, and as a result of his sponsorship, came to fame these earliest generations of *vipassana* practitioners to whom contemporary teachers trace back their lineage of practice. Indeed, as I will show later, he was the first Burmese king to incorporate mental culture into royal discipline.

The popularization of *vipassana* did not take place on any great scale, among unordained Buddhists at least, until the economic depression of the 1930s when these techniques came to be disseminated predominantly by pupils of the Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) and Mingun Sayadaw (1869–1954). Though a famous role model in terms of his own meditative practices, contributions by the Ledi Sayadaw himself were mainly limited to preaching and writing about the subject: he personally never practically taught lay persons on any scale. Mingun's contribution, on the other hand, did involve practical instruction to the laity on some scale, as he was involved in the earliest-known institutionalization of formal classes for unordained in a centre founded for this purpose by his disciples as early as 1911. Nevertheless, it was mainly pupils of these two monks who took *vipassana* methods to the masses. The big names in the 1920s and 1930s were the Kyaungbàn Sayadaw (1860–1927), Nyaunglún Sayadaw (1864–1933), Theikchádaung Sayadaw (1871–1937), Mòhnyìn Sayadaw (1873–1964), Hsaya Thetgyi (1873–1946), Hanthawádi Sayadaw (1886–1959), Sùnlún Sayadaw (1878–1952), Myat Thein Htùn (1896–) and the Webu Sayadaw (1896–1977): possibly with exception of Nyaunglún Sayadaw, these had all been influenced in one way or another either through personal contact or reading the writings of the Ledi or Mingun Sayadaws.

From the Mindon period to the time of U Nu, the *vipassana* traditions moved from a technique appropriated by the aristocracy to a popular technique that is within reach of everyone – it represented the democratisation of enlightenment. What Mindon had done in the domain of the palace, U Nu did for the country as a whole – his was a programme for the true popularisation, democratisation and internationalisation of enlightenment. U Nu (1907–95), Burma's only democratically elected Prime Minister, sponsored in the 1940s and 1950s what was by then a third generation of teachers to disseminate these *vipassana* techniques under the umbrella of state sponsorship, amongst whom the Mahasi Sayadaw was by far the most influential. The *satipatthana* methodology of the Mahasi is traced back ultimately to the Thilon Sayadaw, a forest monk whose teachings greatly influenced King Mindon. Accountant-General U Ba Khin, the other influential *vipassana* teacher, traces his method back to the *anapana* technique of the Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) who was greatly influenced by U Hpo Hlaing.

These were an informal instrument for government reform and for the establishment of a bureaucracy emancipated from greed and corruption. The empire of meditation centres that teach the techniques of the Mahasi Sayadaw, though originally established as a private initiative beginning in the late 1930s, became virtually an instrument of state when they were established under the patronage of the Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Association founded by U Nu, who became Prime Minister within months of founding this organization.

The writings of John F. Brohm (1957), Winston King (1960, 1964, 1980), the auto-biographical travelogues of Shattock (1958) and Byles (1962, 1965), and the vignettes by Kornfield (1977), have so far constituted the main source material in English upon which our current understanding of these traditions is based (apart from my own thesis). Though Brohm and King, in their concern to document the Nu era, ignored historical dimensions prior to the Nu period, the correlation they both identify between transformation in the political order and popularisation of *vipassana* during the U Nu period holds also for the Mindon period – Mindon and U Nu were the only two statesmen to have sponsored a programme of *vipassana* and a Sangayana (Buddhist Synod), and to have taken mental culture into the heart of government. However, the Mindon and the Nu era, almost a century apart, also marked either end of the colonial period, whilst faith in Burmese Buddhist identity was most severely shaken, but where there were the horizons of freedom and national independence still in view. In this sense *vipassana* accomplished more than crossing the threshold of death as part of some life-cycle ritual. In character with the way Van Gennep derived his theory of rites of passage, it also, as we shall see, plays a role in that rite of transition between one concept of domain as opposed to another, and one political system as opposed to another. Indeed, *vipassana*, with its ideal of practice in the wilderness, has a role to play in the personal transformation of Burmese leaders, of the Burmese people and of their polity. Furthermore, foreigners were historically 'wrong-viewed', which provided the popular idiom for the justice of war; now this war is fought in the minds of the *vipassana* practitioners, for whom attainment of right view is the main prize.

Given this strong association with reform and attempts to introduce indigenous models of democracy

during the final days of Burmese royalty in the last century, why should it surprise us that contemporary NLD leaders should have taken to *vipassana* practice the way they did? The *vipassana* traditions have been strongly associated with government reform. They also have much to do with the reform of the status of women in Burmese society; for example, the Mingun Sayadaw (1869–1954), the teacher of the Mahasi Sayadaw, advocated that the lineage of female *bhikkhunis* be restored.

The structure of this book

Tambiah saw an ‘inner logic to what at first sight is an unlikely conjunction between the imperial ruler and the ascetic renouncer: each may pursue his objective with integrity and yet buttress the other’.¹ The relationship between king and saint is symbiotic, symbolised by the monk Shin Arahan supposedly seating himself on Anawratha's throne.² Implied in the stories of Aung San Suu Kyi's encounter with the Thamanya Sayadaw after she was released from house arrest is also such a hopeful message of momentous change in the political order. Realisation of truth in meditative act has a long history in Burma and in Theravada Southeast Asia more broadly as a precursor to momentous political change.

This book then, focuses on this third episode in the history of *vipassana* that is taking place today before our very eyes. It focuses on how the terminology and practices of mental culture inform, indeed constitute coherent internal cultural debates surrounding the politics of the military regimes since 1962, and in particular since 1988. More specifically, I focus on ‘mental culture in crisis politics’, the subject of this book, meaning the role of Buddhist discourse surrounding Buddhist techniques of meditation and contemplation in providing a structure for coping with the political crisis. This is so at the level of emotion, but also at the level of politics, for the teachers of mental culture are a nexus where the political elite come to offer their services. Indeed, mental culture provides the key ideas associated with national independence, freedom, and national unity that ultimately underlie the struggle for political legitimacy on both sides. Furthermore, I aim to show how at the same time these practices also play a role in ameliorating the suffering of prisoners confined under extreme conditions. These provide primary categories in terms of which key actors have made sense of the political arena since the 1850s.

This book deals with the correlation between the political domain as represented in Table 1 – its events, conceptualizations and personalities – with those in the Buddhist domains, as represented in Table 2. It is not the purpose of this book to analyse the entire history of correlation between political crisis and mental culture, for that would take us too far back in Burmese history, and it would take us into complexities that do not necessarily bear on the contemporary situation. My focus is primarily on the post-1988 events, though to make sense of vernacular political terminology we often have to glance back to the development of Burmese Buddhism under British colonialism, in particular in relation to Aung San and Thahkin Kodawhmaing.

Part I describes the parameters of Burmese politics as these developed since 1988, and how these are different from the preceding BSPP and U Nu periods. The SLORC–SPDC have now been in power for over a decade, and in the course of that period they have taken several initiatives that need to be understood before I can develop the NLD perspective in the subsequent Parts II–V. Having had responses from Burmese readers on a draft of this book, I realise that the importance of Part I may escape those who do not appreciate the force of irony. In my view, the military has self-produced the National League for Democracy and virtually all their ‘enemies’ by their own short-sighted behaviour. All parts have to be read to understand that, in writing this, I am not apologising for the regime, but exposing what I interpret as measures put in place to imprison and immobilise the population of Burma – to confine them to a particular *loka* much as a *beiktheik saya* would when performing *loki mangala*.

Part I elaborates post-1988 SLORC–SPDC initiatives in terms of two developments, namely ‘Aung San amnesia’ and ‘Myanmafication’. Under both U Nu and Ne Win's leadership political legitimacy depended heavily on who could claim the heritage of Aung San, the martyr for the freedom and national independence struggle. This struggle was conceived of as spiritual – political concepts such as *nyi nyut-yei* (‘national unity’, ‘harmony’, ‘national reconciliation’) and *lut-lak-yei* (‘national independence’, ‘freedom’) are associated with attainments to do with mental culture, such as *loka-nibbana* and *byama-so tayà*. Since 1988, however, unable to match Aung San Suu Kyi's broad popularity, Aung San amnesia set in among the generals. In the course of

¹ Tambiah (1984:77).

² This has sometimes been compared to the way novice Nigrodha seated himself on the throne of the great Indian king Asoka.

investigating alternative ways of legitimizing their rule, the military have set in motion a process of Myanmarification. This took the place of Aung San's heritage, involving the renaming of the country to reflect Burman pronunciation and the re-enculturing of its peoples. Since Aung San minus socialism equals democracy, and since Aung San had been reclaimed by the democracy movement, the generals conveniently forgot about him. Just as Ne Win left out 'democracy', so the SLORC-SPDC retained only a very selective part of his total spiritual quest, namely 'national independence' and left out 'freedom'. Instead of reforming government, the regime is attempting to reinvent Burma – Myanmarification is the unambiguous reinvention of Burma (Myanmar) and Burmese (Bamar).

Such military authoritarian powers have come at the cost of extreme restrictions on the population of Burma. Part II elaborates on the prison experiences of exponents of the democracy movement in terms of 'mental culture', an idea that permits freedom from the constraints of culture imposed by the regime. Practice of *vipassana* permits relief – the transcendence from *samsara* that it affords, however, is not just for the prisoner, it is relevant to the country as a whole. I also show how these *vipassana* movements are involved in government reform and are related to 'traditional democracy' and in the reform of criminals in prisons abroad.

Part III deals with the tools and manifestations of liberation politics. It shows that the ideas of revolution – *taw-hlan-yei* – and martyr – *azani* – are ultimately related to ideal results anticipated from the practice of mental culture. It also shows how the machinery of government is different from what we would expect, for it is a machinery tied into the supernatural forces of *yantara*, *mandala*, *sek* and the magic of Bo Bo Aung's circles. I have shown that other political organizations identified with the overthrow of the British colonial regime were closely associated with these practices – the *Wunthanú* movement and the *Htwet-yak-gaing* both see righteous politics as situated in the attainment of supernatural power to protect the *sasana* attained through *samatha* and the power to control *samsara*. An analysis of Aung San's speeches reveals that politics is not about the world as we know it, but it is about the Buddhist topography of *loka* and about *samsara*. I show how politicians have repeatedly opted for the practices and concepts to do with mental culture when they were challenged by crises, when they were insecure, and particularly desirous of transformation.

Part IV looks at how Aung San Suu Kyi made sense of Burma's politics increasingly in terms of Buddhism. This is the only possible avenue open to political opposition in Burma, given the criticism and the pervasive practices of 'illegalisation', the depriving of place for all forms of opposition, by the military regime. Her house arrest was symptomatic of a broader condition of political constraint – the idiom for political opposition is mental culture. I deal in some detail with her concepts of 'freedom from fear' and 'the revolution of the spirit'.

Part V addresses the chief terminology of mental culture – *samatha*, *vipassana*, and *byama-so tayà*. I catalogue the myriad ways in which these are involved in ideas about ethnic and political identity, and how they are employed in attempts to transform political, economic and other conditions deemed undesirable.

This book does not have a conclusion, for to write one at this stage would be to create the illusion that the issues have been fully understood. This is not so. This book is merely an exploratory attempt to open up the language of Buddhist practice in Burmese political ideology. The debates I raise here are not foreclosed and are very much open to interpretation and re-interpretation. The main point I wish to make is that these would be nothing but arid concepts were it not for the personalities that brought these to life, in this century of struggle for national independence and freedom. This book shows that the preoccupation with mental culture on the part of the political leadership in Burma is the rule, not the exception. The democracy movement, in emphasizing mental culture under repression, is indeed emphasizing, not so much 'Asian', as 'Myanmar' values, and is in fact acting in line with a long history of responding to conditions of imprisonment by means of mental culture. However, its particular brand of mental culture is not so much in the tradition of narrow Myanmarification à la 'hermit land', in which the aim is power and control over domains (*loka*), but in the tradition of freedom that opens up identity to exchanges without fear, as in the practice of mental culture that transcends *samsara*. After all, U Hpo Hlaing, as Minister of the Interior, opened up new vistas for the country with his 'traditional democracy' reforms, involving regular meetings between diverse interest groups and an enlightened government that works on the basis of wisdom rather than arbitrary authority. He did so while also practising and writing about *vipassana*. That this should land one in prison is the great tragedy of Burma.

Table 1. Elected governments and unelected regimes of Burma since national independence

Dates	Leader	Name	Abbreviation	Informal references
Aug 1944	Aung San (founder of party)	The Anti-Fascist Organization ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်	AFO	Aung San is known as ‘The General’ (Bogyok), and as ‘the father of Burma’s national independence’ [m̥n̥hlḁ d̥ḁ p̥ḁr: P K̥j̥k̥l̥]
Aug 1945		The Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ် ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်	AFPFL P-t-p-l hpa-ta-pa-la P-S-p-l hpa-hsa-pa- la ¹	
4 Jan 1948 ² – 12 Jun 1956 ³	U Nu (Prime Minister)	"	"	
12 Jun 1956 – 3 May 1958 ⁴	Ba Swe (Prime Minister)	"	"	
3 May 1958 – 28 Oct 1958	U Nu (Prime Minister)	The Clean Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League	Clean AFPFL P-S-p-l (q̥n̥x̥t̥h̥) ⁵ hpa-hsa-pa-la (thán- shin)	
28 Oct 1958 – 1 Mar 1960	General Ne Win ⁶ (Prime Minister)	Caretaker Government အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်		
1 Mar 1960 – 2 Mar 1962 ⁷	U Nu (Prime Minister)	The Pyedaungsu Party (The Union Party) ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်	p-T-s pa-ha-sa	
2 Mar 1962 – 4 Jan 1974 (military coup)	General Ne Win	The Revolutionary Council ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်	et̥ḁk̥h̥r: As̥i̥r taw-hlan-yei a-sò-yá	
4 Jan 1974 – 8 Aug 1981	(ex-General) U Ne Win ⁸ (President, Chairman BSPP)	The Burma Socialist Programme Party ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်	BSPP m-S-l ma-hsa-la	‘mortal’ (m̥s̥l̥ ḁ) – joke about the mixture of disparate ideas in party philosophy
8 Aug 1981 – 23 Jul 1988	(ex-General) U San Yu (President) / (ex- General) Ne Win (Chairman BSPP)	"	"	"
26 Jul – 12 Aug 1988 ⁹	(Brig. (retl)) U Sein Lwin (President, Chairman BSPP)	"	"	"
19 Aug – 18 Sep 1988	Dr Maung Maung (President, Chairman BSPP)	"	"	"
18 Sep 1988 – 23 Apr 1992 (bloodless ‘fake’ military coup)	General Saw Maung (President)	State Law and Order Restoration Council နိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ် ပအ်ဝံသ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်အိတ်	SLORC n-w-t ná-wá-dá	‘jaywalker’/ ‘lackadaisical’ ¹⁰ (newt̥i̥n̥ḁt̥ḁc̥)

¹ It should be noted that ‘Ba Cho’s views included much Beidin [astrology]’ and, sensitive to the auspicious letters, he was responsible for changing the Anti-Fascist League’s Burmese abbreviation from the original TM SZ [T: B̥ḁm̥g̥ t̥i̥o̥ k̥y̥s̥ m̥b̥ Z̥ m̥k̥y̥p̥ k̥y̥q̥] to TB SZ (Gyi Maung 1969:130).

² National Election 1 took place on 25 September 1947, and National Independence fell on 4 January 1948.

³ National Election 2 took place in 1952.

⁴ National election 3 took place in 1956.

⁵ A split took place in the AFPL between the Clean AFPFL led by U Nu and the Stable AFPFL (P-S-p-l (t̥v̥m̥p̥) led by U Ba Swe.

⁶ Formerly known as Thahkin Shu Maung.

⁷ National Election 4 took place on 6 February 1960.

⁸ The 1974 BSPP Constitution specified that only civilians were to take up Chairmanship of the BSPP and Presidency of the country. Therefore, Ne Win became a civilian. However, continued army influence meant that this was widely regarded as ‘wearing civilian dress over army uniform’.

⁹ The protests following 8.8.88 forced out Sein Lwin.

¹⁰ Jaywalker – ‘pedestrian who crosses, or walks in, street without regard for traffic’. Lackadaisical – ‘languishing, affected, given to airs and graces, feebly sentimental; unenthusiastic, listless’.

30 May 1990 – Election 5 – NLD victory, winning 392 out of 485 seats (81 %); military sponsored National Unity Party wins only 2 %	Aung San Suu Kyi, U Kyi Maung, U Tin U (leaders of the elected NLD Party not permitted to assume government)	National League for Democracy Ami qā dñi kers AP pā\	NLD	
23 Apr 1992 – 15 Nov 1997	General Than Shwe (President)	State Law and Order Restoration Council Nā-w-t ná-wá-dá Sakār: AP pē	SLORC n-w-t ná-wá-dá	'jaywalker'/ 'lackadaisical' (new tñā t ac)
15 Nov 1997 – present	General Than Shwe (President)	State Peace and Development Council Nā-w-t ná-wá-dá er: Nā-w-t ná-wá-dá	SPDC n-A-P ná-á-hpá	'Cow Committee' (Nā-w-t ná-wá-dá)

2. Mental Culture in Burma and its socio-political implications

vipassana (insight contemplation)

- Buddha's enlightenment
- 1850s: response to Anglo-Burmese War II; associated with aristocracy: Mindon, his queens; factor in government reform; factor in Minister of the Interior Hpo Hlaing's 'traditional democracy'
- 1913: Mingun Sayadaw; first *vipassana* centre for the practice by laity
- post-1947: democratization of *nibbana*; U Nu – sponsor of Mahasi Sayadaw; meditation centres spread country-wide
- post-1962: nationalisation of property; Ne Win's actions forces people to come to terms with loss of property; many enter *vipassana* centres
- post-1988: prison; SLORC-SPDC; prisoners take to the practice of *vipassana*
- today: several dozen traditions, over a thousand centres, several million practitioners internationally; 'medi' visa

Buddhism

- purity (*visuddhi*); uproots mental defilements permanently; ultimate truth; *lokuttara*; awareness of suffering (*dukkha*), non-self (*anatta*), insubstantiality of existence (*anicca*); produces *ariya*; *nibbana*; 'burns' *kamma*; ceases *samsara*; *bodhi*

Socio-political implications

- justice; internationalism; democracy; influence (*awza*); transcends boundaries and 'inside'/'outside'; distrustful of language; autonomy; ultimate freedom; mental purity; government reform (salary cf. tribute); free from prison (*loka/samsara*); meditation centres; non-violent; abolishes need for police or military; 'apply oneself to the *dhamma*'; true Burman is realisation of non-self (Hpo Hlaing) cf. foreign theistic religions; equality

samatha (concentration meditation)

- beginning of world: Manu
- r. 1472–92: Dhammazedi
- 1782–1819: Bo Bo Aung challenged King Bodawpaya
- Bo Min Gaung
- 1910–40: *Wunthanú*, U Ottama, U Wisara, Thahkin Kodawhmaing
- 1930: Saya San rebellion
- 1939: *Htwetyak gaing* (Freedom Bloc), Aung San

- Galon/Nagani

Buddhism

- power (*abhiñña*); suspends mental defilements temporarily; conventional truth; *loka*; *samadhi* (one-pointed mind); *jhana*; supernatural powers; control rebirth up to highest heavens

Socio-political implications

- authority (*ana*); universal king; law; nationalism; rebellion; sovereignty; preoccupied with boundaries and 'inside'/'outside'; power; control; hermit (*yatheti*); *zawgyi*; *weikza gaing*; 'doing Sasana'; alchemy; material purity; cosmic travel; extension of life; pagoda building and conquest through royal charity; *cetana*; transactional; foundation of settlements and countries; medicine magic; armed conflict; highly localised; not (yet) exported abroad; hierarchy; magic (*loki pañña*)

byahmaso-tayā – brahma vihara: The Brahma (Noble) Practices (Dwellings)

1840–70: King Mindon

1946: Aung San 'Problems for Burma's Freedom' (20 Jan)

1948: U Nu

1971: Burma Socialist Programme Party

1988: Aung San Suu Kyi – NLD

1992: SPDC-SLORC

Buddhism

- Mangala Sutta; *metta* (loving-kindness); *karuna* (compassion); *mudita* (sympathetic joy – *jhana* up to realm 20); *upekkha* (equanimity – *jhana* up to realm 27); social meditation ('glue of *loka*'); leading to attainment of *samadhi*; morality; preparation for success in *vipassana* and *samatha*; *paritta*

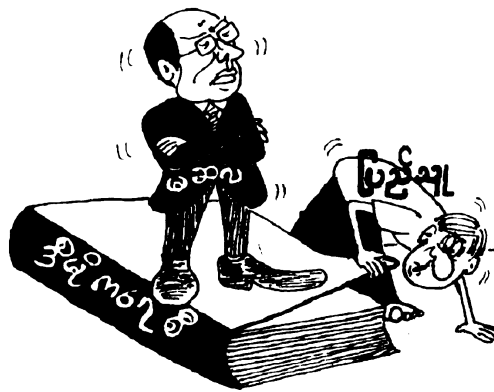
Socio-political implications

- 'mangala country'; good royal government; socialism; democracy; national harmony-unity; influence (*awza*); co-operation; engaged Buddhism; good economic development; freedom from fear; reconciliation with enemies; social bonding (ethnic identity); supernatural protection (*paritta*); higher heavens; free from unjust imprisonment (heat); non-violence; protection

¹ SLORC in Burmese literally means 'Quiet-crouched-crushed-flattened' [ZD4].

Part I

Myanmafication – Imprisoning Burma



The people try to open the book of democracy,
kept shut by the Burma Socialist Programme Party,
with Ne Win on top.

(Source: Voices of '88 – Burma's struggle for democracy.
Open Society Institute, 1998)

Part I
Myanmafication –
Imprisoning Burma

Chapter 1

Democracy, the demise of socialism and Aung San amnesia

In the broadest sense, legitimacy of the Burmese State is bound up with the Buddha *dhamma*. Conceived of as impersonal, this has no boundaries and exists even without being represented by human beings. In a more narrow sense, however, legitimacy of the State centres upon persons with particular qualities and particular states of mind whose remains, when they die, exercise a powerful allure for inheritors of their ideas. In modern Burmese politics, legitimacy is crucially linked to human beings engaged in the national independence struggle, and in particular Aung San. It is through him that modern Burmese ideas of nation and nationhood have been translated.

Ever since his assassination together with his cabinet ministers-to-be on 19 July 1947, just prior to national independence, Aung San has been officially commemorated by the Burmese government as the spiritual father of the Burma army, and as the leader and architect of the independence struggle against British capitalism and against Japanese fascism.¹ The three main national holidays, celebrated continuously since 1948, all commemorate episodes in the unification of Burma by mean of Aung San's leadership: Union Day on 12 February is the day he rallied the diverse ethnic groups represented at Pinlon to join in support of the Union of Burma; Resistance Day on 27 March (today called Armed Forces Day) is the day he led the struggle against the Japanese; finally, Martyrs' Day on 19 July commemorates his assassination and that of his colleagues. His portrait resides in many homes and offices. Many places have been named in his memory, including the National Sports Stadium, the chief market in Rangoon, the National Park, and streets all over the country. Until recently, the Burmese currency invariably carried his portrait.

The high esteem in which Aung San has been held by the Burmese public has proved difficult for the military regimes who came to power in the 1962 military coup to handle. Though Ne Win made attempts to diminish Aung San's stature early on, in the end he decided that it would be more useful to construct his authority upon Aung San as spiritual father of the army.

Aung San's double role, on the one hand, as representative of the emergent indigenous government and, on the other, as representative of the protesting students against illegitimate foreign regimes, caused the SLORC regime inheriting power from Ne Win to rethink the way it positioned itself in relation to political heritage. During the March 1988 protests, a question mark arose over who actually perpetuated the political tradition of Aung San. Was it the military regime that had inherited the instruments and ranks of the army and were guided by Ne Win, or was it the students who opposed them and carried Aung San's portrait into the streets?

Leaving Oxford, England, Aung San Suu Kyi's accidental visit to Burma in March 1988 to nurse her mother, the very month when the protests began, prompted one observer to refer to her as 'truly an accidental tourist politician'.² It drew her into the centre of the controversy over the army's manipulation of Aung San's imagery for its own legitimisation. Today, Aung San is claimed by the democratic movement his daughter came to lead. The regime's marginalisation of Aung San since 1989 must, in part at least, be read as the result of the success by the opposition in eroding the army's legitimacy by demonstrating ambiguities in Aung San's political heritage that were not in favour of the regime.

Aung San Suu Kyi and the Aung San factor

Aung San Suu Kyi's image in Burma cannot be understood without appreciating what is widely known as 'the Aung San factor'. As one journalist defined it, the Aung San factor is that 'most citizens can believe that Daw Suu Kyi can rightfully use her father's memory to call attention back to 1948 and to draw on political history and traditions that touch a collective and familiar chord in the hearts of all the people'.³ He is also

¹ In Burmese he is known as ‘the father of Burma’s national independence’ [ɪnmaɪ tɛ pà:PKcɪkɪ].

² In Burma people commonly refer to her as 'an accidental politician' [*kyauksa paingantsemyi*], a concept she used for herself first. See also (Mya Maung 1992:144).

³ Victor (1998:105).

commonly referred to as 'the Burmese equivalent of George Washington'.¹ The Aung San factor reaches deep into the core of the regime itself, as even the soldiers placed to guard Aung San Suu Kyi had to be frequently changed in case their loyalty to the military would be overcome by the presence of Aung San Suu Kyi, as Victor's interviews her former guards also indicates.²

Aung San is Aung San Suu Kyi's father, and she refers to herself as 'my father's daughter'.³ He is her main inspiration, and her main political asset. She was born a little over two years prior to Aung San's assassination. Burmese often refer to the striking resemblance she bears to him. Though her photographs were briefly available for sale between 1989–90, they are now banned by the military. Nevertheless, the army's own elevation of Aung San as hero means that they cannot avoid her appearance as a child in the greatly popular Aung San family photographs.⁴ She recognizes her popularity as derived from her status as daughter for she said that 'I serve as a kind of unifying force because of my father's name', but also because she perpetuates her father's reputation for selfless and uncorrupted dedication to the cause of the Burmese people. She says, 'I am not interested in jostling for any kind of position'.⁵

Aung San was the initial reason for her entry into politics, for, as she says 'when I first decided to take part in the movement for democracy, it was more out of a sense of duty than anything else. On the other hand, my sense of duty was very closely linked to my love for my father. I could not separate it from the love for my country, and therefore, from the sense of responsibility towards my people' [E19]. 'I'm doing this for my father ... My only concern is that I prove worthy of him' [ZH8]. Also, she says that 'I felt that I always had his spiritual support'.⁶

After the war Aung San was, in British eyes, a new and young element in Burma's politics which they did not like at all. They were used to the old guard of politicians such as Ba Maw, who played ball with the colonial authorities. After the war they preferred to deal with them rather than with Aung San. This situation is replicated here, for the regime initially saw Aung San Suu Kyi as a young upstart of little significance. Later they saw her as an irritation and as the main focus for opposition to their government. Unlike the British government, who eventually came round to negotiating with Aung San, the regime has still to see her as a legitimate opponent with whom one negotiates. Targeted by ultra-conservative members of the military, she runs the same risks of assassination as her father.

To Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung San's struggle represents clean politics for she says, 'when I honour my father I honour all those who stand for political integrity in Burma' [ZH9]. His memory was, in her words, 'the guardian of their [the people's] political conscience'.⁷ She did not initially aspire to be involved in politics and said herself that her intention when she arrived in Rangoon in March 1988 was 'to start several libraries in my father's memory'.⁸

Her entry into Burmese politics began with her first major speech at the Shwedagon to the Burmese public, in which she quoted her father's support for the fight for democracy and freedom [ZH11] and also his views on the organization and correct behaviour of the army, who should uphold the highest values and not impede democratic reform [ZH12]. Indeed, repetition of history, namely the renewal today of the repressive environment her father fought against, motivated her to characterise her contemporary struggle as 'the second national independence struggle' [ZH10]. It should be noted that this first speech took place at the very same pagoda, namely the Shwedagon, near to which the remains of her father was interred, and where he had made some of his earliest, most inflammatory speeches against the British.

When Aung San's wife, Daw Khin Kyi, died on 2 January 1989 at the age of 75, this meant a State funeral in memory of her not only as wife of Aung San, but also as mother of Aung San Suu Kyi. By this time, the army already felt Aung San Suu Kyi had betrayed them. It was an orderly and disciplined event

¹ Victor (1998:7).

² Victor (1998:103–6). See also Stewart (1997:100).

³ ASSK (1995:206).

⁴ 'At stalls in Yangon and Mandalay which specialise in selling pictures of famous Buddhist monks, one popular item is a photograph of Aung San, the leader of the Burmese independence movement, with his family. Dandled on Aung San's knee is his baby daughter, Suu. With a bit of prompting, the stall-holders will also sell photographs of Aung San Suu Kyi as a grown up; these are kept under the counter.' ('The prisoner of University Avenue'. *The Economist*, 28.01–02.02.1995)

⁵ ASSK (1995:201).

⁶ 'Patience, pragmatism pays off for "The Lady"'. *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

⁷ ASSK (1995:37).

⁸ Victor (1998:32).

attended by about 100,000 people during which Aung San Suu Kyi clearly was the focus. At this point it became apparent that Aung San could no longer be the unambiguous spiritual leader of the regime, for his daughter had become too influential and had begun to claim back her father's political heritage. She was now free from her duties nursing her mother and could dedicate herself to the democracy struggle.

Her own commemoration of her father provided the regime with its reasons for placing her under house arrest in at least two respects. First, she proclaimed that the close connection Ne Win proclaimed to have with Aung San was, in the opinion of her father, a negative connection; she argued that Aung San distrusted Ne Win, that Ne Win was not inheritor of the army, and that he was an improper leader for the country who was chiefly responsible for the country's state of deterioration. Without mentioning Ne Win by name, Aung San Suu Kyi had already criticised him as early as 8 August 1988, prior to the Saw Maung period: 'It is the belief of the majority of the people of Burma that the army is being manipulated and misused by a handful of corrupt fanatics whose powers and privileges are dependent on the survival of the present system.'¹ However, Ne Win's smiling appearance at the dinner for Armed Forces Day caused Aung San Suu Kyi to openly criticise him as responsible for the problems in Burma, and in a press conference on 26 June 1989 she charged that 'General Ne Win, [who is] still widely believed to control Burma behind the scenes, was responsible for alienating the army from the people, fashioning the military into a body responsive solely to him ...'. Also, 'the opinion of all our people' was that 'U Ne Win is still creating all the problems in this country'.² In another June speech she said that U Ne Win 'caused this nation to suffer for twenty six years', and that he 'lowered the prestige of the armed forces'.³ In interviews on 1 and 8 July she said she thought Ne Win was behind SLORC's refusal to hold dialogue and that she did not think 'there will be free and fair elections so long as U Ne Win is at the helm of power'.⁴

However, her chief criticism of Ne Win, widely interpreted as having resulted in her being placed under house arrest, was made on 13 July 1989 when Aung San Suu Kyi questioned whether the army was in line with the wishes of Bogyok Aung San or Ne Win, which according to Saw Maung 'indicate(s) that there was personal hatred, prejudice, incitement to make people misunderstand the Tatmadaw'.⁵

Her fierce criticism of Ne Win's relation to Aung San was at least a contributory factor in the de-emphasis of Aung San by the military, in addition to the fact that she was Aung San's daughter claiming his heritage. Whether this break with her father on the part of the regime will in retrospect be seen as a good thing, is a question I cannot entertain at this point, except to say that a shared image of Aung San may help when the moment comes for reconciliation. Once under house arrest, she continued her criticism of Ne Win. In August she said the NLD had 'enough of the shadow boxing – let us get at the real enemy' and called him 'a megalomaniac' who does 'anything to keep himself in power'.⁶ October saw the publication of her statement about her father's dislike, distrust and demotion of Ne Win.⁷ Much later, in 1997, however, she refused to unambiguously identify him for causing her to be under house arrest.⁸

Aung San was indirectly involved in her house arrest in a second way: it was imposed on 20 July 1989, the day after Martyrs' Day. On 19 July she was prevented from going out as Rangoon was awash with soldiers seeking to prevent any form of gathering. At that time she said that her party 'had no intention of leading our people straight into a killing field'.⁹ Nevertheless, the following day Aung San Suu Kyi insisted on

¹ ASSK (1995:205).

² Amnesty International (1989:40) cited in ASSK (1995:343).

³ 'U Ne Win is one of those that caused this nation to suffer for twenty six years, U Ne Win is the one who lowered the prestige of the armed forces. Officials from the armed forces and officials from SLORC, I call upon you to be loyal to the state. Be loyal to the people, you don't have to be loyal to U Ne Win.' Aung San Suu Kyi in June 1989 speech cited in Kanbawza Win (n.d.:97).

⁴ Amnesty International (1989:59) in ASSK (1995:347), ASSK (1995:225).

⁵ Saw Maung (1990a:54).

⁶ 'He's done enough to ruin the country. I think it is time to be stopped. He's very easy to understand in a way, he'll do anything to keep himself in power. A megalomaniac.' (*Time*, 14.08.1989); Kanbawza Win (n.d.:93–94).

⁷ 'My father was very worried about how this army could be misused and he said a lot about it. He made this point; that this army was not founded for the use of one man or for one group. It's for the country, it's for the people. He didn't think much of General Ne Win, and he never trusted him a lot. My father stopped him from becoming commander of the army, had him removed and demoted him to quartermaster general at one point.' *Time* 'Whoever shoots me' cited in Kanbawza Win (n.d.:96–97).

⁸ 'AC: Was Ne Win the one behind your incarceration in 1989? ASSK: I don't know. But it is a fact that I was incarcerated after I started criticising him for the ruin he had brought on the country' (ASSK 1997b:23).

⁹ 'Avoiding a "killing field": Suu Kyi arrested for "endangering the state"'. Amnesty International, *Briefing*, September 1990; Alan Clements's *Burma: the next killing fields?* (1992:33). In 1996 came the concept of 'The pipeline killing field', linking the concept to the Unocal gas pipeline which would traverse the Karen, Mon and Tavoy lands, to forced village relocation and forced labour ('No

paying her respects at her father's tomb along with her numerous political followers, despite warnings from the regime that they would permit her to go only in her private capacity as a family member [ZH13].¹ Win Htein, her personal assistant put the reason for her house arrest:

July 19 was Martyrs' Day, in recognition of the 1947 assassination of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's father. Previously, that occasion was quite an open affair. The immediate families were invited and they attended the ceremony. Following that, the general public joined Martyrs' Day to pay homage by putting flowers onto the tombs of the leaders. But this year the SLORC restricted each family to only two persons. It was a provocation and we knew it. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi announced that she would attend the ceremony anyway with her own family as well as with NLD leaders. Because of that, she was detained the next day. I was also taken from this residence the same day.²

Aung San's memory sustained her during her house arrest. She describes how during that time she frequently looked at her father's picture hanging on a wall in her living room, and thought 'Well now, it's just you and me – but we'll make it'.³ Though the conditions of her house arrest were officially lifted six years later in July 1995, she has never been fully free to move around since then. Nevertheless, the regime was pleased when, upon her release and in a conciliatory gesture, she attended the official ceremony in commemoration of her father.

However, the thought that the image of the national martyr should have been appropriated by his daughter for the political opposition caused great consternation with the military regime. The regime's fear of her is nowhere more evident than in the vast number of official press reports, editorials, news items and speeches made by regime journalists in the official media to discredit her.

Aung San – first democracy, then socialism

If Aung San's role in the lineage of Burmese politics has a double-take, a dual inheritance that permits him to be claimed both, by members of the military regime and by the democracy movement, this is but a reflection of a degree of ambiguity in the political ideology ascribed to him. The speeches and writings attributed to him can be used to justify arguments on both sides. Nevertheless, as I will show, the military regime, as currently constituted, has a very weak claim to Aung San's heritage. That they know this today is evident in the way that they have soft-pedalled Aung San since 1989.

With one document excepted, namely 'Blueprint for Burma', Aung San has consistently presented, and is generally understood to have intended, Burma's political development to follow the order of: national independence – unity – democracy – socialism.

Blueprint for Burma⁴

'Blueprint for Burma' represents the army's best argument for claiming Aung San's heritage. This was the early plan attributed to Aung San at the age of twenty-six sometime in January and February 1941, while he was being trained in Japan by the Japanese army, and while jointly planning the invasion of Burma.

Blueprint does not contain references to socialism, and so is not denigrating of it. However, it is uncomplimentary, to say the least, about democracy, as it advocates a 'strong state administration as exemplified in Germany and Italy [in the 1930s]', the pursuit of a 'eugenic policy', setting up of 'racial units', and dividing our people into 'backward' and 'administered' sections, where 'all the backward people must be raised to one level'. It argues that 'there shall be only one nation, one party, one leader', and 'no parliamentary opposition, no nonsense of individualism. Everyone must submit to the State which is supreme over the individual'. Burma's economy was to rely on Japan based on 'exchange of mutual goods such as Japanese manufactured goods for our raw materials and rice', and 'Japanese investment in Burma, preferential treatment for Japanese goods, joining the yen block will be part of our new economic life'.

The army has often cited this document to show the relevance of their actions. One can understand why, when we read that it says 'all questions of the state ... in fact, all such questions revolve around the

petrol dollars for SLORC'. *FBC*, 06.06.1996). By 1997 'the killing fields' became linked in the press to the regime's attempt to gain credibility by setting up nature and wildlife reserves ('Nature groups work with Junta in Burma's ethnic killing fields. World renowned wildlife groups are working with ... military regime on huge conservation projects on sites being cleared by systematic slaughter of the Karen ethnic Minority ...' Adrian Levy *et al.* *London Observer* 23.04.1997). Because of the HIV problem it also became linked to 'the killing fields of the global sex industry' ('Sex, slavery and kids.' *The Toronto Star* (Final Edition), 28.08.1996).

¹ Nawrahta (1995:83).

² *Burma Debate* May/June 1996; the regime's view of the situation was published in 'Destiny of The Nation-24', a series of articles by Nawrahta (*NLM*) two days before Aung San Suu Kyi's release.

³ Victor (1998:108).

⁴ Published in Silverstein (1993:19–22). I am grateful to Kei Nemoto for my discussion with him on this document.

central necessity for national defence'. It is dependent on Japan, for 'we shall have to build a powerful Army, Navy and Air Forces, and here the help of Japan is imperative'. Here also 'in administrative as well as judicial and financial matters, the rule of authority more than the rule of law should prevail'.

However, for such a supposedly crucial document, it is peculiar, to say the least, that Blueprint was published not until March 1947 in *The Guardian*, more than six years after it was supposedly conceived and almost one-and-a-half years after the Japanese had left, when the views it expresses were no longer fashionable. Certainly, Aung San had revised his views by 1946, when he said that Asian concepts of unity 'must not be like the Co-prosperity Sphere of militarist Japan'.¹

Nevertheless, we can surmise from the fact that Aung San does not seem to have denied its contents in the three months between its publication and his death that it is likely to have been, though painful for him later, probably a document which he did indeed write.² The purpose of writing the document, however, was most likely intended by him only for consumption within the Japanese army and was severely edited by the military officers in charge of Aung San, in whose possession the document was found. It was not originally written for consumption in Burma, as otherwise it would have been published before. Furthermore, it was written while Aung San had literally been kidnapped by the Japanese army. It was, more likely than not, an attempt to fit Burma into overall Japanese discourse, so that Japan might be swayed to act and expel the British; it was not, in my view, an ideological statement of Aung San's views.

It is also more than likely that its publication was initiated by Aung San's political rivals to detract from his reputation as the political leader to inherit Burma's national independence. The date falls between a number of significant moments in Burma's political history. It occurred six months before the elections and in the month prior to its publication Aung San had negotiated the Pinlon Agreement. Also, a few months before, U Saw had been wounded by an attacker, which he presupposed to be Aung San's doing. Its publication was likely, therefore, an attempt to discredit and embarrass Aung San.

There are many pointers that suggest that the contents of this document, which was found in possession of one of Aung San's Japanese superior officers, had not been under Aung San's personal control. The fact that this document glorifies Japan (including proclaiming the lineage of the emperor unbroken as opposed to the 'inferior' broken lineages of Burmese kings) is out of character with Aung San's other writings. Furthermore, Aung San himself did not include this document in his collected speeches, suggesting that he himself disowned it as irrelevant to his views on Burma.

Aung San's democracy

Prior to the war, the revolutionary students and many other Burmese were sceptical of democracy. After all, it was a democratic country, Britain, that had occupied their country. In this way, in the 1930s and early 1940s, democracy was greatly disliked by most of those who were later to become Burma's leaders. Indeed, the heroes of the students at the time were Mussolini, Hitler, and the Irish revolutionary leaders, while Japan was looked upon as a friendly fellow Asian country that was potentially a liberator of Burma. U Nu, widely regarded as an exponent of democracy, in his 1935 inaugural speech at the Student Union stated 'I dislike democracy, where much time is wasted in persuading the majority and in trying to get the consent of the majority. Democracy is good in name only ... It cannot work in the period of dictatorship of Hitler and Mussolini.'³ In 1936, U Thant, later Secretary-General of the UN, said that 'democracy is lovelier at a distance. Seen at close quarters, it is nothing to sing hymns about.'⁴

However, the Japanese occupation of Burma radically changed the opinion all Burmese nationalists had of democracy, for 'the resistance against the Japanese militarism was proclaimed in the name of democracy', and 'the freedom of Burma was demanded in the name of democracy and the rule of law in the family of nations'.⁵ Originally the Japanese offer to help found an army marked the creation of a viable instrument to

¹ Aung San. 'Problems for Burma's freedom.' In Aung San (1971:34).

² The document is proclaimed to be based on a notebook which is a 'a true copy of Mr. Sugii's without any amendment or supplement'. The document does not carry Aung San's signature and was obtained from his ex-army trainers. However, though supposedly based on the original Aung San's hand-scribbled notes, the version published was actually an edited copy of a copy. It was Mitsuri Sugii, furthermore, not Aung San, who seems to have abandoned several drafts. Though this document is proclaimed as 'the almost perfect copy [i.e. of the version around February 1941] which can tell us the real idea of the late General Aung San for the reconstruction plan of Burma in those days' (i.e. around February 1941), there are some obvious discrepancies.

³ Butwell (1969:19,23).

⁴ Thant (1956).

⁵ Maung Maung (1959:92).

fight off colonial yoke and attain national independence, but already before the invasion began in December 1941 many Burmese nationalists were disillusioned, and this was compounded in the course of the occupation by what Burmese deemed offensive behaviour by Japanese army personnel.¹ As this resistance against the Japanese built up it was eventually translated in the founding of the Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO) in August 1944. This changed the opinion these young nationalists had of democracy, and resulted in widespread support for it.

After the return of the British, all parties – even the communists – agreed that democracy was the political system Burma would aim for. At the AFPFL Party Manifesto on 25 May 1945 a democratic constitution was envisaged for the government of independent Burma.² Socialist democracy would protect the poor through nationalisation of the important means of production. Full socialism, however, was to wait until after democracy was implemented, for ‘however anxious we may be to set up socialism in our country, her present economic position is such that socialization at the present stage is by no means possible’. In short, Aung San set forth his view that, after national independence was attained, democracy should precede true socialism.³

From the mid-1940s, though he retained a hand in the Peoples Volunteer Organization, which was seen by the British as a threat because it had the attributes of a military organization,⁴ Aung San was preoccupied with Burma's national independence at that time as primarily a civilian political rather than a military problem. He left the army and refused offers from the British for a senior army role. Indeed, in early 1947 he was talking even of retiring from politics altogether after the transfer of power.⁵

In the absence of an external enemy, once the struggle against colonialism had attained its political momentum, he saw the role of the army as being in the barracks. Aung San, since he founded the army himself and had some control over it, did not see countries or armies as the primary danger, but rather political systems such as fascism and capitalism, which had produced the occupation of Burma by the Japanese and the British respectively. His speeches were directed at addressing these evils in order to safeguard local representation in government. This, he realised, could only be guaranteed by democracy that would permit local representation, as against government forcibly imposed by overseas countries.

Aung San launched the concept of ‘new democracy’ [သစ်နယ်အုပ်ချုပ်ရေး] on 25 August 1946 in his speech to the AFPFL ‘It is clear that Aung San cannot win’ [ပုဂံကို အောင်နိုင်မည် မဟုတ်ပါ] at the Cripps Conference.⁶ In this very section, he also unambiguously says that ‘socialism can only be attained after democracy’ [သမ္မတစနစ်မှသာ ဆိုရှယ်စ်ကို ရနိုင်မည် ဖြစ်သည်] In a speech nine months later he described ‘new democracy’ as ‘although not entirely free of capitalism, is not capitalistic’, is ‘somewhere betwixt and between’, is based on ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’ and where ‘the greatest number wields the greatest power’. If the old democracies had succumbed to underhand manipulation by ‘capitalists and big business discreetly assuming power’ the constitution of this ‘new democracy’ would ‘place power in the hands of the masses through their elected representative from top to bottom’ so that, ‘if they have no confidence in their representative they must have the power to recall them’.⁷

On 23 May 1947, less than three months before his death, Aung San gave a speech which made his thoughts on democracy very clear. He distinguished ‘true’ [သစ်နယ်အုပ်ချုပ်ရေး] from ‘sham’ democracy [သစ်နယ်အုပ်ချုပ်ရေး]

Only when the ‘State’ is there by the people's consent, only when the ‘State’ identifies itself with the people's interest in theory as well as practice can there be true democracy. Any other kind of democracy is sham. Only true democracy can work for the real good of the people, real equality of status and opportunity for every one irrespective of class or race or religion or sex. Not every democracy is true democracy. Some are imperfect democracies concealing in democratic guise the dictatorship of the capitalist class. True democracy alone must be our basis if we want to draw up our constitution with the people as the real sovereign and the people's interest as the primary consideration. Democracy alone is the basis upon which the real progress of a nation can be built. There may be such other ideologies as Socialism and Communism, but they sprout from the

¹ Cady (1958:448–453).

² Trager (1966:68,368n1).

³ Aung San's address at the AFPFL Convention, Jubilee Hall, Rangoon, 23.05.1947 in Silverstein (1993:154) and Aung San (1971:295).

⁴ Governor of Burma to Secretary of State for Burma, 20.06.1946. In Tinker *et al* (1983–84:571).

⁵ Sir Hubert Rance to the Earl of Listowel. In Tinker (1983–84,II:362).

⁶ Sagaing Han Tin (1985:172–73).

⁷ Aung San's address at the AFPFL Convention, Jubilee Hall, Rangoon, 23.05.1947 in Silverstein (1993:155) and Aung San (1971:300–1).

same parent stem of true democracy. They are only seeking its wider connotation. They are not satisfied with democracy in its political denotation. They seek to extend it over the economic sphere'.¹

'Sham democracy', according to Aung San, is produced when power is retained against the wishes of the people.

Power is a coveted and valuable thing. Once grasped it is not readily relinquished. We have seen possessing classes contending among themselves for power. The people never come into it. The people come only when they can be used as a lever, 'in the name of the people'. The words 'people' and 'democracy' and so on are used freely, but not sincerely. They are only catchwords to hoodwink the people into placing power in the hands of those who are supposed to use that power in the interest of the people, but who eventually use it in the interests of the ruling classes against the interest of the people.²

With these concepts of 'true' and 'sham' democracy, Aung San aimed for local representation in government and managed to broker a degree of unity between the various political factions and to a limited degree with the ethnic minorities as reflected in the Pinlon Agreement. He proceeded to argue when he expelled the Communists that democracy was the third way in Burma's political path, between two extremes, communism and capitalism or fascism. This kind of politics, he said, is like the Buddha's Middle Way. There was no room here for a military government.

However, his assassination on 19 July 1947, meant that he could take democracy no further in terms of concrete implementation, as he did not live long enough to experience national independence.³ His assassins were linked to U Saw who had attempted to sway the British to support his leadership at National Independence. In 1997, at the fifty year commemoration of the assassination, it was revealed that U Saw was merely a pawn in a plot attributed ultimately to British intelligence. The revelation was based on evidence supplied, in particular, by an interview with U Kyaw Zaw, Aung San's closest friend during their training in Japan, who lives in exile in China.

That Aung San himself, as Martyr of the country and founder of the army, was unable to personally engage himself as a civilian in implementing democracy meant that the latter was immediately disadvantaged. Had he been part of the process, as founder and leader of the army who had chosen civilian life by preference, Burma's history might have taken a very different course.

Ne Win and 'lightning rod democracy'

Critics of democracy have argued, pointing at the Blueprint, that really Aung San did not believe in democracy. They point at what they see as an anti-democratic disposition on the part of Aung San and other political leaders prior to National Independence. Also, critics have pointed out that the concept of democracy is not actually used in the 1947 constitution.⁴

Nevertheless, against this stands the fact that most nationalists changed their view of democracy around the time of the foundation of the Anti-Fascist Organisation in August 1944. At that time Aung San began to regard democracy as a vital element in Burma's self-governance, a view that persisted right up until his death. To Aung San, democracy was a system that would make impossible for a government to be in power that totally disregarded local representation, as had Japanese fascism and British colonialism. In this sense, democracy was having unanimous appeal right across all political factions in Burma. Furthermore, as regards the Constitution making no mention of democracy, Britain does not have a constitution, yet is still a democracy by all accounts.

Aung San was appointed the first General (Bogyok) in the Burmese army, and Ne Win the second. In the publications *Is trust vindicated?* Ne Win has himself depicted alongside Aung San with the caption 'After the General [Aung San], the General [Ne Win]'. Both received their military training in Japan. Ne Win's biographer wrote that as Bogyok Aung San had 'fallen on the march – as a good soldier would', so that 'only Bogyok Ne Win remained'.⁵ Ne Win is portrayed as preordained to fill in for the vacancy left by Aung San. Ne Win is widely regarded as an anti-democrat for obvious reasons, for he performed the 1962 coup against U Nu's elected government and suspended parliamentary democracy. The paradox, however, is that because he had inherited democracy from Aung San and supposedly walked in his footsteps, Ne Win never eliminated democracy from view entirely. Indeed, democracy was, in my view, a vital element in his political path with a meaning that shifted in the course of his career.

¹ *Ibid*, in Silverstein (1993:153) and Aung San (1971:295–96).

² *Ibid*.

³ Kyaw Zaw (n.d.:82–84).

⁴ Callahan (1998a:51–53).

⁵ Maung Maung (1969a:194).

Just prior to taking charge of the caretaker government, Ne Win and his officers still declared themselves committed to the national ideology of 'freedom, democracy, and socialism', in that order, as formulated in the Meiktila Defence Services Conference of 21 October 1958. In this, their role was to 'restore peace and the rule of law, to implant democracy, to establish a socialist economy'.¹

If these aims were along Aung San's originally specified order, and were adhered to when power was returned to the elected U Nu government in 1960, Ne Win, after his 1962 coup attempted to implement a socialist system directly, by-passing democracy. As Kyaw Zaw said in his interview, after 1962 Ne Win and his group 'passed over the second stage – democracy, and to suppress democracy they started to shout "Socialism". The Socialism which Bogoyoke [Aung San] advocated was the genuine one in which the country becomes rich, peaceful, united and developed, and not that like Ne Win's "socialism", which dropped our country to the LDC (Least Developed Country).'²

However, this did not mean that democracy was eliminated from the political path or, indeed, that it was rendered politically meaningless thereby as an ideal; it merely signified Ne Win had indefinitely postponed its realisation. Writing of the Ne Win regime in 1966, Trager views Ne Win as having placed it at the end of the political path. He conveys Ne Win's views as being that 'we can help the Burmese to have what they say they now want – unity, order, socialism, and democracy'.³ Just as in the protests of the late 80s and the promise to hold elections, democracy still had much value to military politics, but it was reduced to a mere promise, a utopian ideal that they were unprepared to give a chance unless their hand was forced. At the time of Ne Win's resignation such a situation arose, and he then finally advocated multi-party elections.

In the English version of his biography, Maung Maung, Ne Win's biographer, justifies Ne Win's coup by denying the ability of democracy as understood by U Nu to work. In a speech he gave to the Revolutionary Council on 30 April 1962 he declared the Revolutionary Council to be 'deeply disillusioned with parliamentary democracy', which had been 'tried and tested in furtherance of the aims of socialist development' but has not only 'failed to serve our socialist development but also, due to its very defects, weaknesses and loopholes, its abuses and the absence of a mature public opinion, lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims, until at last indications of its heading imperceptibly towards just the reverse have become apparent'.⁴ However, this by no means resulted in Ne Win throwing democracy out altogether from the political path, for even then the Revolutionary Council also stated that the new political path must develop 'in conformity with existing conditions and environment and the ever changing circumstances only such a form of democracy as will promote and safeguard the socialist development'.⁵

Maung Maung then went on to cite Aung San's very unrepresentative 'Blueprint for Burma' as proof that Aung San also thought the military should have a central role in Burmese society, forgetting that there is no evidence that Aung San ever personally endorsed Blueprint as the political path for Burma. Aware that he had only one document by means of which he could justify military government, Maung Maung excused the omission of socialism in this document saying that Aung San 'did not use the word "socialism", for he was in Japan, among military leaders who had no great fondness for the word'.⁶

After 1962, the army positioned itself at the heart of socialism. Socialism, in turn, came to be used as an excuse for army business ventures. In Ne Win's concept, as expressed in *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, the army has a special role as it 'will also be developed to become national armed forces which will defend our socialist economy'. This peculiar use of an army, in the absence of external enemies, to 'defend our socialist economy' suggests that the centralisation of the economy in the Burmese Way to Socialism was no more but an instrument for the army to attain control of the State. It was, so to speak, Japanese militarism as inherent in the Blueprint rather than Aung San's concept of socialism that Burma inherited in this way.

Such weak justification for constructing the socialist path on the basis of military strength was to play puzzle with Aung San's words and was to stretch the limits of credulity. Nevertheless, in the first ideological statement *The Burmese Way to Socialism* it was again affirmed that what the military was doing was merely to

¹ Caretaker Government (1960:534); See also Trager (1966:181–82).

² Kyaw Zaw (n.d.:75). This ordering of priorities between national independence, unity, democracy and socialism is recognized in Minye Kaungbon (1994:10, 30–31). See also Nawrahta (1995:106–7).

³ Trager (1966:211).

⁴ Maung Maung (1969a:296).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Maung Maung (1969a:298).

take further Aung San's original plan, for 'we, the peoples of the Union of Burma, shall nurture and hug a new patriotism as inspired by the words of General Aung San'.¹

Ne Win, in pretending to follow Aung San, had not only jumped to socialism in Aung San's political development path, but he still kept up the pretence of developing towards a democracy. He knew that his version of socialism was unpopular and that people might tolerate it *only* if he kept to Aung San's heritage, and *only* if he promised attainment of democracy eventually. And promising democracy is what he did.

Aung San's insistence on democracy, and Ne Win's declaration that he would adhere to Aung San's words, means that the democratic ideal has been undeniable and inescapable even in Ne Win's army-centred politics. On the anniversary in 1966 of the coup on 2 March, celebrated as Peasants Day, General Ne Win himself promised that 'true democracy' would emerge and that power would be transferred to the people.² In 1967 serious food shortages occurred, accompanied by civil unrest. In the following year, Ne Win emphasized in his Burmese speech that 'I will make democracy flourish' [သမ္မတစနစ်ကို အောင်မြင်စေမည်] ³ Ne Win formed the Internal Unity Advisory Body of thirty-three civilians to report to him by 31 May 1969 with recommendations for future structure of government. Nevertheless, nothing was done with these recommendations and no substantive arrangements were made to implement democratic reforms.

Cynics would say that these were all mere gestures Ne Win made towards his plan to broaden membership of the elitist cadre of the Revolutionary Council, and in developing the BSPP to become a mass movement. By the time the BSPP held its first congress from 28 June to 11 July 1971, it brought together 1,200 delegates and was looking forward to increase its membership country-wide. However, when on 23 July 1988 Ne Win finally gave his resignation speech at the emergency BSSP congress, he admitted his socialist experiment had failed, and said 'since it is our belief that the answer to the question – a multi-party or a single-party system – can be provided by a referendum, the current congress is requested to approve a national referendum ... if the choice is for a multiparty system, we must hold elections for a new parliament.'⁴ In this speech it was clear that Ne Win did finally admit the failure of socialism, as in the same session it was proposed that the country would open up to foreign investment and foreign businesses, spelling the end of BSPP socialism.

This persistent reference to democracy as an ultimate goal of the Ne Win regime indicates that Ne Win knew that his version of army socialism did not gel with the political ideas prevalent at the time of national independence, in particular with the plans for Burma after the Japanese occupation by Aung San and the other nationalists. Furthermore, they indicate that, in order for people to tolerate his version of socialism, he knew that he periodically had to hold out the promise of democracy while reorganising his power base just to keep up people's hopes while he was vulnerable. Finally, the 1988 reference clearly indicates Ne Win's own admission that army socialism – the way he conceived it – had failed as spectacularly, if not more so, as U Nu's democratic government at the time of his coup.

Democracy under U Nu had only fifteen years not to work, but by 1989 Ne Win's socialism had been suffered for twenty-seven years, and people were considerably worse off than when he took power. The view that Ne Win used democracy as a carrot all the way through the period of military socialism is confirmed when one looks at the BSPP's *The Burmese Way to Socialism*. Here it is quite clearly stated that democracy cannot be faulted as a political system at all for, as an antidote to feudalism, 'parliamentary democracy ... happens to be the best in comparison with all its preceding systems'. The military could only justify the immediate implementation of socialism by saying that they were promising an even better system than the parliamentary democracy system that had so far failed as implemented in Burma.

parliamentary democracy has been tried and tested in furtherance of the aims of socialist development. But Burma's 'parliamentary democracy' has not only failed to serve our socialist development but also, due to its very defects, weaknesses and loopholes, its abuses and the absence of a mature public opinion, lost sight of and deviated from the socialist aims, until at last indications of its heading imperceptibly towards just the reverse have become apparent.⁵

It concludes that 'the nation's socialist aims cannot be achieved with any assurance by means of the form of parliamentary democracy that we have so far experienced' and that 'it must develop in conformity

¹ *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, 30.04.1962.

² Tinker (1967:388).

³ *ပြည်သူ့လွှတ်တော်* 1289/68 Maung Maung (1969b:d).

⁴ Lintner (1991:118).

⁵ *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, 30 April 1962)

parliamentary democracy. In the Lanzin Party era, there was socialist democracy. Democracy had flourished under the respective programme. Currently, the State Law and Order Restoration Council Government is seeing to a political transition directed toward multiparty democracy. The Government, responsible for this period, will proceed within the bounds of laws, rules and regulations.

Deterrent action will be taken against any person or organisation not adhering to rules and laws promulgated by the Government and for any act to oppose and deter projects and objectives of the Government. It is meaningless to shout at the top of their voice that those desiring democracy are being suppressed. Stability of the State and rule of law are of primary importance today. The Government must curb and prevent any act to jeopardise objectives of the nation. Therefore, what the NLD planned to do from 27 to 29 September had to be curbed.¹

Given the continuities from Ne Win politics, SLORC may be forgiven for thinking that it had inherited 'democracy' from the Ne Win regime, and that it had to defend these concepts from unruly parties such as the NLD who, elected by a majority vote, were threatening to upset this form of, for want of a better term, 'perpetually postponed' or 'lightning rod democracy'.

Today, the SPDC concept of 'discipline-flourishing democracy' is characterised as accompanied by (1) 'rights to freedom exercised within framework of law', (2) 'compatible with political, economic and social structures of State', (3) 'in line with historical traditions, customs and culture of nationality', and it is (4) 'especially democracy that brings benefits fairly for all nationals within the framework of national solidarity'.²

Aung San Suu Kyi is reported to have told a foreign-based Burmese broadcast station, 'we are very afraid of what "the Burmese Way" means when Ohn Gyaw speaks of the "Burmese way to Democracy"'. We faced the Burmese Way to Socialism for 26 years under Gen Ne Win's regime. We don't expect democracy through the military's way.³ U Kyi Maung, alluding to Saw Maung's reference to 'guided or limited democracy' along the lines of the Indonesian system, wittily characterised it as 'the military's misguided democracy'.⁴

Democracy as intrinsic to Burmese politics

Of course, Silverstein is right when he says that 'the irony of Burmese politics is that, however they have been organised, all leaders have championed democratic rule, even those who seized power illegally and destroyed it'. Even the post-1962 military 'feels obligated to pay lip-service to it'.⁵ Since the collapse of socialist and communist states in Eastern Europe, SLORC and later the SPDC, have decided that socialism is no longer a viable goal, and have instead decided to emphasize democracy, but by reserving the central role for the army, it would not appear to be substantially different from its earlier concepts of 'central' and 'intra-party democracy' except for the apparent abandonment of socialist ideology.

So the question that arises is, if socialism – or, 'socialist democracy' based on army-orchestrated 'central', 'guided' or 'intra-party democracy' – has failed, how will a new concept of army-orchestrated democracy possibly fare? As Nawrahta, one of the regime's journalists put it, 'Myanmar is now in a transitional period from an old era to a new era ... A socialist era has definitely passed by now. To say that the new era is a democratic era, the fact is we are not yet in a democratic era.' The State, he says, has only just begun to 'shape the new age'.⁶

In placing her father's quest for democracy up-front, Aung San Suu Kyi is not asking for radical change at all, for evidently democracy was the initial plan laid out at the time of national independence under Aung San, whose political philosophy the army have proclaimed to espouse since national independence. And it was Aung San's political philosophy that was subscribed to by the Ne Win regime since the 1962 coup, included as a concept in the *Burmese Way to Socialism* and promised by Ne Win upon his retirement in 1988. Democracy was then defended by SLORC to the extent of holding the elections and permitting the NLD win, and it is now finally promised by the SPDC.

In this context, given the agreement of all parties, it is difficult to argue the case that democracy is not suitable for Burma by virtue of some variety of 'Burmese' or 'Asian values'. What is evidently controversial, from the point of view of the SPDC today, is not NLD demands for democracy, but NLD's view that the

¹ Yangon's Press Conference (3), Rangoon, 01.10.1996.

² Excerpts from the address delivered by Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1, State Peace and Development Council, at the closing ceremony of the Special Refresher Course No 3 for Officers of the Development Department at 12.30 hours on 21 November 1997, at the Central Institute of Civil Service, Phaunggyi.

³ Win Htein. 'Burma's forced resignations – the final onslaught?'. *The Irrawaddy*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 15.12.1999.

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:158); U Kyi Maung in ASSK (1997b:199).

⁵ Silverstein (1989b:7,17).

⁶ Nawrahta (1995:134).

Moreover, although the 1989 Armed Forces Day was still referred to as Resistance Day and celebrated Aung San's going out to war to liberate and unify the country,¹ later these too lost their references to Aung San. The Aung San Museum in Nat Mauk, the restored house in which Aung San was born, and which was once the pride of the Ne Win government, has been virtually emptied of exhibits and left neglected.² The second Aung San Museum in Rangoon, first set up by Ne Win in 1963, is the large house at 25 Tower Lein Street [တောင်လှိုင်လမ်း], later renamed as 'General Museum Street' [ဗဟိုပြတိုက်လမ်း] in which Ne Win briefly lived until he gave it to Aung San, who lived there between May 1945 and July 1947. This is largely unadvertised and unknown, and when I visited it in August 1998 I was the only visitor. On top of the house is a **သုတေသန** Buddha shrine. Though principally a Buddha who ensures safety against fire, some of the people associated with the museum related to me that Aung San supposedly meditated there before going out to fight the Japanese.

Also, military leaders have increasingly expressed publicly criticisms of Aung San. General Saw Maung's last public speech on 27 March 1992 criticised Aung San for not resolving the ethnic minority question prior to national independence.³

This suggests that, when it comes to the issue of who assassinated Aung San, one has to wonder whether, in practising Aung San amnesia and in treating Aung San Suu Kyi as it has, it is not the regime that is re-assassinating Aung San, if not the man, than at least his image, his ideas on democracy and his role in bringing about national unity. The regime substituted Aung San with culture, as implied in the Myanmification programme. In this, Japan plays, today once again, an important supportive role. There is an important question here as to whether Japan's role in discovering and training Aung San and his army in 1940, is not now being re-enacted at the cultural level, about more of which below. Furthermore, political controversy has been inflamed by abandoning Aung San's views on politics, in which he strongly argued against reserving a central role for either 'culture' or 'religion' in the sense of Buddhism [ဘုဒ္ဓဘာသာ] (cf. Buddhism, **ဘုဒ္ဓဘာသာ**).⁴

Aung San reclaimed

The army lost its legitimacy when they cut themselves off from Aung San. As daughter of Aung San, and as principal leader of the democracy movement, Aung San Suu Kyi was their biggest threat. Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership strikes at the heart of the image they attempted to nurture of themselves as the leaders and custodians of the country. She inherited the image of her father, the image that the army had worked so hard to distil and purify. Her image was purified even further once she stood up erect for more than a decade against the entire machinery of State deployed to silence her. This prompted them to find new military heroes, such as Maha Bandoola, and impersonal symbols that had no children alive who might query their lies as Aung San Suu Kyi had done.

Though the first symptoms of Aung San amnesia began to set in during the final days of the Ne Win regime in 1987 – well before the democracy movement started its protests – this was greatly hastened by the democracy protests. Appropriation of Aung San as the icon of the opposition, in turn, seems to have served to further hasten his marginalisation by the regime. Those students most active in encouraging the protests saw Aung San as having been a student leader in his days and a rebellious young person fearlessly questioning authority and quite insubordinate to the illegitimate foreign invaders of Burma. This was reason enough for his portrait to be carried prominently in the protest marches by students even before Aung San Suu Kyi appeared on the political scene.⁵ Indeed, one of the regime's journalists retrospectively called this 'political defiance' programme 'Bogyok Aung San's Programme'.⁶

Of course, this does not mean that Aung San's legacy was actually erased from collective memory. For example, a collection of articles on Aung San recently came out edited by Ni Ni Myint, wife of General Ne Win, and leading figure of the Myanmar Historical Commission. Intellectuals in Burma interpret this volume as a reminder to this regime of the public's desire to see Aung San's views on democracy finally implemented.

¹ See Saw Maung's speech in Saw Maung (1990b:76).

² I am grateful to Kei Nemoto for pointing this out.

³ Callahan (1996a:48).

⁴ See Houtman (1990a).

⁵ This included demonstrations in Mandalay (Abbott 1990:169).

⁶ Nawrahta (1995:82).

If erasure of Aung San in Burmese collective consciousness is impossible, the very fact that it is being attempted is to awaken the desire to play Aung San's heritage up even more on the part of the protesters. In other words, the army's carefully orchestrated image of Aung San as the country's hero, and as the original architect for the country's path of socialist development right up until 1987, fell straight into the lap of the democracy movement who re-appropriated him and for whom Martyrs' Day has become a rallying cry for the democracy movement [ZH13].

It proved impossible to retain Aung San, for his daughter's manifestation became equated with him. In 1989, rumour spread that the design of the 1 Kyat note had been secretly altered by its designer, in which Aung San was redrawn to resemble Aung San Suu Kyi. Supposedly, the designer was a supporter of Aung San.¹ Upon discovery, the regime ordered printing of that particular note to stop, and Aung San ceased to be represented on currency notes from then on.

The denigration of Aung San Suu Kyi

Blaming her for their woes, since 1989 the regime has concentrated on destroying Aung San Suu Kyi's image. They attempted to delegitimize Aung San Suu Kyi as Aung San's daughter, and to assassinate her character as unpatriotic, having more in common with the British than with the Burmese. At the mundane and least serious level, this includes scrutinising her finances in detail to find evidence of 'alien' support from 'enemies of the state' and renaming her.

Frequent allusions are made to her by the regime's leaders and the regime's journalists avoiding her name – Aung San Suu Kyi – as a matter of policy.

According to Myanmar customary law and Myanmar Dhamma Rules, a bad and evil offspring shall not have the right to get inheritance from one's parents. The Bogadaw [wife of a European] has lost her right to inherit her father's name 'Aung San'. According to English custom there is no reason to even call her Suu Kyi. She should be called Daw Michael Aris or Mrs. Michael Aris.

In what bad and evil manner did the Bogadaw [wife of European] behave to lose the right of inheriting her father's name? The most simple answer is that in the plot to assassinate her father, it was the Englishmen who pulled the strings from behind the scene and provided assistance and it is because Suu Kyi had married an Englishman and given birth to two sons ... The fifth obligation of the children towards their parents is to safeguard own race. As for Suu Kyi, who is the daughter of no ordinary person but a National Leader, instead of preserving the race of her parents, the Myanmar race which the father greatly loves, she destroyed it by mixing blood with an Englishman.²

In press briefings 'her jailers cannot bear to speak her name' and would refer to her as 'the factor' or 'the very specific problem'.³ If her name *is* used, her father's name elements, Aung San, are frequently left off, except in some editorials where the purpose is to question her integrity as Aung San's daughter. Most popularly she is referred to as Mrs Aris (her husband's family name), but she has variously been referred to as puppet doll, puppet princess, puppet girl, axe handle, 'The Veto Lady', 'Mrs Race Destructionist' [ZO14], lady, 'England returnee miss', democracy princess, that person, that woman, or occasionally Suu Kyi or Ma Suu. Lately she has been referred to as 'Mrs Suu Kyi Aris',⁴ but the regime's journalists are not beyond innovating by calling her 'Mrs. Michael Aris', a reference acceptable in American, but not in British English.⁵

One of the more interesting references is Bogadaw [bʊkəta]. This is intended to mean 'wife of a European'.⁶ In part, however, given the regime's association of Aung San Suu Kyi with the Anauk Medaw

¹ I am grateful to Kei Nemoto for relating this issue to me.

² Po Yaygyan. 'Adrift and washed ashore'. *NLM*, 09.05.1997.

³ *Asiaweek*, 02.06.1995.

⁴ Embassy of the Union of Myanmar, Ottawa. 'Political demonstration resolved peacefully'. Myanmar News Release, Vol.10, No.17, 29.07.1998.

⁵ Kyaw Myint Naing. 'Who is opposing and destroying the people's wish?'. *NLM*, 02.09.1998, p. 5.

⁶ 'The Bogadaw, alias the so-called democratic leader, who is in Myanmar for a temporary period and who is dancing to the tune of the imperialists, carries on insulting the race that the Myanmar people could no longer tolerate.' ('More faithful to a foreigner than one's own nationality'. *Kyemon*, 25.07.1996, p. 6). 'No matter how she tries to cause disturbances and to destroy Myanmar and put her under domination of aliens, all her efforts will be in vain. That no patriotic Myanmar could value Mrs Michael Aris (Bogadaw Ma Suu Kyi) and would care about any alien interfering in Myanmar's internal affairs has been firmly expressed by the following People's Desires ...' (Thet Shay. 'Myanmar people will do Myanmar's politics by themselves'. *NLM*, 16.11.1996); 'The US Government is increasing the momentum for Myanmar's destruction by using its influence to install its puppet Bogadaw Suu Kyi--a woman who destroys her own race.' (Taungdwin Bo Thein. 'The US, a country surrounded by enemies.' *Kyemon*, 06.07.1997); 'It is like this. The puppet troupe led by the political stunt star Bogadaw has expressed its enthusiastic welcome to the blatant, shameless encroachment of the US Government, incompatible with its status, upon the sovereignty of Myanmar, by allowing the use of not less than US \$ 2.5 million for funding the instigation of disturbances in the country and supporting KNU insurgents led by Bo Mya,

['Mother of the West'] spirit,¹ this could also be interpreted as a word-play on spirit medium *nat-gadaw*.² Since *Bo* means both 'European' and 'officer', Burmese people readily jump to the interpretation that it is the officers' wives to whom this applies, who are joining their husbands in corruption, whereas on Aung San Suu Kyi they have tried to find evidence of corruption for years, but have been unable to unearth it.

This contrasts with the terminology of the opposition. In Burmese she is affectionately known as 'Auntie Suu' or Daw Suu [edāsu] and by elderly generation with a claim to have known her as a child, she is known as Ma Suu [msu] (lit. 'Elder Sister Suu'). However, speaking her name in public is dangerous in Burma as it immediately alerts military intelligence to the topic of conversation. In English, therefore, as eavesdropping on foreigners is inevitable, she is sometimes referred to as 'The Lady'.³

Everybody here calls this place by the same name, not 54 University Drive. Certainly not Aung San Suu Kyi's home. The mere mention of her name's been enough to get people arrested. Instead they come to The Lady's House. We're going to The Lady's House, they say, or I'll meet you at The Lady's House.⁴

The regime's reason for avoiding Aung San as an element of her name is therefore very different from abbreviation of her name by the Burmese people in general. Just as the regime removed her house number to confuse visitors, though everyone knows very well where she is located,⁵ so they also remove elements from her name to avoid people locating her in history alongside her father. The Burmese people keep the full name in their hearts, as they do her address, though they may pronounce it as a gesture of endearment or to avoid detection in abbreviated form. The regime, however, avoids reference to the Aung San element in her name so as not to link her to Aung San. Reference to the Aung San element is only included in contexts where her link with Aung San is ridiculed or where they have no choice but to use her full name in order to identify her without ambiguity to a foreign audience, for whom it would be difficult to comprehend their cryptic, alternative naming practices, and to whom these practices would anyhow be offensive. The issue of naming in Burmese society is an interesting one,⁶ and it is possible to speculate that one of the reasons why Burma has such large intelligence services is because, without compulsory rules for representing parents names in children (there is no system of family names – all names are, in a sense, first names), and because of the ease with which people rename themselves, the authorities have great difficulty keeping track of Burmese citizens and their family relations.⁷

Reporting Aung San Suu Kyi

Alternative naming of Aung San Suu Kyi is evident in the reporting in the national press of the motorcade incident. A blockade had been placed around Aung San Suu Kyi's home on 27 September 1996

called by the colonialist group as remnants of the ethnic rebels at the border, gangs trafficking in opium and smuggling timber and gemstones and internal traitorous elements who are the CIA spies.' (Pauk Sa. 'Running away without being banished and coming back without being invited'. *NLM*, 24.06.1997).

¹ 'As the name, the West Medawgyi, applies she resorted to all tricks of the lower way.' (Thanlyet. 'Harm caused by one's own deed, being caught in one's own trap – all should beware! *NLM*, 25.11.1996).

² 'According to Myanmar customary law and Myanmar Dhamma Rules, a bad and evil offspring shall not have the right to get inheritance from one's parents. The Bogadaw has lost her right to inherit her father's name "Aung San". According to English custom there is no reason to even call her Suu Kyi. She should be called Daw Michael Aris or Mrs. Michael Aris.

In what bad and evil manner did the Bogadaw behave to lose the right of inheriting her father's name? The most simple answer is that in the plot to assassinate her father, it was the Englishmen who pulled the strings from behind the scene and provided assistance and it is because Suu Kyi had married an Englishman and given birth to two sons ... The fifth obligation of the children towards their parents is to safeguard own race. As for Suu Kyi, who is the daughter of no ordinary person but a National Leader, instead of preserving the race of her parents, the Myanmar race which the father greatly loves, she destroyed it by mixing blood with an Englishman.' (*NLM*, 09.05.1997).

³ It should be pointed out that from Victor's interviews with SLORC officials and intelligence personnel it is evident that 'The Lady' is a reference SLORC officials also use to refer to Aung San Suu Kyi in relation to journalists such as Victor herself (Victor 1998:7,144). Indeed the regime it was publicised her foreign connections in the English national press using the title 'The Lady's privileged foreign connection' (Victor 1998:106).

⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Radio. Report aired on 17.12.1995 on CBC's "Sunday Morning Report" by Dick Gordon in Rangoon (BurmaNet News, 02.01.1996).

⁵ Victor (1998:27). However, another interpretation for the removal of the number is that it represented 5+4=9, a lucky number the regime did not want to see associated with Aung San Suu Kyi. Another interpretation is that they removed the plaque in order to perform *loki pañña* (magic) on it.

⁶ For an analysis of the principles underlying the Burmese personal naming system, see Houtman (1982).

⁷ It is well-known, for example, that especially in the 90s inexperienced intelligence staff made serious errors in identifying relations between family members. Since the policy in Burma is to repress family members directly or indirectly associated with dissidents, there have been many inappropriate arrests and suspicions as the result of perceived family continuities in names.

to prevent the NLD from holding the All Burma Congress of the National League for Democracy to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the founding of the party. In the wake of the 20 October 1996 student protests, the first major student protests since 1990, the regime began a crackdown, which included the arrest of U Kyi Maung under suspicion that he had spoken to the student leaders. Aung San Suu Kyi announced she would resume her weekend talks to the public outside the barricades on 2 November, and supporters of the regime harassed NLD sympathisers making their way to this venue. This presaged the attack which took place the following week on 9 November when NLD members were attacked on two separate occasions on the same day by groups of men identified as SLORC-paid United Solidarity Development Association (USDA) members. In the attacks U Tin U sustained a small cut on the face when his windshield shattered, and Aung San Suu Kyi's car was hit with an iron bar which left a large hole. Riot police and soldiers stood by without intervening, except to arrest three NLD supporters.

After the NLD reported the attacks for consideration by the police, the following account was published by the regime of the attack. Note that it refers to 'Suu Kyi', without the Aung San:

Last Saturday, 9 November 1996, she had cheaply organizable persons, fanatics and awalas gather ... On getting in front of the Bahan Basic Education High school No 2 at Kaba Aye Pagoda Road at about 3.45 p.m., about 200 persons opposed to Suu Kyi threw stones at the motorcade ... Suu Kyi will get into trouble if she thinks that every group she sees is her supporters. Upon reaching the stage of being hit by stones openly she will have to exercise a restraint. It is difficult to allege specifically who are opposed to Suu Kyi, for Suu Kyi has caused trouble to various strata of society ... As Suu Kyi is becoming more and more apparent as the one trying to destroy all these prospects for stability of the State with her fangs, it is rather difficult to indicate what sorts of people do not want her.¹

Another article, responding to the NLD's claims that the USDA attacked the motorcade referred to Aung San Suu Kyi as 'the woman'.

It is clearly a deception on the part of the woman [Aung San Suu Kyi] and her co-conspirators to have more Western pressure on the Na Wa Ta [SLORC] that they cursorily, dishonestly and rather brazenly accused the incident was the work of the government. In other words, it was just a deliberate attempt with low-down plot hatched to damage the political prestige of the steady and mature government which handles political problems so plainly and gently, though it happens to be called a military government.²

I will later deal with the foundation of the USDA and the nature of its activities. Suffice here to note that Aung San Suu Kyi compares them to Hitler's Brown Shirts.

'She is a foreigner'

The regime felt Aung San Suu Kyi's entry into the political arena posed serious dangers to its legitimacy. The authorities initially tried to keep the name of Aung San 'pure' by discrediting his daughter as illegitimate and as a foreigner who had cheated on Burma. The regime-controlled mass media attempted to discredit Aung San Suu Kyi by divorcing her from Aung San, and to 'disinherit' her from the link to what they claim is their own spiritual father. In particular, they proclaimed her alliance with 'the west bloc' and her ignorance of Burmese ways. This was in spite of Aung San Suu Kyi having spent the formative years of her life in a Burmese home environment, between her birth in 1945 right up until 1964, when she would have been nineteen years old, including the last four years in India living with her mother who held the appointment of Burma's Ambassador to India.³ Her independent life abroad did not begin until 1964, when she went to Oxford to take her degree.

However, the 1962 coup and the hope that Burma would eventually change, kept her mind actively focused on the country, in particular in her studies and writings. Burmese connections provided vital points of contact. For example, after her studies she worked as research assistant for Hugh Tinker, the Burma scholar at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, and stayed with Ma Than E in Algiers and New York while working for the United Nations. Her marriage in 1972 to Michael Aris, a Buddhistologist, gave her a new reference point. Michael Aris conducted his research in Bhutan, where they lived for the two years after their marriage. Motherhood then took up a considerable part of her life, as with any mother. However, she soon returned to Burma-related affairs. She catalogued Burmese books for the Bodleian Library between 1975–77,⁴ and by 1984 had a book on her father published. This was followed by a children's book on Burma in the subsequent year. From 1985 she then performed several years of research at Kyoto and this resulted in substantial publications focusing on Burma. In 1988, as she was about to

¹ *NLM*, as cited in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 12.11.1996.

² *NLM*, 15.11.1996.

³ On the Burmese and Buddhist nature of her upbringing see Stewart (1997:25–29).

⁴ Stewart (1997:58).

further develop her studies on Burma in the field of Burmese literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, when she was taken to Burma by her mother's illness. Upon marriage she furthermore made Michael Aris promise that her country would come before him, which he accepted.¹ The story since 1988 is, of course, tied to Burma beyond question, as she cared for her mother, who had suffered a stroke, for three months full-time.

Therefore, it is quite clear to any casual observer that, though she has not lived all her life in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi has certainly not only spent her formative years in a Burmese environment, but also chose to be preoccupied with Burma and Burmese life throughout her life. Furthermore, she has taken care of her Burmese family with diligence. It has been politically expedient for the regime, however, to deny this fact. One example is an article entitled 'The unforgettable 19th July', published the day prior to Martyr Day on 18 July 1996 by Bo Daewa. After saying that it was 'according to concrete proof and significant evidence we can never forget that it was the British who assassinated our Leaders on 19 July', Aung San Suu Kyi is represented as married to a British long-nosed person, living decadently in the West until manipulated by British forces to cause trouble around the time of Martyrs' Day [L6]. Racial continuity with Burma supposedly broken, she has joined the British race and according to this reasoning even her own father would have assassinated her [L7]. Bo Daewa continues saying that the 19 July Martyr Day problem was caused by foreign elements controlling her [L8]. This editorial tug-of-war over the commemoration of Aung San on Martyrs' Day was written to intimidate anyone wanting to march with Aung San Suu Kyi to her father's tomb on Martyrs' Day 1996.

Another example is the article which says that 'if only Thakhin Aung San were alive, I do not know whether he would kill or exile his daughter who married an Englishman'.²

I have wanted to write this for a long time, but I was unable to do so. I was inspired to write this after reading Ma Shwe's article – on 28–5–96. My mother, who would be over 100 years old if she were still alive, once asked, 'Hey, where are Thakhin Aung San's [Aung San Suu Kyi's father] children and what are they doing?' I answered, 'Mother, they live in England and I heard they are married to English people. My mother said, 'Oh – what kind of kids are they? I am very sad to know that they have discarded their father's country to live in England and marry the English. They have no regard for their father or their country. If only Thakhin Aung San were alive, I do not know whether he would kill or exile his daughter who married an Englishman.

My mother told us when we were young that U Phan was a head coolie, a colonial era usage, engaged in carrying sand and gravel from the Shwebo canal. A lady laborer named 'Ma San Set' was in his laborer group. Ma San Set was attractive and had a pleasant personality. An English officer, who knew a little Burmese, approached U Phan and said he wanted 'Ma San Set'. U Phan said, 'Hey, Ma San Set, the Englishman is giving preference to me and my work. I know he is doing it because of you. I feel bad and I do not agree. You do not like him because he is from another race, so why don't you quit this job?'

Ma San Set replied, 'My goodness, I couldn't even work peacefully as a coolie and now that this Englishman is after me I cannot continue to work. Uncle Phan, I cannot become an Englishman's wife so I am quitting my job tomorrow. I would rather sell roasted beans and jaggery, it would be more dignified than being a foreigner's wife and rich.

The poor Ma San Set's spirit is commendable. She knew that she would be rich and her life would be secure if she had married the English officer, but she still preserved her country and her own status. We should be proud of her strong will.

I feel, today's Myanmar [Burmese] ladies do not think of Ma San Set as an example, but instead envy Ma Suu Kyi. I see frequent advertisements in the newspapers about Myanmar ladies marrying English, American, and other foreigners with parental consent. Their parents might think it is prestigious to be married to a foreigner and I do not know whether they can feel proud of their race and religion.

I do not know they feel that marrying a foreigner like Ma Suu Kyi, the daughter of a national leader, is a prestigious act, or if it makes them feel great, proud, and able to use foreign things, or if they think the English and the Americans are better.

I would like to shout from the road junction, Myanmar ladies do not envy the race-destruction act!

Invariably, the regime seeks to delegitimise Aung San Suu Kyi with this cheap propaganda within the community. In fictitious stories, they portray her as seen through the eyes of kindly Burmese people who, in the course of a social chit-chat, deliver damaging blows to her reputation by pointing at her consort with foreigners and her betrayal of the Burmese cause. Most of these are written under pseudonyms by members of the Psychological Warfare Department of the Ministry of Defense to give the impression that all kinds of people from all backgrounds dislike Aung San Suu Kyi. It is but an extension of the earlier BSPP attempt to blame foreigners, in particular Indians and Chinese, for the failure of the Burmese way to socialism.

Rather than step back and strike a deal with what had evidently become a truly popular politician, the army instead identified Aung San Suu Kyi as national enemy Number One and has sought to eliminate her. This is somewhat surprising, for, as a perceptive Japanese journalists once asked spokesmen for the regime

¹ Stewart (1997:54).

² Chan Mye Khin. 'Want to shout from the road junction', *NLM*, 30.06.1996 (BurmaNet News, 17.07.1996).

at a press conference, 'we have learnt that the SLORC has worked with lots of former rebel groups and you have been successfully working together. So my question is why you cannot work with NLD people or the leaders of NLD?' To this, the SLORC responded that the armed ethnic minorities accepted SLORC's claim to supremacy whereas the NLD did not.

What had happened with national armed groups is that when we sent some feelers their response always is that they are agreeable to the Three National Causes that the State Law and Order Restoration Council has laid down that is the non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of the national races and the perpetuation of our sovereignty. And apart from that they all of them are agreeable to join hands for the development of their respective areas. That is what we had got before hand, before starting our meetings with them. But concerning with some of our internal politicians, some are quite temperamental and ... most of them ... are not talking about the development of the country but talking about sanctions and other things, so these a[re] the things ... hard to assess [on] the government side whether to take the next step or not.¹

The fact is, the regime can do deals with drug barons such as Khun Sa, but it is unwilling to even talk to Aung San Suu Kyi. Indeed, Martin Smith has pointed out that after the 1990 elections the regime has reversed its priorities. It built bridges with the ethnic minority groups, its former enemies, but has sought to positively undermine the NLD, the party it originally formally permitted to operate.

Indeed, in many respects, Burmese politics have gone full circle since 1988. During much of 1988–89, for example, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) was a legally-registered party which successfully went on to win the 1990 general election (Burma's first in three decades), whereas ethnic insurgent forces, such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), were being denounced by the SLORC as 'bandits' or 'terrorists'. Now, by contrast, the situation is almost reversed, and it is the NLD which the state-controlled media is describing as 'treasonous,' and armed opposition leaders, such as the NMSP president, Nai Shwe Kyin, or much-derided 'opium kingpin,' Khun Sa, who are being feted by government officials in Rangoon.²

This is how Aung San Suu Kyi could remark that 'it seems very strange to me that they're prepared to talk to armed insurgents but not to legal political parties'.³ The regime now proclaims that all ethnic groups except one, the Karen, have 'returned to the legal fold', but the cease-fire peace agreements must be seen as temporary and extremely vulnerable to dissolution.⁴ Furthermore, the army's decision to resist input in decision making from other parties, means that it has to take sole responsibility for the enormous toll that Burma has had to pay. Not least, it has been involved in bringing drug barons out into the open in Burmese society, doubling the size of the army since 1988, closing virtually all educational facilities for seven years out of the past ten, and serious new health problems emerging, including a severe HIV epidemic fuelled by destitute refugees in search of a livelihood. A whole generation of youngsters has been lost because of their folly, and Burma will not recover for a generation or more from this set-back.

In sum, the protests in the name of democracy and Aung San Suu Kyi's political ascent could only further hasten the process of Aung San amnesia already under way on the part of the military; it meant the return of a martyr to the Burmese people. This provided an impetus for the regime to rewrite history, as we will momentarily show.

Democracy and socialism – *loka* and *lokuttara*

Neither socialism nor democracy is what it appears in Burma, for both are perceived and legitimated through Buddhist terminology. Democracy and socialism have been understood in Burma as two elements in a Buddhist path. In this respect, the most important is the association between democracy and the 'transcendent' [*lokuttara*], and between socialism and the 'mundane' [*loki*]. Both associations are clearly evident already in Aung San's speeches (see chapter 12).

The BSPP's *The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment* [လူ့စနစ်နှင့် အသက်မွေးဝမ်းကျောင်းစနစ်] (17 January 1963) explains socialism in terms of what is variously referred to as 'the Correlation of Mind and Matter' and as 'the Philosophy of humanism based on the system of dialectical objective-realism'. In the introductory paragraphs socialism is equated with a 'mundane [*loka*] view' [လောကီ အမြင်] and as concerned with the 'mundane affairs [*loki*] of human society' [လောကီ အရာများ]. This is followed immediately by a chapter on 'the three realms [*loka*]' [လောကီ ၃ ပုံ] that make up the Buddhist idea of the world-system. More strongly, in chapter 5 it is argued that 'our party's reflection is that it is concerned with mundane [*loka*] affairs. It is not concerned with transcendental affairs [*lokuttara*]. That is why it is our Party's view that it is not right for us to view with a transcendental perspective. Only a mundane perspective is

¹ Yangon's fourth news briefing, 01.11.1996.

² Smith (1996b:6).

³ ASSK (1995:254).

⁴ Bruce Hawke, 'Burma's ceasefire agreements in danger of unraveling', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 01.11.1998.

suitable ... These are conventional truths.’¹

As a mundane philosophy, based on ‘conventional truths’ that subordinates politics to the mundane sphere, socialism was cut to fit the Buddhist template of *loka*. This was clearly an attempt to distinguish socialism from U Nu's earlier democracy politics that referenced politics as working to the attainment of *lokuttara*, namely to overcome material distinctions in this world and to attain *nibbana*. If BSPP discourse aspired to attainment of substantive material control over *loka*, to U Nu the goals within *loka* were ultimately subservient to *lokuttara*.

I shall later come back to how at the heart of both socialism and democracy is *byama-so tayà*, a form of Buddhist social meditation at the boundary between *loka* and *lokuttara* – it serves *loka*, but helps attain *lokuttara*. Since 1994 this has also become the credo, through *Mangala Sutta*, for the SLORC and the SPDC. The problem for the latter, however, is that it would like to keep the *loka* constraints that favour central control by the military, but it has no attractive ideology – democratic or socialist – that legitimates it and that bridges the divide between its *loka* disposition, and the legitimating *lokuttara* principles. In other words, it is using *loka* to create a country prison without permitting a *lokuttara* escape from it in the name of freedom.

National independence and freedom

Let me here further home in on a local debate concerning the nature of freedom and national independence, for these are crucial prior concepts to even the building of political structures. They were prior in Aung San's path, and they are also prior in the political path of the current SPDC. It is the different attitudes to these that sum up the divide between exponents of the conservative militarist and the reformist democratic viewpoints. Both are intrinsically related to the Buddhist concept of the transcendent (*lokuttara*) and *nibbana*.

Martyrs' Day

To Aung San Suu Kyi Martyrs' Day represents the most important national day. As I have shown, her father's legacy it commemorates is inextricably intertwined with her own struggle. If the regime prefers to forget about Martyrs' Day, this is exactly because to her, and to the democracy movement, Martyrs' Day has come to reflect the inseparability between the spiritual and the political.

This year's Martyrs' Day, which commemorates the assassination of my father and eight associates, coincided with the full moon of the Burmese month of Waso, which marks the beginning of the rainy season Buddhist retreat. The National League for Democracy arranged a ceremony for offering food and robes to fifty monks for the sake of merit to be shared between those who have passed away and those who have been left behind. It was an occasion that afforded us with an opportunity to reflect on the three aspects common to all conditioned things: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (the unresponsiveness of objects to one's wishes) and on *nirvana*, the unconditioned, undefiled state where *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* become extinct. Spiritual matters are as much an integral component of the fabric of human existence as politics, which has to do with how man relates to others of his kind. Whether we like it or not, the spiritual and political will remain part of the design of our lives.²

Here I would like to demonstrate how, because he inherited the vocabulary of political struggle from the early generation of monk resistance leaders, which was a Buddhist vocabulary, Aung San could not avoid perceiving and representing the political struggle in spiritual terms as pertaining to the supramundane (*lokuttara*). I shall later focus on the interrelationship between national unity and the quest for *nibbana* in Aung San's discourse, but here I would like to focus in particular on the conjunction between national independence and the prospect of attaining *loki nibbana*, namely the penultimate stage in the release from *samsara*, the mundane cycle of existence.

Lut-lak-yei

To understand colonial and post-colonial politics it is crucial to appreciate that in the Burmese language there is no clear distinction between ‘national independence’ and ‘freedom’, as both of these are rendered as *lut-lak-yei* [လုတလက်ယို].³ National independence was formally declared in 1948 as the result of the first struggle against the British and the Japanese, but this did not actually result in ‘freedom’ in the long-term. Aung San Suu Kyi therefore characterises the ‘the present ... national crisis’ as the struggle for the

¹ *The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment*, pp. 56-57 (see also p. 26).

² Aung San Suu Kyi. ‘Political, spiritual struggles inseparably linked’. *Mainichi Daily News*, 04.08.1997.

³ I am indebted for the idea that in Burmese national independence and freedom are conceptually linked to an anonymous Burmese intellectual. However, here I work out the implications of this for Aung San and Aung San Suu Kyi in my own way.

attainment of freedom, namely as the ‘the second struggle for national independence [lut-lak-yei]’ [Y19][ZH10]. She relates this to her father’s speech, in which he proclaimed that ‘democracy is the only ideology which is consistent with freedom’.

I have dealt with the significance of enlightenment and *nibbana* for transcending and reconfiguring the boundaries of the State (See App. I.6). In the vernacular, the highest concept of *lut-lak-yei* is linked to Buddhist ideas, namely of transcending the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) and the attainment of *nibbana*. In that sense, then, both national independence and freedom – through *lut-lak-yei* – are related to mental culture. Hence, mental culture is both an instrument for personal fulfilment and a nationalist political instrument, for it achieves both. As I will show later, this correlation between politics and mental culture is furthermore vital to understand Burmese thinking about other concepts – such as martyr, Freedom Bloc (*Htwet-yak gaing*) and *Wunthanú* village associations – these mix freedom in both a personal and a national sense.

Loka nibbana

In vernacular political discourse, Aung San Suu Kyi is not far off associating Martyrs’ Day with *nibbana*, for to Aung San attainment of national independence and democracy was indeed that, namely *nibbana* in this mundane world. To Aung San, national independence represented ‘mundane *nibbana*’ (*loki nibbana* **el akl nb̃a**), or as this Burmese Buddhist concept has sometimes been translated, ‘a pleasant state in the human realm’ [**l̃ l̃l̃ ak̃0qayawepaeqa Aet̃Aeñ**].

Loki nibbana is a Burmese term that is not found in the Pali texts. Aung San first used this concept in the speech ‘The ceremony opening the U Wisara Statue’ [**l̃wsarek̃ak̃Rp̃ap̃ak̃m̃Anã0**] in early October 1943, where he says ‘as the national independence attained so far is not yet permanent because we have not yet won this war we are unable as yet to enjoy the taste of national independence, of *loki nibbana*’.¹ This was the very year in which the AFO was founded, and it represents Aung San’s idiom for political resistance while living under conditions of severe repression.

Aung San did not use this without cause, for the struggle against colonialism in the 1920s was led by Buddhist monks. This included the very martyr (*azani*) monk U Wisara (c. 1888–1929), whose statue Aung San unveiled when he first used this concept. As a monk, U Wisara conceived the goal of the struggle for national independence from the British in terms of *loki nibbana*.² He characterised the British as ‘wrong-viewed’ in a Buddhist sense, and encouraged the monks and the people to attain ‘right view’ by meditating jointly to ‘eliminate the mental defilements so as to attain *nibbana*’.³ While in Rangoon in 1923 the Sangha Samegga of which he was a member exhorted its members to preach ‘The Four Noble Truths of *Loki Nibbana*’ [**el ak̃hb̃aqs̃el̃ :p̃ã**] in which the path to freedom from *samsara* and national independence coincide under the headings of the Four Noble Truths. The fourth – namely the cessation of suffering – represented his idea of *loki nibbana*:

1. The Truth of Suffering, P. *dukkha sacca* (The truth of suffering of the country **t̃0p̃ṽSc̃r̃p̃ak̃p̃m̃**)
2. The Truth of The Origin of Suffering, P. *samudaya sacca* (The causes of suffering of the country **t̃0p̃ṽSc̃r̃p̃ak̃p̃m̃**)
3. The Truth of The Cessation of Suffering, P. *nirodha sacca* (The path to freedom-national independence of the country **t̃0p̃ṽl̃ ãl̃ p̃0r̃:tr̃ã**)
4. The Truth of The Path of Way Leading to The Cessation of Suffering, P. *magga sacca* (*Loki Nibbana* – the attainment of freedom-national independence of the country **t̃0p̃ṽl̃ ãl̃ p̃0k̃:el̃ ak̃hb̃ã**)

Indeed, in at least one of the nationalist songs, namely *The Song of National Independence* [**l̃ ãl̃ p̃0r̃:q̃k̃ẽ**],⁵ a Pali phrase through which Buddha had indicated the path⁶ is translated that states that ‘the Noble Buddha has now attained the golden and noble land of *nibbana*’ [**0nt̃sãB̃ã:q̃k̃ẽ** **kỹat̃ant̃k̃l̃m̃t̃ãl̃ ãl̃ p̃0r̃:Sĩp̃b̃ãr̃ẽp̃0nt̃k̃k̃ẽp̃0l̃**]. To this the reply is ‘Lord, as for us we have not yet attained *lut-lak-yei*. Please give us *lut-lak-yei*’ [**B̃ã:tp̃ṽat̃ãt̃m̃t̃ãl̃ ãl̃ p̃0r̃:k̃ĩrẽq̃:p̃ã**].

In ‘Minister of Warfare’ [**ss̃ñk̃l̃**] (7 October 1944), Aung San remarked, under a section entitled ‘to arrive at *loki nibbana*’ [**el ak̃hb̃ãq̃iarak̃ñ**], that national independence has not yet been attained, and says that in spite of this, ‘if we can overcome the suffering, we will be able to attain *loka nibbana*’

¹ Originally published in **b̃mãk̃t̃** 05.10.1943; Sagaing Han Tin (1985:74).

² **el ak̃hb̃ãqs̃el̃ :p̃ã trã:k̃q̃k̃ẽ ãAaz̃añṽÃq̃ẽl̃ws̃ar̃x̃rñk̃ok̃** ‘d̃añsãep̃x̃ 1971x̃m̃k̃ñã65–67x̃

³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴ Lwin (1971:65–67). See also Sarkisyanz (1965:125) and Kodawhmaing (1938:181).

⁵ See **em̃im̃ĩk̃ṽl̃nỹk̃p̃k̃ss̃ñk̃t̃p̃q̃ãt̃iañt̃:q̃k̃ẽm̃x̃rñk̃ok̃q̃h̃m̃c̃x̃** 1981x̃m̃k̃ñã1148x̃

⁶ **ñemãet̃ b̃ũr̃t̃0p̃0et̃ãq̃ĩq̃b̃0q̃m̃ĩD̃p̃ĩp̃0p̃ẽÑĩq̃it̃0ẽem̃qr̃%B̃M̃x̃**

In ‘The two kinds of revolution’ [တရားနှစ်မျိုး] (28 March 1947) he urges ‘the battle for national independence is not yet finished ... Let us from today, saying “starting from today, till the end of life” (*ijjatagge anupedan*), take the vow to work with all our strength so that we might attain *nibbana* in the mundane plane (*loki nibbana*)’ [သီလကုသိုလ်တရားတို့ဖြင့် (အဘိဓမ္မာဓိပေါက်) ယခုမှစ၍ အသက်တော်တိုင်း အားစုစုတို့ဖြင့်]

Aung San therefore expressed Burma's struggle against colonialism and fascism by means of an inherited Buddhist idiom from an earlier generation of monk freedom fighters, for whom national independence and freedom were represented by one and the same goal, attainable through mental culture, namely *loki* or *loka nibbana*. Before Aung San characterised it thus, this concept had already been used to translate the final goal of socialism, in the sense of a classless society, in the works of Thahkin So and Ba Thaug.

The *nibbana* that Aung San describes is in the popular imagination often represented as ‘the city’ and as ‘the country’ of *nibbana* in prayers accompanying the water libation ceremony at the end of an act of Buddhist charity. Though this is popularly believed the equivalent of a ‘kind of indestructible country or city’ and some believe that it is a place where ‘those who have passed into it lived happily with mind and body free of old age, sickness and death’, it in fact represents successful accomplishment of a complete and permanent transformation of the mind by *arahat* and Buddhas in their last existence, with the consequence that there is no longer a next existence, since there has been annihilation of all ignorance and its related mental defilements. *Loka nibbana*, however, is but one kind of *nibbana*. *Lokuttara nibbana*, is another kind, where additionally also has occurred the extinction of the five bodily factors (*khandas*), so that there is no longer any physical existence – this involves the complete ceasing of being.⁴

Going as far back as the Pagan Period, it has long been part of Burmese political tradition for royalty to pray for the attainment of *nibbana* at the end of their grand acts of charity. Furthermore, out of compassion for the world, it was not uncommon for political leaders to take the vow to become a Buddha (i.e. as *bodhisattvas*) out of mercy for their subjects, the inhabitants of this world; they aimed to remain in this world longer to achieve some political objective. They would postpone their personal entry into *nibbana* so as to eventually build up the strength to take the masses across the threshold of *samsara* into *nibbana*. If this was the prerogative of aristocracy in the past, in Burma of the 1920s and 1930s a transition was gradually made which democratised the concept of *nibbana* as being within reach of every person. This culminated in the democracy period of U Nu, where *vipassana* centres were sponsored all over the country.

Hence, when Aung San Suu Kyi says that Martyrs' Day provides an opportunity for reflection on 'nirvana, the unconditioned, undefiled state where *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* become extinct', is of great significance, as it touches the national sentiment that Aung San had also evoked in his speeches on national independence-freedom (*loki nibbana*). Though national independence was attained after Aung San's death, the flavour of *loki nibbana* in the sense of freedom was enjoyed all-too-briefly. After the army contributed to the fight for national independence, it eventually stepped back into political power at first in 1958, and later

⁴ Mingun (1990–96,1:272–74).

in 1962, and in the name of national independence they eliminated freedom. The Four Freedoms were no longer formal part of political ideology, and elections were no longer practised.

However, between 1958 and 1962, just as we find overt acceptance of democracy, so the army still held to this ideal of freedom in a *spiritual* sense. In 1958 there was much insurgency and quibbling among political factions within the country, and the army proposed that order and law needed to be restored. They expressed the freedom as having essentially a spiritual flavour.

The Union of Burma has passed her eleventh year as a Sovereign Independent Republic and is now entering her twelfth year. In the early days of Independence hopes were bright in the hearts of all citizens of the Union that, free at last, they would enjoy the fruits of this freedom to the utmost. They thought to themselves: 'Now free from anxieties over food, clothing, and shelter, we shall be able to go in peace to work or to our pagodas and monasteries. Far, far better is our lot now than when we were subjects under imperialist rule.' So they hoped and their happiness knew no bounds. But these hopes were soon drowned in a sea of trouble and a sense of insecurity overwhelmed them.¹

Eventhough the people could not 'enjoy the fruits of this freedom to the utmost', and were 'unable to go in peace to work or to our pagodas and monasteries', the army nevertheless continued to hold up this spiritual goal of freedom until the 1962 military coup. The National Ideology and Our Pledge, known as the 'First Phase of Ideological Development', was made at the Defence Services Conference, Meiktila, 21 October 1958:

Man's endeavour to build a society set free at last from anxieties over food, clothing and shelter, and able to enjoy life's spiritual satisfactions as well, fully convinced of the sanctity, dignity, and essential goodness of life, must proceed from the premise of a faith only in a politico-economic system based on the eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality. This is our belief. We would rather give up life than give up this belief. In order to achieve the establishment of such a society, we have resolved to uphold this belief forever in this our sovereign independent republic of the Union of Burma.²

By 1988 it was clear to all observers that, in spite of its strong promise to uphold this belief, the army had not been able to set people free, even from anxieties over food, clothing and shelter, let alone from enjoying 'life's spiritual satisfactions' and from experiencing 'justice, liberty and equality'.³ The army's promise that the people were 'to enjoy life's spiritual satisfactions' was only true in so far as it supported the meditation traditions which had informally been permitted to grow unhampered, so that dissenters and those who experienced the mental distress of having their property nationalised, had somewhere to go to resolve their problems.

After the 1991 monastic boycott against the regime – the first against a government in Burmese history – it became evident that the army was no longer a defender of the spiritual realm – not even a neutral bystander – but rather an attacker. The last and only element of freedom left, namely in the monastic order, came under threat. At this point, spiritual freedom and spiritual resistance, the only domains not to have been nationalised, were also under serious threat.

Today, when Aung San Suu Kyi encourages a 'revolution of the spirit' she is encouraging several things. She reminds the army that Aung San's spiritual struggle (of attaining *loki nibbana*) is as yet unfinished. After the army had a crack at it for twenty-six years, she cannot accept the army's promise that it will eventually deliver 'spiritual satisfaction' and 'justice, liberty and equality'. Aung San, having been proclaimed as the spiritual martyr for the democratic cause, in this sense bears out Aung San Suu Kyi's saying that 'whether we like it or not, the spiritual and political will remain part of the design of our lives'. As the 'second independence struggle' is taking shape, the struggle for true national independence conjoint with freedom, so also does the spiritual dimension to this struggle necessarily evolve. Aung San Suu Kyi has now taken up her father's mantle in the struggle for *loki nibbana*, the 'revolution of the spirit'. Can she rival the army in attaining Machiavellian control over *loki*, over the physical domain now called Myanmar? As long as the army views 'freedom' as implying the loss of 'national independence' to foreign interests, the fight will be a difficult one – the Burmese people, however, are hoping that she will deliver both kinds of *lut-lak-yei*.

¹ Caretaker Government (1960:535).

² Caretaker Government (1960:534).

³ Citing Aung San, the importance of meeting basic needs was re-emphasised by Saw Maung (1990b:341,243).

Chapter 2

Myanmafication (1): reinventing national unity without Aung San

This chapter deals with the implications for national unity of Aung San amnesia. In the previous chapter I argued that Aung San's aim for *loki nibbana* meant a fight for *lut-lak-yei* in this double sense, namely 'national independence' and 'freedom'. Since 1962 the generals have placed primary emphasis on the *loka* national independence element, while Aung San Suu Kyi insists, following Aung San and following the democratization of enlightenment after national independence, that this is no excuse for denying the 'freedom' *nibbana* element

The ideology of freedom serves to overcome constraints placed upon some person or agency, to do what it would like to do in the way it would like to do it. A call for freedom is a call for an ideal state of unconstraint, which is usually phrased relationally. Both attract attention to the agencies that prevent it from being realised – for example, the anti-colonial uprisings in Burma held *lut-lak-yei* to be freedom from confinement by the British, and this has historically resonated particularly well with the Buddhist movements that sought freedom in the ultimate sense, namely the goal of *nibbana* as freedom from *samsara*. Hence Aung San chose to describe the struggle he and his army fought as *loka nibbana*: this expresses *lut-lak-yei* fully in terms of this double meaning and resonates with the numerous struggles of the past. This is how in Burmese politics mental culture could become the chief instrument not only for personal liberation, but for the liberation of the nation.

However, national independence is a much more tangible and earthly concept than freedom; it does not mean freedom as an absolute, but the freedom to determine within certain boundaries. It typically relies not on a call for personal freedom of movement, but the right to take over agency to control movements within certain boundaries and to defend these boundaries from the threat of encroachment by outside agencies. In sum, national independence is about a lower level of freedom that concerns itself with the freedom to control substantive territorial boundaries associated with *loka*.

During Aung San's political ascendancy, right up until his conversion to civilian status, an indigenous army was widely perceived as a desirable instrument for attainment of both, national independence and freedom. However, since 1962 remilitarisation has meant that the concept of freedom (*nibbana*) has become subsidiary to national independence (*loka*). The generals proclaim that granting 'freedom' in any other way but theirs would necessarily lead to loss of 'national independence' all over again. Saw Maung stated that 'I shall do my duty so that my country and my people do not become enslaved'.¹ It is in the name of containing the threat to national independence posed by encroaching foreign interests that Aung San Suu Kyi and the democracy movement are confined. Their quest, the regime feels, should not contaminate the sentiments of the masses and should remain at best a mental event spiritually realised by the opposition leaders in their enforced privacy, but never implemented for the collective.

Paradoxically then, it is by postulating and living *lut-lak-yei* as national independence, that the regime, supposedly for the sake of national independence, has ended up depriving the people of Burma of their freedom. The regime's partial interpretation of the *lut-lak-yei* concept, suggests limits or boundaries that NLD's interpretation does not. These limits arise from the country versus person-centred discourse that national independence and freedom address respectively. Tied up with the struggle for national independence is the idea of substantiating the nature of the collective, and the concern to substantiate the nature of purity and domain, i.e. setting limits to keep some people in and others out. However, freedom challenges these and transcends the limits. This paradox of how the army is turning *lut-lak-yei* into a bounded and framed concept based on *loka*, then, is the subject of this and the subsequent four chapters.

Hermit land and the Trojan Horse

The rhetoric of freedom was bound to come into conflict with the rhetoric of national independence. To assess the nature of this conflict, let me demonstrate how this tension can be transposed onto another

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:242).

tension that historically operates in Burma, namely the two different interpretations of the hermit in Burmese political history. Competing views on the role of the hermit available to us suggest that both models, namely that of 'national independence' and of 'freedom', go hand in hand. These do not just divide neatly between 'Burmese' and 'foreign' views. Nevertheless, these views are dynamically constituted somewhere at the interface. The hermit stands, on the one hand, for substantive values such as 'national independence' and its associated concepts – 'historical continuity', 'sovereignty', and 'national unity'. However, insofar as the hermit stands for spiritual practice, and operates independently from society and at the boundaries of the State, the hermit at the same time also stands for more absolute universal values of freedom that reach well beyond the confines of the mundane. These transgress and unexpectedly modify boundaries. This is the product of successful practice of mental culture and the freedom to either control events in *samsara* through *samadhi* and supernatural power, or to cessate rebirth altogether through success in *vipassana*.

Political isolation

Dorothy Woodman characterised Burma in the wake of the Ne Win coup as the 'Albania of Asia'.¹ Such is a comparison conjured up from the Western imagination. Burma scholars often prefer to characterise Burma as 'hermit land', for 'they seek to exclude the outside world so that they may find their own destiny'.² This characterisation was made in the sixties to designate Burma's isolation on the Burmese Way to Socialism, lasting from 1962 until the 1988 protests forced the country to open up. Indeed, it is Ne Win, the person behind this, who was once described by *Time-Life* journalist Louis Kraar as 'spiritually, Asia's most dedicated hermit'.³ In the case of Ne Win it meant closure of the country in terms of economy, but also in terms of knowledge and understanding of what goes on in the outside world. Indeed, by his moves 'the state began to seal Burmese culture from outside influences and to focus public attention on state-sanctioned cultural activities'.⁴

Continued economic isolation

Today, Burma has supposedly opened up to the outside world. However, this 'hermit land' characterisation is rearing its head again in a different guise. For example, a recent report from Reuters entitled 'Hermit Myanmar avoids Asia money crisis' points out that the generals are confident that they will not catch the 'Asian flu' because, unlike other ASEAN countries, they have no money market. Though many hotels built in anticipation of the tourist boom expected in 1996 lie empty, having either been bankrupted or still in the process of laying off workers, and foreign companies have left because the country's business prospects have worsened, the generals are still surprisingly confident that Myanmar has the ability to attract all the businesses and tourists that it needs to fulfil its foreign currency requirements.

The insular approach to economics in a fast developing Southeast Asia, means that its slow response and lack of understanding ensure that, as one journalist notes, 'it remains very much the hermit country of Asia'.⁵ Today, the exchange rate is controlled, not so much by prudent monetary policy, but simply by arresting money changers who offer too many Kyat for the US dollar.⁶ The national bank will offer only 6 Kyat to the dollar. While I was in Burma in June 1998, any money changer offering over 300 Kyat was risking arrest, though I could get as much as 350 Kyat. This was accompanied with restrictions on foreign imports by closure of the borders and the revoking of import licenses.

As a result of this unrealistic approach to the economy, however, there was a widening disparity between income and prices. Prices more than doubled between mid-1997 and mid-1998, while wages remained the same over the three years prior. For example, in June 1998 the wages of civil servants and teachers were between 650 Kyat (US\$1.86)⁷ for the lowest paid clerks and 2,500 Kyat (US\$7.14) per month for a Director-General. Additionally, civil servants receive a small rice ration and coupons for travel on local non-air-conditioned buses. However, the minimum required for a small family is 30,000 Kyat per month (US\$85.50) a month. If civil servants calculate the cost of dressing for and travelling to work, than all

¹ Dorothy Woodman. *The making of Burma*. London: Cresset Press, 1962.

² Tinker (1967:388).

³ Louis Kraar, cited in Helen G. Trager. *We the Burmese: voices from Burma*. Praeger, 1969, p. 194.

⁴ Taylor (1997:295–96).

⁵ Martin Smith. 'Burma's ethnic minorities'. In Carey (1997:121).

⁶ Sutin Wannabovom, 04.03.1998.

⁷ The rate at end July 1998 was K350 to the dollar.

are literally subsidising their work with no means of supporting either themselves or their families. Whole families need to find other ways of making their work pay, such as bribes, second and third jobs and weekend work, and they need all family members to pull their weight in order to make ends meet. In other words, ordinary civil servants too, have come to represent a form of forced labour.

University teachers solve their financial problems by charging greatly inflated tuition fees. But there are more organised ways of bringing in the money. One way in which these people cope can be witnessed at the international telephone exchange, where employees follow a new practice. Today they surcharge each international call by 100 Kyat, which provides them with a considerable, but illegal, income. They simply do not connect people to get through if they do not pay this under-the-table fee. Such practices are accepted because the regime cannot afford to pay people the necessary wages.

This view that Burma can do everything in its own way, therefore, stands against market forces; Burma can today no longer afford to act as an independent 'hermit' by itself, for it translates into corruption of those who control exchanges with the outside – whether in the field of knowledge, communication or trade. Furthermore, today's regime continues to solve not just its political problems with arrests, but also its economic problems and, as I will momentarily show, even its cultural problems. In 1994, after five years of military 'free market economy' Burma had the distinction of having the lowest ratio of exports to GDP in the world, with a paltry 2%.¹ However, those who demonstrate total loyalty to the hierarchy of generals, and who benefit from the new economic exchanges that these relationships afford are not arrested, but those who eke out a living independently are.

The economy of Burma, as is its politics and defence, is tied to army patronage. This Myanmar-, but in particular Yangon army-centred world-view maintains that only total sovereignty over all transactions within the boundaries of Myanmar are perceived as maintaining *lut-lak-yei*. All transactions crossing boundaries need to be scrutinised. Awareness of the origins and intentions of all transactions needs to be heightened just in case they reference to the outside world. This necessarily places all power, wisdom and responsibility as emanating from a single institution – the army.

Aung San Suu Kyi – the Trojan horse

The advent of Aung San Suu Kyi, then, created havoc in this tightly confined system (*loka*), for not only did she transgress all sacred boundaries herself, but she did so as the daughter of the martyr who gave his life to defend these boundaries from foreign interference. The generals perceive her as Burma's 'Trojan horse' who has transgressed all sacred boundaries, both with her origins, as she comes from abroad, and with her message, a message of freedom. In the context of such a tightly regulated system in which corruption is tolerated as a necessity of life in order to keep sacred the boundaries between inside and outside, she advocates a value, 'freedom', they feel they can ill-afford. In short, she has become a scapegoat who is introducing the very 'alien' values they had sought to keep at bay indefinitely – she has become Burma's Trojan Horse.

From another point of view, however, she is the 'second martyr of the second independence struggle'. Aung San Suu Kyi directly challenges and confronts the generals' hermit minds. For example, in a keynote address the Deputy Minister of Education summed up Aung San Suu Kyi's views by saying that 'colonialism however has taken a heavy toll and we can still find in our midst sons and daughters of the previous patriotic generation who look to ex-colonial powers for the upbringing of their progeny and the re-casting of our institutions.'² When they look at Aung San Suu Kyi they see an icon reminding them of their own failure, and the psychology of failure is that it is most easily absolved by exteriorising blame for it rather than confronting its underlying causes through fundamental political and economic reforms.

The other side of the coin is that Aung San Suu Kyi, and those who are opposing the current regime, are also best informed about the relative backwardness of the country and its underdevelopment vis-à-vis the rest of Asia. In isolating these opponents, the regime attempts to contain the possibility that these critical views might 'contaminate' the citizens of the country and inform them about this state of affairs – in other words, it is protecting its stake by further trojanising the opposition, demonstrating its foreignness and hopefully thereby making it irrelevant to Burma's political arena.

This hermit policy in the sense of total self-reliance, total sovereignty, stands in relation to hermit life.

¹ *World Development Report 1996*.

² Than Nyun. 'Human resource development and nation building in Myanmar'. In Office of Strategic Studies (1998:9–10).

But what kind of relationship is it? For example, when Japan came out of isolation in the Edo period it also faced great difficulties adjusting itself to an international community that had adapted itself much better to dealing with trans-national issues. The Japanese worked to find a new kind of self-image that would permit it to be an effective player in a larger international environment, but without becoming 'foreign' themselves. This involved a programme both, of government reform, and of selectively re-enculturating the entire country and re-manufacturing old values. In Burma, however, the desperately needed government reforms are being postponed. All that has taken place so far is the re-enculturating, or 'Myanmafication' as I call it. This is an attempt to revive selected aspects of culture perceived as necessary for a new Burmese polity to play a role in the modern world. This project in today's world, however, rather than delivering freedom, is purposely engineered to imprison its people.

Of course, Burma is a very different country from Japan, with a great deal more independent minority groups with separate linguistic and cultural traditions that pose a serious threat to national unity. From the point of view of the generals, Aung San Suu Kyi is to blame for not achieving their objective of national unity and national independence. However, the lack of progress in mending the relationships between the ethnic groups is due to the fact that there have been no serious efforts under army control since 1962 to effect national reconciliation, only, as I shall show momentarily, 'national reconsolidation', which is a very different concept. The emphasis on *lut-lak-yei* as national independence stands in the way of freedom; it is the ignorance, the lack of freedom to 'know', and the lack of awareness and education that ultimately holds Burma back. As I will later show, 'awareness' is a traditional Burmese value advocated by the senior leaders of the NLD, but unfortunately not by the generals.

The essence then, is that while the generals have increasingly had to represent their message as that of *lut-lak-yei* as national independence, concerned with national boundaries and security, so Aung San Suu Kyi's message has gradually evolved into *lut-lak-yei* as a spiritual quest, a 'revolution of the spirit'. The first frames and contains within *loka*, and the latter aims, in non-violent fashion, to transcend and free from the shackles to attain *lokuttara*. Both deal with Burma's hermit world in radically different ways.

Burma and the significance of hermit practice

There is, however, more to the concept of the hermit. Tinker made his characterisation of Burma as 'hermit land' consciously, for hermits have always played an important role in Burmese stories as sages who, steeped in mental culture, have answers to difficult problems, and have the necessary superhuman powers and knowledge to overcome seemingly insurmountable problems.

First, based on a prophesy [*badit*] by the Buddha, Sri Kitsara was founded with the aid of a hermit who through meditation had attained the powers of the *jhanas* [*sanA Biva*] – this became known as 'hermit country' [*reqpv*].¹ In this sense, therefore, Ne Win and his officers were not the first to bring about a 'hermit state'. His was but a variant of this earlier hermit state.

Not only are hermits often mythical founders of Burmese settlements and new royal dynasties, but they are self-reliant and able to achieve what ordinary worldlings cannot. This particular Sri Kitsara hermit permitted continuity in the royal lineage by advising on the appointment of the appropriate new king. Furthermore, when the Buddha-to-be took the vow to become a Buddha in the presence of the previous Buddha, he did so as hermit Sumedha.²

The hermit's role as mender of lineages between Buddhas and as kings in the making is mirrored in the hermit's role in legal matters and in mending lineages of political succession in Burmese politics. The hermit is part of the broader view that roots the origins of the legal code, and therefore the ideas of place, identity, property and crime, in the achievement of Manu, who discovered the laws of humankind and of the universe, while practising concentration meditation (*samatha*) as a hermit.

¹ *Mahayazawin*, Vol 1, pp. 109–116; *Glass Palace Chronicle*, §103, pp. 6–7.

² 'How did our Gautama Buddha obtain omniscience? Over four aeons and a hundred thousand worlds ago, Gautama Buddha was born as Thumeida, a rich man. He gave up his wealth and became a hermit. Not long afterwards, he met Dipangara Buddha. If under the Buddha he had become a monk and practised *wipathana* meditation he would have freed himself from the scourges of old age, death, and separation. Thumeida, however, because of his great compassion, did not wish to enter *Neikban* (Nirvana) alone. He wished to save all beings and attain *Neikban* together with them. He therefore made the wish before Dipingara Buddha that he might be born a Buddha. The Buddha, with his power of prescience, foresaw that the hermit Thumeida would become a Buddha. So the Buddha ordained that his wishes would be fulfilled. Thumeida practised the ten parami through successive existences for four aeons and a hundred thousand worlds. He became a Buddha in this world' (Nu 1975:43–47).

One interesting example in the new Tatmadaw Museum is a hermit portrayed on a painting depicting the progress of military technology. He is represented as the earliest to master the technology of signalling on the drum by means of sound. This is shown in a sequence of technologies leading to electronic devices deployed by the army. This suggests that the hermit, in a sense, provided one of the earliest superior weapons in war.

Indeed, the chief mender of the modern Burmese political lineage referred to himself as ‘hermit’. Thahkin Kodawhmaing, known as the ‘grandfather of Burman politics’, inspired the Dobama movement and launched the modernist Thahkin politicians, such as Aung San and U Nu into their political careers. He referred to himself as ‘hermit-yogi’ [*requeyagi*] and aimed, with his poems and with the practice of Buddhist mental culture, in particular alchemy¹ and *samatha* practised in the isolation of Sagaing, to assist the liberation of the country from the British. Wealth in this hermit discourse is produced not through trade or industry, but through mental culture (*bhavana*). One day, he promised that his meditation and alchemy would bear fruit, and would produce enough wealth to finance a better independent future for the country. His view underlies the Burmese distrust of trade and industry; the economy is driven by Buddhist values and by the perfection of mental attributes.

Attempts at finding continuity and legitimisation for the politics of new generations of politicians are thus deeply rooted in asceticism, and in ascetics who absent themselves from society. Indeed, the hermit has furthermore been used in biographical episodes to legitimise politicians as far apart in their political orientation as former Prime Minister U Nu² and General Ne Win.³

The hermit and national independence

Aung San had been assassinated, and so it fell upon U Nu to sign on 17 October 1947 the Nu-Attlee agreement on Burma's national independence. One observer put it that national independence promised socialism because of its association with Buddhism, for after national independence, ‘socialism was to be adopted because it was in-keeping with *Buddhism* rather than the reverse’.⁴ In this respect, as King observed of U Nu, the practise of mental culture that conjoined the idiom of freedom and national independence was indispensable.

His devotion to meditation is well known. And this has been no mere personal foible or publicity-seeking device. For him it is of primary relevance to politics: the man who meditates is resultingly better able to avoid the pitfalls that threaten the politician, to discipline himself for the political struggle, and to formulate his basic policies. Indeed U Nu would hold meditation to be an absolutely indispensable ‘means of grace’ for the sincere Buddhist statesman. Therefore, when his party split in 1958 and he subsequently lost political power, he spent considerable time in meditation; and before beginning the 1959–1960 campaign that returned him to the premiership he also spent some five or six weeks in solitary meditation. To repeat: there can be no doubt but that he has consistently sought earnestly to relate Buddhist principles directly to political practice.⁵

It is no surprise perhaps that the new Prime Minister of such newly independent country should look towards beginnings, and the significance of this region is that Burma's Buddhism began originally in Mon country, well before Burmans were Theravada Buddhists. After a brief rest upon his return from negotiating national independence in England from 28 October 1947, he went on a nine-day pilgrimage retreat (‘observe duty day’, *ú-bo-hsaung win thi*) at the pagodas around Keilatha Hill in Mon country where he

¹ Agatpavakū I aqūin-yūthqarmer:qBral af qkkyatānq hnywtingz. AMHNS April 1936, pp. 412–26.

² Teacher-Hermit Û Sein-dá, in his visionary discourse of a utopian world, lauded Nu's achievements in his book *The history of the period of the Sixth Buddhist Synod*. He sketched with which we are already familiar. Like Kodawhmaing, as a ‘hermit-yogi’ he inevitably confirms that a new era is indeed about to begin during which Burma will once again be turned over to pure Buddhism based on ‘right-view’. This Buddhist realm will be guarded over by a universal king whose influence and power shall extend world-wide beyond the narrow confines of Rangoon or Burma. He assures his readership that Nu, who oversees the Sixth Sangayana, is no less than a universal king (*set-kyā mìn sikkāncā*), the defender of the dispensation: ‘This Union [of Burma] has itself now a genuine king who proliferates true Buddhist dispensation and culture’. This king proliferates ‘right-view’. Also, by copying and investigating the Pali canon at the beginning of his ‘reign’, Nu performed the very role of his royal predecessors; Mindon and Thibaw had done this before, and generations of kings before them. In drawing attention to Nu's actions, Hermit Sein-da confirms (from his ‘peripheral forest’ position) the significance for the world of Nu's actions as ‘universal’. Sein-da, as hermits are apt to do, thereby legitimates a new realm of action independent from, opposed to, and even transcending the British.

³ Hermit-robed Thahkin Sein Hko attended Ne Win's first presentation at his take-over. He said he had taken the vow to wear the robe while the national problems were not resolved, but now that Ne Win was in power, he approvingly said he could change back and stop being a hermit (Maung Maung 1969a:x).

⁴ King (1964:251).

⁵ King (1964:251).

practised asceticism and supposedly encountered various yogi and hermits.¹ Here, he concluded that many saintly and enlightened yogi and hermits had, to paraphrase a complex verse, 'put fright in the supernatural forces by the achievements of their jhanas'.²

In the text that describes his experiences, a conjunction is made between the original efforts of Buddhist missionaries and Nu's objective in government. Nu's visit, subsequent to the national independence negotiations he had just concluded, is juxtaposed with the story of attainment of enlightenment by Sona and Uttara in this region during the reign of Thiridhamma-thawka, and how, through their missionary efforts, Buddhism spread across the country. Here, there is no doubt that, as Mendelson put it, 'U Nu is presented ... less as an initiator than as a man governed by forces greater than himself at whose command he places himself'.³

The year after he became the first Prime Minister of independent Burma he set to work on the *Land Nationalization Act 1948* and the Two-Year Plan. In it he defended land nationalisation as not being equivalent to theft, but as the opportunity for landlords to make merit by means of charitable gift-giving. Property 'is meant not to be saved, not for gains, nor for comfort. It is to be used by men to meet their needs in respect of clothing, food, habitation in their journey towards *Nirvana* or Heaven.'⁴ Such use of *nibbana* to justify nationalisation is a modern version of an old theme involved not only in Anawratha's kingship, which deprived the spirit cults of their rights over lands, but in the reconfiguration of authority over land as the result of the broadening of the Buddha's *mandala*.⁵

Hermit practice, national independence and freedom

At times the hermit has been introduced into politicians' lives by their biographers as a literary device, a concession to the cultural sensibilities of the readership and an attempt to contribute to a decisive climax for readers to enjoy. Nevertheless, these were all serious men with a mission and they believed in the efficacy of mental culture as an instrument and as an idiom for freedom. In this respect, there is a decisive break in the use of the hermit in Ne Win's biography and that of, for example, U Nu and Thahkin Kodawhmaing.

For the latter, the hermit represented a practice that would permit attainment of freedom conjointly with national independence. This is also what *loki nibbana* meant to Aung San. The hermit was not just a device to proclaim sacred boundaries for the sake of 'national independence', but he signified ultimate and ideal sense of 'freedom' through the actual practice of mental culture. By 'hermit-yogi', a designation he used for himself, Thahkin Kodawhmaing meant the freedom to come and go, 'the language of the hermit, it means to go where you want to go, to come when you want to come, to preach when you want to preach, to speak when you want to speak and to go out into the forest ...'.⁶ His cryptic rhymes were beyond the understanding of the British colonial regime, and so he escaped censorship and arrest, in spite of his effective political writings through the Burmese medium.

The outward-looking leaders in particular, such as King Mindon, Prime Minister U Nu, and today's senior NLD leaders, mental culture (*bhavana*) is more than a literary device or an excuse to absent oneself from the world; it constitutes a vital personal practice with real meaning, viewed as necessary for the transformation of the leaders of the country and its citizens, in order to strive for everyone's enjoyment of a freedom that does not currently exist. It is a form of engaged Buddhism, and national independence is arguably not their primary message.

To Ne Win, on the other hand, the hermit was an instrument to sanction his person and his control over boundaries. As leader of the army he was 'destined' to protect national independence, but neither the practice of mental culture nor the concept of freedom were part of his early repertoire. Indeed, he was reacting against U Nu's emphasis on these practices. Ne Win's biographer describes U Nu's support for mental culture with a degree of cynicism, 'those who meditated furiously in strategic places which U Nu

¹ *Sangayana Monthly Bulletin*, 1, no 6 (Oct 1953:10); *BTNA* (1958:10–15); Mendelson (1975:265–66).

² *BTNA* (1958:11).

³ Mendelson (1975:274).

⁴ *Land Nationalization Act*, 1948 (pp. 1,2,16,28–31), Maung Maung (1959:107); Sarkisyanz (1965:213), Trager (1966:151–52).

⁵ See Appendix 1.6 & 1.7. I have benefitted from my discussions with F.K. Lehman on the issue of Buddhism and landrights.

⁶ Ludú Ū Hlá (1965:164). There is an interesting correlate between the powers of the hermit and those represented by the *zawgyi* marionette, whose supernatural powers mean that his feet do not touch the ground in marionette performances. There is no obstacle within the country that cannot be negotiated by a *zawgyi*, and hence they are frequently portrayed as, on the one hand, in opposition to the king (they enter from the opposite side of the royal entrance in the plays), and on the other hand, supportive.

passed on his regular visits to the pagoda were often the regulars on the cocktail circuits'.¹ By 1974, however, Ne Win finally succumbed to more potent forces in Burmese society, and finally incorporated mental culture, giving it central place in the national ideology. Today he is reported to be practising meditation by his daughter Sanda Win.²

SLORC and the SPDC face a worse problem in this regard. Ne Win personally participated in the national independence struggle, but the members of these regimes do not even belong to the generation that led the struggle for the liberation of Burma; hence, neither national independence nor freedom believably coincide in their widely unpopular claims to legitimacy. Governing as a collective they make the best of an inherited ideology that it is the army that protects the country from what are now extremely remote external dangers, but they themselves are not the fountain for this ideology. In the process, Aung San Suu Kyi has been turned into an honorary colonial ambassador for Britain. In short, their determination to ruthlessly pursue government in terms of their chosen idiom of fighting for and safeguarding national independence seriously conflicts with the spiritualised ideal of 'freedom' inherited from the national independence struggle. They desperately need to bring in the idea of the hermit in both senses, independence *and* freedom, if they are to secure any place in Burmese history.

Hermit land versus hermit practice

The paradox, therefore, is that the idiom of mental culture has historically been accompanied, not so much with attempts to close society from the outside world and confine its people, but rather with liberation from unnecessary political, social and cultural constraints, and with fostering a broader awareness through international exchanges. In other words, the hermit-country stereotype is a suitable designation for those who merely pay lip-service to these practices as an excuse for self-isolation from the world, who reaffirm their status in the cosmology, without, as Manu did, finding out more about what their role and their place in this global world is truly all about. As NLD's Tin U points out, Burma can hardly be liberated unless these generals liberate themselves first.

Hence, since 1988 these regimes have continued to operate the 'hermit-land' policy, though with significant differences from the way the Ne Win regime 'hermitised' Burma. This new hermit-land policy is driven by a policy of Myanmarification. In this part and in the next, I shall attempt to sketch some of these tensions between the two versions of hermit-life – political self-confinement (*lut-lak-yei* as national independence) versus mental self-transformation to experience ultimate freedom (*lut-lak-yei* as freedom) – as a tension between a rule-based culture governing *loka* and aiming incorporate all Burmese peoples, and a mental culture, aiming to liberate from all constraints into a neutral and free domain called *lokuttara*.

Myanmar or Burma?

As one of the regime's journalists pointed out, in 1988 'Myanmar resembled a house that tumbled down. The Tatmadaw had to pick up the pieces and build a new one'.³ Indeed, Saw Maung himself asserted that during the 1988 unrest 'the State Machinery had stopped functioning'⁴ and in the aftermath 'it is just like building a country from scratch'.⁵ A new house had to be built, and one of the cornerstones of the regime since 1989 has been the attempt to delineate and reconstruct the entire country through the programme I dub here 'Myanmarification'. It is quite the opposite from the concept of uprooting the house by eliminating ignorance through mental culture, as implied in the discourse of some members of the political opposition. (In this latter discourse, the builder of the house is 'ignorance' that perpetuates *samsara*, and as I will show later, this must be uprooted by mental culture).

In his speech on 23 September 1988, within five days of seizing power, Saw Maung asserted with confidence that 'I and all my colleagues and all *Tatmadawmen* most respectfully and honestly give our word to all rahans [monks], laity and the people that we do not wish to cling to State power long'. He spoke of 'handing over power to the government which emerges after the free and fair general elections' and strongly intimated that this was to be in the near future, immediately after the elections.⁶ Indeed, he said that he was

¹ Maung Maung (1969a:290).

² Victor (1998:174).

³ Nawrahta (1995:69).

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:148).

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:51).

⁶ Saw Maung (1990b:29–30,48).

'laying the path for the next government', and 'I will lay flowers on this path for the next government'.¹ The army had irrevocably changed its ways since his coup, he asserted, for it was no longer to be involved in Party politics like before.² In March 1989, Saw Maung asserted that after the elections the legally elected government would come into power, 'comprising the representatives of the people who were elected to the Pyithu Hluttaw', and that the army would at that point 'return to our barracks' and would not have a role in politics.³ He intimated also that he himself would retire immediately after the elections.⁴

However, in the course of the first half of 1989 the regime began to show signs of being unable to tolerate the increased criticism levelled at it, in particular by Aung San Suu Kyi. By end May 1989, the regime announced moves that indicated it would not wait for political measures until a government was elected. The regime wanted to go on record that the army had done something positive for the nation. On 25 May the Border Areas and National Races Development Central Committee was established. This was followed up on 30 May 1989 with the appointment of the 21-member Commission of Enquiry into the True Naming of Myanmar Names (မြန်မာအမျိုးအနွယ်အစွယ်အရာအမည်အမှန်ရှာဖွေရေးအဖွဲ့) on which were seated only four academics, two of whom were specialists in Burmese and two in English, who were outnumbered by eight members of military rank and a majority with positions in the civil service.⁵

Burmese place and state names were examined according to their original Burmese names, i.e. as these were before they were changed under colonial influence. Since historically they were written in various ways, the Committee transcribed these into English according to contemporary pronunciation (ဗမာအမည်အမှန်ရှာဖွေရေးအဖွဲ့). This is what the Burmese have long themselves used in literary and formal vernacular, and so it did not affect the Burmese pronunciation. It only affected it in languages other than Burmese, including the languages of ethnic minorities (see table 3).

The Commission was long in deliberating its findings, holding their 16th meeting in August 1991. However, they nevertheless rushed the 'Adaptation of Expressions Law' to come out as soon as possible, namely on 18 June 1989. This resulted in the official replacement in languages other than Burmese of 'Burma' and 'Burmese' (or whatever other languages use) with 'Myanmar' and the extensive renaming of many towns, including the capital Rangoon which became 'Yangon'. It should be pointed out that this renaming has virtually no impact on Burmese citizens speaking in Burmese, who continue to refer to both *Myanma* as well as *Bama* (this not unlike formal reference in the English language to 'The Netherlands' while informally using 'Holland'). It was a measure solely intended to affect references (both written and spoken) to Burma in languages other than Burmese, who may not now refer to Burma. At national independence under U Nu, the country was known as the Union of Burma. Under Ne Win in 1974 this changed to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. In 1988 it briefly went back to Union of Burma, and now we must refer to the 'Union of Myanmar', or Pyidaungsu Myanmar Naingngandaw (ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်).

Though taking place without referendum, this was officially endorsed by the United Nations five days after the regime's declaration. Because of the UN endorsement it has entered into widespread use, so that it is currently even used by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International.⁶

A chronology

Between the announcement of the *Law of the Elections Commission for holding democratic Multi-party Elections* on 20 September 1988 and the elections that took place on 27 May 1990, two hundred and thirty-five political parties emerged. The regime's journalists, instead of seeing this as a positive development, a step towards coming to terms with representing the diversity that is Burma, saw this multiplicity of parties as 'an image of collapse of national unity'.⁷ Nevertheless, for the regime, such proliferation of parties meant potential disagreement among politicians and an opportunity for the army to retain power. They were not unhappy, at first. This changed, however, when under Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership the NLD during April

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:54).

² Saw Maung (1990b:146).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:79).

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:50).

⁵ See Burma (1991:139–40,200). It should be noted that similar renaming has occurred, though mostly on a lesser scale, in other countries. Thus Siam became Thailand, Peking became Beijing, and Cambodia became Kampuchea (though the latter was later reversed).

⁶ Mya Maung (1991:258).

⁷ Nawrahta (1995:70).

Table 3. Myanmar versus Burma

	NLD English British (*American) English			SLORC-SPDC English/ 'Asian' English			Burmese vernacular irrespective of political persuasion			
	noun	adjective	possessive	noun	adjective	possessive	literary		colloquial	
							adjective	possessive	adjective	possessive
country	Burma	Burmese	Burma's	Myanmar	Myanma/ Myanmar	Myanma's/ Myanmar's	Myanma Naing-ngan ၀၀၀၀၀၀၀၀	Myanmá Tatmadaw ၀၀၀၀၀၀၀၀	Bama Pyei bma:p\	Bamá Tatmadaw bma:t\
language	Burmese	Burmese	Burmese	Myanmar	Myanma/ Myanmar	Myanma's/ Myanmar's	Myanma batha ၀၀၀၀၀၀Baqa	Myanma batha yé ၀၀၀၀၀၀Baqaꣳ	Bama sagà bmaska:	Bama sagà yé bmaska:ꣳ
nationality	Burmese (*Burman)	Burmese	Burmese	Myanmar	Myanma/ Myanmar	Myanma's/ Myanmar's	Myanma lumyò ၀၀၀၀၀၀လူ	Myanma lumyò yé ၀၀၀၀၀၀လူꣳ	Bama lumyò bmal လူ	Bama lumyò yé bmal လူꣳ
dominant ethnic group	Burman (*Burmese)	Burman	Burman	Bamar	Bama/ Bamar	Bama's/ Bamar's	Bama lumyò bmal လူ	Bama lumyò yé bmal လူꣳ	Bama lumyò bmal လူ	Bama lumyò yé bmal လူꣳ

1. The phonetics of ‘r’.

In SLORC-SPDC English final ‘r’ – Victorian English long ‘a’ – is used to transcribe both the level and heavy tone in Burmese pronunciation. The ‘r’ is dropped following the context in which a native Burmese speaker would vary their pronunciation and end on either creaky tone or a glottal stop. Since this is in part a Burmese syntactic rule expressed phonetically, and in part does not follow a rule but expresses mood by a native speaker, this causes insoluble problems for speakers in English and for speakers of other languages. Since SPDC-SLORC English forces Burmese syntactical and phonetic rules upon languages other than Burmese, it is a major burden for all languages other than Burmese. There is no clear English syntactical rule for dropping the ‘r’.

2. Nouns end in 'r'.

In case of Myanma(r) and Bama(r) used as nouns in English, the rule for SLORC-SPDC English is that these always end with a final 'r'.

3. Adjectives and possessive case follow Burmese 'r' rules irrespective of English grammar or pronunciation.

Since the circumstances under which SLORC-SPDC English drops the 'r' pertain to native speakers of Burmese, these are impossible to distil into a rule that works for the English language (and for most languages other than Burmese). Burmese does not distinguish between nouns and adjectives in the way English does (Okell 1969, 1:45–105). In particular, the Burmese language, unlike English, uses *Myanma* or *Bama* only very rarely as nouns (in English it is possible to treat 'Burman' or 'Burmese' as nouns standing by themselves, but in the Burmese language *Myanma* is mostly an adjective that has to be followed by some noun, whether country, language, nationality or ethnicity). Pronunciation of *Myanma* and *Bama* varies in Burmese depending on whether they are in the possessive case and on the mood and style of a native Burmese speaker.

When used in the possessive case, pronunciation of the Burmese adjectives *Myanma(r)* and *Bama(r)* follow a complex rule (Okell 1969, 1:57–59). Sometimes, to indicate the possessive as part of the adjective itself, the final syllable is changed to a creaky tone (*Myanmá* and *Bamá* – in which case we would have ‘Myanma’ and ‘Bama’). However, at other times, a creaky tone possessive particle (ယ်) is suffixed so that the final syllable of the adjective itself does not change its pronunciation (in which case we would have ‘Myanmar’ or ‘Bamar’). Since SPDC-SLORC English follows Burmese phonetic rules, it would be impossible for an English speaker to know whether to remove the ‘r’ unless the English expression is translated into Burmese first, before it is transcribed back into English. It then depends on how this is rendered in Burmese whether the ‘r’ is dropped or not. For example, the English expression *New Light of Burma* may be rendered into Burmese in several ways, some of which require dropping the final ‘r’ (e.g. *Myanma New Light of Burma*), while others do not (e.g. *Myanma New Light of Burma*). Translation between two languages in one direction is already a difficult task. However, here we have to perform translation two times, to which are added subjective complexities of mood and style. Hence, since native Burmese speakers vary in how they render a particular English expression back into Burmese, and English speakers might disagree on how to render the Burmese expression back into English, this rule cannot be applied but by monumental effort for each individual expression. If the rule is difficult for native speakers of Burmese and English, what of non-native speakers of these languages?

4. SLORC-SPDC 'Asian' English.

In most western countries 'Burma', 'Burmese' and 'Burman' (or their equivalents) continue to be the preferred designations in informal, and even in many official contexts. The SLORC-SPDC ruling has had minimal effect. For example, the French and the Dutch continue to refer to the country as 'Birmanie' and 'Birma', and the people as 'Birman' and 'Birmaans'. In Japan, however, though historically referring to the country as *Biruma*, the regime's ruling has been accepted that everything is Myanmar, extending even to editorially 'correcting' Aung San Suu Kyi's own speeches despite her clearly stated views on this subject. The Asian, and in particular ASEAN countries have accepted Burma's ruling even in informal reference.

and May 1989 had such success making alliances between many political and ethnic groups, much like her father's role in the Freedom Bloc in 1939 and in the AFPFL in 1944, that it looked as if she had the ability to unify the opposition in a manner that would leave no political role for the authorities.

The chronology of events leading up to the Adaptation of Expressions Law was explained in Khin Nyunt's press conference briefing in August 1989 (see also table 4).¹ The regime very much despaired over what it regarded as Aung San Suu Kyi's 'unfair' criticism of the military and of security orders 2/88 and 8/88 during her tours of the townships in Ayeyarwady Division between 14–25 January, and in particular her second trip between 4–6 April 1989, when the Danubyu incident took place. The military was particularly incensed by the way she encouraged anti-military slogans by the public during the Thingyan Festival between 13–17 April, which immediately prompted the setting up of a Committee for Writing Slogans for Nationals on 16 April (see below). The regime was deeply disturbed when on 18 April the NLD set up a countrywide umbrella group, and convened a meeting between 41 parties.

On seeing countrywide alliances emerge between the NLD, the various political parties and the ethnic groups, the army felt that the country was slipping from its grip. However, in mid-April the military was in luck, as an event it had been waiting for since national independence occurred, namely the collapse of the Burma Communist Party (BCP). The ethnic cadres of the party had turned against the BCP leaders and had driven them across the border, declaring themselves free and independent. The regime entered into agreements with these groups in the Wa and Kokang states, promising them that they would be able to retain their weapons and power in these areas and continue to pursue their opium trade provided that they no longer fight the Burmese government and would ally themselves with the regime against other minorities. The military took courage from the fact that it had allies. It became more assertive and intransigent (and this developed into a new idea of dealing with minority groups through ceasefires).

During her subsequent trip to Mandalay and the Kachin State from 24 April to 26 May Aung San Suu Kyi further incensed the military with her criticism which she directed at the way it was dealing with schools. The regime attributed Aung San Suu Kyi's resistance to the influence the BCP was having on her, despite the fact that the BCP had already collapsed in April that year. It seized NLD literature on 12 May at Nandawun Press, and threatened to take further action at its 26 May press conference.

The regime was affronted when the NLD adopted the slogan 'defy as of duty every order and authority not agreed by the majority', a slogan the NLD announced in advance and that would extend to all its literature as of 6 June 1989. The regime took action on 6 June by issuing Directive No 38 of the Printers and Publishers Registration Central Committee, which threatened action against those not keeping to the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law. It was particularly disturbed by the increasing numbers of calendar days the NLD marked to celebrate their own political agenda as opposed to the calendar days marked by the regime. In particular, it was Aung San Suu Kyi's decision to include Martyrs' Day among these days, and not to ask for permission from the authorities to visit the mausoleum, that the regime interpreted as a mark of defiance of its authority – this was to precipitate her house arrest.

Table 4. Context of 'Adaptation of Expressions Law'

Jan – Jul 1989: SLORC escalates confrontation with Aung San Suu Kyi's and NLD campaigns throughout the country
16 Apr 1989: appointment of the Committee for Writing Slogans for Nationals – all aim for national unity
25 May 1989: appointment of the Central Committee for the Development of Border Areas and National Races
30 May 1989: appointment of the 21-member Commission of Enquiry into the True Naming of Myanmar Names
31 May 1989: appointment of the 11-member Committee for the Compilation of Authentic Data of Myanmar History; appointment of the Work Committee for the Development of Border Areas and National Races, plus sub-committees and regional committees; Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law
18 Jun 1989: 'Adaptation of Expressions Law' – renaming of country & capital in languages other than Burmese. Renaming of place-names and streets.
20 Jul 1989: Aung San Suu Kyi placed under house arrest (until July 1995) – NLD colleagues imprisoned

¹ 'Burma Communist Party's conspiracy to take over state power'. SLORC Secretary (1) Brig-Gen Khin Nyunt's Statement, Special Press Conference, 05.08.1989.

SLORC initiatives

With the country's mood swinging against the army, and with a track record of unpopular action, the regime was badly prepared for the elections. It pursued two moves that it felt might restore people's faith in the army in the hope this would improve thereby the electoral chances of the National Unity Party it supported. First, seeing how Aung San Suu Kyi had gained significant support from the ethnic minorities, subsequent to the collapse of the BCP it developed a policy of negotiating ceasefires with armed ethnic groups who were tired of fighting the regime. This was not, as Martin Smith has pointed out, altogether without positive benefits from the point of view of the ethnic groups, for it permitted them a respite from the endless fighting, and an opportunity to develop their local economy.¹ However, it would appear that the army wished to take the credit for willingness among the ethnic groups to negotiate peace, rather than leaving this goodwill to be harvested by a civilian political party under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Here, however, I wish to focus on the name changes, another benefit the army felt they contributed to Burma. The SLORC presented the name changes as a testament of its patriotic spirit, its goodwill for the country, and as a milestone in the history of the revolution that would bring the ethnic groups of Burma together. Since in its view it represented the final liberation of Burma from colonialism, and a return to ethnic harmony, it presented this as their major contribution to Burma's historical records. The decision to rename the country in languages other than Burmese was the beginning of an attempt to dictate this new reading of Burma's image abroad in the hope that it would help fight these popular and apparently communist and foreign-influenced democrats. Indeed, as Saw Maung put it, all foreigners, but in particular all Burmese, must accept this renaming much like French- and German-speaking Swiss nationals also fully accept their own Swiss nationality, for 'what is important is that all Myanmar citizens should possess the spirit of true Myanmar citizenship no matter what race'.² It is this motivation to build up national unity that underlies the renaming, and from the military point of view there was no better statement of its authority over the country than demonstrating that it had the power to take back from the British all the names that symbolised their rule so divisive to ethnic harmony.

The place names that were changed were invariably considered to be imperialist 'English'. Since the regime made the form of democracy as advocated by Aung San Suu Kyi to be a 'foreign' idea initially introduced by the British, and since Aung San Suu Kyi had married an Englishman and had strong connections with England, the idea was conceived to use the image of the colonial past and the struggle for national independence to revive anti-colonial and anti-foreign sentiment in order to rally and unify the Burmese people against 'Anglophile' ways of life. To reinforce this impression, the state-controlled press covered news from the West selectively to demonstrate how foreign ways of life are full of sleaze and miscarriages of justice. A month after the Expressions Law, Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, and the other senior NLD leaders were gaoled.

Redrawn boundaries

'Burma' and 'Myanmar' have never been void of political connotations, but the regime has politicised them to the extent that, unless one hyphenates or brackets references to Myanmar-Burma, using either today commits one to make a political statement for or against the regime. In the words of Taylor, 'the dimensions of political conflict in Burma are symbolised by the inability of the most visible antagonists to agree on the name of the State when speaking and writing in languages other than that of most of the population of the country itself'.³

It is difficult to eradicate two centuries of English language use. Furthermore, though most accepted the official renaming as the result of its acceptance at the United Nations, many politically aware people in the English-speaking world persisted in continuing to use 'Burma' and 'Burmese'. Aung San Suu Kyi made it a point to continue to refer to Burma. British and American broadcasting stations similarly did so in their broadcasts, which elicited an indignant response from the regime's journalists.

However, the Leik's [English] wife Puppet Princess Mrs Michael Aris, (together with the Leik broadcasting service and publications) and their Anglo-Saxon kin Kan [American] broadcasting station and newspapers have all along continued to use the term Burma. This is tantamount to a heinous disregard and insult on the Myanmar people. A few days back a so-called representative of the Kan and a spokesman of the Japanese Foreign Ministry were engaged in a discussion on Myanmar which

¹ Martin Smith. 'Playing the ethnic card: Burma at the cross-roads'. *Burma Debate*, Nov-Dec 1996.

² Saw Maung (1990b:340).

³ Taylor (1998a:33).

and the NLD. They were looking for instruments by means of which they could defend the idea that they were in charge of the country, while her popularity so evidently swept the country at that time. Through her appeals to the soldiers and the ethnic minorities, she was percolating into their most sensitive domains. During this period, her canvassing trips were increasingly disrupted by soldiers, and crowds attending her speeches were intimidated. She was supported across the country, not just by Burmans, but by most ethnic groups and by foreigners, and was furthermore threatening to boycott all the regime's initiatives. The regime behaved as if it were the last of the Mohicans, the last representation of indigenous loyalty against a tide of 'foreign' ideas and 'foreign' support for the opposition, for whom Burma's boundaries no longer seemed an impediment. A rhetoric emphasising Burma's boundaries, national independence and its ancient culture, they hoped, would help assert their territorial rights.

The demerits of Myanmarification

As a newly opened up country, it is understandable that the regime should focus on making it easier for tourists and businessmen to navigate, which requires romanised versions of place names to be calibrated with local pronunciation. Furthermore, there is no reason why it should not encourage pride in the country by renaming streets after Burmese personalities instead of British figures. However, the regime has ended up making a mountain out of a molehill, and unnecessarily complicating people's lives.¹

There are several points to be made about the linguistics behind the Myanmarification project – the political agenda to find a linguistic terms that encompasses all nationalities, the problem of literary versus colloquial Burmese, the problem of accuracy in transcribing Burmese language, the variation in pronunciation within Burma and its discrepancy with references from outside, and finally, the issue of forcing speakers of languages other than Burmese to accept the illusion of national unity in Burma.

Myanmar and the ethnic question

Since the 1920s, attempts have been made to find a single term in Burmese, the majority language, that would encompass all national ethnic groups. This all-encompassing concept has oscillated, in Burmese, between *Bama* (Burma) and *Myanma* (Myanmar). Burmese nationalist sentiment had been aroused by the Buddhist shoe question in 1917, prohibiting the British to wear shoes in sacred Buddhist monasteries and pagodas (displaced from palace shoe question in the 19th century), to a more overt political dyarchy question in 1920, and whether Burma should strive to attain self-government as part of India or as a separate country. This led to the formation of the Greater Council of Burmese [*Myanma*] Associations (GCBA). This was known originally known formally in Burmese as **Amiqa: t pəpə: sūnma Aqc: Kp̄k̄l** (usually shortened to **ūnma Aqc: Kp̄k̄l**), where *Myanma* was understood as representing the whole country and all its diverse peoples.² However, in the 1930s the radical leftist politicians of the Dobama Party, showing their dislike for the politicians of the 1920s, referred instead to *Bama* [**bma**] as the collective designation for all national peoples.³ Their party was known in full as 'the Us-Burman Party concerned with the whole of *Bama*' [**bma Nct̄ M̄c̄k̄ t̄ bma Asv: AR̄M̄l**].⁴ In 1974 the BSPP once again turned this around, referring to *Myanma* as the collective term.

However, at no time were the terms *Myanma*(r) or *Bama*(r) used in English until this particular 1989 regulation, when for the first time these concepts were forced upon languages other than Burmese, in preference to Burma, Burmese and Burman or their equivalent in other languages.⁵ Neither *Myanma* nor *Bama*, from which Myanmar and Burma are derived, are neutral terms, as both are strongly associated with the Burmese language, the language of the ethnic majority. Furthermore, the generals gave no clear thought

¹ Saw Maung enjoyed the idea that worldwide everyone would have to take note of the regime's changes, and that all encyclopaedias, 'right up to the maps, documents and materials' would have to be changed 'which would be damaging for them' (Saw Maung 1990:339).

² Among Burmese intellectuals it was best known by its English abbreviation, namely GCBA *Ahpwé-gyì* [**g̃s̄ B̄e AAp̄g̃l**]. This subsequently led to forgetting what the 'B' stood for – was it 'Burmese' (e.g. Htin Aung 1966:78)? or 'Buddhist' (e.g. Ba Maw 1968:7,424; Nu 1975:20)? With this confusion some foreign academics understandably assumed it to mean both (Steinberg 1988:43). However, peasants tended to call it *Wunthanú* Association [**w̄ȳn̄ AAp̄g̃l**] and some referred to it later as [**ūnma t̄ c̄rc̄: q̄a: (w̄ȳn̄ AAp̄g̃l Aqc: Kp̄k̄l) (q̄n̄ P̄nc̄ t̄ al̄ h̄r: kal̄ N̄c̄h̄ Aet̄ āk̄ ōl̄ r̄nk̄ ōl̄ r̄p̄ V̄ t̄ n̄k̄ 1956, page 4).**

³ e.g., see **Kc̄m̄ack̄ t̄ m̄l̄ t̄ ō̄ Kc̄q̄n̄ m̄ack̄ l̄ f̄ B̄w̄ N̄c̄h̄ M̄ l̄ g̃s̄ h̄g̃a: x̄ saep̄n̄ n̄ r̄nk̄ ōl̄ 1979**

q̄v̄l̄ h̄m̄: k̄iss̄v̄ t̄ a: Ap̄q̄at̄ sv̄ t̄ l̄ w̄v̄: q̄a ew̄ah̄r q̄s̄q̄v̄ b̄ma: p̄c̄ q̄v̄l̄ (m̄l̄ k̄ h̄ 54)

⁴ I am grateful to Pat Herbert for information supplied.

⁵ The exception is perhaps the English reference to the Dobama Party.

or guidance as to how the various derivatives from these terms should behave in different syntactical positions in English and in other languages.

Literary Myanmar

When Aung San Suu Kyi was asked ‘how do you feel about Burma being renamed Myanmar?’ she answered:

No one should be allowed to change the name of this country without referring to the will of the people. They say that Myanmar refers to all the Burmese ethnic groups, whereas Burma only refers to the Burmese ethnic group, but that is not true. Myanmar is a literary word for Burma and it refers only to the Burmese ethnic group. Of course, I prefer the word Burma.¹

The regime has blamed the people who sided with Aung San Suu Kyi on this issue as uncivil and as placing emphasis on personal ends rather than historical truth. Interestingly, one of her critics turned this criticism on its head and warned that her continued use of ‘Burma’ would culminate in a personality cult that would produce a dictator.²

What Aung San Suu Kyi means is that in Burmese a distinction between literary and colloquial language permits the use of two terms in parallel, namely *Bama naing ngan* [bmaNaiŋŋan] (‘territory conquered by Bamar’), and *Myanma naing ngan* [mjanmaNaiŋŋan] (‘Myanmar dominion’), the literary and official reference. The differences between official and informal colloquial Burmese are not easily summed up, however, as most expressions tend to mix both styles to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, what is certain, however, is that the former is more ornate and elaborate, and is more commonly found in historical records than the latter. This prompts John Okell to refer this as ‘elevated’ in style because it has ‘formal and literary connotations’.

Though there are complex linguistic arguments about the way Burma and Myanmar relate to one another as the result of shifts in pronunciation over time,³ there is in reality little difference between the two in terms of meaning. The following table 5 are the dictionary glosses for Myanma-Bama:

Table 5. Dictionary glosses of Bama and Myanma

Dictionary	Bama [bma]	Myanma [mjanma]
[1] The Universal Burmese-English Dictionary, 1978	(no word bama – only adjective bma as in bmaŋv)	mjanma Burmese bami
[2] mjanmaABDanAki: 1979	‘colloquial pronunciation of Myanma’ [mjanmaNaiŋŋan] bmaŋv	‘ethnic groups who have lived from time immemorial in Myanmar’ mjanmaNaiŋŋan bmaŋv
[3] Myanmar-English Dictionary, 1993	1. Bamar: Burmese; Burman. 2. Same as Myanma [mjanma ...]	n 1. the people of Myanmar. 2 (a) Same as bma n; Bamar; (b) (no longer current) Burmese; Burman

If *Bama* and *Myanma* are merely alternatives to one another, then why would the regime insist that Burma be known as Myanmar? The fact is that since the 1962 coup, colloquial language has been regarded as subversive and associated with undesirable political opposition (which, in turn, is mostly equated with ‘communism’).⁴ To write in colloquial fashion may under certain circumstances attract the accusation of having communist sympathies, as indeed, is one of the principal accusations against Aung San Suu Kyi. It has not been encouraged in print except in literary entertainment such as the many monthly magazines and

¹ Interview with Michele Manceaux in *Marie Claire Magazine* (May 1996, Singapore Edition).

² Hpe Kan Kaung (1997:304–5).

³ I should point out here that linguistic arguments have been put forward as for the relationship between *Bama* and *Myanma*: ‘The distinction according to which, often but not always nowadays, ‘bama’ refers to ethnic Burmans and ‘myanma’ to the nation and all its people, regardless of ethnicity, is a matter of conventional usage that goes back no farther, really, than the time of the Do Bama Asi-Ayone. It came about because there exists in the Burmese language a fairly regular contraction rule: if a syllable starts with an ‘m’ and undergoes stress reduction, so that its vowel becomes the short ‘a’ and it loses its tone and any medial glides (here, the ‘y’ following initial ‘m’) and the consonants after the vowel (here, the final ‘n’ of the first syllable of ‘myanma’), then the ‘m’ reduces to ‘b’. In this way, for instance, ‘Maing Maw’ (from the Shan ‘Moeng Mao’) ends up as ‘bamaw’ (Bhamo). What seems to have happened is that, since contraction forms of words are more colloquial, the uncontracted, or full form of the word acquired overtones of being a formal, legalistic word, so that it was used to refer to the State/Nation and hence to any and all the people natively associated with that political entity, whilst the contracted, colloquial ‘bama’ was left as having no especial legal reference and was able to refer to just ethnic Burmans and their culture, though, as Ye Myint indicates, not altogether consistently.’ (Chit Hlaing, personal communication).

⁴ The names of the Communist political parties notably use Burma (*Bama*) rather than Myanmar (*Myanma*).

In forcing the application of the literary reference Myanmar under all circumstances, and in having its machinery of censorship in place over the media, the regime hopes to centralise and assert maximum control over grass-root ideas about the country, glossing over all variations of views that might disagree with its narrow vision of the country. While the Burmese people themselves may continue to use *Bama pyei* (Burma) in limited contexts such as unofficial speech, the regime has insisted on forcing all English speakers, and the international community as a whole, most of whom know nothing about such distinctions, to implement the literary over the colloquial version of the country's name even when they are speaking rather than writing.

Myanmar transcribed

The Burmese language is notoriously difficult to represent unambiguously in roman script. In particular, pronunciation is a bad guide to spelling. In his *Guide to the romanization of Burmese*, John Okell gives the romanised example of *batha* [**Baqa**], meaning ‘language’ or ‘subject’. This word can represent any one of twelve different pronunciations, each of which could be spelt in Burmese in several different ways; one pronunciation alone has seventy-two spelling possibilities.¹ Many linguistic features of the Burmese language, such as tones and glottal stops, cannot possibly reflect both spelling and pronunciation in ordinary romanised script.

Myanmar has become a combination of both methods – the ‘myan’ element is transcribed, and the ‘mar’ element is transliterated. To be consistent either way, would result in ‘myanma’ or ‘myamma’ under the transcription system, or ‘mranma’ under the transliteration system. The idea is that when referring to the name of the country we would use the ‘r’ to reflect level tone ‘a’. When used as an adjective in the English language (e.g. Myanma Ceramic Industries) or a possessive in the Burmese language (e.g. the newspaper *Myanma’s Light* [မြန်မာ့အလင်း]), the ‘r’ is dropped to represent the creaky tone ‘á’. Okell suspects, however, that the ‘r’ is sometimes not even a phonetically expressed feature of Burmese grammar but simply serves to express a mood on the part of the speaker or author.²

¹ John Okell. *A guide to the romanization of Burmese*. 1971. James G. Forlong Fund, vol XXVII. London: Royal Asiatic Society.

² The idea seems to be 'to try and differentiate between low and high tone (eg *mar* for "to be hard" and "to be towering") versus creaky tone (*ma* for "female"). The device does high-handedly disregard the pronunciation of Americans and Scots: I once had some correspondence with a very irate Scot about it. But then so do the Thais with syllables like "sert" and "korn", where the R is not pronounced.' John Okell, personal correspondence.

Victorian and early Edwardian practice of indicating a preceding long 'a' in English, which died out in England, but has been preserved only in Burma. This would indicate that, rather than moving away from the colonial period, the generals are unthinkingly recreating it and have further complicated and mystified Burmese place names.¹ In short, the effect of introducing the 'r' into Myanmar means that it is no less misplaced than the 'r' in Burma; it has merely changed place.

If these changes defeat logic, it has caused much confusion with non-Burmese speakers, especially the French, who invariably pronounce the 'r' as a consonant rather than a lengthened vowel 'a'. Even seasoned Burma specialists make mistakes. Burmese speakers themselves do not implement the regime's directives consistently. For example, some Burmese intellectuals leave out 'r' in Myanmar on their name cards, even where it is part of an official country name implemented by the regime. More often than not, a lack of clarity about this naming system means that many simply do not know what the rules are. For example, sometimes there is reference to Myanmar Railways, and sometimes to Myanma Railways. Burma's flagship national airways was renamed from Burma Airways to Myanma [Burmese] Airways. In 1995 after the joint venture with Singapore, the company became known as Myanmar [Burma] Airways, while Myanma Airways continues to exist as a separate entity. Also, what is the logic of referring to *Myanmá* [Burmese] *Alin* [မင်းမာအလင်း] as 'The Light of Myanmar' where it should strictly speaking be 'Light of Myanma'.² Indeed, in Burma some also follow foreign reference by journalists by using 'Myanmar Alin'.³ With this confusion, some speakers prefer to coin their own words, and so in several articles, and in particular in Japan, I have encountered the newly-coined designation 'Myanmarese' for the language of Burma.

Pagan has been renamed Bagan. Though usually pronounced with the initial 'B', this is in fact written in Burmese with the initial 'P' [ပုဂံ]. Were one to transliterate the name and write it down, it would therefore be perfectly legitimate to use Pagan.

Therefore, if accuracy of pronunciation is to be the overriding point, then at least some of the changes the regime has made are not only highly doubtful, but also extremely confusing. To be truly accurate, would have meant writing place names in a phonetic script better able to reflect pronunciation. However, this would have the disadvantage of being difficult to represent on ordinary fonts and typewriters, and those not initiated in phonetics would still find this difficult to pronounce.

Pronunciation confined

Even a phonetic script could not begin to resolve the problem of variation in pronunciation between dialects and languages. The British arrived in Lower Burma, far away from the capital in Upper Burma. Apart from taking over names from the Portuguese and Dutch, many names are likely to have come into English through whatever were at that time the locally spoken and written languages. For example, as already mentioned, the regime decided to rename Rangoon as Yangon. Though this is closer to the pronunciation by the majority, we do not know whether Rangoon entered English through Arakanese, through a monk steeped in Pali or even through the pronunciation of some of the communities speaking Indian languages, all of whom pronounce 'y' as 'r'. To insist on Yangon, is to insist on a rather simplistic one-dimensional view of these linguistic complexities and variations. It is, indeed, to rewrite history.

In dictating its version of pronunciation, the regime glosses over contemporary and historical linguistic diversity in the history of relations within and outside Burma and demonstrates intolerance for variation. As one observer notes, many changes 'are unfamiliar, politically sensitive or rejected by different ethnic groups and parties'.⁴ This is an ill-omen for the declared democratisation programme.

Myanmar censored

Perhaps the most important aspect of Myanmafication terminology is not so much the attempt to transcend so-called 'colonial' naming systems of the past through censorship of colloquial expressions, but the attempt to give the illusion of a unified Myanmar. The introduction of Myanmar into English is not merely substitution for the English word Burma. It is also an attempt to engineer connections between what were distinct terms in the English language. In SPDC English, Myanmar merges two hitherto distinct terms – Burmese (the language, the ethnic groups, and nationality) and Burma (the country). The term Bamar

¹ I am grateful to U Chit Hlaing (Kris Lehman) for his comments.

² e.g. Ah May, 'Dawn breaks on the era of light'. *MP*, September 1997.

³ It should be noted that historians such as Prof. Than Tun prefer the spelling **plm**

⁴ Smith (1994:18).

supplants Burman (the dominant ethnic group). In American English, Burmese and Burman are sometimes used in the inverse sense of British English. If this were to be accepted in English, then the regime would have succeeded in eliminating the distinction between country and language. However, the concept *Myanma* [mɔ̃nma] as used in the Burmese language permits even less diversity than the English Myanmar. Though there are attempts to reserve the colloquial *Bama* [bama] for 'Burman', and to use *Myanmar* for matters related with the Union as a whole,¹ this turns out to be not feasible since the two terms in Burmese continue to be colloquial and literary alternatives to one another as before. In the Burmese language *Myanma* remains as strongly linked to the majority Burman ethnic group as did *Bama* (even the most recent government dictionary includes 'Burman' as one of its meanings). In sum, this means that, though the regime ostensibly claims to distinguish between Burmese and Burman, this distinction only works in the English language, but in Burmese it in fact ends up saying that Burma and Burmese are Burman.

Royal Myanmar

The implication of the preceding discussion is that the renaming of Burma to Myanmar represents the singularisation and simplification of the country from a Burman centrist point of view, but its obfuscation for everyone else. Than Tun has pointed out that the concept of Myanmar, or *Mirma* in his transcription method, is strongly identified with royal history. It was first used by King Kyanzittha [1084–1113] 'to describe how the palace was built'. Later it was used to describe the king's residential town rather than the country.² Similarly, before he renamed what was formerly known as Dagon, King Alaungphaya renamed it 'end of strife' (Yangon) in celebration of his conquest over the enemy [rɔ̃kɔ̃t yɔ̃]. To insist on Myanmar and Yangon, therefore, is also to emphasize and celebrate past royal victories over the various ethnic groups along with foreigners, and add insult to injury by having languages other than Burmese – including minority languages – make this change in reference. Yet it is represented as a step towards racial harmony. This permits a very different view of the enormous revival of the palace tradition by the regime since 1989. It is a revival of the old technique of place-making.

To 'Myanmify' is to unify

In practice therefore, in Burmese the concept *Myanma* has come to represent the ultimate illusion of unification of the country, encompassing all five separate meanings: the language, peoples, nationality, country, and also the ethnic majority as unified through royalty.³ The changes of name are politically motivated. Though some authors have observed this change as 'suggestive of cosmetic reform',⁴ this Myanmification is in fact the unambiguous Burmanisation of place names, the attempt to make all place names conform to Burman pronunciation overriding all other grass-root variation in the many languages present in Burma. It therefore should be read as the attempt to Burmanise Burma – it is Myanmification.

In the absence of external enemies, the regime's desire to be seen to conquer foreigners, to extend its censorship to the international community, goes back further in history before the date the law was enacted. Indeed, it has resulted in the retrospective renaming of Burma to Myanmar even in verbatim quotes from British colonial records.⁵ In other words, the reach of the Myanmification programme is so extensive and so unmitigating, that the regime is prepared to tamper with the language in which historical sources themselves were cast. This is symptomatic of the regime's inability to tolerate divergent views, even where they are part of historical records. The regime is using Myanmar to crowd out all alternative concepts of unity that various ethnic groups and foreign languages might have expressed throughout history. In this sense, then, Orwell is quite right when he says that 'in Burma the past belongs to those who control the present'.⁶

¹ e.g. 'In fact Burma only means Bama, one particular nationality. Myanmar is the name for all nationalities' (Nawrahta 1995:145). 'And just when a reconsolidation of national unity, particularly unity between Bamars, Mons and Kayins, had become an imperative need, the Myanmar King's palace and the ruling circle, instead of strengthening their own unity, were being [divided] by squabbles and conflicts' (Minye Kaungbon 1994:45).

² Than Tun (1983–90, X:1).

³ In the Myanmar-English dictionary published in 1993 the term Myanmar is given as 'the people of Myanmar' and '(no longer current) Burmese; Burman, and the Burmese language'.

⁴ Smith (1991:21).

⁵ For example, see citations from Major Snodgrass's *Narrative of the Burmese War* and Mackenzie Smeaton's *Loyal Kayins of Burma* in Minye Kaungbon (1994:33, 159). It should be noted that, though in this particular case the author stops censorship only at not changing the titles of these books, in the case of reprints of Daw Khin Myo Chit's book *The Burmese family* not only has all the contents been revised to reflect the new names, but the title of the book was altered to *The Myanmar family*.

⁶ Victor (1998:226).

The name of the country now divides all who refer to it. For example, it divides one tourist guide from another, as Wilhelm Klein's *The insight guide to Myanmar* versus Nicholas Greenwood's *Guide to Burma* (of which the second edition is dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi), and the shorter *Alternative guide to Burma*, both published in 1996.¹ Scholars are similarly divided over the naming of the country. Some, such as Taylor, sometimes use 'Burma-Myanmar'. Also, Callahan, seek to transcend this divide by arguing that 'those who call the country Burma have somewhat warped readings of a troubled historical time, while those who call it Myanmar seem trapped in a time warp'.²

As I will show below, Myanmarfication, though it initially originated in response to containing Aung San Suu Kyi and her demands for democracy, has turned into a programme that fits in snugly with a number of other military interests. In practice the thinking that gave rise to Myanmarfication has led to unnecessary confinement and relocation of vast numbers of people, destruction of communities, simply in order to secure total control over the physical borders that this concept implies. Just as it 'myanmarfies', it also 'foreignises', leading to the accusation that many Burmese have been turned into foreign agents. The primary cause, as Saw Maung states, is that

These foreigners who live so far away from us and are so very different from our culture, traditions and language have been agitating and inciting to cause disintegration of the Union since our country's independence was regained. They have been doing this for a great many years since when Myanmar Naing-ngan was first plunged into servitude.³

Instruments for Myanmarfication

Diverse instruments were put in place to develop and study Myanmar identity. Research into Myanmar history and culture are the sole purpose of the Myanmar Historical Commission. The more specifically ASEAN-oriented issues fall under the new Myanmar Institute of Strategic Studies.

It should be noted that, although my overall tone is critical of the Myanmarfication programme and its instruments, this should not be extended to all those who are implicated in it. I am aware that among those who organise and attend the conferences, there are people of independent mind who are committed to do what they can to take things beyond the realm of propaganda, and who have a critical approach and the intention to use their knowledge to improve the situation in the country. But unfortunately their scope is very limited, to say the least.

Committee for the Compilation of Authentic Data of Myanmar History (CCADMH)

In the wake of the unravelling of BSPP ideology, and with the Aung San factor now working for Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, there emerged a desperate need for alternative views of history from which to build up a new enduring concept of the State. If before the elections the SLORC described itself as a temporary measure, after losing the elections Khin Nyunt described the SLORC in terms of 'an historical requirement' that can only be discerned as the result of possessing superior knowledge of Burmese history.

The SLORC is an organisation which, after seriously scrutinising and reviewing the course of historical change in Burma, is providing guidance to ensure that a good historical course takes place on the legal path with discipline. ... As political scientists well know, political developments in a country are determined by causes and effects which are interlinked. A country's location, physical geography and inhabitants, and their customs and national character determine the developments in that country and cause history to run into cycles.⁴

¹ For an acrimonious exchange between Greenwood and Klein see BurmaNet News, 23.09.1995 & Klein's rebuttal on BurmaNet News, 02.10.1995. What is interesting is that, though initially supporting the democracy movement, by 1998 Greenwood seems to have fallen out with the Burma Action Group, and himself had become an advocate for the regime. Perhaps due to his frequent visits to Burma as a leader of tours, by this time the regime approvingly placed Greenwood's rebuttals to foreign criticisms on their Internet site. Greenwood's letters criticised the view that tourism into Burma should be boycotted as disseminated in the English newspapers (*IS*, 9, 12, 17 August; 1, 10, 22 October 1998). In these letters Greenwood signs his name as 'Travel Writer and Tour Consultant (Burma)'. However, he does not limit his criticism of the boycott, and increasingly becomes virulent about Aung San Suu Kyi, whom he refers to as 'that woman', and openly blames her for instigating the boycott of tourism as her personal decision. He wrote a letter in criticism to Mr. Fatchett's statements on Burma, the British Foreign Office Minister. Though he continues to refer to 'Burma (Myanmar)', at one point his signature is given as 'Travel Writer and Tour Consultant (Myanmar)'. It could be an error in the search-and-replace procedure at military intelligence who run the Internet site, but it could also be an expression of one who already feel proprietary about Burma, for in one of these letters he proclaims proudly that 'I have been the first Western traveller for over 30 years to have gained access to all areas of the country'. The regime published his letter in which he writes to Martin Linton, MP, that he as 'the UK's Burma travel expert', knows 'far more about the country than he [Fatchett] does' (*IS*, 05.11.1998).

² Callahan (1998a:50).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:238).

⁴ 'On a legal path with discipline.' Major General Khin Nyunt, 104th news conference, 11 September 1990 (Weller 1993:201). It should be pointed out that in this statement there is evidence on the ethnic issue, for Khin Nyunt suggested that he was repeating

⁶ The conference (scholars who gave papers / participants) were affiliated to establishments in the following countries Australia

opportune' in light of current changes.

The second conference was held between 2–4 December 1996 in Rangoon at the Council Chamber of the Convocation Hall on Thai-Myanmar Studies. The third conference, held in January 1998, presented research papers on the theme 'Southeast Asian Seaports and Maritime Trade' at the International Business Centre, Rangoon.¹ The fourth held between 16–18 December 1998 on 'Post-colonial society and culture in Southeast Asia'.²

The MHC and UHRC are walking a tightrope. From the point of view of the academic community in Burma and the few scholars invited from abroad, the academic venues they organise represent a unique opportunity to present research on Burma, which has not been possible since the 1962 coup. However, these venues are clearly manipulated as a political instrument of State. Internally, those who participate feel the regime is attempting a facelift of the Ministry of Education after the breakdown in 1988 in the relationship between the students and the authorities. But in a broader sense, they are required to come up with narrow answers to narrow policy-questions set by the regime.

Members of the academic profession, like any other profession in Burma, are desperately underpaid, lack opportunity for independent research and are unable to disseminate their findings uncensored. Given the way many of these projects are being organised, and their popular presentation in the press, a question mark arises over the ethics of participation. The opening speeches to these events by high government officials such as General Khin Nyunt, Chairman of Myanmar Education Committee, and Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, testifies to the central importance of these conferences to Burma's image building. The papers in these conferences are billed with 'Myanmar' in the title.

In his preface to the first conference on traditions, General Khin Nyunt explains that our cultural heritage and our traditions are 'of serious concern to us', and explains why the State made 'uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of the cultural heritage and national character' one of its main social objectives. He explains how the regime took the initiative to rebuild palaces, pagodas and monasteries, but that it is 'the enthusiastic and energetic response and participation of the people which have made them a success'. The history of conflict the military has experienced with students spurs Khin Nyunt on to point out that cultural tradition is particularly important for the youth, who 'in their formative stage, are more susceptible to influences which are alien to our tradition', and he proposes that the education system should 'disclose and preserve Myanmar cultural traits', and must engage in 'promoting and strengthening the patriotic spirit and Union consciousness of the youth'. He explains how his initiative involved reviving monastic education at the primary level to form the youth's 'moral character'. The University of Rangoon has a motto 'with truth and loyalty', and General Khin Nyunt argues that this 'enjoins not only a search for knowledge but also service to the nation', as the University of Rangoon 'is a tradition of knowledge in the service of the nation and its people'.

As for the second conference on maritime trade, the Minister of Education summed up its significance by saying in his closing speech that this conference is 'an indication of Myanmar's active participation in the recording and dissemination of Southeast Asian history and culture, as well as being a dynamic member of ASEAN'. We should take this idea of 'dissemination of Southeast Asian history and culture' literally, namely the regime desires to make culture its political centrepiece, both internally within Burma, and externally within ASEAN.

Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS)

MISIS was formed in July 1992, largely in order to have a counterpart to the many ISIS namesakes in other ASEAN countries. Its Chairman, U Ohn Gyaw, was until recently Minister for Foreign Affairs.³ It has organised a number of workshops in conjunction with other institutes in other ASEAN countries, including: 'A Workshop on Asean's Structure and Mechanism', 10–11 April 1997.⁴ However, it is often confused with the much more high-profile Office of Strategic Studies (OSS) (see below).

(5/8), Burma (4/37), Japan (3/4), Thailand (3/17), UK (2/3), Germany (2/2), India (1/1), France (1/4), USA (0/2), Singapore (0/2).

¹ 'Myanmar history'. *MP*, March 1998.

² This involved 21 scholars, mostly from outside Burma.

³ Khin Maung Nyunt. 'The Roundtable on Myanmar-Asean Interaction' *MP*, October 1997.

⁴ 'Workshop on Asean's structure and mechanism'. *MP*, April 1997.

Office of Strategic Studies (OSS)

Founded in 1994, this is a military intelligence agency that falls under the Ministry of Defence. It is headed by Colonel Than Tun and by Brigadier Colonel Kyaw Win (Deputy Head). The latter is also Deputy Director of Defence Services Intelligence.

Under Ne Win, military intelligence was powerful, but it was ultimately seen as working in favour of Ne Win, the figurehead whom all high-ranking ministers accepted. Today's situation, however, is more complicated. Though many speculate that General Khin Nyunt is the most powerful person in the regime, he does not have Ne Win's credentials as a Thakkin fighter for national independence, and furthermore faces opposition from his contemporaries who believe he was not rightfully promoted via the usual route, namely the battlefield. Nevertheless, the fact is that military intelligence has largely taken over the functions of government, and it works, in a sense, because it is unrepresentative, unidentifiable and unpredictable.

The Office of Strategic Studies (OSS) is described as 'the most interesting power centre in Burma today'. Under the new SPDC regime, it was responsible for the clean-up operation of corrupt ministers.

What's increasingly clear is that the OSS is now in charge. 'Its stated objectives mirror the functions of the government,' says a Rangoon-based analyst. 'It advises the Foreign Ministry and tells the Ministry of Information what to say.' The OSS directs ethnic affairs and Burma's drug policy, apart from keeping a watchful eye on dissidents within and outside the country. It has even organized seminars in Rangoon to map out economic policies. In effect, it is the government.¹

Andrew Selth, a specialist on the Burmese military, identifies the OSS as a post-1988 development closely associated with the career of its chief General Khin Nyunt as follows:

A new addition to the country's intelligence apparatus is the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS). A small body directly answerable to Khin Nyunt, the OSS was initially believed to be a semi-academic institution similar to the strategic studies institutes and think tanks found elsewhere in the region (and further afield). Some commentators speculated that the OSS had been created in part to give Burma a seat at various 'one and a half track' (a mixture of both academics and officials) and a 'second track' (academic only) talks on security issues that were then becoming common throughout the Asia-Pacific region. This seems to reflect confusion, however, between the OSS and the Foreign Ministry's 'Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies' (MISIS), which was formed around the same time. A more likely explanation for the creation of the OSS was that a new 'Strategic Command' was required within the defence hierarchy, to justify Khin Nyunt's elevation in 1994 to lieutenant general rank. If this is true, then the OSS would be formally higher than the DDSI in the Defence Ministry structure, equating roughly to a Bureau of Special Operations in the General Staff Department. Even so, Khin Nyunt seems to have retained the titles of both Chief of the OSS and Director of Defence Services Intelligence (as well as being Director General of the NIB and Secretary (1) of the SLORC). On this basis, it would be logical for the OSS also to be member of the NIB.

The OSS is divided into five departments. These cover international affairs, narcotics, security, ethnic affairs, and science and the environment. Not all positions of departmental head are currently filled, although some senior officers have responsibility for more than one department. All OSS officers are members of the armed forces and are drawn from the ranks of the DDSI. Some retain their DDSI roles, even as members of the OSS. Since its creation in the early 1990s, the OSS has demonstrated a close interest in the activities of dissidents and opposition politicians, notably Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD). Why Khin Nyunt does not feel able to use the existing military intelligence apparatus to do this, however, is not clear.²

The effective designation of the OSS as 'government' therefore means that General Khin Nyunt is currently leading the new SPDC. It gives a semblance of sophistication to the regime, which in the past made many a public relations blunder.

The OSS deals with military strategic studies as defined in the broadest sense, concomitant with the view that the army should be in charge of all government activities. The OSS is associated with monitoring and thinking out all major new initiatives. First, the most significant policy studies emanate from it. Second, OSS officers organise press conferences for foreign journalists and are at hand to answer their questions. Third, it maintains links with other intelligence groups in the region, including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Pakistan. The OSS is also strongly linked to attempts at improving the regime's image through the Internet and public relations agencies. It writes the *Information Sheets* and many of the inflammatory editorials under pseudonyms. Moreover, it has carried out archaeological work and leads the Pondaung Primate Fossil Exploration and Study Team which pursues the origins of Myanmar man, led by Than Tun and Kyaw Win (see below).

The 'Roundtable on Interaction between Myanmar and ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies and the Office of the Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defence' was held on 28 October 1997 at the International Business Centre, Rangoon. The point of this meeting was to make sure that 'the ASEAN focal

¹ Lintner, Bertil. 'Velvet glove.' *Far East Economic Review*, 07.05.1998.

² Andrew Selth. 'Burma's intelligence apparatus.' *Burma Debate*, September–October 1997.

points of the various Myanmar Ministries' could interact with counterparts from other ASEAN countries, for 'they were the people responsible for handling ASEAN related issues in the Myanmar national context and so they would have a first hand experience of the ASEAN way of engagement'.

An important Burmese view expressed at this meeting was that it is not sufficient for ASEAN to be a collection of neighbours who co-operate economically – there is a need for a sense of identity summed up ultimately into 'consolidating one Southeast Asia'.

The Minister [U Ohn Gyaaw] went on to say that Myanmar's entry, together with Laos, into ASEAN had marked a new era of ASEAN interaction and consultation, and pointed out many important things ASEAN members have in common in geography, history and culture, and many basic values about kinship, religion, philosophy, tolerance, discipline and consensus. Despite diversities, the inherent similarity in the region brings and bonds the South-East Asian nations together. It is this inherent similarity that determines the formation of a regional community in the vision of ASEAN-10. Being an ASEAN member, 'Myanmar is fully committed to contributing her best effort in developing a clear understanding of a regional identity for all ten nations in the region. . '. In concluding his speech Minister U Ohn Gyaaw expressed his confidence that 'this process of interaction and mutual learning among member state will enhance and complement the overriding cause of consolidating one Southeast Asia'.

The Roundtable spilled over into a meeting with the ASEAN-ISIS delegation at the Defence Services Guesthouse, hosted by the OSS. At this meeting a video was shown, *Endeavours of the armed forces of the Union of Myanmar in the reconstruction of a modern and developed Nation*. Though I have not seen this video, there is a tension within it between the past and the future, between 'reconstruction' and 'a modern and developed nation', for by 'reconstructing' Burma it would be confirming the Burma of the past, as opposed to 'constructing' Burma, a more future-oriented exercise. The result of this initial exploratory meeting was OSS co-sponsorship of the following important conferences:

- (a) 'International Symposium on Interaction for Progress: Myanmar In ASEAN', 24–25 October 1998, jointly sponsored with Information and Resource Centre of Singapore and Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Japan
- (b) 'An Analysis and Assessment of the Current Economic Situation in Myanmar', 16–21 January 1998, jointly sponsored with the Tun Foundation Bank, the chairman of which proposed the theme.¹
- (c) 'Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar', 18–20 November 1997. This conference sought to catch up on the Burmese perspective on human resources which had initially been raised in Jakarta at the 1986 conference on Jakarta Plan of Action on Human Resource Development in the ESCAP Region.
- (d) 'Socio-economic Factors Contributing to National Consolidation', 9–10 October 1996

The latter two were published and were available at Burma's international airports in 1998. These provide an insight into the regime's perspectives on subjects such as Buddhism, culture, nation building and development, as discussed below.

Two important things should be noted about these conferences. First, the subjects of the various conferences are normally the domain of particular ministries (e.g. human resources falls under the Ministry of Labour, archaeology falls under the Ministry of Culture). However, it is military intelligence in the guise of the OSS that convenes, guides and charts the subjects' frontiers. This is symptomatic of the lack of autonomy that ministries have, and the tight hold the army retains over all aspects of government and all forms of knowledge and development. Second, the documents resulting from these conferences are full of slogans and unsubstantiated assertions, and contain very little serious and honest analysis of Burma's situation. For example, in a paper on education it is proudly stated that illiteracy has decreased and that 'all the races live in harmony'.² Though interestingly the regime permits the incorporation of a few selected perspectives from ASEAN scholars and policy makers regarding their experiences in their own country, it is nevertheless clear that the outcome of the papers themselves is very different from those of the Historical Commission, which allows scholars some freedom. The Burmese regime continues to prefer to spend its money on military intelligence and propaganda, rather than high quality independent academic studies and the establishment of a sound education system.

Nevertheless, the strong propaganda element in these volumes, and the fact that they were written, edited and published by the chief policy makers in Burma, makes them of great interest to us, as they provide us with an insight into the regime's objectives.

¹ Reported in detail in 'Seminar on an analysis and assessment of the current economic situation in Myanmar' (MP, January 1998).

² Myo Nyunt (1998:104).

Chapter 3

Myanmafication (2): the quest for national unity

Benedict Anderson argued that the nation is an ‘imagined community’, that it is not a given reality and involves imagination.¹ Winachukil accepts Anderson’s model as useful, but modifies it to argue that it is ‘a discursive construct’.² In particular he looks at how the shift from the pre-modern cosmology discourse to a modern discourse involves the creation of a domain with definitive boundaries mapping the geo-body of the State. The transition between these two discourses, so Tambiah has argued in the case of Thailand, is about the transition from a pulsating *mandala* galactic polity, working to cosmological boundaries, to the ‘radial state’, working to geographical boundaries.³

Though there are similarities between the Burmese and the Thai situation, there are also some significant differences. In Thailand the king retained its place at the cosmological centre even in the new discourse, but in Burma the last king disappeared from the centre when the British carried King Thibaw away from his Mandalay palace in 1886 and placed him in exile in India. Furthermore, the British controlled the State and placed British royalty at its centre, permitting no indigenous rule for sixty-two years. We would expect, therefore, the concept of national unity to have different meanings from the Thai context.⁴

As I have already pointed out in relation to Aung San’s politics, national unity, along with national independence, was the chief pre-occupation of Burma’s earliest generation of politicians.⁵ However, it has also been the chief pre-occupation of the current generation of democracy leaders. In fact, this emphasis on unity characterises the ideology of Burmese politicians in general. Thus, Aung San Suu Kyi herself in her very first political 28-paragraph short speech used this very concept of unity (*nyi-nyut*) nineteen times, and in the Burmese version of *Freedom from fear* it is additionally used in titles of speeches on at least two occasions.⁶

As Callahan perceptively says, ‘common to both the SLORC and the NLD is an overarching emphasis on unity and solidarity’.⁷ She views this emphasis as ‘simply inimical to the development of institutional mechanisms that can accommodate the needs and demands of the broad range of social forces that exist throughout the country’.⁸ I am not sure that this concept itself is responsible for this, for as I will show, it is rooted in various ideas with their own ramifications. What is certain, is that constant stress on national unity is undoubtedly a reflection of the awareness that divisions, and in particular ethnic divisions, exist. It is necessary to investigate this concept further.

Today, national unity continues to be the most important political concept in the vocabulary of the regime. For example, it set up a web-site called ‘Unity is No.1’ that says ‘protect your country with Information Technology’, which focuses on attacking on the NLD in particular.⁹ The web-site contains links to pages that indicate how support for the regime comes from the country’s borders, and from repentant

¹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

² Winichakul (1994:12).

³ Tambiah (1976:102–131, 197–98, 526–8).

⁴ It is interesting to note that when General Chavalit led the largest Thai delegation to Burma ever, the Burmese presented him in the press by making a peculiar inverted comment on their own situation. He is represented as saying that ‘in the history of Thailand unity had disintegrated owing to fighting between one group and another and that had caused Thailand 100-year delay in the development of the country’. Chavalit was reported to have said that ‘he did not want to see such a thing happening in a country which is most friendly to Thailand’, and that ‘he delightedly took pride in intimately meeting with the closest Burmese friends who are striving for the welfare of Burma.’ (Ye Yint Min Gaung. ‘A visit of friendship by relatives’. *Working People’s Daily*, 16.12.1988). The article does not consider the question, however, whether the Thai did not also produce greater benefits for its citizens *because* they were perhaps less transfixed upon the concept of unity. Can Burmese national unity in and of itself produces any discernable benefits without accompanying political reforms?

⁵ Instances when Aung San stressed national unity include his primary point for the development of the ‘new democracy’ (Aung San 1971:95).

⁶ ‘The need for solidarity among ethnic groups’ [တစ်နိုင်ငံလုံးရှိ လူမျိုးစုများအကြား တရားဝင် ဖက်ဒရယ် အကျိုးအမြတ်များကို အသုံးပြုခြင်း], and ‘The power of democracy and unity’ [တရားဝင် အကျိုးအမြတ်များကို အသုံးပြုခြင်း].

⁷ Callahan (1998a:65).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ <http://www.twics.com/~yangon/unity.htm>.

political activists abroad. National unity is an assumption at the core of the regime's political vocabulary, including 'national consolidation',¹ 'national reconsolidation', and 'national solidarity'.

Underlying all these concepts is *nyi-nyut-yei*, a concept that has its central meaning in Buddhism, and more particularly in the life as lived in the monastic order with the meaning that the majority decision should be respected. This was already commonly used in the Sagaing period, found in the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda inscriptions as well as in Maha Thilawuntha's writings. This very same concept is also the overriding theme in some of the earliest Buddhist chronicles such as *Sasanavamsa* in reference to the comportment of the Sangha.²

Ethnic diversity within the country is of a particular kind. We find the concept of national unity much used in other countries where majority cultural and linguistic groups are differentiated territorially, as in the case of Eastern Europe and Canada. National unity is less stressed in, for example, the United States, a country with an ethnically mixed population most of whom trace their 'roots' ultimately to beyond the country's borders. Furthermore, in most democratic countries national unity is seen as layered, and discussion focuses on ways of representing the spectrum of diverse interest groups in government through various political parties and NGOs, while keeping a high standard of human rights and stability.

There are two features of Burmese concepts of national unity. First, in Burma the story of national unity is not primarily addressed at the level of institutions but at the level of the person. Second, it is primarily addressed not at the level of secular ideology, but at the level of Buddhist practice. This Buddhist practice conceives of the realms of the body and the nation as homologous, and both as subject to the same laws of *samsara*.

National unity is closely bound up with strong personalities able to strike a high moral cord, and in particular it is represented by Aung San himself. Aung San was widely regarded as having accomplished and indeed himself representing, national unity. However, the meanings people attached to his role in forging unity and indeed, the meanings he himself attached to unity, cannot be understood without comprehending the Buddhist concepts surrounding mental culture. His sense was more a cosmological, even ideological, sense of unity operating on the vertical imaginary Buddhist cosmological plane, in particular where the higher mundane (*loki*) realms transit into the transcendent (*lokuttara*) beyond.

Since 1988, however, with the opposition's strong claim to Aung San, Myanmarification turned into a hasty search to attribute content to what had hitherto remained largely undefined. Though many elements in this discourse may appear similar to Aung San's and that of his mentor Thahkin Kodawhmaing, it in fact represents a major shift in the interpretation of unity. First, the Myanmarification programme provides an impersonal replacement of Aung San as symbol of unity – it represents a shift from unity conceived in terms of personalised influence (*awza*) to that of impersonal authority (*ana*) as expressed in the shift towards military intelligence and through the array of Government Organised Non-Government Organisations (GONGOs, see below). Second, it represents the aim to territorially realise actual unity between diverse ethnic groups on a geographical horizontal plane through improvement of transport and initiatives in development. Third, it has raised the profile of certain material ingredients in the concept of national unity, including such ideas as common racial origins, common culture and common language.

I here trace these concepts as used by Aung San and his mentor, Thahkin Kodawhmaing, and later by the SLORC and the SPDC, and I finally explore how national unity is being developed in relation to ASEAN (see table 6).

Early concepts of unity

National unity – Aung San's *samadhi* and monastic unity

Emphasis on unity is commonly found in other Theravada Buddhist countries.³ Indeed, Burmese politicians view Buddhism as providing a form of unity no other religion can match, a religion that even permits crossing boundaries. As Aung San states in a speech to the Siamese delegation, Burma and Thailand are bound together by their 'spiritual affinity' based on Buddhism, and he expressed admiration for how Thailand introduced far-reaching legislation 'to enlist Buddhism in the cause of national unity'.⁴ Indeed, in

¹ See Khin Maung Nyunt (1997).

² Patrick Pranke (personal communication).

³ See for example S.J. Tambiah *Buddhism betrayed*. University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 105–6.

⁴ 'Our fraternal greetings to the Siamese people'. In Aung San (1971:104–5). It is interesting that often, and this counts for

Table 6. Core political terms and their relation to mental culture

	horizontal bounded model: 'radial polity'*	vertical Buddhist 'mental' open-ended cosmological model: 'mandala polity'*		
* See Tambiah <i>World conqueror, world renouncer</i> , pp 102–131, 197–98, 526–8.	SLORC-SPDC	Aung San Suu Kyi: principal leader of the NLD	Aung San: founder of Communist Party, Freedom Bloc, army, Pinlon Agreement, AFPFL, national independence	Thahkin Kodawhmaing: ideologist anti-colonial struggle, grandfather modern Burmese politics, teacher of Aung San and U Nu
<i>lut-lak-yei</i> [l̥ ʔək pər:]	national independence	freedom, 'second independence struggle', 'revolution of the spirit'	U Ottama's and U Wisara's <i>loka nibbana</i> (national independence & enlightenment)	alchemy, <i>samatha</i> , Ledi Sayadaw's <i>vipassana</i>
<i>nyi-nyut-yei</i> [n̥i n̥yut:]	national unity, national solidarity, national (re)consolidation (through army)	national reconciliation harmony (through social meditation and sangha) <i>byama-so tayà</i>	national unity attributed to Aung San's <i>samadhi</i> (one-pointed mind)/ analogous to Sangha	national unity analogous to unity of the Sangha <i>byama-so-tayà</i>
<i>tayà úbadei</i> [t̥ ʔək pər:]	law ('royal decree', <i>yaza-that</i>), army discipline	justice (<i>dhamma</i>), monastic code of conduct		
<i>yin-gyei-hmú</i> [y̥ ʔək h̥mú]	Myanmar family civilization/culture/ Mongolian spot / history-archaeology	international (Burma) mental culture/ <i>byama-so ta-yà</i> (self-empowered)		

Burma at least, as I shall demonstrate here, national unity is not only an emphasis arising from Buddhism, but is observed as the product of certain Buddhist practices, the inducement of certain states of mind, that are comprised by what I call mental culture.

Up until 1988, Aung San himself represented the modern ideal of national unity. Aung San had argued that 'we must take care that "united we stand" not "united we fall." ... unity is the foundation. Let this fact be engraved in your memory, ye who hearken to me, and go ye to your appointed tasks with diligence.'¹ To the Burmese people he was a representation, a symbol of unity [sv:ŋ m̥l̥v̥aŋ] **Am̥H̥Aq̥a:l̥ k̥əS̥əl̥ ak̥əq̥ab̥l̥k̥p̥k̥.**²

Aung San's role in the liberation of Burma is reiterated in a leaflet distributed on the 35-year commemoration of Martyrs' Day by the regime in 1982. Here he is presented as the Fourth Unifier of Burma [b̥l̥k̥p̥k̥Aac̥Sn̥Aa: st̥ ɔ̃n̥h̥aŋl̥k̥k̥sv̥:ŋ m̥l̥v̥aŋT̥ac̥q̥] after the kings Anawrahta, Bayinnaung and Alaungmintaya. This particular reference has been attributed originally to a historian named 'Lewiss'.³ U Nu, however, expressed a similar view shortly after Aung San's death, in which he designated Aung San as the fifth (rather than the fourth) unifier of Burma, adding Sinbyushin as the fourth:

That kind of national unity under one popular leader happened only about four times in the 2000 years of our history.

Burma was always divided in warring kingdoms, and feuding villages, and Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, Sinbyushin, and Alaungpaya were the four great kings and leaders of our earlier history who were able to unify the country. In our time Bogyoke Aung San accomplished the unification and the building of our independent Union of Burma.⁴

Elsewhere U Nu, in his radio speech at the time of the interment of Aung San's remains and those of the other martyrs, referred to this period as 'the fourth great pillar (*mandaing*) of national harmony'

Burmese politicians in general, sensitivity is lacking of the political implications of what they say outside their own frame of reference. I am sure the Thai would not have appreciated when in the same speech Aung San said to them that 'the national heroes that excite our utmost admiration are Alaungpaya and Phya Naret. Both the Shwedagon and the Wat Arun are the objects of our common veneration...'. It was, after all, Alaungpaya who invaded Thailand and, unbelieving of their Buddhism, proclaimed to the Ayuthaya inhabitants 'His Burman majesty comes as a divine incarnation to spread true religion in your country. Come forth with respect and present him with an elephant and a daughter'. After conquest over the Mon he worshipped the Shwedagon Pagoda and renamed the landmark town with which it was associated 'end of strife' (Yangon) (see Harvey 1925:224, 241).

¹ Silverstein (1993:151–61).

² **em̥p̥k̥j̥m̥re̥q̥ae̥Aac̥Sn̥r̥nk̥nk̥k̥p̥k̥k̥p̥k̥ 1966x̥ m̥k̥N̥A780X**

³ Kyaw Zaw (n.d.:83).

⁴ U Nu in Maung Maung (1962:145).

[**vīṭar: m< ī**] to be established without arms and through *metta*.¹ U Nu also summed up the source of this national unity as the quality of one-pointed mind [**qmaḍi: samadhi**] that characterised Aung San. Thus he said in relation to the issue of national unity [**vīṭar:**] that 'it is only because of General Aung San's goodwill (*cetana*) based on the ingenuity of his steady *samadhi* that success was attained in overcoming the difficulties of unifying the country'.² Moreover, his path was followed 'with truthful *samadhi*' [**qsāqmaḍiṭ vīk vṣāp**] by the other fallen leaders.³ U Thein said about Aung San, 'He impressed me deeply as a man possessed of great powers of concentration'.⁴

The quality of *samadhi* is the product of mental culture (*bhavana*). It is also a vital attribute of the original mythical unifier in this world, namely the first elected king (Mahasamata) at the beginning of the world who was replete in 'moral virtue' (*śila*), 'one-pointedness of mind' (*samadhi*) and 'wisdom' (*pañña*) (See App. I.2). Though Aung San, as befits a man of high standards, once wrote an essay in which he denigrated the popular perception of him as advanced in *samadhi*,⁵ such only confirms the popular perception that the struggle for national independence and national unity are produced internally in the mind through mental culture, and, contra the Myanmarification project, was not historically seen in itself as the product of culture, civilization or race.

If Aung San did not extol his own *samadhi*, how then, did he himself express the unity the people feel he represents? The concept he himself used for 'national unity' is *amyò-thà nyi-nyut yèi* [**Amīqā: vīṭar:**], which was also the title of his speech 'National Unity' on 17 January 1946. In this speech he urged for national unity and working towards non-factional politics. He made three main points.

First, to educate the people on party politics, which was new to the Burmese people, he said that 'just as we built the Shwedagon Pagoda brick by brick, so the peoples of Burma must jointly work towards their aims'.⁶ This would suggest that unity is not just produced by personally transforming one's mind, but also by jointly working towards commemorating Buddha's enlightenment, i.e. charity towards commemorating the Buddha's successful overcoming of his mental defilements through mental culture.⁷

Second, he argued that a united party produces national unity. The AFPFL party at the time represented the unification of diverse forces seeking national independence nation-wide. Aung San was deeply concerned about the threat factionalism posed to this unity. He took the example of the 'false monks' [**Al zēhn:**]⁸ posing a threat to the unity of the Sangha, 'if even in the Buddha's time there were false monks, so also in our AFPFL there will also be false monks that I do not know about'.⁹ He then gave the example of a rich man who discovers that a particular monk is a shameless monk, and decides not to associate with him. Aung San's advice was for Party members to, in analogy with the conduct of the Sangha towards shameless monks, simply not to associate with those who cannot maintain the high standards of conduct the AFPFL strives towards.

Third, he argued that party aims, in turn, take care of the human state as a foundation and serve to prepare for future enlightenment. He says 'in religious terms, only after having become a human being can one become a Buddha, as a human being has the power to create and strive for what he has envisioned' [**Baqat ra: Ar eparmy Siyck lē Bā: PsNīṭ yidē tākā l hPn't Nīṭ Asaq tīḍy**].¹⁰ It is interesting that this idea of unity-through-enlightenment, through the transcendence of divisions, which has such an important role in Burmese myths of political transformation (see App. I.6), was later also used by his daughter Aung San Suu Kyi. Mistakes were attributed to her by the regime in a major press campaign (see chapter 16).

¹ U Nu speech at time of interment of the remains of the martyrs, 12.04.1948. On the concept of the *mandala* see App. I.6.

² Meinmyó Chit Hswei (1970:261).

³ Meinmyó Chit Hswei (1970:262).

⁴ Maung Maung (1962:115).

⁵ In his autobiography is a sub-section entitled *samadhi* in the section 'As for knowledge/understanding' [**pvaSiqvmh**] (Thein Hswei 1951:15–17; Aung Thàn (1969, I:75–77; II:47–49) (see chapter 12).

⁶ Aung San (1971:96).

⁷ An equivalent view on the army under SLORC is that 'some people ... regard the Tatmadaw as a scaffolding in building a pagoda and that after the pagoda is built they must dismantle the scaffolding.' (Nawrahta 1995:116).

⁸ Patrick Pranke points out to me that in terms of its Pali meaning this is better translated as 'shameless monks' than 'false monks'. However, in this case the speeches refer to false monks in English.

⁹ Aung San (1971:108–9).

¹⁰ Aung San (1971:103).

Aung San's views of national unity expressed the politics of unification in the human world as an activity that prepares for the attainment of *nibbana* and commemorates the Buddha's enlightenment. As we have already seen, the concept of national independence, of personal freedom, and the socialist goal are themselves expressed in terms of *nibbana*. Indeed, U Nu's view of Aung San's superior *samadhi* merely serves to confirm that national unification is about the politician's mind in preparation for the quest for *nibbana*.

National unity – *byama-so tayà*

I will return later to Aung San's concept of politics, but here I am only concerned with discriminating broadly between different ideas about national unity before and after the Myanmarfication initiative started.

I have already noted how closely Aung San's idea of unity partook of Buddhist ideas. However, this preoccupation with Buddhist meanings he inherited from the early struggle for freedom by Buddhist institutions. Aung San's concept of national unity is not complete without understanding that of Thahkin Kodawhmaing's, his mentor.

Burmese political forces had been mostly unanimous since the inception of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1906. In 1920, after various Buddhist groups united together, the YMBA changed its name to what became the first organization representing national independence and national unity,¹ namely the Greater Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA). This was popularly expressed at that time in terms of the concept of harmony-unity or *nyi nyut yei* [vɿvæ:ɾ:].

However, in 1921 the Dyarchy question was introduced that created serious divisions among the Burmese. These divisions motivated Thahkin Kodawhmaing to write an essay in 1928 on the 'Chronicle of National Harmony-Unity (1)' [vɿvæ:ɾ:razwɿ(1)].² The first split occurred between the GCBA and the U Pu faction, headed by U Ba Pe, which contained 21 council members and was known as the 21 Party and which opposed Dyarchy. Devoted to Home Rule, Thahkin Kodawhmaing was upset that this split among Burmese political leaders would have an impact on Burma's future.

He stressed the morale of keeping unity through harmony [vɿvæ:ɾ:] by recounting an ancient tale.

Once there was an argument between two seals how they should divide a fish they had caught. Both of them wanted the best middle part for themselves and they invited a fox to divide the fish up for them. The fox was clever and he gave both seals a head and a tail he involved in the affair of part of the fish, but he took away the middle portion. When he reached home he gave the middle portion to his beloved wife who insisted she should be treated with a good fish. Sayagyi pointed out the head and tail of the fish as Dyarchy, the good middle portion as Home rule. The fox couple (Indians) ended up as the ones who took the best part.

Loss of the most valuable part of the fish to the Indians (the clever fox) took place as the result of disunity among the Burmese, who had been reduced to deceiving one another (*samasika vinsana dhamma* [qamaqkw'et ra:]). People were also engaged in measuring superficial mundane differences such as comparing status quo, wealth and so forth, so that if one party could not get what it wanted it was even prepared to let go of the common good. Thahkin Kodawhmaing wanted the politicians to improve their mentality and show unity by joining together and putting a united demand before the Simon Commission.

His expectation was not met and factionalism remained rife, but his work gives us an insight into the idiom an influential Burmese writer at that time used to admonish behaviour so that Burmese political leaders would attain national unity.

It is crucial that one particular aspect of Thahkin Kodawhmaing's thought about national unity be understood. Without this, it is impossible to understand the current disposition of the NLD. Thahkin Kodawhmaing attributed discord and factionalism among Burmese leaders to the loss of unity. However, unity was, in turn, attributed to the lack of *byama-so tayà* in the modern period. He asked 'in what way is *samasika vinsana dhamma* the greatest danger to unity [vɿvæ:ɾ:ki]?', which he answered by saying that it was because 'in this era people are without *byama-so tayà* towards one another ...'

[ykekt'akqymhla:t'inet'iatp'ohsitra:kcNk]³

In his *Commentary on dogs* [ekaka], Thahkin Kodawhmaing repeated his attack on divisive behaviour, this time comparing it to dog-like behaviour. He also commented from his own point of view as hermit-unifier of Burma, and as being in possession of *byama-so tayà*

¹ *ĒwtyANAppkmtmSbqa Amīqa: I aē pər:vɿvæ:ɾ: tɿpəc'skɿpcRsaI qvK(qh:Pmck etak hr:kal NibbāAet'akNk'rnk'neRv'tnā1956*, page 4).

² *Dūyiny*, 1928X

³ Myín Hswei (1977:372–88).

I, hermit, who practise four sublime states of mind [*byama-so tayà*], write this treatise on the way politicians and Councillors are emulating dogs, for it is an opportune time to publish such a treatise [Burmese text].¹

Since *byama-so tayà* practice results in the same one-pointed quality of mind (*samadhi*) through which Aung San was popularly perceived to have unified the country, this concept shares in and supports the overall view that the unity as represented by Aung San and Thahkin Kodawhmaing is a mental unity as represented by *samadhi*. I will come back to this later, as it is a core element in the contemporary democracy movement and in the foregoing socialist period that is ultimately based on building a country based on the Thirty-Eight Mangala (see below).²

In 1932, Thahkin Kodawhmaing wrote 'Chronicle of harmony (2)' [Burmese text].³ This article dealt with the issue of dyarchy. The problem of either falling in line with India's demands for national independence or to separate from India, was created by the British for the Burmese politicians to argue and fight over. This argument was sapping the strength of the Burmese nationalists. The British succeeded in destroying Burmese unity as the dispute caused divisions between family members throughout the country seemingly without anyone realising who was the real culprit.

Two delegations, one from Burma and one from India, came back from negotiating in England to their respective countries. However, their reception was radically different in their respective countries. The Indians worked in unity for their country's interest, while the Burmese politicians were disputing and fighting against one another for their self-serving interests. Thahkin Kodawhmaing felt that this pleased and worked to the benefit of the British colonial government.

Thahkin Kodawhmaing praised Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian politicians, when he took prison terms instead of compromising the interest of the country and when he fought by fasting from inside the prison wall with disregard for the imminent risk to his own life. In contrast, many Burmese politicians collaborated with the British and took their 5000 Kyat salary, using their status to oppress their opponents. Thahkin Kodawhmaing pointed out that even the Buddha, who had predicted that the Sangha would last for 5000 years, would have been unable to change the attitude of such selfish politicians.

Thahkin Kodawhmaing gave the example of the Buddha's teaching known as *kosambadaka khandhaka*, after Kosambi, the location where the Buddha himself could not pacify disputing monks which caused disharmony and a weakening of the Sangha. The Buddha left them because they no longer took his words seriously. The Buddha then went to Pulalei grove to meet three monks, Shin Anuroda, Shin Nandiya and Shin Kimila, who were meditating there. The Buddha inquired with what mental disposition they were living (as opposed to the disputing monks). The monks replied to the Buddha that, though they each have separate bodies, they were living in one mind.

Thahkin Kodawhmaing proposed that there are two kinds of monks. One group quarrels among one another and encourages divisions while another group lives in accordance with the Buddha's teachings and, through mental culture, creates a peaceful, harmonious, productive and desirable atmosphere that forms the foundation of national unity. In this same way, he contrasted how Indian leaders behaved harmoniously after returning from England compared to Burma's politicians who were fighting one another for personal gain. He gave these two examples and expressed the desire to see reunification of national politicians and called for their utmost devotion to the country's interests. Thahkin Kodawhmaing followed this up with examples from Burmese history, to remind egotistic politicians how disharmony ruined dynasties (including Tagaung through Pagan, Pinya, Myinsaing, Sagaing, Ava, Nyaunggyang etc.).

Buddhism and unity as harmony

Burmese ideas of national unity are based on the Buddhist concept of harmony as a product of mental culture. In the evocative words of Hpo Hlaing, the early advocate of 'traditional democracy' under King Mindon and King Thibaw:

[Burmese text]
[Burmese text]

As successive Buddhas have taught

¹ Anguttra. 'Sense of humour: our national asset'. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Golden Jubilee Commemorative Issue*, 1947–1997. Rangoon: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997, p. 389.

² On Thahkin Kodawhmaing's use of *byama-so tayà*, see also [Burmese text] (2016) 6x 12X

³ [Burmese text] 1932; Myin Hswei (1977:491–509).

‘May harmony (unity) prevail amongst all of you’

One criticism Winichakul expressed about Anderson's work is also relevant here. Anderson had sketched national identity largely as a positively rather than a negatively phrased attribute. In other words, it was phrased in terms of the possession, rather than the absence of, a particular quality or substance. Winichakul, on the other hand, argues that, in the Thai case at least, this is not so. He argues that ‘to figure out a sphere of commonness is to identify the difference between that sphere and the one beyond’. If Anderson's description implied that ‘an imagined entity always implies the absence of such an identity at the point beyond its boundary’, in the Thai case, the pre-modern or Buddhist concept of State functioned on a very different basis. It is true that the nation implies a presence of something, namely a diverse landscape of sacred entities such as pagodas, monasteries, the Buddha's footprints and palaces. However, this presence itself postulates an absence. It postulates a vertical cosmology of the three mundane spheres (*loka*) pointing ultimately towards *nibbana* as representing the beyond in which there is absence of ignorance and suffering. Rather than pointing at local presence, the ultimate idea of unity of the nation therefore points at a local absence.

Though Winichakul does not take it this far, I am inclined to think, given the foregoing discussion of the views of Aung San and Thahkin Kodawhmaing, that the pre-modern concept of the Burmese nation centred upon attaining to the heights of *loka* on the path to *lokuttara* or *nibbana*, in which the noblest attributes are the suspension, and eventual elimination of those mental defilements held responsible for precipitating differences that pose a threat to harmony and unity. In other words, they are about the State in which there is absence of inferior mental process.

From his mentor, Aung San inherited national unity as a sacred space created by mental culture in which harmony prevails and, as a result of this, national unity. He generated a sphere of influence (*awza*) upon which it was possible to build a sphere of authority (*ana*). It is harmony within the Sangha produced through correct moral and mental behaviour that is the chief analogy for the nationalists' own concept of national unity. As mentioned earlier, to Aung San the merit attained by collectively building the Shwedagon, the collective part of the quest towards *nibbana* as human beings aspiring for perfection in Buddhahood, and the frequent collective harmonious assembly of monks while keeping their moral code of conduct high, are the primary analogies presented for the meaning of ‘unity’ [vVær:]. Thahkin Kodawhmaing's *byama-so tayà* concept and the good conduct of the meditating monks who were ‘of one mind’ are thus most vital to the understanding of all subsequent politicians, ranging right from Aung San, U Nu, Ne Win and now the senior NLD members. Indeed, socialism and democracy have themselves been understood primarily as political systems built upon this sense of national unity as harmony, as a by-product of Buddhist mental culture, and in particular through *byama-so tayà*.

It is important to stress that early dictionaries understand the *nyi-nyut-yei* concept in Buddhist ways. For example, Judson gives it as an idiomatic expression particularly used by monks to mean ‘if circumstances allow’ [Aekac:vVær: t], used when laity ask a monk to do something for them, where the Vinaya does not permit making a definite promise to do so. To break the Vinaya rules would be to break the harmony and unity of the Sangha. Furthermore, Hok Sein gives the primary meaning of the verb *nyi-nyut í* [Vvær:] as meaning ‘to harmonise’.

A monk once expressed to me the Buddhist institutional manifestation of ‘harmony/unity’ [vVær:] in terms of ‘association’ [qmg@amagga]. This *samagga* concept is the main ingredient in the names of many associations (including the United Nations) and is the default concept for union [qmg@ac:]. In Buddhism it means ‘being in unity’, ‘harmonious’, and it is an indispensable element in a number of expressions that suggest involvement of consent and agreement (*samaggatta*) of the parties involved: for example, ‘to dwell in concord’ (*samaggavasa*), and ‘to harmonise, conciliate’ (*samaggi-karoti*). It also implies peace, as in ‘making for peace’ (*samaggakarana*), ‘rejoicing in peace’ (*sammagganandin*), ‘delighting in peace’ (*samaggarata*), and ‘impassioned for peace’ (*samaggarama*).² In Burmese, to be ‘on friendly terms’ is sometimes expressed as ‘to be *samagga*’ [qmg@sqv].

The idea that national unity might be associated with monks who attained harmony by emphasising certain Buddhist mental states, and might be modelled on those attained in the Sangha, presents the Sangayana held by King Mindon and Prime Minister U Nu, and later Ne Win's efforts to unify the Sangha,

¹ Maung Maung (1969b), inner front cover.

² For further concepts see Rhys Davids & Stede (1921–25).

species than itself. Against this stands the political discourse of the NLD, for whom mental culture, and in particular *byama-so tayà*, is not only the political ideology, but is the only way to keep the political opposition together in the face of concerted oppression by the authorities; these are thoroughly decent expressions of Buddhist sentiment.

Sloganeering unity

Unwilling and in my view intellectually quite incapable of engaging opposition leaders in discussion, the regime began a campaign in September 1989 expounding slogans seeking to encourage unity.¹ These slogans were the brainchild of a new 24-member Committee for Writing Slogans for Nationals

[**Ami q̄a:er: e Sa c̄p̄n̄h̄a: er: q̄a:er: "Islekañt̄**], set up on 16 April 1989 to re-establish control and improve the spirit of patriotism among Burma's national peoples. The regime witnessed Aung San Suu Kyi's success and was incensed at the way she had allowed an anti-military contest of slogans between 13–17 April 1989. The regime's response was to have its committee compose about fifty slogans, among which were 'Our Three Main National Causes' [**di t̄ awn̄ Āer: 3p̄ā**] [ZM1], all of which pointed at national unity. This concept is popularly represented on posters and illustrations by a strong young man testing the strength of a tied bundle of bamboo with an old man looking on admiringly; the bamboo stalks represents the unity of Burma (including the individual ethnic strands of the Myanmar family).

Since 1990, these slogans have been reproduced in every newspaper, on the first pages of every magazine and every book, and on bill-boards in central public spots around the country up until today. By 1992, a pattern had emerged in the enumeration of these slogans, rather like the way in which monks and ritual masters (*beik-theik saya*) remember the numbered categories of ancient wisdom. Saw Maung's original 'Four Tasks'² soon proliferated into The Twelve National Objectives – comprising the Four Political Objectives, Four Economic Objectives and Four Social Objectives [ZM3]. These all serve as guidelines in fulfilling the Three Main Causes [ZM1]. It is remarkable how these slogans come symmetrically in threes and fours, and how they are presented as true, like the Three Noble Jewels and the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha.

To make these come true, we are told by the media at every available opportunity, would be to build and transform Myanmar 'into a peaceful, prosperous, modern and developed nation'.³ No open discussion of these aims is encouraged or permitted, but print-houses have found some consolation in resisting this imposition of sloganeered unity by leaving the page on which the quotes occur uncut, so that the page cannot be turned and the slogans cannot therefore be read; a small excusable 'binding error' in a totalitarian State.

Journalism and the historical quest for unity

The slogan approach to national unity was soon supplemented with a journalistic search for new symbols of unity in Burmese history. The range of issues brought up in the transition from unity-as-slogan to this more discursive concept of unity reach maturity in Minye Kaungbon's book *Our three main national causes*, representing a series of 44 articles, most of which were published in the national newspapers between 15 July 1993 and 19 June 1994. In the foreword, he argues that Our Three Main National Causes are 'national responsibilities which must be held in esteem and striven for by the people residing in the nation and all Myanmar citizens living abroad'. He scrutinises colonial history for reasons why Myanmar fell to the British, and to learn the necessary lessons so that this would not happen again. Military heroes were brought forward, mainly from earlier history than Aung San. Aung San plays hardly any role in this scenario, nor does his Buddhist terminology about unity in terms of the Sangha and *byama-so tayà*.

¹ Callahan traces this sloganeering back to the Fort Bragg psychological warfare training a handful of young Burmese army officers such as U Kyaw Sunn received during the Cold War in the 1950s. These officers attained high positions within SLORC (Callahan 1998a:49).

² To (1) ensure maintenance of law and order, (2) provide secure and smooth transportation, (3) to strive for better conditions of food, clothing, and (4) to hold multi-party democracy general elections (Saw Maung 1990b:77). These were originally included in Declaration 1/88 as publicly explained by Saw Maung on 23 September 1988 (Saw Maung 1990b:29).

³ 'It is interesting to note that this numification was extended also to the soldiers, who now have to observe the 60 Codes of Conduct, ten less than a novice, and much less than the 227 rules of the Vinaya for fully ordained monks. 'The people enjoying fruits of labour of Tatmadawmen' (speech by Maj. Gen. Kyaw Than on presentation to graduates). *NLM*, 05.09.1998.

Colonialism and the destruction of natural unity

From history was drawn the idea that foreign domination had destroyed national unity. Myanmar, he argues, was a united country until the British began to interfere.

Never throughout the history of the country had there been any hatred between one national group and another ... The fact that Myanmar indigenous races had always united and consolidated their strength in fighting against imperialist aggressors, in defending their freedom and in protecting their sovereignty can be clearly seen throughout Myanmar history.¹

The British enslaved Burma, exploited it, and 'drove a wedge in order to sow suspicions and hatred among our national brethren'.² Though nature dictates unity among the races, 'mutual distrust and disaffection had emerged among fraternal Myanmar national races only as a result of divisive tactics resorted to by British imperialists'.³

The Union of Burma Inquiry Commission Report of 1 December 1958 is cited below to make the point that, using the metaphor of flowing water unifying tributaries, the waves of migration in the early ages were just about to be diluted into one another as the British came to reassert divisions.

Moving about in the manner of whirlpools, racial groups have assimilated to a large extent and just as one major was about to emerge, Myanmar fell under imperialist rule. Some currents of water that had not yet completely assimilated with others were prevented from reaching the journey's end and were left half way. It was then that the imperialists took a foothold in the fissures that still remained and began aggravating racial and religious divisions with a view to prolonging their rule of the country. They spread false tales of differences in race and in culture as if they were merely defending minority rights

... Let all national groups have complete faith, trust and love among themselves. They are blood-brothers and let them be united just like water is united and indivisible.⁴

Only the army reunifies, party politics divide

The country remained disunited until the SLORC accomplished 'national consolidation': 'at present, however, national consolidation has been restored thanks to noble, correct and sincere efforts of the State and Law and Order Restoration Council'.⁵ Indeed, this is not the 'unification' of the country, but its 'reunification', the rightful restoration to its original and natural state of unity.⁶ Such is reflected in the concept of 'national reconsolidation [အမျိုးတူ နှစ်လုံးတူ ပြန်လည်စုစည်းခြင်း]' (my emphasis) in the Four Political Objectives [ZM1]. This has sometimes been conceived of as the elimination of this 'historical (colonial) negative legacy'.⁷

If Aung San himself and his selfless personal struggle to attain *samadhi* analogous to good monks, represented the concept of unification prior to the SLORC, now the concept of 'reunification' or 'reconsolidation' places unity in the category of a natural state of affairs belonging to the pre-colonial past. In this version, unity was not accomplished not by Aung San. Division was sown by colonial powers and reunification was not re-established until the SLORC came to power. The hero in all this was not so much Aung San, who barely receives a mention, but the royal army under the leadership of Maha Bandoola,⁸ who stood up to the divisive foreigners, and who also happens to join the symbol of the lion on the recent 500 Kyat currency denomination; this is all part of crowding out Aung San not only from Burma's national currency, but also from national memory.

Because the SLORC managed to restore this natural state of affairs, today 'the centre of unity for all national races, all parties and organizations and for all classes and masses of the people ... is the Tatmadaw'.⁹ The army is committed to providing 'necessities of life' and deserves support by all people.¹⁰ Indeed, the army is presented as a benevolent a-cultural and a-factional entity – an entity beyond difference – that exists solely to look after the well-being of all Myanmar peoples. Unlike monks, who do not help in social tasks, the army is ready to help the people with all their needs.

The Tatmadaw personnel have a tradition of serving the local people wherever they may find themselves, a tradition that

¹ Minye Kaungbon (1994:181).

² The idea that the British (and also the Portuguese) were responsible for ethnic and religious division is evident throughout Minye Kaungbon's work (e.g. pp. 35, 43–45, 80, 140–41, 143, 146–47, 156, 168, 175). (This is the de facto assumption in all discourse mourning disunity, including Thakshin Kodawhmaing's above whose 'clever fox' metaphor also pointed at the foreigner.)

³ Minye Kaungbon (1994:155).

⁴ Minye Kaungbon (1994:168, 178).

⁵ Minye Kaungbon (1994:i).

⁶ Minye Kaungbon (1994:182).

⁷ *NLM*, 01.09.1998, p. 4.

⁸ Minye Kaungbon (1994:33–40).

⁹ Minye Kaungbon (1994:i). See also 'SLORC says only we can control minorities in Burma.' Reuters, 10.07.1996.

¹⁰ Minye Kaungbon (1994:108–9).

began with the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist days when they pounded paddy, fetched water, gathered firewood and gave medical attention to villagers as if they were members of their own families. Today's Tatmadaw personnel also take care of villagers as if they were their parents and thus contribute to national reunification.¹

This is a sequel to Ne Win's disdain for politicians, who 'do not have any practical knowledge', and permits 'civil servants to become leaders'.² Or, as another of the regime's journalists says, while special interest groups engage in divisive party politics, only the army can engage in truly 'national politics' because it is beyond division.

The Tatmadaw, however, represents no political ideology whatever. It does not represent any particular class of people, it does not represent any particular national group, it does not represent any particular territory. The Tatmadaw represents Our Three Main National Causes. It represents all Myanmar citizens, all national groups living in Myanmar, all classes of people that are in Myanmar, the whole of Myanmar.³

The army is 'not political'

Maung Maung asserted during his brief presidency that 'no service personnel shall carry out party politics'.⁴ Saw Maung took this up and said that the army is 'neutral',⁵ and is 'not confined to the interests of a single party but in the broader national interest'.⁶ Indeed, he made a virtue of his ignorance of politics, for he said that 'I do not know politics' and 'I don't know anything about party politics', and so the army does 'not understand political tricks'.⁷ It underlies the slogan, supposedly issued by the army and the ethnic groups in solidarity with one another, as if they both work together at national unification: 'undivided, united we shall always be withstanding divisive acts of anyone (Nationalities and Tatmadaw)'

[Byakkaung Pansu N Maung (tuncq: I Min: Nekt pheta)].

This is a belated response to Aung San Suu Kyi's challenge to army ideas about political organization. She had reminded Ne Win that the BSPP's own literature had emphasized that 'if we should have to choose between the good of the party and the good of the nation, we should choose the good of the nation'.⁸ The regime is making a virtue of a necessity – they are not, and cannot be, a political party because, relying on authority (*ana*) and not on influence (*awza*), they have no popular foundation.

However, if army-as-government is beyond representing the particular interest groups that represent the diversity of the country, then also the reverse argument holds, that is to say that the army represents none other than itself. This would disqualify it from a political role in the world's democratic countries, particularly when engaging in business in addition to its other roles (see chapter 4).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the army is the main Burman presence in the ethnic minority areas, and since the army asserts that insurgency arises from discrepancy within the family of nationalities due to gaps in the standard of living and due to discrepant views as the result of colonial interference, it maintains that the army sees itself as the preferred agent for development.

The army 'develops'

I have already noted that since May 1989 various instruments were put in place for development of the border areas. These instruments included The Border Regions National Races Development Central Committee aims to accelerate 'development efforts for border region national races', and the Work Committee for Development of Border Areas and National Races which aimed 'to develop areas whose development had been retarded by insurrections to the same level of development enjoyed by other areas of national races'.⁹ Now unable to rely on the popular vote, these bolster its claim to be the sole agency supposedly able to control development because of its country-wide presence, and this is how its name came to be changed to be State Peace and Development Council, for development can only take place in

¹ Minye Kaungbon (1994:182).

² Ne Win. Fourth Party Seminar, 11.11.1969, p. 16.

³ Nawrahta (1995:110).

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:244).

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:158).

⁶ Saw Maung admits that after his own involvement as a central executive BSPP committee member he followed Maung Maung's instructions for service personnel to disengage from party politics. He says 'from the time it was told no service personnel are to carry out party politics, I have had no party duty at all' (Saw Maung 1990b:244). Since then he has come to place the army above and beyond politics, for army duties are 'much wider and nobler than party politics'. He then saw the army's role even as that of independent jury (Kynadi [K]) (Saw Maung 1990b:30, 47,66,78–79,323).

⁷ Saw Maung (1990b:159).

⁸ ASSK (1991:193).

⁹ Minye Kaungbon (1994:183).

peaceful (i.e. conquered) areas. Desire for peace and development now justifies conquest and therefore justifies the central role for the army in government.

Minye Kaungbon suggests that unity of all races means to share a similar economic environment (unity in poverty and prosperity):

The unity and fraternity among indigenous peoples is nothing else than a firm determination by Kachins, Kayahs, Kayin, Chins, Barmars, Mons, Rakhines, Shans, etc. to live for ever together in unity through weal and woe and through poverty and prosperity. Only then will the indigenous peoples be able to join hands with mutual trust to work for the interests of the Union and for all Union citizens. Only such a conviction would be able to obliterate the erroneous concepts of 'majority race' and 'minority race' that had emerged in the past out of mutual distrust and mutual animosity among indigenous races.¹

This concept of fraternal unity between the races as leading to a similar standard of living is then immediately coupled to the concept of development: 'in accordance with this conviction, the Revolutionary Government had consistently endeavoured to achieve economic and social development of undeveloped areas where national races lived'. Minye Kaungbon then suggests that the agencies concerned with Border Regions National Races Development were set up to accomplish this development for the sake of reunification.

However, if we look at the history of dispute between ethnic groups and how the army considers development projects, we find that the regime's own development agencies began to impose restrictions. The restrictions controlled the establishment and running of education facilities, and restricted the teaching matter. Moreover, all international aid was to be channelled through the agencies affiliated to the regime. Many ethnic groups felt perfectly capable of managing their own education system. One example is that of the restrictions imposed on the new National High School. As a result, the Mon have called for Japanese aid to be channelled directly to them and not through the regime's agencies.² This kind of conflict can only increase as more development projects are initiated, and as these start to impact on the cease-fire agreements. National unity is therefore at risk from the regime's own concept of centrally controlled development which, in the end, will exacerbate rather than quell political unrest.

In his articles Minye Kaungbon describes how in 1824 colonial history began with united opposition to the British on the part of all ethnic minorities, for at that time 'patriotism, nationalism and anti-imperialism of Myanmar was most intense'.³ A whole list of reasons is given why Burma succumbed to the British during the three Anglo-Burmese Wars, including in particular the lack of central co-ordination of all national groups, a lack of skill in modern warfare and a lack of strong leadership.⁴ Since the army today supplies the solutions for all these weaknesses of the past, these arguments are followed by a series of articles on 'Let us rally around the Tatmadaw, build and defend the country'.⁵ Here 'English troops were mercenaries and Myanmar troops were patriotic heroes'.⁶

Though many ethnic groups demonstrated loyalty to Myanmar, the British succeeded in setting up divisions between the Barmars and the ethnic groups. Nevertheless, once the British were weakened, the ethnic minorities were once again reunited in Myanmar. Until the GCBA, the national peoples offered resistance separately and on a local basis, but 'this war lacked central co-ordination and remained only as local anti-imperialist struggles'.⁷ Thus, 'national peoples stood united under the leadership of the GCBA'.⁸ Though on return to Burma the British 'tried to sow dissension between the Hills peoples and the Plains peoples', nevertheless 'the national peoples held a conference at Pinlon and signed the unity Pinlon Agreement on 12 February 1947 and thus foiled the British plan to divide the country'. In this account, it was not so much Aung San and the comrades that secured independence, but it was the struggle on the basis of 'the spirit of Pinlon' that 'won the people their national independence'.⁹

If the army is unified, so is the opposition

The aim to unify the country through military rule has its corollary, namely unification of the political

¹ Minye Kaungbon (1994:183).

² Nai Monchai Sirihong. 'No benefit for Mon people from Japanese ODA.' Article 10526, soc.culture.burma, 22.10.1996.

³ Nawrahta (1995:2-4).

⁴ Minye Kaungbon (1994:15-16, 18, 21, 22, 28-29).

⁵ Minye Kaungbon (1994:30-46).

⁶ Minye Kaungbon (1994:33).

⁷ Minye Kaungbon (1994:12).

⁸ Minye Kaungbon (1994:5).

⁹ Minye Kaungbon (1994: 6).

opposition. All contemporary forms of opposition to the army's intent to restore unity to Burma are interpreted as 'reactionary elements who smell of slavery [to colonial powers]', which 'requires us to be very vigilant as regards these "maggots"', and for which we need to re-examine and learn from history.¹ Indeed, according to this xenophobic approach, ex-colonial countries are all waiting to exploit the opposition in order to reassert their supposedly unified voices of interference. As Nawrahta put it

There are national traitors in Myanmar who are handing over a sword to a thief by chanting repeatedly for outside help in establishment of democracy in Myanmar and there are foreigners who desire to achieve their own interests with the excuse of trying to establish democracy in Myanmar.²

Because democracy means people trying to represent interests on a smaller scale than the entire nation, on the one hand, and across borders, on the other, it is ruled out as 'selfish' and ready to be exploited by 'foreigners', of which the consequences 'will lead to the destruction of the State and the people'.³

Myanmar and the Mongol Spot

Accepting Cochrane's Mongol Spot [မုန်တုန်း] as the 'anthropological' measure of all peoples of Myanmar as 'one single race', Minye Kaungbon argues that 'notwithstanding the various names under which we may be known, we are all descendants of Mongols'.⁴ This he originally takes from the view expounded in the Union of Burma Regional Autonomy Enquiry Commission published in 1948, which also refers to the national races of Myanmar as all blood relations and descendants from Mongols.⁵

It is clear from Dr Hla Myint, the Director General of the Department of Health, who expresses delight at the slogans about consolidation and familial kindness between the ethnic groups, that the Mongol Spot is not just a journalist idea, but has scientific credibility. In her assessment of 'research contributing to national consolidation' she writes that the research 'has led to the conclusion that "We all descended from the Mongolian Tribe and therefore we, the indigenous of races are not aliens but kith and kin."' She continues, 'as this research has unearthed conclusive and scientific evidence as to the blood relationships of the national races, the fabrications of the colonialists have been shown for what they are. For the future generations as well this constitutes a piece of historical evidence for the trusting the blood relations and not outside whenever the affairs of the State are to be carried out.' She then proceeds to consider that the apparent shortness of the Tayone tribe in the Kachin State is 'because of their health problems though they are Mongolians like us'.⁶

In the current debate, however, it was originally Saw Maung's aim to 'scientifically' root out the Karen as having 'one hundred percent Mongoloid blood', and as having 'even more Mongoloid than the Bamars' that set the army on this track. This was evidence that division was created by foreign interference.⁷

Since it was the colonialists who invented the idea of the Mongolian origins of the Burmese peoples in the first place, contradicting the Burmese belief of having originated from Northern India and Nepal, this merely confirms the strength of colonialist discourse in penetrating Burmese self-perception fifty years later.

In spite of asserting commonality Minye Kaungbon cannot resist the temptation to provide the Bamars with a special historical mention that lifts them high above the Mongoloid race and raises their pride as a superior race, namely that 'Bamars are descendants of Sakyans who are of the Aryan Race or of some other descendants of Aryans'. Though there is 'scarcely any race that can claim descent from exclusively one original race', nevertheless, Burma's proximity to India permits the claim that the Burmans have 'an ornamental Aryan superstructure on the existing Mongoloid foundation', resulting in some historians proclaiming that 'Myanmars were descendants of Aryans'.⁸

¹ Minye Kaungbon 1994:13.

² Nawrahta (1995:152–53).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Minye Kaungbon (1994:155).

⁵ Minye Kaungbon (1994:164). This view of one blood, one nation, one family, is also evident in U Min Naing. *Our blood, our sons, born from the national races* [သွေးချင်းတို့ကလေးများ] (Rangoon: Ministry of Culture, 1967). Though the book does not elaborate on the philosophy behind this, the idea of common blood was clearly assumed. This idea of blood as one of a bond created, as the Thirty Comrades did, by drinking one another's blood, is actually taken literally by the army now. Saw Maung refers to fellow army comrades as 'blood brothers' (Saw Maung 1990b:81). However, he also refers to the Karen as having 'one hundred percent Mongoloid blood', and as 'even more Mongoloid than the Bamars' (Saw Maung 1990b:327).

⁶ Dr. Hla Myint. 'The role of the health sector contributing to national consolidation'. In OSS, 1997, p. 141.

⁷ Saw Maung (1990b:327). Saw Maung based his knowledge on an article on research work in the *Loktha Pyithu*, 24.11.1989.

⁸ Minye Kaungbon (1994:165).

Research into unity as consolidation

As already mentioned, the SLORC had formed by 31 May 1989 the 11-member Committee for the Compilation of Authentic Data of Myanmar History headed by Dr Khin Maung Nyunt. By the mid-90s academic answers to the problem of unity were becoming available that attempted to go into more detail than the journalistic approach from the very institutions referred to above, namely the Myanmar Historical Commission (MHC), the Myanmar Institute of Strategic Studies (MISS) and the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS). However, even in this academic sphere the agenda remained one of military propaganda. As Kyaw Win, Professor and Head of the Department of History at Rangoon University explained, 'the divide-and-rule policy of the British was the main cause of the disintegration of national unity'.¹ In other words, national unity is still assumed to have been in evidence until the British arrived and destroyed it by encouraging dissent between the Burmans and the ethnic minorities. Again, in this account, we no longer see Aung San as the one who accomplished unity, but rather it is the British who prevented the Myanmar ethnic family from joining together according to ancient rights. In short, unity did not have to be re-invented, as it was Myanmar's natural state prior to the advent of colonialism, and it was merely to be 'reconsolidated' so as to restore Myanmar to its harmony of old. This attainment has been attributed to the army under the SLORC and the SPDC.

Khin Maung Nyunt – Burma as a human body

After some historical research, one historical interpretation of national unity as consolidation finally emerges. In 1996, in his keynote address 'National consolidation' Professor Khin Maung Nyunt defines this as 'a unanimous integration, without divergence of opinions, of all ethnic nationalities' and as 'the goal that can be achieved only by the will of the nation as a whole'. Burma has the good fortune to have seven 'contributory factors' to national consolidation, namely its good geographical position, common anthropological origin and relationship, strong historical background, rich natural resources for economic development, sound social system, cultural tradition and heritage, and favourable time and circumstances.

Burma's favourable geographical position ensures that 'all its physical features ... all rise, run and terminate well within its boundaries', so that 'Myanmar does not have to share her physical features with any neighbouring country' as 'nature has endowed Myanmar with a naturally integrated entity'.

Just as the structure of a human body begins with the head at the top and goes down to end with the feet, Myanmar begins in the north and ends in the south. Hence the Kachin State resembles the head of Myanmar, the Chin and Shan State are like the two shoulders and arms, whereas the Sagaing Division, the Magway Division, the Rakhine State, the Bago Division, the Kayah State, the Kayin State, the Mon State, and Tanintharyi Division represent the two legs. The Malikha and Maikhka, the Tapaing, the Shweli, the Chindwin and many other tributaries, rivulets and streams are like branch arteries of a body joining the main arteries like the Ayeyarwady, the Than Lwin, the Kaladan and the Sittaung rivers. The mountain ranges in the Kachin, Chin, Shan, Kayah, Kayin, Rakhine, Mon States and the Bago and Tanintharyi Divisions, and the hill ranges in the Central Myanmar serve like the skeleton and backbone. The plains, valleys, and the deltas can be likened to flesh and muscles. The forest cover provides Myanmar a green uniform, while the underground and underwater natural resources are Myanmar's heart, liver, kidney, intestines, etc. The geographical shape of Myanmar gives you the figure of a human standing with his head facing east. Since all its physical features run from north to south, the north is the top, the up or the upper, and the south is the bottom, the down or the lower – a traditional directional concept in the mind of the Myanmar people.²

The analogy of the body for the shape of the country is taken further by Khin Maung Nyunt in respect of cultural heritage, about which he says that it is 'the norm by which the identity of a country, people or nation is distinguished' and also 'it is a nation's "personality"'.³ In this account, however, he looks for a common organic factor that binds Burma together, namely the 'common anthropological origin and relationship' between the 135 ethnic groups. Khin Maung Nyunt asserts that the cultural and physical origins are the same of Burma's peoples:

Physical anthropology which studies the appearance and the body structure points out that Myanmar ethnic nationalities belong to the Mongoloid stock – a fact which is further supported by cultural anthropology which is the study of beliefs, customs, traditions and daily life style. In their economic and social systems we find that they live in an extended family based upon shifting cultivation and husbandry. Their common Mongoloid origin, linguistic affinities, and a greater degree of similarities than diversities in economic and social life are favourable anthropological factors for national consolidation of the 135 ethnic groups whose differences are more apparent than real.

The third factor contributing to national consolidation is that Myanmar has a 'strong historical background' as it is 'not an artificially created country as a result of the world wars, the arbitration of the

¹ Kyaw Win (1997:211).

² Khin Maung Nyunt (1997:x-xi).

³ Khin Maung Nyunt. 'The law to protect and preserve cultural heritage regions'. *MP*, September 1998.

great powers or an emerging new nation grown out of a fallen empire', but 'a natural country evolved out of its geography, anthropology and long span of history'. This 'strong historical background' is why colonialism was not enduring. However, 'external intrigues' and 'internal disunity' cause dangers to the unity of the country and it was 'the concerted effort of the Tatmadaw and the people that rescued the country in time from such dangers'. Since these dangers persist, 'while building a peaceful, prosperous and modern developed nation, we all should keep averting all impending dangers with patriotic spirit and national consolidation'.

The fourth contributory factor is the wealth of natural resources for economic development, and the fifth is a 'sound social system' where 'all Myanmar ethnic communities live in an extended family including relatives from both parents, and where 'communal help is available in times of distress', so that 'such a liberal social system provides an atmosphere conducive to national consolidation'.

The sixth and most important contributory factor is cultural tradition and heritage, and 'it is the cultural heritage based upon Theravada Buddhism that gives the cultural identity of *Myanmarness* to the country and its peoples'. Though animism, Nat worship, Hindu Brahmanism and Mahayana Buddhism are found as 'the main strands in Myanmar culture', it is 'Theravada Buddhism that permeated the daily life of Myanmar peoples'. Because Buddhism is 'undogmatic and tolerant' it is possible for 'latecomer faiths Islam and Christianity' to peacefully co-exist with Buddhism.

Finally, Myanmar is 'at the threshold of a new era, for time, place and circumstances are favourable for the achievement of national consolidation if only the peoples have the will to do so'. It is favourable because the many groups are 'now returning to the legal fold to join the Government in the constructive works', and 'there never was a time when the country enjoyed peace, stability and progress, as it does now'.

Colonel Kyaw Thein – unity through transport

Colonel Kyaw Thein, Deputy Chief of the OSS, provides a military strategic interpretation of national consolidation in his paper 'An analysis of the return of the armed groups of national races to the legal fold and the renunciation of armed insurrection.'

This paper looks for unity with the ethnic minorities. The persistent lack of unity between the Bamars and the other Myanmar peoples is not only due to divisive colonial heritage, but also the 'difficulties of transportation' and 'the lack of improvement in the quality and quantity of contacts', which resulted in indigenous peoples beginning 'to harbour misconceptions regarding the Bamars and the Myanmar proper, construing themselves as the victims of Bamar discrimination'.¹ Armed conflict is the main cause for Burma falling behind its neighbours in development, the causes of which Kyaw Thein attributes to ideological differences, hard-line nationalism and religious extremism.

He assesses the successes and failures of the U Nu AFPFL government and the Ne Win revolutionary regime, concluding that each had only limited success, so that civil war continued largely unchecked. As for the SLORC, he praises its achievements in having nine groups abandon armed insurgency between 1988–92, so that by April 1992 the SLORC's 'serious intentions to achieve national consolidation became obvious'. A further six groups 'returned to the legal fold' between 1993–95. In November 1995 Khun Sa, the leader of the armed opium-trafficking group, surrendered to the army between January and February 1996. The regime could proclaim that by now only the Karen National Union (KNU) was the last insurgent group operating freely. He concludes that 'the claim that the problem of armed insurgency within Myanmar is nearing its final resolution and disappearance is amply justifiable'.

He attributes the failure of prior regimes to the insistence on the seizure of weapons. The SLORC did not insist on surrender of weapons and focused instead on 'co-ordinated efforts aimed at regional development and building mutual confidence'. These developments were accelerated by the Ministry of Development of Border Area and National Races. The issue of abandoning weapons would be raised at the time of the new constitution, which the armed groups have 'voluntarily expressed'.

Commentators on this paper concur with Kyaw Win. It is undoubtedly an achievement to have negotiated a cease-fire. However, it is my view that the concept of development as initiated by the regime, and the way it is handling issues such as education together with the role of the vernacular languages, are now increasingly central. These, along with the economic conditions of the country, suggest that any proclamation of success is premature. Furthermore, the insistence on channelling foreign aid through the

¹ Kyaw Thein (1997:191–92).

regime's institutions is already showing friction with the ethnic minority groups and aid agencies. There is no doubt that a surrender of weapons will prove impossible to orchestrate under these circumstances. As a result of these difficulties, the regime is forced to keep pushing forward the constitution, thereby further compounding political uncertainty. They are wasting an opportunity to accomplish a much more broad-based and more effective solution in conjunction with the elected members of Parliament, and in particular the influential NLD.

ASEAN and national unity

It is of interest that for Aung San unity was not actually limited to the nation alone. As a product of mind, unity has applicability well beyond the geography of the nation. Aung San, in a farsighted speech made in January 1946, aspired for Burma to be part of 'something like the United States of Indo-China comprising French Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia'.¹ Furthermore, he repeated this in a later broadcast on All-India Radio entitled 'Asiatic Unity', in which he said that 'Asia is one, in spite of diversity on the surface and the colour of the people'.² Unlike the regime, however, Aung San, was careful not to tie this to race or religion – he treated it as a matter of co-operation between neighbours. ASEAN unity, however, since it is based on such a diverse array of cultures and interests, is today straining the regime's concept of national unity as a substantive racial and cultural entity.

Aung San's vision was not realised after national independence. After 1962, Burma returned to being the hermit state it had been during royal times. Nevertheless, the poor state of the economy and the 1988 protests forced Burma to open up its borders to an influx of businessmen and tourists. The country had not experienced anything similar since 1962. Burma was granted observer status in ASEAN on 20 July 1996, and formally became a full member of ASEAN on 24 July 1997.

Aung San's concept of unity was a product of the struggle against domination by foreign capitalists and fascists, and was primarily meant to make sense internally. How is the current regime, given its xenophobic views, to conceive its centrepiece of identity in relation to this recent attempt at attaining second-level ASEAN unity?

Entry into ASEAN forced the generals to rethink the concept of Burmese unity within a new family atmosphere of Asian nation states. This concept of unity must now not only be understood internally, but it must also make sense from the outside.

Khin Maung Nyunt in the final paragraphs of his key address on the concept of national consolidation gives us a clue about the significance of ASEAN to national unity. He explains to us why ASEAN is important, for he says that South-East Asia is 'politically stable and economically developed and advanced, moving with bright prospects into the 21st century'. The regional unity of ASEAN permits participation in this regional organization which is rapidly taking up its own agency and tracing its own path of development against that of the West.

The age of Big Powers' domination over small powers is over. But there still remains the danger of Big Powers' hegemony by economic and military means. Today by regional co-operation small powers are trying to avert such a danger. The current regional and world situations provide an opportune moment for Myanmar to achieve national consolidation.

In other words, the inclusion of Burma's friends Indonesia and Singapore in ASEAN, and the general atmosphere of non-interference in affairs of member countries, turns ASEAN into a convenient bloc from which it is possible to consolidate national unity with impunity, as no criticism will be forthcoming. Furthermore, Burma would be backed up by ASEAN against western criticism.

In *ASEAN and Myanmar*, Tekkatho Tin Kha presents a collection of articles and comments on Burma's role in ASEAN in the year running up to its inclusion. When reading this, one realises that in these early days Burma's concept of unity (as opposed to harmony) was being projected onto ASEAN. It is commented that by accepting Burma's observer status 'ASEAN has taken a step forward to achieve the objective of "Ten nations, one voice and victory ahead" in international affairs through unity'.³

A few months prior to Burma's admission to ASEAN, the government-controlled newspaper included 'ASEAN from a Myanmar perspective'. This article conceived of ASEAN in terms of the diverse local perceptions of the same entity in the way six blind men conceived of an elephant, each touching a different part of the body.

¹ Aung San (1971:36). January 1946.

² Aung San (1971:102). Speech delivered on 05.01.1947.

³ Tekkatho Tin Kha. *ASEAN and Myanmar*, International Affairs News Journal, 1997, p. 14.

Is ASEAN like a wall [the elephant's body] against a common threat? Or is it more like a pillar [feet] that stands firm for the interest of the region? Would it seem to be a rope [tail] that binds all members together? Does it represent determination of purpose like that of a snake [trunk]? Is ASEAN's thrust as sharp as that of a spear [tusk]? Is it bringing that long-awaited cool breeze of development with it? There may be different perceptions as to what simile or metaphor would best describe the Association vis-à-vis Myanmar, but I feel that ASEAN is all these and more.¹

The author proceeded to point out that though ASEAN may be perceived differently by the different blind men, it was always clear that ASEAN was not a place to celebrate diversity but to develop a sense of unity, for 'in a region characterised by diversity in every sense – geographical, cultural, ethnic, and political – a common goal pragmatically focused on the shared destiny of the region, rather than on values and norms that differed according to the different "after-tastes" of colonial masters'. Colonialism brought difference to Asia and to ASEAN, and so the Asians must take it upon themselves, for the sake of unity, to remove these differences and keep their focus upon similarities.

The 1967 Bangkok Declaration stressed promotion of economic co-operation, its first objective was 'to promote the economic, social and cultural development of the region through co-operative programmes'. However, rather than a programme of co-operation, the author saw this programme as a form of support for its Myanmarfication project of forging unity throughout the country.

As emerging economies still on the road to development, it is not surprising that economic, social and cultural development are stressed as preconditions to political stability. Indeed, in a region characterised by diversity in every sense – geographical, cultural, ethnic, and political – a common goal pragmatically focused on the shared destiny of the region, rather than on values and norms that differed according to the different 'after-tastes' of colonial masters, naturally has a high potential of succeeding. In 1967, what was needed was that long-awaited draft of a sense of achievement – of being able to deliver the goods to the people and to give them a stake in the future of their respective lands of residence. What better way than economic prosperity and a sense of belonging?

Economic development then, is dependent on the need to belong. Furthermore, the sense of belonging that goes with development requires Myanmar and ASEAN identity to reinforce each other, and be 'forged'.

Reading various literature on ASEAN affords the readers access to the different dimensions of the Association. However, at a time when identity needs to be forged – identity as Myanmar, identity as sons of Southeast Asia, identity as part of the region and therefore part of what is going on in the region – there is an increasing need to be aware of what it really means to be part of the Southeast Asian Nations. For this, we in Myanmar will also need to have a clear idea of what really is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, apart from its historical development and institutional responsibilities.

The author stresses a number of ASEAN characteristics as positive. ASEAN identity is 'to be aware of and to accept the differences while strengthening the similarities'. It is an enclosed system, 'the wall that stands strong and firm in the face of challenges and dictates from outside ... the wall that protects and weathers those within from the harsh winds blowing without ... the wall that tells everyone of the residences inside and that demarcates the extent of our domain'. It is also a centralised system, for just as 'all roads lead to Rome', so also 'all ASEAN matters emanate first from the ASEAN Secretariat', and this in turn is 'the rope that binds all members and partners ... of ASEAN National Secretariats in the capitals of member countries, and the ASEAN Committees in third countries'. The Bangkok Declaration that set ASEAN into motion is 'like a needle that first took up a strong and wonderful thread, with the aim to ultimately achieve a very special necklace of the ten colourful beads in the region of Southeast Asia'. The author exaggerates given the regime's attacks on fleeing refugees and its skirmishes with the Thai army as a result of its own infringement on Thai territory, as he says that 'not a single shot has been fired in anger in resolving disputes, which underlines the Association's track record of brotherly relations, even in the thick of an intra-regional conflict'.

If these early 'Myanmar views' express a regimented and centralised view of ASEAN, the regime's official view after joining expresses membership of ASEAN as a necessary precondition for the tranquillity and stability of Burma and for its efforts at promotion nationally of its 'economic, social, cultural and development conditions'.

At present, Myanmar is striving its utmost to construct a peaceful, modernized and developed multi-party democratic state based on the market economic system. In order to promote the economic, social, cultural and development conditions of the country, and to safeguard its political, economic and tranquil situations. Myanmar has joined ASEAN and is now actively participating in its various deliberations. Thus, Myanmar is now enjoying the peace, stability and economic progress which in the past [it has] never been able to achieve.²

Burmese ideas about unity are, of course, the product of their own relative isolation. Development of the old European democracies, for example, involved many independent relationships across borders not

¹ Moe-MOFA. 'Asean from a Myanmar's perspective'. *NLM*, 18.03.1997.

² 'Myanmar has joined ASEAN'. *Myanmar Today* (<http://www.myanmar.com>).

just between governments, but between non-government organizations, churches, unions, opposition parties, universities, businesses, ethnic groups and alternative counter-cultural movements. Many European towns and cities are twinned with a counterpart over the borders. No European country would worry about these independently initiated cross-national links and any concept of unity in this context is cross-cut by many ties, and governments play only one role among other bodies in defining and guiding such ideas. What matters here is whether government represents the politics of these diverse groups sufficiently so that as many people as possible witness the benefits of government representation and do not feel the need to resort to terrorism.

Instead of seeing itself as providing a minimal form of representation, itself dependent on all agencies in the country, the regime instead understands ASEAN primarily as a network of inter-state relationships in which each government monopolises representation of the entire landmass and all the peoples living within its territory and all other agencies operating within it. As Burma was closed for so long at government level, government holds that complete political unity must be achieved first at any cost. ASEAN membership must imply a united Burma. Anticipating Burma's ASEAN membership it was said that there were 'a lot of noises and criticisms against ASEAN's latest move – but with unity, hard work and diligence, it will not be long before the prophets of doom are proven wrong'. This unity is represented as a victory over colonial power, for 'an ASEAN that ultimately includes all ten South East Asian countries will finally celebrate a victory over the divisive legacies of different colonial masters that ruled the region in its pre-independent days'.¹

This view of ASEAN, links unity to the unfinished struggle for independence from colonialist agencies. Since Aung San did not defeat the enemy, continued struggle requires supervision from the army and its agencies. In this line of thought, Burma would appear able to fulfil an international role only when it has literally achieved complete unity, that is, when it has eradicated all diverse views and is able to speak in a single voice with a single channel of command for the entire territory, including the one-third of Burma's territory where Rangoon has not yet established control. This is all done in the name of preventing foreign penetration of Burma's territory, since this would result in loss of independence.

Of course, by insisting on the centralisation of all forms of representation through itself, and by eliminating the array of diverse independent institutions that could fulfil such a role alongside the military, the regime is also confirming its own view that there are no institutions in Burma that could capably and independently represent alternative interests in the country. By eliminating the institutions that could provide such an exchange, the army is continuously confirming its own concept of unity at every turn, the concept that it alone can serve as the unifying force of such diversity. The army views this task of unification as its alone to accomplish.

Some foreign scholars have believed this propaganda, and are unfortunately giving it credibility, which it should not have. Nevertheless, understanding such view permits us to understand why the disintegration of the army came to be presented as the ultimate disaster for the entire nation. Aung San Suu Kyi, as daughter of the founder of the army, threatened military unity, and this threat was thus a national threat, for divisions in the army are naturally interpreted as national divisions. The army became myopically focused upon the idea of 'unity', and so it began its slogans of 'non-disintegration'. However, the army is not concerned with unity for Myanmar's sake alone. Today, the army employs the notion that is unifying for a greater cause, it is creating a Myanmar 'family atmosphere' within the broader family of ASEAN. In doing so, it does not face the reality that the other governments in place have populations mostly with different religions and different priorities.

Hitherto it emphasized that ASEAN unity provides the impetus for a renewed vigour, to have total and absolute control over all exchanges within, and keep at bay the return of colonialism. When the Karen, one of the last groups to hold on to their autonomy, did not want to join the Myanmar family, this was expressed in terms of their unwillingness to return to familial relationships for the sake of ASEAN.

After all 'blood is thicker than water'. Almost every Myanmar national nowadays can proudly claim to have a drop or more of blood from one another which strongly suggests how far they have come towards complete admixture and assimilation among themselves. To imagine oneself of being foreign in origin and bearing allegiance to a far away past-colonial-master is a dangerous delusion. One should not forget that this was entirely a family affair and should never look for solutions outside of the Union.

Time is now to forgive and forget.

Time is now to avoid confusion and despair.

¹ *IS*, 27.07.1997.

Time is now to reunite and rejoin the family.

If the ten countries of ASEAN with different political ideologies and religious beliefs can get together as ‘the regional grouping’ why can’t the nationalities of the Union of Myanmar get back together as a Union? After all Kayins are Myanmar too.

Just as the ‘ASEAN’ was the dream of the original founders of the ASEAN movement, the ‘Union of Myanmar’ was the dream of the country’s independence fighters led by General Aung San. We must not waver now but strive to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the hard-earned Independence together, with or without those self-interest groups abroad who may not view the ‘Union’ in favourable light — simply because it is not in their interest.¹

This emphasis on ASEAN unity running parallel to Myanmar unity, necessitating ethnic minorities to dilute their identity and merge it into the pool of Myanmar blood for the collective good, is an expression of how the regime views all forms of ethnic dissent as a national threat and conveniently at the same time as a threat to ASEAN. Unlike developments in the European Union, where governments encourage cross-national co-operation across all levels of society, here we find that Myanmarfication is exactly the opposite, for it means the reinforcement of the centre by placing all exchanges with other countries under army control including the ethnic groups that straddle the borders with Burma’s neighbours.

In order to achieve centralisation to the point of subordination, the army doggedly plays up the colonial past. Since it was colonialism that separated the minority groups from the harmonious Myanmar family, it is colonialism that today continues to threaten the family unity of the country. For example, in relation to the Karen it was felt that the fact they were unwilling to submerge their identities in the Myanmar pool merely perpetuated colonial inspired divisions.

It is regrettable to learn that the KNU statement (Response from the KNU and KNU News, Information and Research dated 10 June, 1997) is indicative of their present leaders still nurturing and rekindling the old flames of animosities among the national brethren of Myanmar. Also it is simply anachronistic and grossly outdated to continue to defend the divisive legacies of colonialism in Asia. They must realize that those who do this may only do so at their own peril. Because even the ten linguistically and colonially divided countries of South East Asia have matured and developed into a united regional organization, where the spirit of Amity and Cooperation among each other is central to their philosophy. The newly reorganized ‘ASEAN 10’ may be viewed as the final victory over the divisive and diverse legacies of the colonial past.²

Such an attitude towards the total subordination of all ways of life has already irritated the Muslims against whom the regimes have systematically discriminated to the extent of expelling them to Bangladesh, and imposing strict constraints on the movements of the Arakanese Muslims. Neither Malaysia nor Indonesia is satisfied with the regime’s handling of ethnic and religious differences, and just as the unity of ASEAN is based on diversity, so Myanmar concepts of unity should also take into account this diversity if they are to result in effective ideas of unity that can be implemented.

It is difficult not to conclude that entry into ASEAN, rather than leading to liberalisation of government and the economy, is actually spurring the regime towards further army centralisation and control. There is no doubt that with a doubling of the army in the run up to ASEAN membership, so far Myanmarfication has meant armification. The emphasis on familial unity within ASEAN is used today as an excuse to speak with one voice and to eliminate all forms of ethnic autonomy and all forms of political opposition.

The fact is that when I visited Burma in June 1998 I found that the Asian financial crisis, which had coincided with Burma’s entry into ASEAN, contributed to make 1998 the worst year economically since the 1988 uprisings. Burmese intellectuals are extremely cynical about the conditions under which Burma entered ASEAN. They crack jokes about how Burma’s entry *caused* the Asian financial crisis. Once the ASEAN economies were ‘tigers’ [**ကု:**], but admission of Burma has turned these promising developing economies into mere ‘monitor lizards’ (lit. ‘Hput tigers’) [**ပုကု:**], also a metaphor for a useless person. If a monitor lizard [Burma] enters the house [ASEAN] this is interpreted as a bad omen, causing the entire family to become destitute [**ပုကုတီယ**]. Some Burmese even told me that they attributed the haze extending across Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia due to forest fires as the consequence of ASEAN admitting Burma into their ranks.

If the regime worked with a sense of parallelism between consolidation in terms of internal unity and unity within ASEAN, this was coming apart with the emerging mood of a more critical engagement of ASEAN members in the wake of the downfall of Suharto in Indonesia in 1998.

National unity – democracy and national reconciliation

Every day the regime publishes the same list of political, economic, and social objectives on the front page of the

¹ ‘The view from the Embassy of Myanmar In Ottawa.’ [no source] Vol. 9, No. 12, 18.06.1997.

² *Ibid.*

government-controlled newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar*. The list includes a call for 'national reconsolidation' rather than national reconciliation.¹

If 'national unity', 'national reunification', 'national consolidation' and 'national reconsolidation' are the staple vocabulary of the regime, by contrast the democracy movement, the ethnic minorities, and, internationally, governments, human rights organizations and NGOs are calling for 'national reconciliation' [အမျိုးသားချင်းယှဉ်းအေးရေး], a concept that does not assume an a priori shape or content, nor does it assume a singular agency that might bring about unity. For example, Bill Clinton accepted Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest as 'a major milestone' provided it was a step towards enabling her 'to participate in a genuine process of political reconciliation'.²

When, in an interview, Senator Richardson asked what the prospects for reconciliation were, Aung San Suu Kyi answered that 'this is precisely why I've always asked for dialogue. You have to work out the terms and conditions under which national reconciliation can be brought about. If SLORC refuses to talk, how can they bring about national reconciliation?'³ National reconciliation involves 'talk' and 'dialogue', i.e. the need to meet and exchange views, to give and take, and then to jointly decide the priorities for the country as a whole. In this sense, the term is an indispensable element to 'democracy'.

Like 'human rights' and 'democracy', the regime very rarely employs this concept, except when it talks about the distant future, or simply wants to create a favourable impression with some particular constituency.⁴ For example, Khin Nyunt used it once in an interview addressing a foreign audience, though in this interview the objective of unity (rather than harmony) still comes before reconciliation, and is joined with consolidation.

Our first task was to build back law and order and peace and tranquillity in the country, and then to [form] the administrative system, which had broken down completely, and to have it function smoothly. Our second task was to achieve unity, reconciliation, and reconsolidating among the national races. Members of our military council went into the jungle to have talks with the armed troops to bring them under legal umbrella to help achieve our tasks.

In previous governments, the one stumbling block to discussions was that we always asked the armed groups to give up their arms and surrender. So now in our discussions we told them they didn't need to surrender yet. Instead the government is trying to establish an understanding, and to win their trust and confidence.

Little by little, in discussion after discussion, we finally reached an agreement that they would give up their arms when we drew up a new constitution. So group after group of armed forces, 17 in all so far, laid down their arms and entered our legal union, which drove out the communists. These forces are now working with us for the development of their regions, and of course, we are providing assistance and funds for that development. Some of the leaders of these armed groups are even taking part in the convention that is drafting the new constitution.

[At] the moment, there is only one group left to join the rest, and then there should be absolute peace and stability throughout the country. When the last group joins the legal union, there will no longer be any armed insurrection in the Union of Myanmar.⁵

Criticism of the regime has often focused on how its policies are at variance with national reconciliation. It is on the basis of this vocabulary that the NCGUB, for example, criticised Ohn Gyaw's speech at the UN.

Nothing in his speech indicates that SLORC intends to improve the human rights situation or to advance the process of democratization and national reconciliation in Burma. He even refused to use the words 'human rights', 'reconciliation' and 'democracy' in connection with Burma.

Ohn Gyaw says SLORC was aiming for national 'reconsolidation' which meant that SLORC was forcing the whole country, including the ethnic people, to conform to its political agenda. He also indicated that SLORC was pushing ahead with the process to legitimize military rule in Burma via the national convention.⁶

Interestingly, however, U Ohn Gyaw barely five weeks later responded to his critics and changed his vocabulary when he said that 'the Burmese government places top priority on national reconciliation'.⁷

Also, in a statement by veteran pro-democracy politicians it is quite clear that 'national reconciliation' must precede 'national solidarity', for 'in order to establish the national solidarity, the first requirement that

¹ Warren Richey. 'The Lady and the generals: gloves off in Burma'. *Christian Science Monitor*, 15.04.1998.

² Bill Clinton cited in Stewart (1997:114).

³ *Burma Debate*, July/August 1994.

⁴ 'All are specially urged to discharge the national duties to which they are assigned for national reconciliation and emergence of an enduring Constitution for which the State is making efforts so that Myanmar Naing-Ngan will exist perpetually in the comity of nations.' (Gen. Than Shwe. 'Peasant Day speech'. *NLM*, 02.03.1995)

⁵ Interview with Khin Nyunt. *Leaders Magazine*, April-June 1998.

⁶ Sar NK. 'Rebuttal to Ohn Gyaw's speech'. NCGUB, 03.10.1995 (BurmaNet News, 07.10.1995).

⁷ 'Aung San Suu Kyi talks possible in future, says Slorc minister.' *Bangkok Post*, 09.11.1995. This may have been an editorial slip of the pen.

we should implement is national reconciliation. In the present world history, there are many numerous examples of solving longstanding national and regional conflicts through negotiation.¹

Yugoslavia is an extreme example of what happens when national unity is given priority over national reconciliation. When forged by a dictatorship tolerating no discussion, national consolidation does not amount to much at the end of the day. The danger is that the path to national unity as currently pursued by the regime will leave a similar legacy of hatred and distrust among the ethnic groups that may not be eradicated for generations.

Conversely, South Africa is an example where the National Reconciliation and Truth Commission has attempted to ‘promote national unity’ through ‘reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past’ by means of a four-pronged programme, including:

- (a) establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date, including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations, as well as the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the persons responsible for the commission of the violations, by conducting investigations and holding hearings;
- (b) facilitating the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective and comply with the requirements of this Act;
- (c) establishing and making known the fate or whereabouts of victims and by restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims, and by recommending reparation measures in respect of them;
- (d) compiling a report providing as comprehensive an account as possible of the activities and findings of the Commission contemplated in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c), and which contains recommendations of measures to prevent the future violations of human rights.

The South African National Unity and Reconciliation Act 1995 was an attempt to build national unity by healing the wounds that ethnic conflict had brought which meant bringing all aggrieved parties into reconciliation. To deal with the future meant first of all recovering the truth of the past, and the Truth Reconciliation Commission did just this to provide the basis for future national unity.

National reconciliation then, is a healing of conflict in a thorough and complete sense in an atmosphere of truthfulness and tolerance. It is to permit divergent views of the past. The Myanmarfication project does exactly the opposite – it only permits a ‘royal’ past in which the powerless do not have a look in. The NLD has asserted that ‘national reconciliation cannot be achieved through military means. We sincerely believe that this can be achieved only through political means’. The NLD, as part of its political platform, has stated that ‘every nationality shall have a right to maintain and develop their own literature, languages, cultures and traditions’, and it looks for ‘full rights of self-determination’.

National reconciliation can be attained only when the majority of the people of all the nationalities accept the constitution. For this, leaders of the nationalities, leaders from the authoritative bodies of the country and leaders from all political parties should meet and discuss the problem. Only then do we reckon that a well defined ‘Genuine multi-party democratic State’ or ‘Democratic Union’ can emerge.²

The concept of ‘national reconciliation’ has more in common with the Buddhist sense of *nyi nyut yei* as expressed by Thahkin Kodawhmaing and Aung San above. This concept also arose at a time of serious repression in the context of the second independence struggle. Some have politely reminded the regime that Aung San amnesia is not beneficial to the country in the long-term. For example, Daw Ni Ni Myint, wife of Ne Win and Director of the Universities’ Historical Research Commission, in her introduction to *The literary workmanship of Bogyok Aung San* [bU KpəAacSn:F saepI kka] (Rangoon: Universities Historical Commission, 1998) suggests the regime would benefit from returning to him for guidance.

After reading Aung San's literary workmanship, I wish that you may develop, according to Aung San's desire, independence, patriotism, and to try to attain unity and harmony of the nationals, and a modern peaceful and developed country.

[bU KpəAacSn:F saepI kka] kka: kEit NgəpI bU KpəAacSn:F SNA tən aə pə: kint Nū sit
mīk sīt Bə t t i pəe Aac Pn t i l sīt t t c r c q a mē: sv N l m a d e Aac k c p n sīt mīk B a k t i t k a k t m Aac
e Sac R b a sīt mē p a mē: l a k a e k t m t i t k j e A k n q a y a e q a N i b a k k i p s e p i l a e Aac s a c S a c N i k p a s h U N i p a q v N

In aspiring to attain national unity, the concept of national reconciliation offers a better hope than the concepts of national consolidation, national reconsolidation, or national solidarity as presented so far in the context of the Myanmarfication programme. National reconciliation is closer to the Thahkin Kodawhmaing

¹ ‘A request to Slorc and NLD led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to open a dialogue for the national reconciliation’, 24.11.1995.

² ‘Translated letter of 23 politicians from inside Burma’, ABSDF(MTZ), 29.12.1995 (BurmaNet News, 02.01.1996).

³ ‘The attitude of the National League for Democracy regarding the nationalities of Burma’, 12.02.1996 (soc.culture.burma, article 10740).

and Aung San line of thinking, which strives for unity by improving one's own mindset and by putting in place instruments for dialogue that might begin to foster harmony and tolerance, and not with military strength. And this can only take place in an environment where truth is sought. In short, this is how we should understand the relevance of the NLD critique, namely that national reconciliation must be based on the practice of, and not just lip-service to, *byama-so tayà*. Politics is not culture, but it is mental culture.

Therefore, instead of unity the way Thahkin Kodawhmaing and Aung San suggested, that is to say harmony produced by means of a mental disposition that transcends difference at the level of the mind like the Sangha practise mental culture, unity here is a concept delineated by strict, somewhat unimaginative material boundaries based on the conjunction between nation, race, civilisation and language. Unity is no longer based on the generation of harmony in a way analogous to the ideal comportment among good monks, and as the result of Buddhist mental culture arising from bending one's own mind to reality in *samadhi*, unity lies in the production of substantive hierarchy of physical differences that require the nation-wide subordination of the interests of all groups to the military. In arguing for this kind of unity, the army leaves no opportunity for developing the alternative cultural mechanisms that might peacefully help come to terms with diversity of views and interests.

The process of Myanmarification is to enforce a singular view of the past, to create an impenetrable *loka* that people cannot enter into from outside, and people from outside cannot contribute to. Just as the military bypassed democracy in favour of socialism during the Ne Win era, and 'freedom' in favour of 'national independence' (*lut-lakyei*), so today the primary Buddhist connotations of *nyi nyut yei* as 'harmony', unprejudicial to ethnic origin or culture, have been passed over in favour of 'unity' framed in terms of Myanmar (Bamar) culture, and 'reconciliation' is bypassed in favour of 'reconsolidation'. Myanmarification is intended to obfuscate such important distinctions between these ideals that exist in the Burmese language at the level of Buddhism. The Burmese army, I am afraid, has become a cuckoo that can only live by eliminating all its rivals and lives off weaker species than itself. The consequences of the army taking the place of the Sangha in the discourse of national unity are too tragic to contemplate.

Chapter 4

Myanmafication (3): the four attributes of disciplined democracy

Shortly after General Ne Win's military coup, Smith discerned a trend in Burmese political ideology. For the first time a new national political 'ideology' seemed to be emerging that might just replace 'tradition' as the way of legitimating government. Contrasting it with U Nu's 'failure of leadership', he viewed the army as 'in some ways more conducive to modernization in that it can afford to emphasize the secular, rational, and scientific approach to problems'.¹ It may be true that the army can 'afford' modernity. But unfortunately such benefits have not materialised in the case of the Burmese army. Furthermore, the SLORC-SPDC regimes have no secular national ideology, except the sense of control over *loka* through magic, and their idea of modernisation and development is so far guided only by propaganda. It is after authority as a product of what it calls legal and cultural tradition. These unfortunately are no more than templates around which the population of Burma must shape themselves. It aims for the short-term goal to bolster authority in the present.

The form of democracy that is being proposed is not much more than 'boundary politics'. There is little in terms of 'freedom' in the democracy that is currently being proposed. Freedom, insofar as it is permitted, must work within frameworks, within traditions, within boundaries that can be controlled by the State. In this boundary politics the army has the duty to patrol, and military intelligence has the duty to inform on all boundaries; whatever transcends must either be clarified, enlightened, made to understand, or it must be constrained, put down or exterminated. Any entity working at these boundaries cuts itself on the sharp edges of this regime – imprisonment, exile, or even death, whichever is the more effective.

Today, the SPDC believes that if only foreigners would see it is striving to improve the country, then they would come round to its views. In this chapter, I aim to examine what 'discipline-flourishing democracy' means on its terms. The early stages for this formulation were already set by Saw Maung on 27 November 1988, when he is reported to have said 'as the Vinaya is to the Rahan and the fencing is to the village, so is discipline to the race'.² In an interview with *Asia Week* on 17 January 1989, he said that 'you need full discipline to enjoy full democracy'.³ He later said in his speech that 'democracy goes together with discipline [rules and regulations] [သန့်ရှင်းစီစဉ်မှုများ], and 'discipline in other words means laws [နိယာမများ]'.⁴ On 5 July 1989, during the transitional period, he referred to this as 'guided or limited democracy'.⁵

It was not until much later, namely in November 1997, that the SPDC developed a more elaborate idea of 'disciplined democracy', which it characterised more specifically as accompanied by the following: (1) 'rights to freedom exercised within framework of law', (2) 'compatible with political, economic and social structures of State', (3) 'in line with historical traditions, customs and culture of nationality', and it is (4) 'especially democracy that brings benefits fairly for all nationals within the framework of national solidarity'.⁶

Let us examine here, one by one, the regime's attempt to deal with these proposals and build disciplined democracy. In appealing to the qualified and strictly compartmentalised nature of democracy – for it is all characterised as substantially contained within local 'frameworks', 'structures' or 'traditions' – we must remember that the regime is challenging its foreign critics to come up with a substantive analysis of what it does in terms of *local* values. To have any effect, therefore, we must evoke in our arguments those critical cultural and religious values that live within the boundaries that the regime declares is rightfully its to

¹ Smith (1965:311–13).

² *Working People's Daily, Collected Articles*. Rangoon, Book 9, pp. 231–236. See Andrew Huxley. 'The importance of the Dhammathats in Burmese law and culture.' *The Journal of Burma Studies*, vol. 1, 1997, p. 15n34.

³ Saw Maung (1990b:56).

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:311,342).

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:158).

⁶ Excerpts from the address delivered by Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1, State Peace and Development Council, at the closing ceremony of the Special Refresher Course No 3 for Officers of the Development Department at 12.30 hours on 21 November 1997, at the Central Institute of Civil Service, Phaunggyi.

govern. Of course, this is difficult, as since 1962 Burma has been academically the most neglected country in Southeast Asia. Indeed, this is exactly why the regime stresses these local values because it *knows* that foreign critics find it difficult to build an argument against their *clichés*. Since it controls its own academics, it therefore has little criticism of its ideas. However, one would expect a government serious about progress and development to do more than propagate propaganda, and instead to carry out a serious study of the nature of these existing 'frameworks', 'structures' and 'traditions'. Where are they? How are they constituted? To what extent do they overlap? What synergy is there between various concepts among the various national groups? The fact is that the regime performs no such vital research. Worse, it forces its journalists and academics to write cheap propaganda. There is no sense of reality or trying to reveal the truth.

Yazathat and the framework of law

Conflicts over law

On every occasion, when members of the regime accept democracy as a concept, it is invariably qualified by saying that democracy activists must work 'within the framework of the law'.

Regretfully, Daw Su Kyi's rigid and uncompromising stance towards the authorities has created unnecessary setbacks for Myanmar in its transition towards democracy. The confrontational line she has been pursuing in the political arena has quite often forced the authorities to take necessary measures intending to maintain stability in the country by the lawful enforcement. Unfortunately, her actions and motives are not only unsupportive in the building of democratic institutions but serious setback for Myanmar in becoming a functioning democracy within a reasonable amount of time ...

It is very much regretful and surprising to witness that Daw Su Kyi, who has been criticizing the Myanmar Government for not being a democracy has failed to realize that even in a full-fledged democratic society political activities have to be conducted with the framework of the law. Activities intended to create civil unrest, disobedience are not tolerated by any government in the world regardless of political system they practise.¹

Aung San Suu Kyi retorts that it is the regime that flouts the laws.

SLORC does not abide by the existing laws and what they are doing is contrary to the existing laws. They keep saying when they want to attack us that they won't tolerate any action contrary to the existing laws. But they are the ones to constantly flout the law. [ZD1]

Reports by international human rights groups, to the chagrin of the regime, would appear to agree with Aung San Suu Kyi that the law does not function in Burma. Human rights groups either see an absence of law in Burma, as in *Myanmar, 'no law at all'*,² or they see Burma as completely ignoring international legal criteria, as in *Burma beyond the Law*.³ Here, the SLORC's 'attachment to legal form is no more than a thin façade', and 'the picture which emerges is one of a regime which seeks to use the notion of law to buttress its own political pre-eminence'.

The regime shakes off its foreign critics by claiming to follow *local* legal tradition. It needs to be demonstrated, first of all, what the claims of both sides amount to in terms of local Burmese concepts of law. Current legal reports on Burma do not, however, attempt to unravel the 'local' concepts of law the regime proclaims as their guide.

Given the regime justifies its existence on the basis of law, one would expect it to be clear on the meaning of law. This is not the case. It is surprising how trusting it is of its own knowledge and understanding of legal matters, and yet how little it really knows. The SLORC's clampdown on NLD party members prior to the elections prompted Amnesty International to appeal to the SLORC to charge politicians with an actual offence at the time of arrest. Saw Maung said that 'it is like forcing us to take action against these persons [NLD] even though we do not wish to do so as we are all Myanmars'. The EEC had imposed sanctions as a result, and he bemoaned his lonely situation saying that 'what must I do for our country not to be misunderstood by other nations of the world, for us not to be misunderstood and for our country not to be hurt or harmed'. Saw Maung then explained how the army should be disciplined, and that the Buddhist law of ultimate truth [*Amhit ra:*] of impermanence was the ultimate law for everyone. This is either cynicism or ignorance; I believe it is both. It is difficult not to conclude from its behaviour that the regime is hastening the 'ultimate law of impermanence' for the people of Burma, and before soon, for itself.⁴

¹ IS, 05.11.1997.

² Amnesty International, October 1992.

³ Article 19, 1996.

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:269–70).

Law and the regime

Law has been the most important qualification and self-conceived responsibility of the regime from the very beginning. Indeed, the SLORC stands for State Law and Order Restoration Committee, and the very first of its four aims was ‘to ensure maintenance of law and order prevalence of regional peace and tranquillity’ [t ra: pedsimiar: ngyeA: Khyi qayaer:], and the fourth and last was ‘to hold multi-party elections’.¹ With the introduction of the State Peace and Development Committee the anticipation of benefits was brought forward a little more, but such would appear a mere palliative, as the concepts of law and order remained the army’s primary justification for holding onto power in Burma. Indeed, ever since Ne Win took power, democracy has always been the last element in a path that grows increasingly long and more fully populated with prior reservations and qualifications (see chapter 1). Ne Win also used democracy as a lightning rod to dissolve tension in crisis situations, but when he felt confident, democracy was invariably pushed forward into the future.

After the elections, Saw Maung stated on 27 March 1989 that ‘a new legally elected government’ would come into being that he hoped ‘will strive its utmost in leading the State in the interests of the people’. At that point he would have the army ‘go back to our barracks’.² Under the *Pyithu Hluttaw* Election Law No. 14/89 of 31 May 1989, ‘promulgated’ by the SLORC itself, the parliament (*Hluttaw*) ‘shall be formed with the *Hluttaw* representatives who have been elected in accordance with this Law from the *Hluttaw* constituencies’. The government that would emerge from the elections had a choice between the 1947 or the 1974 Constitution. This upbeat assessment that the future would be a democratic future was given a boost when the SLORC in its pre-election press-conference said that ‘the elected representatives can choose one of the [two] constitutions to form a government, and we will transfer power to the government formed by them.’ Furthermore, if the elected representatives ‘did not like the two existing constitutions, they can draw [up] a new constitution. Neither the Defence Forces nor the State Law and Order Restoration Council will draw up a new constitution.’³

From there on, once the election results came out and the army was electorally condemned, democracy was qualified by new preconditions. Today, in the SPDC slogans democracy still has the lowest priority, for now it has been translated into writing a constitution under the supervision of the army *prior* to government taking power, a procedure they have dominated now for almost a decade with no results to show. Article 19 judges that SLORC’s actions ‘cannot be justified under Burmese domestic law’.⁴

With ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ thus increasingly pushed further towards the horizon of time, law looms larger as the only justification of its actions and legitimacy. Saw Maung’s favourite expression was that everyone had to work ‘within the framework of the law’.⁵ For those working outside the framework, there is danger and there are threats, for ‘there is no danger for those who live within the bounds of law and order’ [pedA te mda nq m AN ra y n R H]. Anyone who, once having been opposed to the regime,⁶ strikes a deal with the army and accepts its patronage and benevolence, is celebrated in the national media as ‘returning to the legal fold’.⁷ To return to the legal fold is, furthermore, equivalent to ‘joining hands with government’, i.e. SLORC-SPDC.⁸

Law is also co-equivalent to the domain controlled by the army. This has been admitted as much in

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:22,29,77).

² Saw Maung (1990b:79).

³ 43rd News Conference, SLORC Information Committee, Rangoon, 9 June 1989.

⁴ Article 19. *Burma beyond the law*. August 1996, p. 13.

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:219, 269). ‘It is necessary to get people into the habit of doing things within the bounds of the law’ [t ra: pedsimiar: ngyeA: Khyi qayaer:] (Saw Maung 1990b:221,271).

⁶ This includes members of the Thirty Comrades such as Bohmu Aung who, after going in opposition against the state in 1972 ‘entered the legal fold under the amnesty granted in 1980’, but then was found to have a ‘flaw in his character’, when he was found gambling, so that his rewards from government had to be revoked. At this same briefing Aung San Suu Kyi’s body guards were apprehended as ‘terrorists’ (Press Briefing, 01.03.1998).

⁷ ‘The government made overtures to the armed groups to return to the legal fold’. (Ohn Gyaw. ‘On peace and development in Burma.’ *Burma Debate*, Dec 1994–Jan 1995). Ohn Gyaw, who used to be Minister of Foreign Affairs, used this expression at least six times in this article alone. It has also been used in Burmese as ‘coming out into the light’ [Al cwck aqv] (Saw Maung 1990b:183,239). However, mostly it is expressed as ‘to enter within the boundaries of the law’ [t ra: pedsimiar: ngyeA: Khyi qayaer:] (Myanmar Today. Ministry of Information, 1997, p. 3.).

⁸ ‘17 Armed groups having returned to the legal fold and [are] joining hands with government’. (‘Allegations of forced labour in Myanmar categorically rejected’. *NLM*, 22.10.1998).

Law and democracy

Exponents of the democracy movement hold that laws may be based on local ideas, but legislation and the judiciary should not be subject to manipulation by the army or any one interest group; they should operate independently and at a distance from government. To democrats, international laws are instruments that are as important as local laws, if only to ensure that a government does not use law for self-serving ends.

Aung San Suu Kyi has characterised the SLORC's concept of law as 'ordinances' which 'appeared suddenly, like rabbits out of a conjurer's hat at the will of an individual or a dictating group' [ZD6]. If the generals' laws are ordinances that are 'promulgated' to serve their powers and are repressive to the extreme, 'the Buddhist concept of law is based on *dhamma*, righteousness or virtue, not on the power to impose harsh and inflexible rules on a defenceless people'. As Tin U said, the regime's application of authority lacks compassion for it is rooted in 'delusion' and 'ignorance', which is why it expresses itself in terms of *adhamma*, 'crushing' its opponents.¹ 'Coolest of all is the shade of the Buddha's teachings' and to 'provide the people with the protective coolness of peace and security, rulers must observe the teachings of the Buddha' central to which are 'the concepts of truth, righteousness and loving-kindness'.

The NLD was aware that the regime threatened to use the law to terminate its formal existence even before its senior members were placed under house arrest on 20 July 1989, for it drew the United Commission on Human Rights' attention to the SLORC's self-seeking use of the law as 'arbitrary edicts decreed by a regime which does not enjoy the mandate of the people'. There was no 'fair and impartial administration of legal rules' [Y5]. This does not mean that there was no mechanism, but it was a 'non-judicial system' [C30], based on 'non-trials' of 'non-offences' [ZD2].

Of particular note here is the concept of law Aung San Suu Kyi advocates is the Buddhist concept of 'righteousness' (*dhamma*) which permits 'absence of fear' (*abhaya*) [O15]. This is quite unlike the SLORC's concept of law she characterises as 'the will of the dominant faction' [ZD1]. In the absence of such an independent legal system in Burma, the search for such independent system has perforce returned to the practices which uproot the 'I'-ness and selfishness implicated in the *yazathat* mode of law-making in favour of a more universalistic idea that transcends boundaries. This underpins the practice of *vipassana* as permitting the attainment of ultimate freedom, along with the realisation of the laws of ultimate truth, as well as transcending the implications of suffering the SLORC-SPDC 'legal' system.

Vernacular concepts of law

We are now ready to ask in more concrete terms what underlies such conflicting perspectives, with the military at one extreme and democracy activists such as Aung San Suu Kyi at the other. The regime insists that exponents of the democracy movement are seeking foreign ideas of law, and that in Burma there are only 'local' laws involving local practices, that have nothing in common with British or international. But what are the local laws that the SLORC and the SPDC proclaim to follow?

I can not go into great detail here on law, and to understand all its detail requires much more room and specialist skills than I have available here. However, in table 7 I attempt to sum up some salient features of at least four very different vernacular concepts of Burmese law. Two of these are believed to operate 'universally', i.e. independently from any particular government or even government in general. A third type is thought of as only operating 'locally' on the basis of being 'promulgated' by a particular government or even by a person perceived to have authority. A fourth was introduced by the British in the early 19th century, and later adopted to some extent by Burmese royalty – my understanding is that *tayà úbadei* is a relatively recent compound word used in Burmese law. Of these the *dhamma* is sometimes referred to as 'cognitive' since it questions the legal issues in terms of the broadest framework without primary reference to sensorily derived features of the material world, while the latter three operate very much nominatively, namely on the basis of sensory experience of the material world.

In my view then, the above problem arises from the fact that the Burmese concepts of law addressed by the two parties operate somewhere across the spectrum of these conceptions of law. They roughly correspond to dispensing justice and decree respectively; exponents of the democracy movement demand the first, but they are subjected to the latter.

Universal laws

The two important cosmological concepts of that law the NLD appeals to are those that have some

¹ ASSK (1997a:233–34).

Table 7. Attributes of diverse legal systems operating in Burma

	Pre-colonial legal systems			Colonial and post-colonial legal systems
	1. Dhamma	2. Dhamma-that	3. Yaza-that	4. Tayà úbadei
Buddhist	v	(v)		
Secular (<i>loki</i>)		v	v	v
Universal	v	v		v
Local/national		v	v	v
Representative ¹		v		v
Unrepresentative ²			v	
Regime				
- proclaimed	v	v		v
- actual			v	
NLD				
- desired	v			v
1. Updated by complex legislation with local representation 2. Updated simply by issue of royal decree V present; (V) variable.				

independence from government and are to varying degrees in principle trans-local or universal. Both are heavily dependent on Buddhism.

1. *Dhamma* [Dm̥] or *tayà* [tra:] is ‘cosmological law’, ‘natural law’, the eternal law of the universe, which the Buddha realised, which he taught and which can be realised by all through mental culture according to the Buddhist path (i.e. incorporating *vipassana*).

The term ‘meet with the *dhamma* (*tayà*)’ [tra:etəv] means both, to be engaged in a law suit and to discover a new precept or important truth while meditating. When Saw Maung invited the student refugees in Thailand back to Burma he used the concept of ‘seeing the truth [*tayà*]’ [tra:mh] in person for themselves in this sense. However, the NLD argue that such use of law is cynical, for there is no fair legal representation and the army’s actions are not based on the *dhamma*.

The *dhamma* system is based on supreme wisdom, generated by the attainment of *vipassana* supported by *samatha* and the perfection of virtue and the ten *parami*. By these means the Buddha eventually gained his enlightenment and was able to see all causes and effects objectively. Since *dhamma* is codified in the Pali texts and maintained by relatively autonomous monks, and is based ultimately on personal realization of ultimate truth rather than collective realization of a conventional truth, this is a difficult system for government to alter and interfere with. It is not, furthermore, narrowly pre-occupied with mundane concerns happening here and now.

On the *dhamma* rests the ultimate concept for legitimacy of the State. Indeed, the *dhamma* was a product of the Burmese State. Historically, the measures involved in the introduction of the *dhamma*, and the royal prerogative to uphold it have produced the Burmese State. By appealing to a higher good beyond substantive difference, the *dhamma* has historically modified the authority proclaimed by local landlords and local spirits (See Appendix 1). Its broad reach, as I will show later, permitted the resolution of many inter-ethnic and inter-cultural conflict situations.

2. The *dhammathat* [Dm̥t] concerns a collection of customary rules and precedents. Though it places universal law within the boundaries of the king, it retains a universal appeal that transcends these boundaries. Manu came into the services of the king because the people discovered his talents of legal judgement as a young cow herder. He was elevated to the position of judge by the king. The judge made a serious judicial error pertaining to ownership of a cucumber, whose roots were in one garden and fruit in another. He judged the cucumber to be owned by the garden in which the fruit lay, whilst the roots supplied the nutrition and were laboured in the other garden. Feeling inadequate as a judge and with insufficient *samadhi*, he reversed the decision after disapproval by the people and the devas. He asked permission from the king to leave his services as judge, and instead become a hermit and practise asceticism, which the king allowed him to do. He then discovered the full text of the law in the heavens whilst in the state of *jhana* and *samadhi*.

Though having at its foundation some Brahmanic ideas of law that are not necessarily specifically Buddhist, the *dhammathat*, as the designation *dhamma* indicates, are more or less subject to Buddhicisation,

depending on the extent to which the Buddhist teachings were woven into the particular work in question.

Unlike the *dhmma*, which is based on an unchangeable source, the *dhmmathat* have undergone alterations over time. Known as ‘mirrors of the society of the day’,¹ they are often written down at the behest of royalty. In particular, they were formulated during and just after major conquests during which the territory was enlarged. This was the case with Alaunghpaya's conquest. The *dhmmathat* is associated variously with Brahmanisation, Sanskritization, Buddhicisation and Burmanisation, depending on its contents at any particular time. It stands at the interface between the universal and the local, and changes its content historically to accommodate local needs and requirements. That is why there are so many versions of the *dhmmathat*.²

Local laws

3. *Yazathat* [ရဇာဓိပတိ] Maung Maung Gyi reminds us that Burma is not a law-of-contract but a law-of-status society. Laws do not operate on the impersonal and contractual plane, to which all people can subscribe. Instead, it emanates from the personalities in power, for whom the laws serve to eliminate potential rivals. Laws are made and broken by those who manage to extort the highest personal form of address, not for the benefit of society as a whole, but primarily to serve those in power. This leaves little or no place for political opposition in Burmese political culture. The royal rulings are the most narrow concept of law, constituted mainly by pronouncements or ‘orders’ [အမိန့်တော်] by individual rulers as they see fit. The king's word was law. However, in practice the king ‘seldom went against tradition or religion of the majority of his subjects’.³ The *yazathat* are included in the royal orders kept in the Shwe Taik in the Palace Archives, and these were compiled and translated by Than Tun covering the period 1598–1885, and published by Kyoto University between 1983–90.

Foreign laws in Burma

As I have pointed out in Appendix 1, the first two concepts of law are both crucially dependent on certain techniques of mental culture that permit transcendence of the locality. Successful practice is supposed to lead people to change their minds to the extent that they will naturally become inclined to understand and observe law and order. ‘To practise mental culture’ is ‘to apply oneself to the *dhmma*’ [တရားအာတုတရား] where *dhmma* can be used to refer to the ‘attainment of *nibbana*’ or the ‘Buddha's teachings’ (*tipitaka*). However, it could also mean ‘justice’ and ‘law’.⁴

Moreover, of these three concepts, the first and the second interact to a significant extent. The first, based on *lokuttara* and ultimate truth, proposes no spatialised boundaries. And it universalises, greatly influencing and lending credibility to the second, which has at its core the mundane realm (*loki*) and is preoccupied with localised conventional truth. The meaning of the *dhmmathat* concept of law-in-the-shadow of *dhmma* is implied, for example, in the use of learned monks as reliable and independent legal witnesses to contracts. However, as these are presupposed to encompass truth, *dhmma* is not concerned enough with the intricacies of mundane existence and is not therefore particularly responsive to changes in particular circumstances. The *dhmmathat*, based largely on revelation through *samatha*, is still not readily updateable to new legal circumstances as they arise.

The latter two forms of law are normative, i.e. they are strictly based on the assertion of an eternal substance, *atta*, which runs counter to the first, specifying that at the level of ultimate truth there can be no *atta*, that the cycle of life is impermanent (*anicca*), and necessarily perpetuates suffering (*dukkha*). The third concept of law is highly responsive to the mundane world, but on the whim of whoever takes the authority to promulgate the laws in their own interest as ruler. The point then, is that the broader the domain is that these laws purport to govern (their cosmological reach), the more they are dependent on influence (*awza*) and the less easily the laws can be enforced or updated. On the other hand, the more easily updated they are, the narrower their reach and the easier it is to enforce these through *ana*. Buddhism permitted the domain of the Burmese State, a Buddhist state, to arise by virtue of its ability to transcend local systems, and the *dhmmathat* was a sufficient compromise between local laws and the *dhmma* so that the kingdom could increase its size.

¹ Maung Maung (1965:9).

² Professor Ryuji Okudaira is currently making a comparative study of several versions of the *Manugye Dhammathat*.

³ Than Tun (1983–90, I: vii).

⁴ For a detailed analysis of this concept see Than Tun (1978:77–90).

4. *Tayà-úbadei* [t̪raːˈped]. Until Mindon's time, there was no concept of law that was systematically updated to reflect new social circumstances and new legal problems as and when these arose. The ideal of an independent yet regularly updated and cumulative legal system that does not just serve the king, but also protects his subjects from unreasonable demands and from corruption, are features of a fourth concept of law, namely the *úbadei*. This was instituted under King Mindon in an attempt to emulate the British legal system operative in Lower Burma, after it was realised that it conveyed considerable economic advantage and power to the British polity.

At the same time, Mindon's rule has been associated with a decrease in influence of Brahmins in the royal court (and the concept of *atta*) as compared to previous kings, a relative decrease in emphasis on non-Buddhist forms of *samadhi* as a source for law, and an increase in the influence of Buddhist or *vipassana* inspired cosmological ideas of law.¹

Only local laws?

The regime thus insists that laws are Burmese in nature and apply locally – something which foreigners find impossible to understand.² However, such is unresearched and wishful thinking.

With national independence Burma inherited the British legal system that had operated in the country for more than a century and a half. Over the years the British made many studies of the Burmese legal system on which they published in some detail from the very earliest years of colonial rule. For most of that time the vernacular and the colonial laws operated side by side, in which each system was modified in response to the other. For example, just as the British sought to incorporate local ideas about marriage and inheritance, so also during the last sixty years of Burmese monarchy the last two generations of Burmese kings increasingly incorporated British ideas to gain the same benefits as the legal principles that protected constitutional liberalism under British rule in Lower Burma. Though the 1989 martial law directives are the legal basis of investment in Myanmar, it is the British laws that are internationally considered Burma's greatest asset, attracting foreign companies to invest in the country.

Some aspects of legal developments in modern Burmese law are described by Andrew Huxley, a specialist on Burmese law.³ First, his view is, as do most legal specialists, that Burma since 1988 the declaration of martial law has experienced a legal crisis. The State has been 'delegalized'. Declaration 1/90 proclaims to set aside all legal principles so as to prevent 'the disintegration of the Union, the disintegration of national unity and the perpetuation of sovereignty'. However, in doing so the regime 'has an aching gap in its constitutional, legal and political discourse'. Second, the legal situation had already come to a crisis under the Ne Win regime, when Maung Maung introduced a 'radical legal decolonization' – i.e. to reintroduce Burmese values into what were mostly English laws. These attempts attained their height in 1972 when Maung Maung recast the legal professions 'on entirely un-British lines' with an attack on the separation of powers doctrine. Legislature, executive and judiciary were all joined up into one and the bureaucracy associated with these were liquidated in the name of 'the system of peoples' justice'. At that point law became an adjunct of one-party BSPP politics, and the legal process began to be guided by non-lawyers. The 'moral rules of conduct' it operated on, harked back to pre-colonial times, and ensured that 'the Bar could no longer serve as a refuge for opponents of Ne Win'. As a result, however, the legal profession in Burma has been dying a death because there is no demand for lawyers as they hardly have any role in court. The local organization of this legal system was a failure, and courts were so crowded with cases that appeals could no longer be heard. U E Maung, the legal reformer under U Nu, was never in favour of such legal decolonization.

If Burma cannot excise British law entirely from its legal system, neither can the regime return to operate solely by the pre-colonial vernacular forms of law. The Burmese vernacular legal system has historically depended on the individual king in power. Hence, even if the regime wanted to go return to pre-

¹ Toshikatsu Ito. Personal communication. Toyohashi, June 1989.

² 'In simple terms, do not measure or compare your laws with ours. We have our own country and our own laws. The laws are made for a people residing within a border demarcated for a country and based on the conditions of the country and the people, its customs and traditions and social relations. If a foreigner looks at our country with the laws that he knows, he will be mistaken. If he makes such statements, it means that his outlooks are wrong and his views are clouded. They should know that this outlook of theirs limits, suppresses and threatens our sovereign rights and freedom. ... In short to be free and fair is to respect the laws and to act according to the laws.' (Saw Maung 1990b:341).

³ Andrew Huxley. 'The last fifty years of Burmese law: E Maung and Maung Maung'. *Law Asia*, 1998, Vol. 17, pp. 9–20.

colonial law, Burma is today no longer a kingdom and the army generals are not kings. The world has changed. Returning to pre-colonial law is an impossibility.

The regime cannot cope with hybridity in the legal system, as it wishes to draw absolute boundaries between ‘local’ and ‘foreign’ laws. However, it cannot avoid the question that many of its current laws are based on foreign laws. It is ironic that it is the century-old laws Burma inherited from the British, such as the Village Act, that are currently being used to detain and arrest activists in Burma. There is no doubt that by not distinguishing between and enlightening themselves on at least four *different* local ideas of law, the army will continue to be locked in a situation of conflict. Its framework of the (non-)law will show cracks that can no longer be forcibly mended by arms alone.

It would be presumptuous to say that in introducing the *úbadei* legal system Mindon was trying to introduce a local concept of updateable local law that at the same time supported universal human rights. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that this is the case. In particular, the writings of Mindon's minister U Hpo Hlaing, who was involved in these reforms, evolved into the concept of ‘traditional democracy’ (see below) and evolved with demands for reform in government generally (with the popularisation of *vipassana* within the court as a way of uprooting *atta*). His views closely correlate to new ideas of law that see the individual as the ultimate self-responsible agent in society, capable of realising *anatta* and attaining *nibbana* through *vipassana*. He was concerned with reducing the centrist view implied in the arbitrary royal rulings (*yazathat*) proclaimed from a self-interested royal point of view.

Today, the regime's most common expression for law is *tayà-úbadei* [**t**ra:ˈped], suggesting that it is a locally updateable legal system using universal criteria, and use of *tayà* places Buddhist legitimacy behind it. However, though Burma formally inherited the British system of law, as I have noted, legal analysts agree that there is no independent judiciary and senior members of the regime promulgate laws by self-interested decree. The legal system does then, indeed operate according to local traditions, but it does so without containing the old legal profession or any of the universal elements – i.e. it operates only along the *local* localised *yazathat* tradition. However, since *yazathat* was insufficient even in a kingdom, which always required the open and universal elements that were part of the *dhamma*, the regime is not, in fact, operating according to these local laws either.

Paradoxically the regime has used the law to justify its actions when in fact it ignores the law and extensively uses military tribunals to deal with its opponents. Furthermore, it makes no distinction between legislature, executive and judiciary, and simply rules by decree.

In a liberal democratic system, protest and dissent between different interests is resolved peacefully because both the authorities and the protestors have a separate realm of impartial and universal concepts of justice in which refuge may be sought at times of crisis, albeit in a localised sense. However, in the current authoritarian imitation of localised *yazathat* laws political opposition are interpreted as open conflict and criminal acts whereby local laws are not respected and bounds and frameworks are transcended.

Rather than a neutral concept permitting and encouraging trust to impartially resolve disputes, law has thus become an instrument for territorialising and entrenching the army within what it considers its very own domain beyond army-civilian and beyond Burman-ethnic and religious divisions, working as Saw Maung himself stated.

Regional control in effect means effective rule of law and order, prevalence of peace and tranquillity and freedom for the people to live peacefully without having to worry about the threat of destructive elements.

In enhancing regional control the most important thing is to make the people understand and appreciate the rule of law, to enable them to differentiate between good and bad and for them to be able to appraise and consider appropriately; and to this end, make discussion and announcement and furthermore enable the people to stand on the side of justice and righteousness and thereby keep clear of the insurgents.¹

Hence, the regime proclaims to be using a single ‘framework of the law’, where there should be multiple frameworks. I have here not even dealt with the ‘local’ legal concepts operated by the 135 ethnic groups. Indeed, when it suits, the regime even does away with a framework altogether in favour of attaining ‘regional control’. What the regime calls ‘local laws’ do not, in the end, win regional control against the insurgents. Conflation between these arbitrary decrees and the law as a universal concept of justice and righteousness is a big claim, and Saw Maung realised in this same speech that people may have some doubt about this, for he expresses his awareness that they might have ‘misunderstanding’. The misunderstanding

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:318).

here, however, is on the part of the regime for not understanding their own concepts of law as they are locally and for having a lack of respect for experts in this field making it their lifetime study. Though Ne Win was the one who started the legal confusion, at least he pretended there was an element of gathering data and research involved as input for the revision of local laws when he said that 'we must try and find the drawbacks and defects in the laws and their practices of the past, and make the laws we are going to write conform to the times'.¹ Even this pretence is absent under the regime today.

Law and constitutional liberalism

Britain's colonies, including Burma, were based on a system of constitutional liberalism, not democracy. This system characteristically endowed many of these countries with a basis for democracy. As of 1983, as Zakaria argued, 'every single country in the Third World that emerged from colonial rule since the Second World War with a population of at least one million (and almost all the smaller colonies as well) with a continuous democratic experience is a former British colony' moved into democracy.² This contrasts with the French model adopted by most non-western countries which, based on the concept of unlimited power for the people, eradicated the complex checks and balances of power and contributed to a lesser emphasis on democratic government in the independent Francophone colonies.

Though undoubtedly the British had their self-interests and were exploiting Burma for their own ends, nevertheless, as a British colony with experience of constitutional liberalism, Burma would, according to Zakaria, therefore appear to have a better basis for democracy than Portuguese, Spanish, French or Dutch colonies. Zakaria worries that whereas 'constitutional liberalism has led to democracy', 'democracy does not seem to bring constitutional liberalism'. His argument is that while constitutional liberalism is about 'the limitation of power', democracy is about 'its accumulation and use'. Democracy is too readily turned into an oppressive mechanism under a centralised authority by unconstitutional means which 'usurps' horizontally (from other branches of government) and vertically (from regional and local authorities, and from businesses and NGOs). Democracy must be accompanied with legal reform to ensure checks and balances on power of the State and interest groups.³ This legal issue in Burma needs to be resolved with urgency. Without legal reform the idea that it might even crawl towards democracy can simply not be entertained. Like a cuckoo, the army will simply unseat anything in its nest without regard to life or property.

Local laws, Aung San Suu Kyi and the cucumber problem⁴

I have already noted that the regime's perspective on Aung San Suu Kyi is that she did not rightfully inherit her father's name, for 'according to Myanma customary law and Myanma Dhamma Rules, a bad and evil offspring shall not have the right to get inheritance from one's parents' because, supposedly, 'instead of preserving the race of her parents, the Myanmar race which [her] father greatly loves, she destroyed it by mixing blood with an Englishman'.⁵ In this particular case, she is accused of collaborating with the English in the assassination of Aung San.

There are three major problems with this interpretation. First, as is well known, Burmese Buddhists cannot make a will, for here 'no one has power to disinherit his or her heir'.⁶ Inheritance is 'by intestate succession only'.⁷ Under local laws, Aung San Suu Kyi cannot be disinherited by her father. Stating the contrary demonstrates a lack of understanding of its fundamental principles.

Second, just because Aung San Suu Kyi married an Englishman does not mean that she has thereby become English or foreign – her passport is Burmese. This follows both British and even Burmese local law. To return to the Manu text, there is parallel between Manu's seventh failed decision, which caused his fall as

¹ Address delivered by General Ne Win, Chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party at the closing session of the Fourth Party Seminar on 11 November 1969, p. 3.

² Myron Weiner. 'Empirical democratic theory', in Myron Weiner and Ergun Zibudun, eds., *Competitive elections in developing countries*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1987, p. 20. Cited in Fareed Zakaria. 'The rise of illiberal democracy.' In *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The argument here was elaborated in more graphic detail in a conference paper 'Manu's state of mind: samadhi and the transformation of legal identity.' Paper delivered at the Colloquium on Burma Studies, Center for Burma Studies, Northern Illinois University, 25–27 October 1996. This has been documented with illustrations in 'Burma or Myanmar? The cucumber and the circle.' *International Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter* No 12, Spring 1997, pp. 20–21.

⁵ Po Yaygyan. 'Adrift and washed ashore'. *NLM*, 09.05.1997.

⁶ Sisir Chandra Lahiri. *Principles of modern Burmese Buddhist Law*. Graduate Friends & Co., 1925, p. 102.

⁷ Maung Maung (1963:103).

minister and judge, and the regime's misjudgment of Aung San Suu Kyi. When Manu decided that the cucumber belonged to the owner of the garden in which the fruit lay, the people and the devas did not applaud, and so he was forced to make a less rigid division of legal rights, admitting, this time to applause, that fruits have their legal place in the land where they are rooted. By all accounts, Aung San Suu Kyi represents Manu's classical legal problem of ownership of the cucumber. Her roots are in Burma – she is the daughter of Burma's independence fighter and is in every respect Burmese in origin. However, her fruits lie on the outside – she is married to an Englishman and her children live abroad, her reputation is international and the world's eyes are on her. The regime has been unable to cope with this ambiguity. They call her Mrs Aris and attempt to disqualify her from political office by virtue of being married to a foreigner, which indicates that they want to see her and present her to the Burmese people as a foreigner by the sanction of local laws.

Third, if the regime is prepared to argue that Aung San Suu Kyi is 'foreign' according to local law than they will have to do so by demonstrating first by equitably considering *all* local laws (including those that might not agree with them) that her father was not a Buddhist and that therefore Buddhist customary law does not apply to his daughter. However, to accuse her father thus would be also be to question their own legal right to exist, for they, too, are ultimately children of Aung San, though it be through the intermediary of Ne Win. The cucumber problem of Aung San Suu Kyi is also theirs. At this point, of course, the army's self-evident lack of legitimacy makes it convenient for Aung San amnesia to set in. However, to assassinate Aung San Suu Kyi's image through Aung San, would mean to re-assassinate Aung San, and to liquidate themselves in the process.

The SLORC is an abbreviation of State Law and Order Restoration Council, but the concept of law handled by the SLORC-SPDC is a foreign concept, even from a local point of view. It is a difficult concept to grasp – for it is neither local nor foreign in origin. In the *Manugye*, Manu recognized in time his mistake of attributing ownership of the cucumber to the neighbouring garden. When will this regime? The *Manugye* provides the limiting case that demonstrates the dangers for the regime of Myanmarfication as an instrument of framing and bounding Myanmar at the exclusion of everything else, runs counter to Burmese customary law. Cucumbers have long roots and long creepers, and they often grow between gardens. To imagine a perfect boundary is not only unrealistic, but it is to invite problems that can never be resolved. As with judge Manu, there is the need for a lot more *samadhi*, until *jhana* level at least, to even know the laws, let alone dispense them. It is time to for the army to renounce.

Myanmar culture

It was Saw Maung who originally – though admitting socialism as having died a death – stressed continuity in the uniquely *Burmese* quality of government from the BSPP.¹ It is not socialism that has continuity with the past, but its very *Burmeseness*. This emphasis translates into the third of the SPDC's requirements of disciplined democracy is that it must be 'in line with historical traditions, customs and culture of nationality'. This is rather similar to the second of the SLORC's Four Social Objectives, namely 'uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character' [ZM3]. This informs and supports all the other objectives.

At the heart of the Myanmarfication project is the search for a single dominant Myanmar national culture that could be respected both internally and externally. Nawrahta links the renaming Burma-Myanmar renaming directly to the latter.² And indeed, it was Saw Maung who early on created overlap between the boundaries of the nation state, the law and culture when he warned foreigners,

do not measure or compare your laws with ours. We have our own country and our own laws. The laws are made for a people residing within a border demarcated for a country and based on the conditions of the country and the people, its customs and traditions and social relations.³

In this respect a particularly important symbol has emerged – the new National Museum. U Aung San, the Minister of Culture, describes its purpose in *The National Museum*, its first official guide, as 'performing

¹ '... It was neither Socialism nor Capitalism. Our Myanmar Naing-ngan had an 'ism' of its own. It was the most significant in the world. It was 'the system of correlation of man and his environment.' It is neither capitalism nor communism ... It opposed any form of exploitation of man by man and prescribed that one shall enjoy the benefit in proportion to one's physical, mental and diligent efforts.' Saw Maung (1990b:243–44).

² Nawrahta (1995:13–44).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:341).

the duty to implement the two [social] objectives'.¹ Indeed, the museum represents these objectives not just symbolically but in reality.

The National Museum preserves and safeguards the ancient cultural heritage which reveal, and are indications of the country's prestige and course of history. As such, the National Museum may well give reason for a heightened national pride and spirit to all the country's citizens. At a time when the country is striving to build a new modern and developed state after laying down the political, economic and social objectives, the systematic organisation and establishment of the National Museum may be considered as, in a way, implementing the national objective.²

I will come back to the museum later, as it has become the leading platform for the presentation and unification of Burma's national culture and the pride of the nation. From the evidence below it should be clear that the regime, rather than preserving and encouraging culture, is attempting to engineer culture instead. By these means, it is trying to criminalise and kill off independent cultural expressions. Indeed, it is destroying the very culture it proclaims to preserve for by all accounts Pagan has been systematically archaeologically ruined by the generals and their concept of merit and *cetana*. Paradoxically, furthermore, though the regime's Myanmarification programme is based on the assertion of indigenous culture as part of a revival of anti-colonial sentiment, it in fact coincided with the reification of culture according to the earlier colonial models of culture-as-civilization, in which race, language, religion and culture are all presumed coterminous. This programme of cultural activities, hastily arranged to manufacture a new source of legitimacy, places the idea of Burmanness deeper into the past than the most recent national independence struggle to which Aung San was central, and it draws attention away from the important political issues confronting the country at the moment. Aung San Suu Kyi herself feels that this is a policy of Burmanisation, i.e. it asserts a Burman ethnic name over the country as a whole, and wrongly privileges one ethnic group over another [ZC1].³ The paradox, however, is that the very definitions and ideas about culture are drawn from ancient British colonial sources, from German ideas of culture, and from introductory American anthropology text books.

Apart from Buddhism, culture has never had a particularly high priority except as a political issue to reify Burmans from the foreigners. In the name of Buddhist impermanence, pagodas and palaces have indifferently been allowed to fall into ruins without any qualms for centuries. This, the new regime says, must change. However, there are no moves to make substantive studies of cultures in Burma. Indeed, it is undesirable for the regime to finance such studies under the current confused political priorities. However, not to spend any time analysing either their own culture, or those of the 135 ethnic groups that they are currently repressing, shows how serious they are about culture.

Culture and anti-colonial resistance

Khin Maung Nyunt argues that 'history and culture which are Myanmar cultural resources have fashioned our Myanmar national independence and identity', and therefore 'it is by them that Myanmar national existence has to be retained with her inherent resilience'.⁴ The slogans that emphasize culture as the backbone of Burma are grounded in the Burmese political conscience of the first decades of this century. Back then, as the Burmese were coming to terms with complete colonial domination since 1886, they responded by asserting their Buddhism, culture, race and language. The politics of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) included cultural values to help defend the country from contamination by colonial values, including prohibiting Burmese women from marrying foreigners.⁵ Thahkin Kodawhmaing's earliest political writings gave this a sharp edge. He sought 'Burma for the Burmans', the revival of old culture, dress and Buddhism as a defence against western ways. He accused foreigners of taking Burmese wives (as in *Boh Tika*) whose offspring would not be patriotic Burmans. Later, in the 1920s under the

¹ See [ZM3a] III. The Four Social Objectives, points 2 and 3.

² Thida Tun. *National Museum*. Rangoon: Department of Cultural Institute, Union of Myanmar Ministry of Culture, 1996.

³ Bertil Lintner quite rightly says that 'It is absolute nonsense for the regime to claim that Myanmar is really the more correct term. Germany has never been called Deutschland in English.' ('Change to Myanmar still tongue-twister'. *South China Morning Post*, 21.01.1998). Nevertheless, many Burmese feel that name change is desirable. However, most also agree that the way it was done by SLORC and their reasons for it are highly suspect. A famous writer, whose name I shall not mention here, said about the name change of the country, 'It must be done by men, not by dogs [SLORC]'.

⁴ Khin Maung Nyunt (1998a:171).

⁵ Anti-British sentiments were first expressed at the YMBA in the 1917 Pinyinman conference when: they decided not to accept the recommendation of the Imperial Idea Committee (appointed in 1916 by the British government to find out means to propagate British imperialism at schools in Burma) that an Englishman should be appointed as principal of a school, and they voted the Burmese girls should not marry foreigners.

General Council of Burmese Associations [တပ်မတော်အလင်းအဖွဲ့အစည်း] the concept of Burmanness [တိဗ္ဗမာ] became a platform to assert nationalism and Burma's independence. This lasted until the 1930s when these turned into the main secular political platform of the 'Dobama Asiayone' Party from which emerged modern politicians such as Aung San and U Nu, whose ideas took Burma into the era of national independence.

However, Aung San, dominant towards the end of the 1930s and early 1940s eliminated culture and religion from the national political platform. Even early U Nu saw little point in identifying politics with any definite ideas about either religion or culture. It was not until political support for the ruling AFPFL was seriously weakened, and after a major split in its ranks, that U Nu began to assert Buddhist values as a central concern in politics.

By contrast, the Ne Win regime, though interpreting Aung San selectively, returned to Aung San's stance of not committing national politics to religion. Though Maung Maung portrays Ne Win in his biography as a Buddhist who was ordained a novice, who came to power with *cetana* and with the *metta* of the people, Ne Win wanted to 'clean up religion'.¹ Predominantly, however, his emphasis was on a secular politics. He described politics as being about secular or 'conventional truth' (i.e. not U Nu's 'ultimate truth'). In this 'secular' (*loki*) politics, culture turned into a central concern. It has been argued that during this period what is widely regarded as the 'nationalization of the society and the Burmanization of its culture' had already taken place,² and that after the new Constitution of 1974 this emphasis on 'local culture, language, and history' gave way to 'national culture, language, and history'.³

Under the Ne Win regime there was a notional policy of recognizing 'complete equality' for the ethnic groups. This included a new way of classifying the various national groups, including the removal of concepts such as 'racial minorities' and 'nationalities' [လူမျိုး] from official usage, and abolishing lists of groups 'according to population strength', so that since 12 February 1964 Union Day 'the official list of races has been proclaimed according to Burmese alphabetical order'.⁴ After 1988, Saw Maung agreed with this policy and said that use by foreigners of terms such as 'ethnic' [လူမျိုး] and 'minority' is 'not good' since it represented the 'divide-and-rule policy of colonialists'. Like Ne Win, he preferred the designation 'national races' [ဘာသာ].⁵

Post-1988 expressions of culture

Since Ne Win's resignation, and in particular after the elections were sufficiently weakened in their legitimacy. There was a need to radically bolster and re-invent this identity around which to build the necessary instruments of control over the country. It involves a narrow sense of racial identity and a retreat to the earliest culture-and-religion type of politics that characterised Burma in the first two decades of this century.

The regime's journalists even replicate the early 'boycott' type politics of the past with which this was associated. For example, at the time of the 1998 Asian currency crisis, the author Pauk Sa argued that 'patriotism originates from locally-manufactured goods', recalling the 1919 boycott of foreign goods that accompanied the claim to indigenous culture as an expression of 'domestic democracy'.

I, Pauk Sa, am singing aloud the song 'domestic product' to urge people to use domestic products and reduce use of foreign exchange for the economic development of the country; to build a domestic family by marrying your own nationality; to use domestic democracy suitable for your own country, tradition, and culture; and to strive for the establishment and development of a new nation with full faith in domestic products, domestic family, and domestic democracy.⁶

An early indication of the importance of culture and tradition is already to be found in General Saw Maung's speeches. For example, he admonished people to 'preserve worthy Myanmar traditions', and it was his view that Burma 'is the only country that can maintain its traditions'.⁷

A stream of reports on the restoration of ancient cultural and Buddhist properties, associated with both royalty and Buddhism, bears witness to the way the production and display of national cultural material has been prioritised. Although the Aung San Museum may be neglected, this is nevertheless a museum period.

¹ Maung Maung (1969a:435,437,439,445–46).

² Silverstein (1980:11–2).

³ Silverstein (1980:242).

⁴ 'The Peoples of Burma'. In *A Handbook on Burma*. Rangoon: Directorate of Information, 1967.

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:268,324).

⁶ Pauk Sa. 'Local product use urged to help economy.' *NLM*, 29.01.1998.

⁷ Saw Maung (1990b:268).

There are now museums in every state, including a major Buddhist museum in Sagaing opened in 1996.¹ Indeed, the idea of museums has now caught on so well that Pagan is characterised as 'a living museum',² and there is even the 'Drug Eradication Museum' in the Shan States that opened on 22 April 1997 and is supposedly 'a popular tourist site' for the Chinese.³

A typical article in the government press praises such support for the restoration of culture in Pagan as follows:

In addition to its endeavours toward all-round national progress, development of border areas and national races, consolidation of national unity, perpetuation of sovereignty, etc., Myanmar at present is implementing enormous projects to preserve and restore our ancient heritage.

Many of the ancient pagodas and religious monuments [are] near collapse in Bagan, the showcase of ancient Myanmar traditions and culture, have been restored to their original style. And plans are under way to repair, renovate and rebuild the remaining invaluable edifices of the centre of the First Myanmar Empire, founded by King Anawratha over 900 years ago.

The history of Bagan has proved that we Myanmars forged national unity and built a strong and powerful nation in which all citizens enjoyed the rights and the fruits of prosperity equally.

The religious edifices and stone inscriptions still existing today are firm evidence of the prosperity, unity, strength, intelligence and religion of the highly cultured ancient Myanmars.⁴

It then says that 'these ancient cities and empires are proof that we Myanmars have been highly civilized for over hundred of years and built the Union with the harmonious strength of all nationalities' and that 'the entire nationalities unitedly and harmoniously lived in weal or woe and in hand in hand under their own monarchs, helping each other for hundreds of years.' The article concludes that this is 'another example of implementing the social objective – uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character.'

It should be emphasized here that authority (*ana*) style army politics has a penchant for ancient culture and palace heritage. Intellectuals in Burma hold the view that Ne Win himself is believed to search for evidence that he is of royal blood, and that he brought forward the Mandalay historian U Maung Maung Tin in the hope that he would prove his royal heritage as being derived from the Prince of Prome (ပုဂံမင်းကြီး). This blood-line style heritage is also aspired to by the band of generals in power, and their Myanmarification is in part at least an attempt to legitimise themselves as appropriate inheritors of royal power. As yet, however, no individual member of the regime has dared to come forward and personally claim royal heritage. Not, at least, while Ne Win is alive.

Culture and the generals

The most influential generals in the regime both initiate and continue to be deeply involved in the issue of culture. The national importance of culture within the Myanmarification programme means that the Chairman of the Central Committee for Revitalization and Preservation of Myanmar Cultural Heritage is none other than the most powerful personality in the regime, namely Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt. At one meeting in 1995, he called for the preservation of 'Myanma culture' by means of 'the use of authoritative power'.

At the time that some are doing business using means contradicting traditional culture, film and theatrical artistes and vocalists are also directly imitating wanton dress, style and habits of rowdy and unruly youths of the West which aggravate the situation, calling for the use of authoritative power to preserve Myanma culture ...⁵

He forbade Burmese businessmen doing business with foreigners from 'directly introducing copied-Western culture into Myanmar society', fearing that this might cause the 'spread of adverse behaviour that may harm the nation's dignity and culture'. He emphasized that women were abused in night-clubs for profit, and explained that the Ministers of Culture and of Religious Affairs had met entertainers to explain in detail 'norms to preserve culture'. Action would be taken against 'those artistes and restaurant owners who do not abide by the rules, those who continue their decadent behaviour at receptions', and against 'those who secretly open Western dance courses'. The preservation of culture and customs by everyone would ensure that 'Myanmar's prestige will be high among other nations'. He warned that 'Myanmars are the top among Asians in preserving their traditional culture which is based on Buddha's Teachings' and pointed out

¹ *MP*, April 1997.

² 'Splendour of Pagan'. *IS*, 26.01.1998.

³ 'Secretary and work committees of CCDAC meet'. *IS*, 12.12.1997; *MP*, February 1998.

⁴ 'Restoration of ancient heritage'. *NLM*, 01.08.1997

⁵ Khin Nyunt's address at Special Refresher Course No 15 for Basic Education Teachers, Hlegu Township, on 1 April 1995. In 'Khun Sa conniving with foreign and anti-Government organizations and KNU for his existence'. *NLM*, 02.04.1995

that 'an ideal culture of the orient will be lost if we do not preserve it.'¹

General Than Shwe, Chairman of the Peace and Development Council, on two National Day speeches emphasized culture more than he emphasized Aung San. On the occasion of the 77th Anniversary of National Day in 1997, Than Shwe had no longer any need to refer to the heritage of Aung San, but he replaced it with the concept of 'preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage'.

In every independent nation, the nationalist spirit of the entire people should be kept alive and dynamic and the entire mass of the people united for perpetuation of independence and sovereignty. Hence, there are two objectives calling for *uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character* and uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit included in the four social objectives laid down by the State.

Nowadays, neo-colonialists are directly or indirectly interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign nations through various means on the pretext of advocating democracy and human rights to help their lackeys seize power. Hence, the State Peace and Development Council, adopting non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of the national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty as national policy and laying down political, economic and social objectives, is building a modern peaceful and prosperous State with added momentum. Simultaneously, it is also firmly establishing national reconsolidation which is essential in ensuring perpetuity of a new nation where democracy flourishes based on law and discipline.

A race will not be able to safeguard the sovereignty if it lacks patriotic spirit. It is an inborn duty of the citizens to strive for uplift of dynamism of patriotism in order to achieve uplift of national prestige and integrity. The basis for the uplift of patriotic spirit is that each and every citizen will have to safeguard national prestige and integrity the same way he sustains his own life. Uplift of national prestige and integrity and uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit constitute elements of spiritual self-defence and foundation essential for perpetuation of sovereignty.²

On Independence Day the following year, General Than Shwe, again, as before, did not make any references to Aung San. This time, however, he argued that not only should culture be preserved, but it should also be completely rebuilt.

All of us could unitedly build proper political, economic and social infrastructure with zeal for emergence of a modern, developed nation. We are also preserving our culture and fine traditions so as to revitalize the dynamism of patriotism and to promote national prestige and safeguard cultural heritage. Tasks covering preservation of cultural heritage such as rebuilding and renovation of ancient Myanmar palaces and old pagodas and stupas in accord with the characteristics of the olden times and holding of Myanmar cultural literary, music, painting, sculpture and performing arts competitions and exhibitions are aimed at revitalization of a civilization.³

What is certain is that Myanmar culture as propagated today is an adjunct of the State, and is a mixture between indoctrination and instilling pride in the country. Secretary 1 of the SLORC said:

Regarding the culture sector, preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage is a national duty of every citizen. Love for the nation comes into being with love for the culture and nationality. Only when patriots emerge, who love the culture, the nationality and the nation, can sovereignty and independence be safeguarded.⁴

Culture and consolidation of the nation

The media frequently refer to 'Myanmar cultural scholars' engaged in the discussion of 'Myanmar culture'.⁵ Four academic papers assess the role of culture and tradition in nation building in the post-1988 period. In 1996 three papers were given on this subject at the 'Symposium on socio-economic factors contributing to national consolidation'. These were given by Nyunt Han (Deputy Director General, Department of Archaeology) on 'The cultural sector contributing to national consolidation' and discussions of his paper was by U Kyaw Win (Director, Dept of Cultural Institute) and U Ye Htut (Lecturer and Head, Department of the Dramatic Arts, University of Culture). In 1997, Khin Maung Nyunt gave another paper 'Myanmar culture, human resource development and nation building in Myanmar' at the Symposium on 'Human resource development and nation building in Myanmar'.

Since these papers are all written by the regime's cultural think-tank and since the authors are themselves also involved in executing the cultural programme, they offer considerable help in understanding the regime's rationale behind the emphasis on culture. They are furthermore freely distributed at US dollar prices in the many airport bookshops and as such represent officially sanctioned government views on the subject.

¹ *ibid*

² *NLM*, 24.11.1997.

³ 'State Peace and Development Council Chairman Senior General Than Shwe's message on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Independence Day.' *NLM*, 04.01.1998.

⁴ 'The closing address delivered by the Secretary 1 of the State Law and Order restoration Council at the closing ceremony of the symposium on socio-economic factors contributing to national consolidation.' In (Office of Strategic Studies 1997:245).

⁵ *NLM*, 18.02.1998.

Nyunt Han – culture in the service of national consolidation

The concept of culture as employed by Nyunt Han is fairly basic. It is limited to definitions drawn from dictionaries and from UNESCO's position on this issue. However, he provides a useful overview of the way the cultural policy is implemented and which kind of cultural projects the regime supports.

He points out that cultural policy of the State is the responsibility of the following three organizations under the Ministry of Culture:

1. Department of Archaeology – Responsible for 'presentation and preservation of Myanmar cultural heritage'.
2. Department of Fine Arts – Responsible for 'preservation and dissemination of Myanmar traditional arts and fine arts'.
3. Department of Cultural Institute – Responsible for 'preserving Myanmar cultural objects and cultural religious, social and customary objects of the nationalities, opening of museums and studying the culture and customs of nationalities'.

In July 1993, the SLORC established the Central Committee to Preserve National Heritage on the instruction of General Than Shwe, with General Khin Nyunt as Chairman. Parallel committees were formed at state, division and township level, which compiled a list of ancient edifices submitted to the Department of Archaeology. The aim is that 'preservation of the national heritage ... will contribute to national consolidation and promotion of patriotic spirit.'

He writes that 'preserving our cultural heritage, preserving cultural arts and handing down art heritage will awaken the spirit of patriotism and love of one's own culture and thus contribute towards national consolidation.' He classifies the culture-related tasks initiated by the State in four sectors.

The first sector concerns 'tasks to uplift dynamism of patriotic spirit, uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation of cultural heritage which will contribute towards national consolidation'. This includes the reconstruction of palaces, monasteries, pagodas and museums, as summarised below.

1. Reconstruction Myanansankyaw Shwenandaw, Mandalay, 1989–96. 'In the hearts of Myanmar nationals, the spirit of patriotism and the awareness that they had once lived under their own sovereignty independently and that they must protect their independence, will be aroused by seeing the reconstructed palace and this will, in turn, contribute to national reconsolidation'.
2. Reconstruction Atumashi Kyaungdawgyi monastery, Mandalay, Jan 1995–Sept 1996. 'It ... displays the skill and talent of the Myanmar, thus promoting patriotic spirit, which in turn will create national consolidation.'
3. Reconstruction Maha Weyanbontha, Amarapura, 5 Feb 1993–1 May 1995.
4. Excavation and reconstruction of Kanbawzathadi Palace, 1992. 'Originally built by King Alaungmintaya, dynamism of patriotic spirit will be uplifted.' 'By studying the reconstructed Kanbawzathadi Palace of King Bayinnaung, patriotism will be aroused in Myanmar nationals which in turn will contribute to national consolidation.'
5. Excavation and reconstruction of Shwebonyadana Mingala Nandawyar, 1995.
6. Restoration and renovation of pagodas in the cultural zone of Bagan. Of the 2230 remaining pagodas 287 have nearly collapsed. 'By donating and taking part in the preservation work of Bagan cultural heritage, the entire nation has also shown national consolidation.'
7. Greening of the cultural zone in Bagan.
8. Excavation and preservation of ancient edifices in Thayekhitaya City. 'The excavation and preservation of the ancient Pyu city, will enable people to see that in Myanmar in the olden days, the people lived in cities of high civilisation, a source of great pride to the entire nation of Myanmar. The awareness that the Myanmar are historically great promoted national consolidation and patriotic spirit.'
9. Museums were newly built to house cultural artefacts. This includes the Bagan Archaeological Museum (1995–),¹ Pakhangyi Archaeological Museum (1992–), Hantharwaddy Archaeological Museum in Bago (1991–),² Innwa Archaeological Museum (1994–).³

To these museums should be added the Sixth Buddhist Synod Sacred Museum, which was in the process of construction in September 1998.⁴

The second sector concerns 'tasks to preserve, safeguard and spread Myanmar traditional culture and art which will contribute to national consolidation'. This includes:

10. Entertainment for the people by dance troupes of the Department of Fine Arts. This includes performances at all kinds of events 'to draw the attention of the people to the need to be imbued with a patriotic spirit, thus promoting national consolidation.'

¹ The old Pagan Museum built in 1904 was too small at 60 by 30 feet, so the new 'Bagan Archaeology Museum' unveiled on 17 April 1998 is no less than 380 by 360 feet on 10.97 acres, and was built within three years. 'Inauguration of New Bagan Archaeology Museum'. *IS*, 19.04.1998. 'A new museum ornamented with Myanmar architectural designs was built and the foundation was laid in March 1995 to build the new museum designed by the architects of Public Works. The new museum has the main hall, Bagan literature hall, social and military paintings hall, architecture hall, fine arts hall, stupa and temple paintings hall and Buddhist art hall which display ancient cultural objects and exhibits.'

² Objects are being collected for a new museum planned in Bago to exhibit the Hanthawaddi and Toungoo Period (*NLM*, 11.04.1998).

³ Nyunt Han (1997:157–61).

⁴ 'Secretary-1 inspects construction of Sixth Buddhist Synod Sacred Museum'. *NLM*, 14.09.1998, p. 12.

11. Performances by Myanmar cultural troupes abroad by the Department of Fine Arts.
12. Raising and nurturing new generation of artistes to preserve culture and arts. By training at the Rangoon and Mandalay Schools of Fine Arts,¹ including classes for amateurs. At the University of Culture,² construction of which began on 24 September 1993, students can take degrees in painting, sculpture, dramatic arts and music.
13. Preserving and encouraging traditional dances and music of the nationalities.
14. Traditional performing arts competitions.³
15. Construction of modern theatres. This includes: Yangon National Theatre (1987–90), Upper Myanmar Theatre in Mandalay (1992–), and Padonmar Theatre in Sanchaung (1990–). ‘The purpose of building modern theatres by the State is to enable the people to enjoy Myanmar culture and arts, to help Myanmar culture flourish and to restore national consolidation by preserving and showing one's culture’.⁴

The third sector concerns ‘tasks to promote national consolidation and good will by promoting knowledge and understanding of the culture and customs of the nationalities’.

16. Construction and opening of the new National Museum (1990–97), Kachin State National Museum (1982–94), Kayin State Cultural Museum (1990–92), Mon State Cultural Museum (1984–90), Rakhine State Cultural Museum (1990–96), Shan State Library extension (1983–89), Mandalay Library (1985–91), Patheingyi Cultural Museum (1989–90), National Library (1995–), Kayah State Library (1990–), Chin State Library and Museum (1991–). ‘By constructing ... and displaying ... love and the spirit of goodwill among the nationals together with national consolidation can be promoted.’

17. Research on culture and customs of the nationalities. ‘By studying and becoming more familiar with the culture, customs of the nationalities, mutual understanding and respect among each other as well as national consolidation can be promoted.’⁵

The fourth sector concerns ‘tasks to promote national consolidation and uplift of dynamism of patriotism by reviving and holding traditional festivals’. This includes the following:

18. Myanmar Traditional Regatta Festival. First celebrated in 1989, ‘the objective of reviving Myanmar traditional festivals and nurturing union spirit and hereditary pride and courage’. This will ‘foster tenacity, industry, perseverance and unity among the national races’.
19. Myanmar Traditional Equestrian Festival. ‘The demonstrations of the bravery of heroes in elephant riding, horse riding, fencing, javelin throwing, the spirit of sacrifice of one's people and country will become alive and active in Myanmar.’
20. Myanmar Traditional Bullock-cart Race and Cattle Shows.
21. Rural Art and Craft Exhibition. This was held in 1992 for the duration of 100 days at Tatmadaw Hall, where household utensils were displayed from all over the country. In doing so ‘the spirit and unity of Myanmar nationals are revealed’, and it acts as a display of unity.⁶

Nyunt Han concludes with a definition of culture as follows

Culture is a heritage belonging to a certain national or race. Only when one loves one's culture, will one be able to love one's nation or race. By loving one's own culture and race, one will also come to love one's own country. It is important to uplift dynamism of patriotic spirit, which is the same as loving one's own culture, race and country. It is important for the entire nation to safeguard and preserve its own culture and independence by means of patriotic spirit. Hence the State Law and Order Restoration Council is undertaking the tasks of reviving and preserving Myanmar cultural heritage, establishing and spreading traditional arts and culture and reviving and holding Myanmar traditional festivals by spending millions of Kyats on these tasks. By doing so, patriotic spirit will be uplifted and promoted, which in turn will contribute to national consolidation.⁷

This emphasis on culture is evident in other aspects of Burma's development. For example, there is an increased emphasis on what are known as ‘traditional health practitioners’. Between 1986 and 1994 traditional medical practitioners were increased from 359 to 508, representing the second largest increase (41.5%) in human resources for health, second only to an increase in health supervisors (85.5%). By 1998, there were three traditional medicine hospitals and 178 clinics throughout the country. There is also a traditional medicine school in Mandalay with an annual intake of 100 students which, it is anticipated, will be upgraded to university level.⁸

¹ Planning is in place for a new University of Culture of Fine Arts in Mandalay. ‘Plans under way to build University of Culture (Mandalay)’. *NLM*, 02.02.1998.

² *NLM*, 02.02.1998.

³ Theatre and song are the most readily available aspect of culture in all forms of events. Great stress is therefore being placed on theatre and song. Steps have been taken to revitalize theatrical art through the annual Myanmar Traditional Cultural Performing Arts Competitions. ‘Theatrical performance is an art presented through various techniques, based on the eloquence and skill of the performers, to let the people know and appreciate traditional cultural thoughts and customs. Moreover, the audiences gain knowledge of drama language and literature which reflects things Myanmar due to the artistes’ prowess and educational inspiration based on goodwill. (‘Another step for revitalization of theatrical art.’ *NLM*, 24.06.1998).

⁴ Nyunt Han (1997:161–65).

⁵ Nyunt Han (1997:165–69).

⁶ Nyunt Han (1997:169–70).

⁷ Nyunt Han (1997:171).

⁸ Mya Oo (1998:196,198–200). The regime views traditional medicine as a way of asserting past Burman traditions against western ways. For example, ‘Myanmar traditional medicine is truly a heritage that has flourished for years countable by the thousand

'Anthropology' Kyaw Win – only wholesome culture for the nation

Anthropology Kyaw Win [မင်းခက်မင်းခက်], Director of Department of Cultural Institute, responds that culture as interpreted by anthropologists is a little more 'sophisticated than English dictionaries'. He uses Keesing's definition, 'the great anthropologist', given in the introductory anthropology text book *Cultural anthropology*, namely 'the culture of a race consists of the properties made and used by that race from birth to death, mode of dressing, the language, the vocations, ideas and concepts, religion, customs, fine arts, and performing arts. Products, behaviour and value systems as the reflections of culture'.¹

He diverges from Nyunt Han in his view of the roles of the institutions' roles carrying out the cultural policy of the State. He adds 'discovery' and removes 'display' from the functions of the Archaeology Department. As for the Fine Arts Department, this is not so much about 'disseminating', but more about 'safeguarding' traditional arts. Finally, his concept of the Department of Cultural Institute's role is so completely different, omitting 'preservation', that it is best given in full. It is 'responsible for investigating and carrying out research on Myanmar cultural artifacts, the cultural artifacts of the national races and their religion, society and customs.'

Kyaw Win devotes most of his paper to the new National Museum. He makes the point that the British never wanted to establish a National Museum for Burma as part of their intentional suppression of nationalism and sought to 'conceal the truth of Myanmar history', because otherwise 'the Myanmar people remembering how they had once proudly lived with their own sovereignty would have risen against the colonialists with nationalistic and patriotic fervour roused by the National Museum.' At the Museum 'after observing these objects, all the national races of Myanmar taking pride in our prestige and status, will become more patriotic, and national consolidation will become more firmly established.' He devotes much attention to the Thihathana Throne, one of King Thibaw's nine thrones returned by the British to Burma in 1948. The throne, an exhibit in the Museum since 18 September 1996, is 'astounding every beholder'. It was General Khin Nyunt who personally directed the architects about its display. Today 'there is no reason for the younger generation of today to lose touch with Myanmar history.'

The sight of the Thihathana Throne, would remind us of how at one time our people lived proudly with our own sovereignty, how our country fell into the hands of the invaders and lived in servitude due to the disintegration of national consolidation in the reign of King Thipaw, how our great grandparents struggled for our independence, sacrificing time, life, blood and sweat in unity, and how we regained our sovereignty. The life-long lesson, 'Should national consolidation disintegrate, our nation will become enslaved,' will be conveyed from generation to generation by that great Thihathana Throne.²

The National Museum has a gallery specifically devoted to 'the culture of national races'. He comments on the multitude of museums in the different states as follows.

These museums proudly stand as treasure houses of their respective national races. Judging from these actions, we see how much value the State has placed on the culture of the national races. The State as done this with the objectives of discovering and preserving the culture of all the national races, promoting them, fostering mutual understanding among the national races and further strengthening their friendship and intimacy.³

However, after reviewing some of the literature on the ethnic groups, we learn that the minority groups must select from their cultures only what is wholesome for the nation.

All the people of our Union will come to appreciate each other as well as their own customs avoiding what should be avoided and retaining what should be retained in their relationship by reading those books and periodicals on national culture. Hence, our unity can be further strengthened.⁴

Kyaw Win, as a man steeped in the study of anthropology, supports the study and publication of the people's cultures as 'they effectively promote mutual understanding and national consolidation'.

Ye Htut – culture as SLORC's 'light'

Ye Htut is lecturer and head of department of the Dramatic Arts at the University of Culture. Lacking even semblance of intellect, his views are even more intensely propagandistic than the others, comparing national culture to 'the light' for which we have the SLORC to thank.

In order to bring out the full glory of our great national culture and thus give a greater role to the cultural sector which contributes to national consolidation, departments, university and schools under the Ministry of Culture have seen the *Light*

contributing towards health, fitness and intellectual advancement of Myanmar people. Myanmar people relied on traditional medicine when the Western medicine was not yet widely used.' (IS, 28.10.1998).

¹ Kyaw Win (1997:175).

² Kyaw Win (1997:177).

³ Kyaw Win (1997:177).

⁴ Kyaw Win (1997:177–78).

and have had an opportunity to participate in making this *Light* brighter thanks to the State Law and Order Restoration Council's farsighted directions and enormous *cetana* with which it is carrying out the steadfast objectives.¹

National culture will prevent penetration of foreignness, for 'a nation can withstand the invasion of a foreign culture if it has a strong and solid culture and arts. Even in the case of a cultural invasion, the foreign culture would have to return to its land retracing its steps like a guest going back home after having paid a visit.'

Myanmar dance has 'race protecting moral principles', and Myanmar classical drama 'may be called traditional grand drama because it is based on Myanmar race-protecting *dhamma* ...'. His conclusion is that 'firmly establishing the culture of the spirit is an infallible way to consolidate the national culture', and 'development of the cultural sector is the same as that of national spirit which will always contribute to national reconsolidation.'

Khin Maung Nyunt's Myanmar cultural strategy – Buddhism

Emphasis on national culture is confirmed in the government-controlled media, in seminars such as 'Myanmar culture, human resource development and nation building in Myanmar', the latter being a paper presented by Khin Maung Nyunt and commented on by eminent ministry officials.² He is the main strategist behind the regime's cultural programme.

Khin Maung Nyunt regards culture as 'the major criterion to assess the quality of her people's life'. He refers to culture as the 'intangible resource', and follows German (rather than Burmese) definitions of it as 'a way of life' and 'a particular form or type of intellectual development'. Myanmar culture is composed of four strands:

- *Indigenous culture* – A 'secular' (in sense of *loki*) religion related to mode of livelihood and includes the spirit cult which 'promotes their material well-being'. Related to this is tribal ancestor worship which is 'very common among races of Mongoloid origin' based on nomad tribal ancestor-worship which permits the extended family as a social organisation.
- *Pre-Buddhist culture* – mainly Brahmanic in the field of life-cycle rituals and rituals of state, which it shares with the other culturally brahmanized nations, including Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia Brunei and Indonesia.
- *Buddhist culture* – Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism accommodated the other belief systems, so that, for example, the chief pagodas incorporated the spirit cults. However, Buddhism is a 'spiritual' religion that 'promotes the spiritual well-being of their life hereafter'. The introduction of Theravada represented 'a significant landmark in the cultural advancement of the Myanmar people.' It retained many of the other elements and took care of formal education.

The introduction of the Tipitaka to Burma by Buddhaghosa and by Arahan 'was a significant landmark in the cultural advancement of the Myanmar people'. It is 'the source of moral education for all', though education in monasteries went beyond moral and spiritual education, including all forms of knowledge, such as secular arts and crafts. The *Mangala sutta*, with its thirty-eight rules, is part of the moral education 'forms the very foundation of cultural refinement for the Myanmar people'.³ Moral obligations and social duties came with Buddhism.

In his account of Burmese culture, Khin Maung Nyunt seeks to show that, though slavery is part of Burmese pronominal reference, 'slavery in the true sense of the term had not existed in the country'. Also, gender discrimination does not exist.

Buddhist teachings brought society 'under moral control and keep it in moral balance', in particular through Majjimapatipada, Brahma vihara,⁴ and Hiri Ottapa, which are preventive, 'serve as a brake on human greed, conceit, avarice, craving and hatred', and which 'minimize the social problems arising out of material progress'.

- *Post-Buddhist culture* – This is the result less of Asian than in particular western influence, the impact of new technology and the processes of regionalisation and globalisation. This results in 'the collapse of bipolarisation', or 'minor powers have been driven into groupings for protection against this danger [of global merger]'. Burma had been in close touch with Asian countries, with which it has much in common and with which its culture was in harmony, but contact with western countries 'the story was different', for 'the impact of Western culture was more harmful than contributory to Myanmar culture'.

Having delineated the positive contribution of Buddhism, in absorbing and harmonising all indigenous

¹ Ye Htut (1997:179).

² Khin Maung Nyunt (1998a); *MP*, March 1998.

³ The *Mangala Sutta* I will later show is of crucial importance to the regime's idea of nation-building, linking to *byahma-so tayà*. This was used in ideas of national unity, political order and even systems of political ideology as far apart as traditional monarchy, socialism and democracy. See chapter 5 and chapter 19.

⁴ This is equivalent to *byama-so tayà* – see chapter 19.

and Asian kinds of culture, and the negative contribution of post-Buddhist culture, Khin Maung Nyunt then proceeds to delineate the 'Myanmar Cultural Strategy'. He argues that joining ASEAN meant taking a leap to catch up in material progress. However, development must hinge on continuity of Myanmar culture.

History and culture which are Myanmar cultural resources have fashioned out Myanmar national independence and identity. It is by them that Myanmar national existence has to be retained with her inherent resilience.

In building Myanmar into a peaceful, prosperous developed and modern nation, utilization of her national and human resources alone is not comprehensive. Culture of the people plays a vital role in the implementation of any development project. Bearing this in mind we have mapped out a strategy for now as well as for the 21st century which is now right on our threshold in which safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character is one of its twelve main objectives.

Ethnic culture, consolidation and anthropology

The regime is interested not so much in preserving culture, but rather in constructing a Myanmar culture that permits it to have people relinquish their anachronistic local cultural elements for the common good of Myanmar. As economic development and tourism advances, the last remnants of resistance will disappear, for ethnic minorities will start to play a constructive role in nation building by giving up their anachronistic 'tribal traits'. In a congratulatory tribute to the work of the Ministry of Culture, entitled 'Endless endeavours', the SPDC is depicted as having lit 'all the cultural candles of the Union', and in the process of constructing the museum it is doing away with 'such anachronistic tribal traits as vendettas, head-hunting, etc.'

Nowadays, in accordance with the four Social Objectives, the State Peace and Development Council has lit all the Cultural Candles of the Union. Splendid cultural museums have been built in the capitals of the seven states. They have been opened to the public since 18th, September 1998.

Through the restoration and promotion of national cultures, such anachronistic tribal traits as vendettas, head-hunting, etc, have been entirely rooted out, thereby restoring the good traditional customs of the national peoples will certainly stimulate advancement of their cultures. It also will promote national unity and nurture the Union spirit among them, thereby contributing to the amity among the national groups.¹

It is important to question what mechanisms were established by the regime in order to gather information about the 'national peoples', and moreover, how it proposes to 'restore' and 'promote' their cultures.

Until 1988 it was sufficient to celebrate cultural difference of ethnic minorities through their various self-contained dances on the occasion of Union Day. This way it could be said that 'the state has annually sponsored cultural shows of union dances and songs not only with a view to entertaining the people but also to highlight the various cultural aspects of the people inhabiting the Union of Myanmar.'² When I observed these performances in 1979, each ethnic group rose onto the stage as a separate entity in its own right, in their own costumes, dancing their own dances, and singing their own songs in their own language. Even if it meant little at government level, at least the idea of uniqueness of cultural uniqueness of the different groups was preserved in this contrived performance.

However, when I watched Burmese national television in June 1998, ethnic groups were being subordinated to a new overarching central concept of Myanmar culture, for all combined to dance the same dance, waving the same Burmese flag, sing the same song in the same Burmese language, under the frequent chorus of 'Us Myanmar' [တို့မြန်မာ]. The only permissible differentiating characteristic was a different costume colour for each ethnic group. Even more disturbing are the alternate clips on television of, on the one hand, army personnel digging trenches and shooting in defense of the country, and on the other hand, peaceful pagoda landscapes. The purpose is to convey the impression that the army fights for a peaceful Buddhist country by overcoming armed insurgency. In other words, the army and Buddhism will combine to level its diverse cultures into harmless representations void of agency. This way they will become responsive to a new concept of development.

Today, there is a tendency to represent Myanmar culture as a civilization in the singular. However, apart from such crude propaganda imagery, it is not easy to come to terms with what should be at the core of Myanmar culture. In the absence of a formal State ideology and in the absence of Aung San, we should not oversimplify the difficulties of the process whereby 'Myanmar culture' is created and represented.

Anthropology

Anthropology was not introduced as a subject into universities until 1951, when a new and separate

¹ *MP*, February 1998.

² Kyaw Win. 'Scintillating dances'. January 1998 (<http://www.myanmar.com>).

Anthropology Department was founded at Rangoon University.¹ Under the BSPP period, nine books were published on the customs of the major ethnic groups. This hardly dents the daunting task of describing the large diversity of Burma's ethnic groups. The regime's emphasis on culture permits scope for an expansion of this subject. However, it is unlikely to do so in any sense other than in the service of 'consolidation'.

One voice, namely the voice of 'Anthropology' Kyaw Win, is of some interest, since he is also Director of the peculiarly named Department of the Institute of Culture. With BA and MA degrees in anthropology, he worked his way up from part-time tutor at Rangoon University and later Assistant-Researcher at the Institute of Culture. Evidently a competent scholar, with a litany of national prizes for his work, Kyaw Win is keen for anthropology to become a more important subject in the future. It is therefore of some interest to examine his views.

Like most anthropologists, Kyaw Win has to make a case for the subject in a society that is ill-informed about it.

Some might feel like asking the question: Why all this activity to do research on indigenous cultures? The simple and straightforward answer is that such research is basic to all understanding and analysis of the Union races cultures, with a view to forging closer ties and working for greater development. According to a Myanmar saying, we cannot make 'wi' without 'wa', that is, we cannot build firmly or extensions without a real basis. There can be no cultural development without a clear understanding of culture.²

After describing the positive aspects of how Kyaw Win 'understands' Naga culture, praising it for its elements of familial co-operation, we then unfortunately come to its more negative aspects.

Not all customs of Nauk Aw Nagas are good and wholesome, however. Inevitably there are some practices and customs which are not desirable, and this is true not only of Nauk Aw Nagas but also of all other races and kinds of people. It is the bounden duty of all Union nationalities to retain the good and wholesome practices and to discard the bad and unwholesome ones. But first of all, there has to be knowledge and understanding of the cultures, customs and traditions.

The search for knowledge and understanding cannot succeed with the efforts of anthropologists, researchers and cultural workers only. Local residents and the nationalities themselves have to co-operate wholeheartedly with those who come to seek information and facts. Only with their unstinted help, like the assistance given by Nauk Aw Nagas, can good progress be made in learning about the indigenous cultures.

Kyaw Win thus argues that data must first be collected through anthropological fieldwork. With this attempt 'local residents and the nationalities themselves have to co-operate wholeheartedly'. Only then can the State decide which customs should be retained and which should be discarded.

The way the results of the research will be used evidently raises serious ethical questions. The information will serve to sanitise entire peoples, forcing them to conform to obviously short-sighted national goals.

This encouragement of nation-serving culture results in some interesting anthropological speculations about Myanmar culture. For example, one description holds it that the Burmese are one big family based, not on the colonial master-servant relationships, but on familial care shown between the elders and the young.

It would appear that Myanmar's view society (without thinking consciously about it) as one huge family, that society is organized around family roles, each with its prescribed role conduct, rights and obligations, with incumbents of different age and sex roles being accorded status commensurate with their respective positions in the family.

These family roles serve as patterns for behaviour in society, attitudes and conduct associated with and appropriate to different family roles being transferred and applied to govern behaviour towards strangers and between strangers as well. In other words, family values and attitudes have thus been extended to encompass the wider social sphere.

One corollary of this extension is that such stratification as exists in Myanmar society is modelled, not on the basis of master to servant, but rather on that of elder to younger. Given the essentially [egalitarian] ethos of the Myanmar family, this would appear to be a happy augury for the future of Myanmar society.³

I have already noted that Myanmar is now the preferred term for all ethnic groups watered down into a single family. In subsuming all ethnic groups under the umbrella of one big familial Myanmar culture, it is now possible for individual members to proclaim achievements for the collective. For example, we find that the Pyu civilization of the 1st century AD is presented as a positive attribute of Myanmar, i.e. as the earliest form of 'Myanmar historiography'.⁴

Culture in media and education

In training sessions for mass-media personnel it is stressed that the role of officials is to 'disseminate

¹ Nyi Nyi (1964:39).

² Kyaw Win (Culture). 'Nauk Aw Nagas'. *MP*, April 1997.

³ Sein Tu. 'Myanmar family roles and social relationships'. *MP*, September 1997.

⁴ 'Myanmar history'. *MP*, March 1998.

independence.¹

When the regime says, therefore, that the third qualification for democracy must be that it is 'in line with historical traditions, customs and culture of nationality', we realise that it is rather the opposite. Today, rather than designing the State to fit the cultures and traditions, the cultures and traditions are being made to fit the State. Burma's plurality of cultures and groups are diluted into a crude and singular unit called 'Myanmar culture' in which only the State has agency.

Modernization and business

The fourth of the regime's qualifications was 'especially democracy that brings benefits fairly for all nationals within the framework of national solidarity'. In previous sections, I argued that the army has impoverished the concept of democracy to mean 'national unity', which in practice demands 'national solidarity' with the army.² Furthermore, I have shown how Myanmar culture and tradition is being re-engineered to encompass and dilute variant local traditions and cultures. But what about the proposed benefits for the people of Burma?

The Ne Win regime emphasized Burmanization of the economy, and its 1969 report proudly proclaimed that 'the progress of Burmanization in trade and industry narrowed the scope for foreign enterprise in this country' and that 'there has since been a steady annual decrease of foreigners in Burma'.³

In *The Burmese Way to Socialism* it was stated in the Programme for Transition to Socialism that a 'Reorientation of views' was essential if the country was to develop properly. It was said that 'in marching towards socialist economy it is imperative that we first reorientate all erroneous views of our people'. Wrong views included 'to do away with bogus acts of charity and social work for vainglorious show, bogus piety and hypocritical religiosity, etc., as well as to foster and applaud *bona fide* belief and practice of personal morals as taught by ethics and traditions of every religion and culture.' In other words, it was quite clear at that time that a modern socialist nation would not appear as the result of 'bogus acts of charity and social work', 'bogus piety' and 'hypocritical religiosity'.

However, by 1988 this policy of Burmanization and nationalisation had been identified as a policy of impoverishment for the nation, and a new policy had to be adopted which gave the foreigner limited access. Myanmarfication is the attempt to reify boundaries between 'Myanmar' and 'foreign' in a different way, allowing foreigners to enrich the country, but not claim a rightful place within it. Since 1988, 'development' and 'modernisation' became new more positively-phrased instruments that would permit outsiders an easier 'entry into the legal fold'.⁴ Support for the regime's Myanmarfication process is, of course, dependent on many other indirect financial sources apart from money spent on culture and tourism. Here I would like to investigate the role of business in the regime, and to what extent the regime currently relies on funding from businesses for its Myanmarfication programme.

The regime reminds us that Myanmarfication represents not just the assertion of the traditional values, but also modernization, and that 'these two magnificent scenarios are the main attraction of Myanmar' and run parallel to one another.

Whenever the country of Myanmar is mentioned, many will recognize it as the land of ancient palaces and city walls, and where one can see many pagodas each shining in their own golden glory. It is the land where the natural beauty and the rich cultural heritage are maintained on one hand, and the tremendous efforts for modernization on the other, can clearly be seen. These two magnificent scenarios are the main attraction of Myanmar.⁵

The juxtaposition between ancient and modern Myanmar was recently reiterated by General Than Shwe on the occasion of Burma's National Independence Day.

All of us could unitedly build proper political, economic and social infrastructure with zeal for emergence of a modern, developed nation. We are also preserving our culture and fine traditions so as to revitalize the dynamism of patriotism and to promote national prestige and safeguard cultural heritage. Tasks covering preservation of cultural heritage such as rebuilding and renovation of ancient Myanmar palaces and old pagodas and stupas in accord with the characteristics of the olden times and holding of Myanmar cultural literary, music, painting, sculpture and performing arts competitions and exhibitions are

¹ Khin Maung Nyunt (1998a:170).

² For example, Saw Maung presented national solidarity as a necessity of life, for 'national solidarity is as important as is life' Saw Maung (1990b:76).

³ 'The peoples of Burma'. *A Handbook of Burma*. Rangoon: Directorate of Information, 1967.

⁴ 'You are aware of the fact that insurgent group in those areas (Kokang, Mongko, Mongla opium growing areas) are returning to the legal fold and are co-operating with us for the development of their border areas and the elimination of drug menace.' (Report made by the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control. 4th Destruction of Narcotics Drugs Ceremony, 1 July 1991).

⁵ 'The own Golden Glory' in Myanmar Today (<http://www.myanmar.com>).

aimed at revitalization of a civilization.

Stepping up the political, economic and social foundations which we have already built, all of us must strive for emergence of a new modern, developed nation with perseverance, industry and diligence.

The door is open for enhancement of scientific and technological skills to be able to catch up internationally and for human resources development.

We are also organizing exhibitions and expositions and training programmes as much as we can for industrial and technological development.¹

If Aung San Suu Kyi is seen as an outsider on the regime's hastily devised 'legal', 'traditional' and 'cultural' fold, this is also the case with modernization. In calling for a boycott of investments, she is accused of holding back State economic development. She has said that 'as long as new money comes in, the SLORC is under less and less incentive to change. The British and all the other foreign investors know this full well.'

I have shown that the army presents itself as the primary defender of the ancient Burmese ways of life. However, the army is also presented as the primary mover for the modernization of Burma. As a high ranking intelligence officer once commented a few days before the launch of the SPDC, in Burma the armed forces not only take sole responsibility for defence, but have also been 'structured as a productive establishment and render ... services to the country.'²

Taylor has argued that the 'experience of the monarchical system in Burma was such as to convince kings that they would be unable to control the private power which would probably have resulted from economic expansion and rationalization, even if this would have increased the overall resource base of society and ultimately the state.'³ Of course, we know that King Mindon, under the influence of U Hpo Hlaing and Prince Kanaung, implemented government reform, encouraged trade and introduced the printing press and the earliest newspapers. Nevertheless, if what Taylor says about the old monarchy were to hold true for the army in its attempt to emulate tradition we would expect the army to have an interest in preventing wealth from trickling into the hands of those outside its immediate sphere of influence.

Largely because of administrative incompetence, the regime has been unable to put in place an equitable tax regime which could ensure financial obligations are met, and because of its unpopularity and the prevalent corruption it is unable to effectively collect the taxes it has imposed. These circumstances offer little incentive to the regime to encourage increased wealth among its citizens – to the regime, an increase in independent private wealth translates into increased political problems. Its defence expenditure, excessive in proportion to education and social expenditure, has forced it to look towards other instruments for finance. For this purpose it has set up state-owned enterprises which provide funding primarily for military purposes. There is a multitude of state-owned economic enterprises (SEEs), of which there are now 58, mostly in non-agricultural sectors. According to varying estimates, after tax these contribute between 16.2% and 24% of GDP, and some of these are virtual monopolies. In addition there are twelve 'enterprises' owned by the Defence Ministry and administered as part of the central government. As I will argue, privatization in 1989 has not meant turning ownership of these enterprises over to the civilian population, since ownership and profits remain with the army.

Solidarity and development

'Solidarity' [ပူးတွဲမှု] and 'development' [ဖွံ့ဖြိုးမှု] are two important concepts much stressed by the regime. However, these concepts are not permitted to be shaped by ideas operating at the local level, but are instead firmly centralised to serve the process of 'nation building'. Indeed, in a recent statement by Than Shwe, he not only placed peace and stability, but also development, as prerequisites to democratization.⁴

'Good' development is closely tied to national culture and nationalism. In his keynote address to a conference on human resources entitled 'Human resource development and nation building in Myanmar', Than Nyun, Deputy Minister of Education, describes human resources as 'the most important factor for economic development'. Furthermore, he suggests that 'nation building' is wider, deeper and more complex process than economic and social development. Development is quantifiable but, as the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the successful unification of Vietnam suggest, good development is based on 'subjective

¹ 'State Peace and Development Council Chairman Senior General Than Shwe's message on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Independence Day'. *NLM*, 04.01.1998

² 'Influential Burmese officer defends army's role in politics'. *AP*, 19 November 1997.

³ Taylor (1990:38).

⁴ *Human rights questions: Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives*. Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar. United Nations, A/53/657, 10.11.1998.

unquantifiable forms such as resurgence of nationalism and national culture'.¹ Colonial powers achieved development by bringing in outside labour, but bequeathed a legacy of disunity:

without the accompanying development of patriotism the benefits were temporary. Colonialism and patriotism are contradictory in nature, therefore the benefits of colonialism always proved to be temporary. Where the colonialists managed to deeply divide the local people decolonization resulted in enormous human suffering and economic and social degradation lasting decades (or even centuries as in the case of the British Isles [Ireland]).²

Hence development must be accompanied by first establishing the cultural instruments for nation building. The coin of nation building is two-sided, 'national resilience' and 'national renewal' which are closely related. The functionalist argument goes that resilience means 'resistance from external destructive forces as well as strength to prevent internal deterioration', while renewal means 'replacement of the old with the new, yet preserving the unity and integrity of the organism'.

National resilience is concerned with 'resilience in spiritual, economic and social aspects of the nation', which at an individual level means 'deep and unshakeable commitment to the love of one's own people and culture, commitment to hard work, frugality and conservation of the nation's economic resources, and commitment to social order and stability'. At a national level, resilience means 'national solidarity', or 'the strong sense of unity and common purpose among the people of the nation'. This is represented by both a large uniform population and a high cultural level, both of which were responsible for the Myanmar having 'withstood the permeation and aggression of foreign cultural influences'.

National renewal is concerned with 'the sustained development of the nation', which at an individual level means 'the re-affirmation and renewal of one's own national identity' and 'imparting it to the coming generations all aspects of spiritual, economic and social development of the nation'.

A related view of development is sketched by Lieutenant Colonel Thein Han, Director-General of the Progress of Border Areas and National Races Department. He takes a pragmatic, if unimaginative view of culture, suggesting that it is the natural divisions such as mountain ranges, rivers and creeks that separated the national races and were productive of culture difference. To build up a national infrastructure linking these regions is the first step he advocated towards national integration, namely 'to develop ... the economic and social works and roads and communication of the national races at the border areas, in accordance with the aims which are non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of the national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty of the state'.³ Preservation of their cultures, on the other hand, takes second place.

This use of roads as a means of bringing all cultures into the Myanmar cultural orbit is confirmed by Barbara Victor, who remembers meeting Thein Han as 'Thane Han'. She refers to 'The Master Plan' initiated in 1989 involving a budget of 1.4 billion Kyats.⁴ The declared purpose for this programme is primarily to build hospitals and schools, to substitute opium crops and to develop the region. The road building projects were explained to her as necessary for the transportation of the 'new' crops to the cities. Since opium farming was illicit, it needed no roads. Myanmar culture, however, needs roads to unite its peoples.

Modernization and phantasmagoria

The army presents itself as being at the forefront of modernity. It likes to perpetuate this image by creating spectator events that Monique Skidmore aptly characterises, following Benjamin, as 'phantasmagoria'.

The emergent forms of modernism described by Benjamin in France and Germany are evident in the envisaged utopia of the Union of Myanmar. In the past five years the junta has constructed its own 'fairy grottoes.' Burmese Fairylands include Joint-Venture Asian Department Stores, 'Duty-Free' Stores, and karaoke nightclubs. In the Sino-Burmese Department Stores, gaping Burmans ride up and down escalators, unable to afford the products well guarded by the staff. The escalators are free, however, and represent as great a spectacle as the rows of glittering Chinese cookware. The banks of television screens in these department stores are similarly the scene of mass gatherings as scores of monks (from Up-country, I was repeatedly told) come daily to watch Bon Jovi music videos on this latest miracle of technology. Then there is the ultimate in surreal phantasms, 'Happyland' and 'Fantasyland' amusement parks where young couples and groups of young men wander around eating 'snacks.' They cannot afford to sample the wonders of Fantasyland, such as video games, because they have spent all their money on the entrance fee. A few wealthy young men playing video games are thus the models on which the Fantasyland or Happyland goers

¹ Than Nyun (1998:6–7).

² Than Nyun (1998:7).

³ Thein Han (1998:216).

⁴ Victor (1998:19–20).

base their experience of the Modern. Like the Department Stores, this is a voyeuristic experience.¹

Some journalists, seeing these wonders, have expressed the opinion that Burma has become a 'fascist Disneyland'.² However, this image of modernity is important for the army to give the illusion that it is capable of negotiating the leading role in the path of development towards a modern nation, despite claiming to also represent tradition.

The army and development

I have already noted the central role of the army in the unification of the ethnic minorities and development (see unity above). There has long been a tendency on the part of the regime's journalists to play up the army's unique central role in the process of development.

On Armed Forces Day 27 March 1995, General Than Shwe summed up the army's involvement in extra-military issues as 'to perpetually keep the people's interest at heart and strive to raise the quality of life for the people'.³ At the following year's Armed Forces Day, he gave more substance to this when he said that the armed forces are 'engaged not only in the tasks of defending the state, but as part of its historical duty, is performing other duties in the political, economic and social sectors'.⁴ This idea was already broached much earlier, however, by General Saw Maung, when he linked the role of the army to maintenance of national independence, and this to the ethnic minority problems. The latter, in turn, were to be resolved through development by the army while they were in power.⁵

The army interprets its role as vital to the development of the country and as a productive force for the people. For example, Col. Thein Swe connects development to the armed forces when he writes that 'the main institution responsible for the defence of the country seeks to maintain peace and stability so that national development may progress without hindrance'.⁶ However, army involvement goes beyond this. For As Thein Swe continues, the army uses its defence budget 'to reap the most benefit for the country as a whole', and 'it is an Armed Force for the benefit of the People', which 'stands resolutely as a productive organization'.

Its function goes beyond even this, for it is suggested that Myanmar, and ASEAN as a whole, 'could face intimidation from certain unforeseeable dangers in the coming 21st century' which 'could presumably be caused by the wide gap between the poor and the rich'. Other problems include environment problems, immigration problems and cross-border crime. Colonel Thein Swe then reassures that, though this 'potential enemy is unpredictable and uncertain', we need not worry, for 'the Myanmar Armed Forces has made provisions for all contingencies and is ever on the alert to repel any form of threat or transgression it may have to confront in the 21st century'.⁷

This, therefore, goes well beyond Ne Win's view in 1959 of the armed forces as fighting two kinds of insurgents, 'political' and 'economic insurgents'.⁸ Normally, armed forces are only needed at times of conflict with external forces. However, since it would be expensive for a developing country to have an army where there is no such crisis to speak of, 'to avoid such a state of affairs, our Armed Forces take sole responsibility for defence, but they have also been structured as a Productive Establishment, giving invaluable service to the country at all times, be it peace or war.' It is with this 'selfless' view that General Than Shwe 'assigned the Armed Forces with civic duties in constructive works for the benefit of the people'.⁹ The examples of the role of the armed forces in nation building include the many construction projects to which military personnel contributed labour, including (a) seven categories of road communication and infrastructure construction projects, (b) drug eradication programmes, and (c) the six production enterprises of the armed forces.¹⁰

With the army taking responsibility for development in this way, it will be very difficult to convince ethnic groups that development is actually in their interest. As development progresses, they will want to see

¹ Skidmore (1998:115).

² Victor (1998:25).

³ Thein Swe (1998:153).

⁴ Thein Swe (1998:158).

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:322).

⁶ Thein Swe (1998:153).

⁷ Thein Swe (1998:155).

⁸ Address by Prime Minister General Ne Win. to Parliament, 13 February 1959. In *Trust Vindicated* p. 550.

⁹ Thein Swe (1998:158).

¹⁰ Thein Swe (1998:159–60).

a distinction between development and the army, since the whole process of development is invariably linked to a military agenda. The fact that much was accomplished through forced labour requisitioned from civilians does not seem to worry the regime. As I will show later, it is a legacy of the Sangha unity that permits the army to proclaim it is meritorious to help build the state – they profit from this legacy from the past.

Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH)

We have seen how the army claims to put its defensive capacity in peacetime to productive use for the good of the country. This selfless image is tarnished, however, once we realise that the army's dedication to the good of the people actually means *owning* the country's main resources and factors of production and wealth creation. The regime's most lucrative source of revenue has been to cream off the benefits of joint ownership with foreign companies in the influx of foreign investments into the country. In doing so, it is contributing to the difficulties its citizens have in earning a decent livelihood.

There are many aspects to military economic and business interests that I cannot go into here, and this is better left for economists to describe. However, in Burma the most lucrative business passes through the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (usually abbreviated as UMEH, but sometimes as UMEHL) (မြန်မာ့စီးပွားရေးဥပဒေကြမ်းက) a privileged holding company set up by the army in February 1990 to finance its activities. I will limit myself here to commenting on this particular company to illustrate my point that the principal beneficiary of development is most certainly the army.

UMEH is the country's largest firm with a registered capital of ten billion Kyat (US\$1.4 billion at the official exchange rate). According to its charter, 40% of its equity is owned by the Directorate of Defense Procurement, a defense ministry agency that supplies the regime's military imports: the remaining 60% is owned by 'defense services personnel', notably senior military officers including SLORC members, and military regiments and war veterans (organizations and individuals). As a company, it operates under the charter of the Directorate of Procurement, which is located across the street from the Defense Services Museum in Rangoon.

Since 100% foreign ownership is not allowed in most sectors, the local joint venture partner of most foreign investors is either one of the state economic enterprises, or the military's UMEH. In 1996 in Rangoon alone, no less than forty-six separate joint ventures had established offices in Rangoon. UMEH is increasingly the local joint venture partner with which the regime encourages foreign investors to affiliate. The Asian financial crisis would appear to have taken its toll, as at the Eight Annual General Meeting held on 29 June 1998, it reported only one additional venture, totalling forty-seven ventures thirteen were wholly owned businesses.¹

The American Embassy analyses the purpose of the UMEH as follows:

UMEH appears designed to persist long after most State Economic Enterprises (SEE) are privatized. The GOB's policy of acquiring substantial minority equity interests in export oriented firms through foreign joint ventures with UMEH could eventually enable the GOB to relinquish state monopolies of leading exports and to privatize many SEEs, while continuing to receive substantial non-tax revenues from the external sector for expenditure by the military.²

In a later report, it put it that

The state remains especially deeply entrenched, both directly and indirectly, in export industries. SEEs and UMEH directly monopolize Burma's main traditional exports: rice, wood, uncut gems, jade, rubber and pearls. In FY 95/96, even after two years of relative decline, public sector exports – which no longer include the growing share of gem and jade exports handled by UMEH since 1995 – still accounted for nearly 40% of all GOB-recorded merchandise exports, and nearly 30% of UNCTAD-reported merchandise exports. In addition, the SEEs and UMEH own joint-venture shares in many of the export-oriented businesses operated by foreign investors, such as garment assembly plants, tourist hotels, and domestic air carriers that accept payment only in foreign currency.³

In other words, the long-term military requirements for the Myanmarfication project are crucially dependent on UMEH-style commercial dealings with foreign companies, which are the main instrument for the regime's non-fiscal income. In expanding the foreign privately-owned sector, the army is literally increasing its own wealth through direct and indirect ownership of equity interests in private firms.

The regime's tight control over trade permits, investments and resources means that it can manipulate the market to the advantage of the enterprises it owns and thereby impede the performance of its

¹ 'Eighth Annual Meeting of UMEHL'. *NLM*, 30.06.1998.

² 'Foreign economic trends in Burma.' US Embassy Rangoon, June 1996 (BurmaNet, 20.09.1996).

³ *Country commercial guide: Burma, fiscal year 1998*. American Embassy, Rangoon, 1998.

competitors. It is known, for example, as in the case of courier companies,¹ to suddenly permit by decree only operation of companies in which it has itself a stake or with which it is on good terms. In this way, central decrees serve to bolster the success of military-owned enterprises. They are also an incentive for all foreign companies to work through the UMEH and be seen to be close to the regime. However, this makes a mockery of its claim to work towards a market economy.

UMEH's chairman is Than Oo, who is also Judge-Advocate General attached to the Ministry of Defense. He also has the rank of Major General in the army. This unique triple role in the business world, the legal world and the army serves the UMEH well on all fronts. It is UMEH that takes the choicest and most valuable stakes by foreign investors in Burma. It is invariably present at state visits by foreign leaders and businessmen, where, under the supervision of the generals, the company negotiates the major deals with foreigners who have little choice but to work with this powerful enterprise.² UMEH stages the regular gem fairs, in which precious stones, including jade and pearls, are sold to local and international buyers netting millions of dollars. UMEH also controls the ruby trade in Burma, including the ruby areas in Mogok, and they have opened an office in Thailand.

For example, when Suharto made his State visit to Burma, following talks with General Than Shwe, the two leaders witnessed the signing of contracts between UMEH Chairman and the Executive Director of P.T Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada. It is reported that 'the visit is a visible significant sign of the growing bilateral relations between the two countries.'³ However, more importantly, as the regime's own journalists reported it, Suharto's personal visit helped the 'establishment of personal relations', which 'is an added impetus to further enhancement of the larger dimension of co-operation in economic and social fields.' The company that signed the deal was, in fact, headed by Suharto's eldest daughter, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana alias Tutut, who travels as part of her father's official entourage.⁴ The fact that Suharto has now fallen from grace will be a major disruption to the activities of both companies.

In this way, UMEH has joint ventures with Indonesia,⁵ Singapore,⁶ Japan,⁷ Korea,⁸ Hong Kong⁹ and many other countries. Because the companies that enter into joint ventures are themselves jointly owned by different companies, many other foreign companies are implicated. These have been targeted for campaigns by pressure groups in Europe and in the United States.

In the wake of the Marcos modus operandi, the Philippines has enacted a law for admixture between business and formal politics, for which their chosen legal term is 'plunder'. At a press conference U Hla Htwe (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*) remarked that Aung San Suu Kyi has raised her voice against such practice. She

¹ P.T. Bangsberg. 'Myanmar bans foreign couriers: DHL venture spared.' *Journal of Commerce*, 17.04.1998.

² e.g. with Indonesian companies (*IS*, 17.12.1997). It was present at the official meetings with the Philippine representatives (*MP*, October 1997).

³ *MP*, March 1997.

⁴ The complex web of Suharto family's interests in Burmese investments has been exposed in George Aditjondro's article 'Suharto's poisoned 30th birthday present for Asean'. *Philippines News & Features*, 20.06.1997.

⁵ A joint-venture agreement with Semen Cibinong Group (Tirtamas Group) was signed on 10 December 1996 in a US\$210 million project. The company's own statements says about the Burmese cement market: 'The Company regards Myanmar and its growing markets for cement as a strategic element in its business planning. The country is currently enjoying a rapid growth and modernization phase, and there is a strong market for cement. Current domestic demand of some 2.2 million tons is filled only by importing some 1.7–1.8 million tons, as Myanmar companies presently only produce some 400,000–500,000 tons per year. This growth potential has convinced PT Semen Cibinong of the room for investment, as Myanmar modernizes.

The Company will also export cement from Indonesia to Myanmar, helping to fill the shortfall, during the construction phase of the new clinker grinding plant. This will coincide with the expected oversupply of cement in Indonesia during 1998 and 1999, and enable the Company to maintain high production levels.'

⁶ 'Berger paints to be produced in Yangon for local market, export'. *NLM*, 07.02.1998; Unity NTUC Healthcare, the chain of pharmacies established in 1992 as a co-operative by Singapore's labour movement, National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), did a 50-50 joint venture with UMEH in the form of a supermarket co-operative, NTUC Fair Price (*Singapore Trade News* Nov–Dec 1996); APBL (Asia Pacific Breweries Limited), jointly owned by Heineken, signed in March 1995 a contract to build a brewery, Myanmar Brewery Ltd. (MBL), in which UMEH has a 40% share.

⁷ 'Tokiwa to set up factories in Yangon, Mandalay Divisions'. *IS*, 21.02.1998).

⁸ Through the 40% stake in the Burmese venture with Korea, UMEH is reported to receive benefits also from trade in clothing in Columbia through Columbia sportswear.

⁹ New York-based National Labor Committee (NLC) called for a "Disney Week: An International Week of Action" in December 1996 to draw attention to 'the cheap labor used in making the company's range of children's ware'. 'The NLC says it bought Disney clothing in U.S. stores that were made in Myanmar at a plant jointly owned by Hong Kong-based Victoria Garment Manufacturing and a military holding company, Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings.' *Asiaweek Newsmag* 1996.

alleges that ‘among the foreign firms investing in Myanmar quite a number of them were immoral’ and so ‘benefits and profits accrued from them have gone only to immoral people.’ Also, she had stated that ‘beginning from 1993, the market economic system in Myanmar has ... [become] an open-door economic system. It has become a system monopolized by the government. The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited has come to own a large slice of the economy and has monopolized it.’ He proceeded to ask whether this was true and to what extent UMEH owns economic enterprises, and what was its percentage of holdings. Is it true, that as Aung San Suu Kyi sees it, ‘we have turned from free enterprise to a government monopolized economic system’. The answer provided by Brigadier-General Abel is instructive.

if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that quite a number of foreign firms investing in Myanmar are not proper that they were operating only for profit motive and that these funds were beneficial only to the companies and certain groups, it was a very serious statement. It was a very serious statement because it had both legal as well as social implications to the investors concerned. If such statements were made, ... directly to the people concerned they have the right to defend themselves legally. That is those investing in Myanmar are well-known internationally. The majority of them were public listed companies in various countries.

He then argued that to regard the second question, the market system was pr[o]ceeding well. In 1988, 96% of economy was controlled by the State and 4% by the co-operatives. Today, 76% of the GDP was controlled by the private sector. 22 % was in the State sectors and 2% in the co-operatives. We have started on the privatization programme for the remaining 22%. That clearly should [indicate] that the market system was working very well. The private sector controlled 55% of all exports from the country. We must also look at the initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the State and national peoples. Every country would do that and also if you look at the third objective.

The development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources inside the country and abroad clearly show that it is not monopolized by investors from within the country and abroad. He stressed that the Economic Holdings was also a private company under the special Company Act.¹

There are two fundamental problems with this answer. First, the legal warning Brigadier General Abel makes against Aung San Suu Kyi's allegation is rather difficult to understand, given that the legal system is partisan. The person in charge of UMEH is not only a Major General in the army, but is no less than the Judge-Advocate General, which indicates that in Burma all domains, including defense, business and legal, are hopelessly mixed and not sufficiently independent to even begin to comprehend this kind of defensive answer. Second, the fact that Myanmar Economic Holdings, as Able himself proclaims, is a private enterprise, yet it served a government function. This makes his answer extremely hard to understand, for any proportional increase in ownership by the private sector would at the same time represent an increase in army holdings and army shares.

The army connections penetrate deeply into UMEH activities. It organizes international seminars using army facilities in collaboration with the Singaporean company Conference and Exhibition Management Services. Held in the Tatmadaw [Army] Convention Hall in Rangoon, they are regularly opened by none other than General Khin Nyunt.

Golf is a common way for businessmen to meet informally, and the UMEH chairman is invariably the man all golfers should look to, for he presents the winners' prizes at the international golf competitions.²

Apart from attending the various army commemorative events in his capacity as Judge-Advocate General and as Major General of the Army,³ the UMEH chairman also invariably attends the graduation of officers to remind them of the great business potential that is to be derived from a career in the army and navy.⁴ His official presence adds weight to the message that the benefits of business do not come without discipline.⁵

There is no doubt that army conquest is translated into improved in business ventures. Injured servicemen who lost limbs in the fight for Myanmarfication received UMEH shares ‘for their long-term benefit’, as a reward for their fight to build their nation and to advance ‘the economic front’.

The Secretary-2 said as the Tatmadawmen are dutifully discharging national defence and nation-building tasks, the public can now take part in industrial, trade, export and agricultural businesses with added momentum and with peace of mind in the economic front, speaking of the need for them to participate in the national economic endeavours.

The Directorate of Resettlement has bought shares for 177 disabled Tatmadawmen at Union of Myanmar Economic

¹ News Briefing, Yangon, 01.08.1996.

² ‘Sports (Golf)’. *MP*, April 1997; ‘Senior General Than Shwe tees off in Tatmadaw Golf Tourney’. *NLM*, 02.02.1998; London-Myanmar Open continues. *NLM*, 08.03.1998; ‘Hussain of Pakistan champ in London-Myanmar Open’. *NLM*, 09.03.1998.

³ ‘Armed Forces Day Commemorative Military Band Contest commences.’ *NLM*, 15.02.1998; ‘Military bands play vital role in enhancing and strengthening morale of the Tatmadaw.’ *NLM*, 24.02.1998.

⁴ ‘Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services addresses Graduation Parade of 39th Intake of DSA’. *NLM*, 11.04.1998, *NLM*, 06.02.1998..

⁵ ‘Junior naval officers urged to observe discipline exemplarily’. *NLM*, 06.02.1998.

Holdings Limited to provide long-term assistance for them and rendering assistance to another 1,340.¹

Six weeks later more injured servicemen had been placed in the care of the UMEH.

Long-term assistance is being given to disabled Tatmadawmen to earn their living, he said, adding arrangements are being made to assist those whose turn has not arrived yet to receive long-term support in order that they may live without financial difficulty.

Shares of Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd have been bought for them for their long-term benefit and a temporary assistance of K 6,000 per month has been provided to everyone whose turn has not arrived yet, he said.

Up to this 23rd ceremony, long-term assistance has been provided to 199 disabled Tatmadawmen and temporary assistance to 1,390, he said, adding plans are under way to render long-term assistance to all disabled Tatmadawmen.

In line with the historical requirements, the Tatmadawmen, under the oath of Our Three Main National Causes, are shouldering national defence and security duties till present, sacrificing life and limbs, he declared. Their heroic sacrifices of life, blood and sweat in safeguarding the life and property of the people are their matchless quality, he noted.²

Invariably the chairman is present at such charitable events organised for injured servicemen, raising their hopes that the tap of apparently ever-increasing wealth might be turned on in their direction in appreciation for their selfless assistance in helping to advance these economic frontiers.³

However, it is not enough to inspire injured soldiers. It is also necessary to catch to children early, and so the chairman also attends various competitions, handing out prizes to children.⁴

In the exchange with ASEAN the army sees a great deal of wealth that could fund the seemingly endless expansion of its entire army and more, and that is of great significance in the Myanmarification of Burma. Thus, the UMEH chairman is present in his capacity as Judge-Advocate General of the Ministry of Defence at ASEAN meetings.⁵

As if the revenue the army receives from subsidies for its cultural affairs with Japan, tourism, and the UMEH were not enough, it behaves as if it were a charity organising necessary funding for a good cause. It organizes collection events from companies and members of the public,⁶ includes such worthy donations as cigarettes and beer from foreign companies, and direct donations to its political arm, the USDA.

There are no trade union rights in Burma. The Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB), founded in 1991 by exiled Burmese, is forced to operate from outside the country. It co-ordinates its activities with the NLD. In some of the UMEH ventures there are reported to have been problems with labour relations. For example, the *ICFTU annual survey of violations of trade union rights 1997* reports that a spontaneous strike had taken place at a UMEH joint venture garment factory because workers had not received the same holiday benefits as management. As for the regime's response, it was reported that 'a few minutes after the strike started, a high-ranking military officer arrived and told the workers that if they ever went on strike again, they would be imprisoned.' A detailed report on this came out in January 1998, which reported strikes between November and December 1997 in at least two factories, and unrest in another four, each of which employed more than 3000 workers.⁷

The regime proclaims that the 'private sector has now risen to 76 per cent for the State owned sector, and 2 per cent for the co-operatives sector' and proclaims that these figures clearly indicate that the private sector has been given special priority.⁸ However, from the evidence above it is also clear how these statistics are achieved, for through the military elite, the State has apportioned itself a significant proportion of the so-called private sector, and it is intent on expanding this, crowding out genuine private business when it is in its best interests to do so. The regime is able to rig the entire private sector market in its own favour. Furthermore, in making itself dependent on non-tax revenue, especially from foreign companies, it is unlikely to have an incentive to improve either the income of its citizens or its own human rights record. And it will continue to bring in the foreign business that provides a direct income. There is little incentive for the regime to ever become a publicly accountable government that truly serves the people. Instead, the people will have to continue to serve the regime with *corvée* labour for the large-scale projects it deems worthy of investment.

¹ 'Thanmyanthu presents cash assistance to in-service Tatmadawmen who sacrificed limbs for national cause'. *NLM*, 19.03.1998.

² 'Secretary-1 Thanmyanthu presents cash assistance to in service Tatmadawmen who sacrificed their limbs for national cause'. *NLM*, 30.04.1998.

³ 'Tatmadawmen who sacrificed limbs for national cause conclude Ngapali vacation'. *NLM*, 12.03.1998.

⁴ 'Participation of people from various strata in contests evinces their love and regard for the Tatmadaw'. *NLM*, 28.03.1998.

⁵ 'Myanmar enthusiastically involved in ASEAN activities'. *NLM*, 17.02.1998.

⁶ 'Cash and kind for 53rd Anniversary Armed Forces Day'. *NLM* and *MP*, 15.03.1998.

⁷ 'FTUB: Textile workers activities', 03.01.1998 (BurmaNet News, 07.01.1998).

⁸ 'Market oriented economy', Myanmar Today (<http://www.myanmar.com>).

So UMEH's *modus operandi* involves mixing business with pleasure, and a few other things too. The legal system, official diplomatic relations, business deals, the world of personal and government contacts all to work to its benefit, which at the same time also benefits the generals who own and generously redistribute the wealth to their subordinates in the army. This evidence therefore bears out Aung San Suu Kyi's assertion that:

We are not against investment, but we want investment to be at the right time, when the benefits will go to the people of Burma, not just to a small, select elite connected to the government. We do not think investing in Burma at this time really helps the people of Burma. It provides the military regime with a psychological boost. If companies from Western democracies are prepared to invest under these circumstances, then it gives the military regime reason to think that, after all, they can continue with violating human rights because even Western business companies don't mind. It sends all sorts of wrong signals to the present government. We think there is great potential in Burma for economic development, but at the right time and under the right circumstances. I do not think investing now is going to be profitable either to investors or to the people of Burma.

I would like to make it clear that the people of Burma are not suffering as a result of sanctions. The real profits do not go to the people of Burma. It's all concentrated in the hands of investors who are not Burmese, or privileged people.¹

Tourism

One of the most promising foreign sources of funding for the regime in its Myanmarfication programme is, of course, the tourist trade. The Ministry for Tourism and Hotels was founded in 1992 when the regime became serious about tourism. After the 1962 military coup visas for tourists were all but impossible to get. Rules were relaxed little by little, and from 24-hour visas in 1969, the fourteen day period was doubled in 1994 in preparation for the Visit Myanmar Year 1996.

The regime invited tourists to the country to admire the greatness of 'Myanmar civilisation'. Much effort has been expended to develop tourism, which helps to increase precious foreign exchange earnings with which the cultural resources are elaborated. It has been admitted that tourism and cultural development go hand in hand, for although 'foreign exchange earning is the main target of the Myanmar hotel and tourism industry', it is 'cultural tourism that Myanmar intends to promote because the Myanmar Government and people believe that cultural tourism contributes to international friendship and understanding.' Through tourism Burma can also fulfil the 'urgent need to present her true image to the world which knows very little but which has many misconceived and misinformed ideas about her.' It is 'with the help of her well-wishers and ASEAN friends the world will come to understand her real situation and realize that Myanmar is a uniquely hospitable and fascinating land to visit.'²

Tourists need not worry about the finer points of the Myanmarfication programme, for it is now 'time to visit Myanmar' before the country is truly modernised and risks losing its cultural originality.

With the opening up of the country from 1989, Myanmar is welcoming all types of visitors, from businessmen to tourists and backpackers.

With peace returning to the country for the first time during her fifty years of Independence, places formerly not safe for travel are all being opened up to welcome various travellers. Peace agreements have been signed with 19 armed groups and only one main separatist group remains from returning to the legal fold.

Roads, railways, bridges and airports are being built, upgraded and enlarged as never before in our history, making it much more easier to travel around in the country.

Hotels, inns, guest houses, restaurants and cafes are also being opened all over the country on an unprecedented scale, bringing modern amenities to travellers.

But the country remains unspoilt, keeping her national identity, upholding her cultural heritage and protecting the environment. Ancient palaces and pagodas are being renovated and rebuilt. Traditional music and dances are encouraged and traditional crafts in wood, silver, gold, brass, ivory and lacquer are being retained and revitalized.

If you were to ask me when you should visit Myanmar, I would say now is the time, before too much development and industrialization make the country so like other urbanized nations that there is nothing new to explore and appreciate.

At present we still retain our uniqueness. The people especially are courteous and friendly and warmly welcome visitors from all over the world.³

Of course, in order to make all of Myanmar's cultural resources available to tourists, the width, breadth and height of Burma must first be conquered and placed under firm control, and there must be a lot of digging for treasures to attract the tourists.

The conquest of the summit of the snow capped Mount Khakaborazi the highest in Southeast Asia by a Japanese and Myanmar mountaineers a year ago, surprised those who could not believe that there are snowlands in a tropical country like Myanmar. Finds of Primate and other fossils in Pondaung area last year captured the attention and interest of paleontologists

¹ 'Burma's Suu Kyi: take your investments elsewhere, please'. *Business Week*, 09.03.1998.

² *MP*, November 1997.

³ 'A time to visit to Myanmar'. *MP*, November 1997.

the world over. This year we have the discovery of a burial site at Nyaungkan village in Upper Myanmar from where were unearthed human skeletons, funerary objects, pots, implements and weapons which strongly suggest that they belong to the Bronze Age. Myanmar is a paradise for mountaineers, paleontologists, and pre-historians. Furthermore, flora, fauna, gems, races, pagodas and monuments which the country abounds in, have been the main objects of interest to many a naturalist, jeweller, anthropologist, pilgrim, and historian from days of yore to the present.

Smokeless industry, as tourism has been figuratively called in today's environmental conscious world, has many facets in Myanmar, natural, anthropological, religious, cultural, ecological, aquatic and marine etc. We may extend Myanmar tourism as far as the range of her natural and cultural resources permit.¹

Tourism cannot be developed in a country torn by conflict, and the entire region must first be conquered. While tourists marvel at the freshly painted and restored pagodas, monasteries and newly built museums, they are not aware that these were renovated, first of all, using 'voluntary' labour, which usually means 'forced labour' (see below).

For the privilege of visiting newly built and newly conquered sites, which are built with extensive use of forced labour, tourists are charged in precious dollars. A tourist visit to many Buddhist sites nowadays attracts a fee of US\$5, a month's salary for a civil servant locally, and yet it was built using 'voluntary' labour – in other words, the State makes a profit on its own people. It is quite clear, also, that all those who work in the tourist industry – indigenous and foreign companies alike – are admonished that they are 'obliged to look after the interest of the state' and 'prevent the image of the State from being tarnished and maintain the region as a tourist destination which is rich in historical and cultural heritage'. Furthermore, 'if any companies are doing business only in their interest without communicating with the ministry, their licenses will be revoked'. Though the South-East Asia region faces a currency crisis, 'which may hamper the development of [the] tourism industry', ministry officials remarked and stated that 'the number of tourists arriving Myanmar is on the increase, and the ministry will provide necessary assistance to the tourism companies'.² Really, is Myanmar so special that the generals think they can command the tourists to come as if they commanded their subordinates? Today there are so many hotels built according to the directives of the generals in anticipation of the planned tourist explosion that many are lying empty. While in October some hotels were expecting occupancy rates of over 40%, in May 1997 occupancy rates of Thai hotel branches in Burma were reported to have dropped to 10% and by November many were coming down to as low as 5%.³ During my visits in 1998 people in Burma were cynically talking of this situation in terms of Elvis Presley's song 'heart-break hotel'.

Indeed, if one wants to fall in with the regime, it is difficult to do so without joining the USDA on some appropriately chosen day. In order for a hotel, for example, to function in this State orchestrated form of tourism, as many of the hotel staff as possible should become members, accompanied preferably with a cash donation to the Chairman of the local USDA, in this case U Aung Khin.⁴ On one particular occasion, the mass membership application from the Alfa Hotel took place on the 53rd anniversary of Armed Forces Day.

Additionally, it is 'useful' if hotels organize supportive function days. The Yuzana Hotel, for example, held a special event for the Ministry of Finance and Revenue's soccer team, at which the deputy minister of the relevant ministry 'told the officials and players of the team to strive for success with sporting spirit as the soccer team represents not only the ministry but also the State' – it would compete at the Asian games.⁵

The drug trade

The drug trade is a complex issue, and I do not propose to deal with it here except very cursorily.⁶ A number of ethnic minorities and interest groups are linked with the illicit international drug trade. Burma produces an estimated 60% of the world's opium and a huge 70% per cent of the opium reaching North American markets. The regime proclaims to pursue a vigorous policy of fighting the drug trade including 'drug-destruction ceremonies' specially arranged for the foreign press. However, between 1988-92, when the SLORC took over, opium production is estimated to have doubled and Burma was one of only four

¹ 'Investment in marine tourism'. *MP*, March 1998.

² *NLM*, 15.02.1998.

³ *Bangkok Post*, 18.05.1997; Dow Jones News Service, 05.11.1997.

⁴ 'Alfa Hotel staff families submit USDA membership applications'. *NLM*, 06.02.1998.

⁵ 'Yuzana Hotel families host dinner for F&R soccer team'. *NLM*, 06.02.1998.

⁶ For further details see: Bertil Lintner. 'Drugs and economic growth' in Rotberg (1998:165–83) and *The politics of the drug trade in Burma* (Nedlands, 1993); Anthony Davis and Bruce Hawke. 'Burma – the country that won't kick the habit'. *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 1998; Robert S. Gelbard. 'SLORC's drug links'. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21.11.1996.

countries to be denied certification by the United States for their failure to take counter-narcotic measures.¹ This coincided with the policy to permit the legalisation of drug money and drug barons in the economy. By 1996, the US Embassy in Rangoon estimated that the exports of opiates from Burma ‘appear to be worth as much as legal exports’, around US\$ 992 million at the official rate of exchange.²

The regime is linked indirectly to the benefits of the opium trade, and probably directly. Evidence of the regime's involvement with the production and trading of opium at various levels is mounting. First, there is the simple procedure whereby the military permits, and often assists in protecting transport in return for a cut of the profits. Second, there is a link between cease fire agreements and the protection of drug profits. The main increase in opium production is thought to be derived from areas under the regime's control, raising doubts about its commitment to eradicate opium growing. Third, there is the legitimisation and the ‘return to the legal fold’ of high profile drug barons such as Khun Sa and Lo Hsing-Han, and other drug trade profiteers, who are permitted with impunity to launder their drug profits in Burma's economy, financing many of the building projects, particularly hotels in Mandalay and Rangoon.³

Not only do the drug traffickers currently own the largest corporations in Burma, but they are deeply involved in dealing with the above-mentioned UMEH, through which they have invested and established joint ventures with a number of foreign companies.⁴

The worry analysts express is that the drug trade is moving from a means to fund ideological and separatist causes, to a goal in itself, which is spurring a change to a very different kind of political situation with great implications for crime and health in Burma, and that of neighbouring countries. The fear is that as long as the regime does not come to terms with the political opposition and make itself accountable to the public, it may go the way of Columbia, in which drug-related corruption will end up operating at all levels in government, and private business cannot tender for contracts without involving drug-tainted money.

Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGO)

The SPDC's second qualification for democracy is that it must be ‘compatible with political, economic and social structures of State’. I treat it here last, not because it is less important, but because it rests on the other qualifications for democracy already mentioned above.

Dahrendorf's definition of authoritarianism, namely as combining ‘the dominance of an exclusive group of leaders with the non-participation of the many’⁵ suggests that authoritarian regimes need gestures from the people to demonstrate their ‘true beliefs’ in the regime's goals, and their ‘real desires’ to participate in the regime's unimaginative schemes. They demand ‘voluntary’ participation, but after gang-pressing they end up with no co-operation, even sabotage. The end-result is a failing economy, a disjointed society, riddled with lies and no commitment to attain to any realistic assessment of the situation in the country. For example, I once travelled with a peasant on his bullock-cart in which he explained how the rice he was carrying he had soaked in water to increase its bulk before he ‘donated’ it to the authorities, so that he might more quickly fulfil his ‘uneconomic’ obligations. Totted up, if all Burmese fulfil their uneconomic obligations to the State in this way, what does that do to the fabric of the country? How strong are the roads and bridges that it builds with ‘voluntary’ labour?

In the wake of the unravelling of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, the regime hurriedly backed the National Unity Party (NUP) to represent its interests in the elections. This party proved to be so unpopular that it only gained ten seats. Since then the regime has attempted to reengineer Burmese society wholesale and has set up mass organizations to play a subsidiary role to the army. To give the Myanmarfication programme muscle, the regime relies on mass movements rather than formal political parties, with which it aims to represent and mobilize military interests within wider society.

Realising that army experiments with the BSPP and the NUP had been unsuccessful, and that a political party directly advocating military views was unpopular the regime set up over time a number of organizations to foster support for its cause among the civilian population. Most of these were founded after

¹ Robert S. Gelbard. ‘Burma: the booming drug trade’. In Rotberg (1998:185).

² US Embassy Rangoon. *Foreign economic trends report: Burma* (July 1996), pp. 92–93.

³ ‘Burmese junta thrives on heroin trade to finance its genocidal campaigns.’ *Crescent International*, 16–29 February 1992. Renard, Ronald, D. *The Burmese Connection: illegal drugs and the making of the Golden Triangle, studies on the impact of the illegal drug trade*, 6, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996.

⁴ Lintner (1998:180).

⁵ Ralf Dahrendorf *Society and democracy in Germany* (New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 314); Maung Maung Gyi (1983:1–2).

1993, and these are sometimes derisively referred to as GONGOs (Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations), though they are also known by expatriates as GRINGOs, Government Recruited and Indoctrinated Non-Government Organizations.¹ Though characterised by the regime as 'local initiatives' operating 'on their own initiative' and as the equivalent to 'foreign NGOs',² they are in fact organizations either taken over from private initiatives into which the regime reverses its own people, or they were set up explicitly under government instructions.

Examples of such organizations include the following: Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRC),³ Myanmar Women's Entrepreneur Association (MWEA), the Karuna Foundation (KF), and the Union Solidarity Association (USDA). However, other organizations designated as 'Non-Governmental Organizations' include: War Veteran's Organization (WVO), Myanmar Medical Association (MMA), Myanmar Theatrical Organization (MTO), Myanmar Vocalists Association (MVA), Myanmar Film Organization (MFO), Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association (MWJO), Myanmar Traditional Artists Association (MTAA), Myanmar Dental Surgeons Association (MDSA), Myanmar Health Assistant Association (MHAA), Myanmar Nurses' Association (MNA), Myanmar Women's Development Association (MWDA), Myanmar Women Sports Federation (MWSF).

There is little doubt that these so-called NGOs head the front-line of the Myanmarification programme. Their intended role in forging unity is clear for more reasons than the fact that Myanmar is, without exception, prefixed in all their names. These organizations typically seek to penetrate as deeply as possible into communities, ranging from state, province, township, to ward. Many of them are institutionalized with offices at various levels, and solicit money directly and openly from individuals, businesses, governments and other NGOs. These organizations furthermore seek to extend themselves across the regions and attempt to penetrate right up to the border. They collect information on people, just as they seek to extort their labour, wealth, aspirations and goodwill unashamedly for the political causes of the regime.

Aung San Suu Kyi has criticised the role these organizations play. An interviewer once asked whether development aid was appropriate, to which she replied that any form of aid had to be scrutinised very carefully for several reasons. First, 'the aid is not given to every one equally at the grassroots'. Second, foreign NGOs are not free to operate in Burma. Third, the regime manipulates contracts so that they are given to businesses owned by army and ex-army personnel. For example, there are allegations that some of the largest UNDP projects have fallen into the hands of SLORC members.⁴ Fourth, in particular projects concerned with women 'will have to go through SLORC wives group', a common practice by the generals to make their wives control the NGO sector. Finally, any money the regime saves on performing their State responsibilities towards its citizens is immediately funnelled back into the system to improve its methods of repression.⁵ Such savings must be seen as partly responsible for the doubling of the regime's ratio of defence expenditure to social services between 1990 and 1996.⁶

The regime likes to press home its benevolence, and foreign dignitaries are often introduced to projects by these organizations.⁷ They are given legitimacy by becoming the subject of academic study as projections of Burma's goodwill towards its citizens in ASEAN. The regime aims to have international aid agencies channel their humanitarian assistance through these organizations. Indeed, aid projects have to be approved by the Ministry of Health and implemented in association with the MMCWA.⁸ This has elicited criticism from human rights campaigners. For example, UNICEF was accused of 'indirectly contributing to building up the capacity of the military dictatorship' when they were prepared to promote capacity-building for the MMCW and MRC.⁹

This confusion is compounded by the regime's use of 'commission' in the naming of these organizations which imitates the more reputable international aid agencies. For example, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) is modelled on the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (UNCND).

¹ Skidmore (1998:72); Christina Fink, BurmaNet News, 28.06.1995.

² *MP*, September 1997.

³ 'MRCS regarded as national reserve in building and defending State'. *NLM*, 07.06.1998.

⁴ Mya Maung (1998a:259).

⁵ Sanitsuda Ekachai. 'The Lady of Burma'. BurmaNet News, 19.06.1998.

⁶ Mya Maung (1998a:259).

⁷ e.g. the Malaysian Prime Minister (*MP*, March 1998).

⁸ Mya Maung (1998a:257).

⁹ 'On humanitarian assistance to Burma.' NCGUB, 14.05.1995 (BurmaNet News 18.05.1995).

The situation in Burma is so bleak that foreign agencies are unsure how to respond. Largely because only an estimated 65% of the Burmese people have access to health services, the health indicators are not only the lowest, but are in an entirely different league from the other countries in the region.¹ Because of its inability to visit prisoners, the Red Cross has been unwilling to return after it closed its offices in 1995. This leaves the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) as its nearest equivalent, though be it only in name. The regime encourages the illusion of international respectability, for example, by making the MRCS the central player in its World Red Cross Day held on 8 May.²

Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA)

The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) [မိမိသားစုနှင့် ကလေးများအတွက် အကျိုးအမြတ်မရှိသော အဖွဲ့အစည်း] was founded in 1991, the year after the SLORC 'promulgated' the MMCWA Law 21/90.³ Described as a 'voluntary association', its growth to a large extent is due to its appropriation of functions hitherto carried out by private organizations. For example, it took over the Maternity and Infant Welfare Society formed in 1911.⁴ However, it is not even at arms-length from government, since not only does it share its address with the Ministry of Health, but the dignitaries associated with it read like a roll call of army officers engaged in high government office.

Critics have dubbed it as 'just a first-wives' club' because of the involvement of wives of the leading generals as part of an attempt at 'guided feminism' in which 'women are used to covering up the sins committed by their husbands'.⁵ Originally it was headed by Dr Khin Win Shwe, wife of intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt. Though she is a medical doctor, she has no specialist training in public health or maternal child care. In 1995, she became Vice-Chair in favour of Daw Kyu Kyu Swe, wife of Colonel Pe Thein. The latter was former minister of health and minister of education, who became a minister at the Prime Minister Office.

U Kyi Soe, the Vice-President of this Association, is the only member to have professional qualifications that might actually fit in with the declared aims of this organization. Also Director-General of Planning and Statistics, Ministry of Health, he is billed with a particular responsibility for the Department of Health Planning. The army, proud of his educational record, refers to him as serving as an army officer in various regiments between 1972 and 1984, after which he was transferred to the Ministry of Health 'according to the necessity of the state'. However, 'he proved that the officers nurtured by the armed forces can undertake any kind of tasks and managed to obtain M.Sc. (Public Health) and Ph.D. Degrees'.⁶ His MSc (Boston) in Public Health, I am sure was well-earned, but he gained his PhD from the 'Pacific Western University'. Internationally, this is an infamous university, regarded by the Burmese elite as a convenient source for university degrees since it involves hardly any expense or time away from their busy schedule; it offers degrees via the Internet without the need to attend classes.⁷ Dr Kyi Soe is involved in researching,⁸ implementing and explaining the regime's policies and exhorting the MMCWA members.⁹

Given its leading members' lack of qualifications – and it has been documented that there are others who have bought their degrees, a fact so ignorantly trumpeted by the regime in its own propaganda¹⁰ – one

¹ This has resulted in an infant mortality rate in 1995 of 105 per 1,000 live births (cf. 27 in Thailand), an estimated 1 million children are malnourished, 1990 maternal mortality rates of 580 per 100,000 live births (cf. 10 in Malaysia), and an estimated 500,000 HIV carriers in 1996. (Cesar Chelala. 'The generals vs. the physicians', *The Washington Post*, 19.10.1997.) The most up-to-date report may be found in the special issue of *Burma Debate* Vol. V, No. 2, Spring 1998.

² 'World Red Cross Day observed with prize presentation ceremony'. *MLN*, 09.05.1998.

³ *BurmaNet News*, 13.12.1995.

⁴ Khin Aye Win (1998:231).

⁵ May Pyone Aung. 'Unsung heroes in an unfinished struggle'. *The Nation*, 19.06.1998.

⁶ OSS (1997:260).

⁷ <http://www.pwu.com>, <http://www.pwu-ca.edu/>.

⁸ According to the International Clearinghouse of Health System Reform Initiatives (ICHSRI), Dr. Kyi Soe is responsible for two research projects. 'Case studies of comparative analysis of experiences with health sector reforms in Myanmar' has the objective to 'evaluate for future policy making and planning'. 'Comparative analysis of five different case studies on health care financing reform in Myanmar' has the objective to 'Identify strengths and weaknesses of new financing schemes (paying wards, users fees for drugs, cost sharing, trust funds for drugs)'.

⁹ Dr. Kyi Soe presented a paper on women's health on several formal occasions ('Workshop on women's development commences'. *NLM*, 07.05.1998; 'Executives of MMCWA, patrons of Supervisory Committee of MCWA meet' *NLM*, 03.02.1998).

¹⁰ The regime announced the award of an honorary Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration on U Khin Shwe, director of a company involved in construction in Burma, for being one of the best entrepreneurs in Asia ('Washington University Confers

might wonder what the aim of this organization really is. We get some idea when we investigate the ideas put forth about its nature. The ingredients to watch out for are to achieve 'good moral character', 'protecting women' (from what?), and the emphasis on work with ethnic minorities.

[The MMCWA] has been engaged in tasks to help women at the grass roots level achieve good health and develop good moral character. It is also helping women at poverty level to achieve economic empowerment through credit facilities and income-generating activities. In the social sphere, the Government is carrying out social welfare programmes aimed at protecting women, and providing vocational training for young women living in border areas which traditionally have lagged behind in development. In the economic sphere, women's co-operatives, such as the Myanmar Women Entrepreneur's Association have been taking the lead in promoting business opportunities for women.¹

In 1998 the vital statistics of this organization were reported as follows.

MCWAs have made rapid progress within the seven years. MMCWA has 14 state/division supervisory committees and formed 312 township associations and 3,975 branches in wards, villages, battalions and units, factories and mills with a total strength of 542,051. There were 219,430 members of 2,254 branches in 1997 and 1,700 new branches which had organized 300,000 members were added within one year.²

Its activities among the ethnic minority population have been stepped up as control over the region began to increase. For example, U Kyi Soe presented medical equipment, soap and money from Rangoon donors to 'Kayins returning to a model village near Myainggyingu village in Kayin State'. The money went to Chairman U Saw Tha Htoo Kyaw of the regime-favoured Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organization 'at the model village'.³

Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA)

The most important GONGO is the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) (**ပြည်ထောင်စုတိုးတက်ရေးအဖွဲ့**),⁴ founded on 15 September 1993. Its logo is the lion which now mostly replaces Aung San's portrait on the national currency, although the anti-fascist star which usually accompanies popular portrayal of Aung San, remains. This GONGO's motto is 'Morale, Discipline, Strength, Solidarity'.⁵

The USDA was founded two weeks after the decision to hold the controversial National Convention with which the regime aims to draft a new constitution that would ascertain a central role for the military. These two events are related, for USDA aims were explicitly equated by the SLORC with the six fundamental principles for drafting the Constitution that specify a leading role for the army. Its fourth principle says that 'the Tatmadaw has the right to make all arrangements to mobilize the entire mass of the people for security and defence of the country'.⁶

The USDA is widely seen as a civilian front for the army which it hopes to later turn into a political party.⁷ Some Burmese intellectuals I met see it as both, a way of spying on the population and a way of recruiting spies. Steinberg, in his article on the USDA reviews mass movements, including the AFPFL, the co-operatives movement and the Lanzin youth movement, and points out that these have grown especially under military leadership and were employed to 'propagate the military's views of the issues in which they were most engrossed at that time.' However, they must be seen as political, as 'serving to pre-empt the formation of alternative, autonomous organizations that might question the military's view of reality'. If Ne Win set up first the people's worker and peasant councils, through which the leadership could channel its views, and which formed the early beginnings of the BSPP as a mass-party, here the SLORC has attempted

Honorary Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration on Zaykabar U Khin Shwe.' *IS*, 21.02.1998; *NLM*, 21.02.1998).

Apparently Khin Shwe had been involved in brokering a deal with a public relations service to lobby the United States Government (See 'Burma's image problem is a moneymaker for U.S. lobbyists'. *Washington Post*, 24.02.1998). The degree was in fact from an unaccredited institution incorporated in Hawaii that offered PhD's for sale between \$3,600 and \$6,000, and was subject to a court case by the real Washington University, that described the information by the Burmese authorities as 'false' and 'misleading'.

¹ UN Women's Conference: Statement by Major-General Soe Myint, 4–15 September 1995, Beijing. (Statement by Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and Leader of the Delegation of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace.) BurmaNet News, 23.09.1995.

² 'MMCWA making rapid progress to see nation's Social Objectives materialize Over 540,000 Committed to uplift of socio-economic standard of mothers, [and] children'. *IS*, 24.05.1998.

³ 'Gifts for Kayins returned to Myainggyingu', *NLM*, 25.02.1995.

⁴ A jocular reference to this organization is 'iguana' (bad omen) (**ကုန်းပေါက်**).

⁵ 'Chairman Senior General Than Shwe, Patron of the USDA Gives Sound Advice to the Future Leaders of Myanmar'. *MP*, September 1998.

⁶ Minye Kaungbon (1994:112).

⁷ Diller, Janelle M. 'The National Convention: Lessons from the past and steps for the future'. *Burma Debate*, October–November 1994.

to 'recreate civil society in its own manner while suppressing alternative possibilities.' The USDA is therefore a mass civil movement that it can control, and that 'will do its bidding, that is ideologically orthodox, and that its leaders hope is building on the future by its concentration on the relatively young.'

The USDA was created by the regime because it realised the difficulties of openly advocating military interests in the context of a privately owned commercial world where there must be at least a semblance of popular support (as in elections or referendums). In other words, it realised that 'direct military involvement was less effective than an indirect tie' and that 'such mass organization should be kept out of the direct military process and divorced from formal politics.' Since the regime does not allow civil servants and the military to join political parties, the USDA would have been deprived of those most useful to its purpose, and whom the regime has most control over through employment. Therefore the USDA was not registered as a political party but as a social organization under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

It has often been compared with Indonesia's ruling Golkar party.¹ The USDA's patron is General Than Shwe, who heads Burma's military government. Its Secretary-General is U Than Aung. All government employees, including military personnel, are required to become members and attend USDA rallies. Civilians are also pressured to join and must show membership cards before they are allowed to buy, for example, air tickets or enrol their children in school.² Other privileges of joining the USDA are free educational and vocational courses in various subjects. Not joining it, however, means isolation in the work place and at school. At community level it works rather like a scout movement except that it explicitly demands support for the ideology of the military, as the five-point USDA ideology is the same as the military regime's. In his address at the AGM on 15 September 1998 General Than Shwe described the USDA as having five aims which are 'the soul of the Union':

- Non-disintegration of the Union
- Non-disintegration of national unity
- Perpetuation of sovereignty
- Promotion and vitalization of national pride
- Emergence of a prosperous, peaceful and modern Union

They are described as 'noble, broad, correct and profound objectives' that are not those of a 'gang', but which must be followed by 'not only the association members but also the entire mass of the people comprising national races' and 'they require the highest and the most effective fulfilment to serve the basic interests of different strata and classes encompassing the entire public'.³

The USDA's increasing involvement in the economy, with ownership of extensive businesses ranging from bus and train monopolies to real estate, gives it a semblance of financial autonomy. Nevertheless, in spite of the resources with which it is being endowed by the regime, at all major national commemorations and army events money is collected for the USDA as if it were a charity in need of funding.

The USDA is being used to play a vital role in implementing the regime's concept of 'development' in particular in the ethnic minority regions.⁴ It has offices at national, district, township and about one in four ward or village levels. With a proclaimed membership of 7.51 million in 1997, and 10 million in 1998, its mass rallies are attended by large numbers, sometimes up to 100,000 people. In June 1996 and end September 1998, after a major push for rallies in the ethnic minority areas, the USDA membership was forced to denounce the NLD. However, recruitment commonly involves people being added to the member list without even being aware of it. Many join through coercion or simply because the benefits in terms of obtaining jobs and promotions are great. Steinberg says 'membership is a kind of tax or corvée labor charge on someone's time and energies'.

By 1998, it was proclaimed that 4.1 million members and non-members had received 'nurturing and training'.⁵ There are three important components to this programme dubbed as 'development of human resources'.

First, its chief emphasis is on culture training, which in effect mainly means Buddhist culture. For

¹ Aung San Suu Kyi originally compared the USDA with the Golkar Party in her first public interview since her house arrest, as published in *Burma Debate* 1,1, July–August 1994; David Steinberg, *Burma Debate*, January–February 1997.

² UPI, 21.04.1996.

³ 'USDA-member and non-member youths trained to step up human resources development. Must be vigilant to deter moves to cause recurrence of events which negate progress.' *NLM*, 16.09.1998, p. 1.

⁴ 'Member of Secretariat of USDA tours Kaya State'. *NLM*, 24.06.1998.

⁵ *NLM*, 16.09.1998, p. 1.

example, at a ceremony during which 1,280 memberships were accepted from the Kalaywa Coal Mine (Ministry of Mines) the Minister of Culture instructed the new members on the correct ways to behave as USDA members.¹ By 1998, it was proclaimed that 3.9 million trainees attended cultural courses in this way.² Training of the *mangala sutta* (see below) is a component.

Second, and here lies its attractiveness to the Burmese youth for whom over the years education has been non-existent with the closure of educational facilities, it aims to offer instruction in various subjects which are desirable in the business world. This includes courses in management, computer studies, international affairs and accountancy.

Third, however, the association is described as 'a reserve force for national defence',³ and it offers military training. As General Than Shwe himself put it unashamedly at the USDA Executive Management Course in 1996, the USDA stands in the service of the military:

The trainees constitute not only the hard core force of the USDA, but also the sole national force which will always join hands with the tatmadaw to serve national and public interests. Hence, ... they should be both morally and physically strong with sharp national defense qualities. Therefore, he said, the trainees will be taught military parade, military tactics, and the use of weapons.⁴

In his 1997 address at the opening of the Management Course No. 10 for USDA executives, General Than Shwe said that the USDA was formed 'to serve the interests of the people, comprising all the national races, and to defend the nation' and that the mass meetings 'dealt with objective conditions in the country and took a firm stand in tabling motions to denounce internal and external destructive elements.'⁵ By 1998, the USDA was described as 'a reserve force for national defence', which had trained 2,395 new generation air youths and 2,614 new generation naval youths.⁶

The purpose of military training is to contain and eliminate those forces the regime identifies as subversive and destabilising, which includes in particular the NLD and the dissenting groups in the border areas. The USDA is being used to intimidate legitimate political parties and to rally support for the regime's National Convention.

At its September 1997 annual meeting, Than Shwe identified the major enemy as 'the kind of democracy being used as a facade by the neo-colonialists to interfere in internal affairs of other countries and drive a wedge', and these have 'caused grossly awful and ugly events in recent history'. Among his three national causes for all members of the association the first is that they should 'possess the strong conviction that our territorial integrity and security must never be encroached upon at all', while the other two relate to education and agriculture. In this speech there is no reference to its involvement in bringing about the much promised democracy.

A culture of violence and intimidation surrounds the USDA, designed in particular to frighten and deter NLD members, their supporters and residents in their neighbourhood. With an active USDA the regime hopes that NLD political activity will be curtailed, once NLD visitors or NLD events are known to automatically attract USDA 'volunteers' intent on wreaking havoc to disrupt proceedings. There are numerous reliable reports that the SLORC calls upon special USDA units to obstruct NLD meetings according to the instructions of its intelligence officers.⁷ Khin Nyunt, in his 5 November 1997 speech on the Burmese radio while attending the closing ceremony of a training course for primary school teachers, warned the NLD not to engage in 'undesirable acts' and proceeded to demand that the teachers 'organize the student youth to take part in successful implementation of programs of national interests of the USDA'.⁸ With the formation of the SPDC, USDA leaders are included in the cabinet, and this means that it is a central and long-term strategy of the regime.

Aung San Suu Kyi views the USDA as being used 'the way Hitler used his organization to harass people,

¹ 'Member of Secretariat of USDA accepts 1,280 membership applications.' *NLM*, 30.06.1998, p. 7.

² *NLM*, 16.09.1998, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *NLM*, 12.03.1996.

⁵ 'Than Shwe – over 500,000 members attended 16 USDA meetings'. Rangoon TV Myanmar Network, 28.05.1997 (BurmaNet News, 01.06.1997).

⁶ *NLM*, 16.09.1998, p. 1.

⁷ Oslo Democratic Voice of Burma. 'ABSDF express concern about USDA obstructing NLD meeting', 15 September 1997; 'USDA forms new groups, plans attacks on NLD leaders'. ABSDF Press Release, 15.09.1997.

⁸ Myanmar Radio, 05.11.1997 cited in BurmaNet, 12.11.1997.

in the most dangerous fashion'.¹ She has said that 'The USDA has become a very dangerous organization as it is now being used in the way Nazi leader Hitler used his brown shirts' and 'I want the whole world to know that the USDA is being used to crush the democratic movement.'²

Aung San Suu Kyi: The USDA is increasingly becoming a branch of the local authorities. On Burmese New Year's Day, the USDA people were sent over to my house to physically break up the NLD ... a fish-releasing ceremony. In another incident, members of the USDA, most of them students, were instructed to throw tomatoes at me at the anniversary of the death of Burma's first democratic prime minister ... Sadly many students are members of USDA because they're forced to be, partly through incentives and partly through threats. In some schools, they are threatened that if they don't become a member of the USDA, they will not be allowed to take their examinations, or they will not be given good grades. I received a letter from a teacher who said that in her school those who want to go to the classes reserved for the best students have become members of the USDA. So students must join for their own survival.

The world community must realize that the USDA, is not an innocent social-welfare organization, as it claims to be, but an organization being used by the authorities as a gang of thugs. Their operations resemble those of the Nazi Brown Shirts. The SLORC sent people from a so-called social-welfare organization to beat up other people taking part in a non-violent, religious ceremony. I must say that that amounts to something very, very close to what the Brown Shirts used to do in Germany.³

The pressure exerted upon members of the NLD by the USDA and other GONGOS is evident in the many newspaper reports.⁴ Also, foreign private companies, including a Chinese company from Yunnan, have been welcomed to make direct donations to the USDA.⁵

Myanmar Women's Entrepreneur Association (MWEA)

The Myanmar Women's Entrepreneur Association (MWEA) was originally founded in February 1995 by women entrepreneurs. However, it was soon controlled by SLORC-SPDC through their wives, and the Association is now 'a mouthpiece of the junta on "women's" issues'.⁶

The association originated from Myenigone Market in Rangoon. The purpose of the MWEA was to generate income for self-employed women running small businesses.

Income Generation, a term which has come into wide usage is a very broad concept with almost endless ramifications. But at the risk of being charged with oversimplification, it could be considered a strategy to effectively 'help those who help themselves'. One of its principal aims is to alleviate the poverty and enhance the socio-economic status of the poor and needy and targeted to help mainly women and destitute and wayward children. Social and humanitarian organizations implementing this strategy do not function in the manner of employment agencies, so they do not find jobs for the unemployed. But they do provide inputs such as technical and/or financial assistance to heighten and amplify the capacity of earning a better livelihood for those, who, on their own initiative are already self-employed and are struggling to survive at the subsistence level. It also aims to protect such people from exploitative forms of work and help them to preserve their human dignity.⁷

Burmese women often run small shops from home, and the association 'aims to assist Myanmar women at the grass roots level generate extra income to help enhance their socio-economic standing and thereby preserve the tradition of Myanmar women supplementing the family's income or fending for themselves with dignified forms of labour.' Under the guidance of Professor Daw Yi Yi Myint of the Institute of Economics, it is proclaimed that the scheme has not had any loan defaulters. It holds its annual general meeting at the International Business Centre at Pyay Road.

Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS)

The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) [မြန်မာအသံကလေးအဖွဲ့] was originally founded in 1920. Its status changed on 24 January 1993, when it was taken out of the government domain to become an NGO, or GONGO to be more precise. Dr Hla Bu sketches its purpose as carrying out 'its three main tasks – health promotion of entire population; prevention of outbreak of epidemics; helping those who are in distress – to implement its objective – alleviation of human sufferings.' On World Red Cross Day, the president called for 'utmost efforts of all Red Cross members of the country in carrying out tasks for community peace and tranquillity of the nation in accordance with the Objective of 1998 World Red Cross Day ... to Promote Peace and Tranquillity'.⁸

However, the MRCS is not beyond controversy as it has reportedly been involved in a crackdown on the

¹ CNN News, 10.11.1996.

² UPI, 21.04.1996.

³ 'Aung San Suu Kyi: the progressive interview.' With Leslie Kean and Dennis Bernstein, March 1997 (BurmaNet News).

⁴ e.g. 'Masses of Taninthayi Division declare it is time to drive Suu Kyi out of the country and to punish NLD group betraying the State and the people'. *NLM*, 02.11.1998.

⁵ 'K 1 million for annual general meeting of USDA'. *NLM*, 09.09.1997.

⁶ Skidmore (1998:87).

⁷ 'Income generation for Myanmar women'. *MP*, September 1997; *IS*, 01.02.1998.

⁸ 'World Red Cross Day observed with prize presentation ceremony'. *MLN*, 09.05.1998.

students at the Thai border in collaboration with military intelligence.¹

Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association (MWJA)

Founded during the Second World War, the MWJA is described as 'one of the oldest NGOs in Myanmar'.² It was renamed to reflect the new 'Myanmar' template, and held its first annual meeting in its new guise in 1993. During its second conference on 23 June 1998 it decided upon three tasks:

The three tasks are: the association members are to actively participate in serving national interests by having ... the people imbued with correct concepts and high morale with the use of literature and journalism: to the extent organization for new members consolidate organisational set-up of the association, raise the leadership role and make organization work dynamic and effective; to bring about improvement in skills of MWJA members, look after their welfare and regularize creation and publishing of literary work; and to strive for increasing the readership.³

The MWJA organizes Writers Day, a day designated on 8 March back in 1944. This supposedly recalls the days Burmese kings used to pay respects to authors and intellectuals. There are five reasons why respect to authors should be paid during Writer's Day, two of which follow the government's aims of promoting culture. One is 'that their works have not perished but remained as a treasurable collection of Myanmar culture', and the other is 'that their literary works matured Myanmar people of successive periods with life knowledge, inherent wit and worldly affairs and inculcated dynamic nationalism, independence and nation-building spirit in them'.⁴ The regime has been unable to co-opt the best and most-respected authors in Burma, as no self-respecting author wishes to be included in these events.

Other forms of 'social engineering'

It should be pointed out that the above are not the only kinds of 'social engineering' that have taken place. Some observers have likened conditions in Burma to what went on in Ceaucescu's Romania and in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.⁵ Not only has social engineering involved the creation of new structures of State, as recounted in the case of the GONGOs above, but it has also destroyed the established ways of communities, forcing them to live at the mercy of these newly established State guided structures. This involved two kinds of forced relocation involving an estimated two million people, half of whom live near the borders with Thailand, China and Bangladesh, and the other half has been internally displaced.

First, massive urban resettlement took place as part of urban redevelopment programmes. Sometimes these were for simple reasons such as cleaning up and beautifying the city, and sometimes these were to make room for particular projects, whether in the field of tourism or manufacturing. But perhaps the most important reasons for redevelopment programmes was the routine removal of residents from strategic areas, to break up possible opposition and to affect the outcome of the elections. Only in a few cases were relocations really of benefit to those uprooted, and then usually they were government employees.

Second, forced resettlement took place on a massive scale as part of the counter-insurgency operations in the ethnic minority areas. The four cuts campaign involved the army cutting off the four basic links between insurgents and civilians, namely of food, finance, intelligence and recruits. Large 'free fire' zones are regularly declared from which all communities are forced to move into 'strategic hamlets', from which they are often unable to even earn a living or carry out their daily activities. They are not permitted to leave the hamlets to visit their homes or they will be shot. Any area outside government control is prone to these authoritarian measures, leaving the ethnic minorities particularly vulnerable to displacement and the destruction of their ways of life.

¹ Mya Maung (1998a:257).

² Maung Lu Zaw. 'Second Conference of Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association'. *MP*, June 1998.

³ *NLM*, 24.06.1998, p. 12.

⁴ *MP*, December 1997.

⁵ A UNICEF report attributed 'social engineering', 'a pervasive strategy in Myanmar at present', as 'perhaps most evident in the constantly changing social landscape due to resettlement'. J Boyden. *Myanmar children in especially difficult circumstances*. Rangoon: UNICEF, 1992, p. 31; See also Smith (1994:46,69–84).

Chapter 5

Myanmafication (4): building Mangala country and the Myanmar human origins

In chapter 2, I presented the main vocabulary of Myanmafication – national unity, national *re*-consolidation and extensive renaming of the country. In chapter 3, I developed the concept of unity, demonstrating how the army replaced the Sangha in the model for unity. Finally, in chapter 4 I developed the Four Attributes of Disciplined Democracy that represent the formally declared programme for countrywide change – law, structures of State, culture and traditions of the people and the economic benefits. However, the Myanmafication project includes several other elements not immediately specified as formal attributes of disciplined democracy. This chapter describes this second-tier, more informal elements of Myanmafication, and in particular the role of Buddhism, gender, archaeology and the relationship with Japan.

Buddhism

Central to Burmese identity is Buddhism, and so Buddhism has to be represented somewhere near the core of Myanmar culture. However, a major problem surrounds how exactly it should be integrated. I have already noted that the army competes with the role of the Sangha in forging national unity. However, if Buddhism is not emphasized, then it is unlikely that the regime stands a chance forming any political organization with sufficient influence (*awza*). On the other hand, if Buddhism is over-emphasized, then relationships with internal and external agencies may be damaged. Problems will be generated internally if Buddhists are motivated to take freedom into their own hand, and uncontrolled manifestation of charisma erodes the regime's control over the country. Furthermore, any emphasis on Buddhism will alienate members of other religious groups. Moreover, if Buddhism is over-emphasized in the organizations and projects of the regime, then it makes it difficult to attract foreign aid, as donors fight shy of providing funds for what are deemed religious development projects. Also, the majority of ASEAN countries are not Buddhist, and it is therefore difficult to place Buddhism forward organizationally.

Nevertheless, by placing 'Myanmar' cultural heritage at the core of the new political system, and in the name of renovating heritage to attract tourists, the regime can disguise its material support for Buddhism as culture, and still gain merit and legitimacy according to the old models of royal legitimisation without foregoing international goodwill.

Beyond this, however, there are strong political reasons for supporting Buddhism. The regime's journalists have proclaimed the 1988 protests to have caused the defilement of Burma's pagodas, including the Shwedagon Pagoda. It alleges a communist conspiracy underlying the democracy movement. Saw Maung stated that those involved in party politics 'ought not to mix up politics and religion', but since 'we (the army) are not doing politics today', so 'we are not those who do party politics'.¹ The implication is that, since the army has abandoned party politics, it may now involve itself in Buddhism because Buddhism represents in this system the neutral ground beyond party or government, as I will show later. Indeed, in the Burmese version (not the English) of his speech, Saw Maung expresses the desire to 'guard the Buddha *sasana* for its long duration' (ပုဂံခရီးသွားအတွက် ဗုဒ္ဓအာဇာနည်ကို ထိန်းသိမ်းစောင့်ရှောက်ရန်)။²

Monasteries, had furthermore become the centre for 'subversive' activities resulting in the boycott of the military between August and October 1990. Another reason is thus to crowd out, through a programme of positive sponsorship, subversives.

The government has to restore, repair and renovate pagodas, stupas, temples, monasteries, ordination halls, prayer halls and other religious structures shrouded with shrubbery or have become dens of vice. In the meantime, a discord was sowed between the Tatmadaw and the monks of Mandalay which had to be resolved with much difficulty ...³

The latter is a reference to the first monastic boycott against government in Burmese history. The regime totally reversed its earlier stance on Buddhism, and instead of unsuccessfully repressing it and

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:337).

² Saw Maung (1990b:308).

³ Nawrahta (1995:142).

providing the opposition with more Buddhist supporters, it decided it was time to initiate a large programme in support of Buddhism.

The army has a long history of using Buddhism as a tool to retain power and to fight communists. The Psychological Warfare Department is notorious for thinking out new strategies by playing on the gullible points of Burmese Buddhists. The *dharmmantraya* project has been well documented. It was apparently 'convinced that they could do it much better than the religiously pious U Nu or other civilian political leaders and other organizations.'¹ However, this did not translate into popular support for the military faction in the subsequent 1960 elections where this propaganda in fact resulted in enhancing the popularity of U Nu.

The project for support of Buddhism is another military attempt to manipulate the Burmese population. In June 1990, a new Department for the Propagation of the Sasana (DPPS) [qacnaet'a\ Taka:npaer: 'Is@an] was established. This incorporated the Burma Pitaka Association, the private initiative ex-Prime Minister U Nu had originally been permitted to set up by Ne Win when he returned under the amnesty to Burma in 1980. This proved easy to incorporate as U Nu was under house arrest between December 1989 and 25 April 1992 for refusing to disband the parallel government that he had formed. There was nothing he could do about it.

From 20 March 1992, Religious affairs, which had under the Ne Win regime been represented by the Department of Religious Affairs under the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs, came under a separately constituted Ministry of Religious Affairs. This is today one of the most powerful ministries, incorporating the above-mentioned DPPS in addition to the Department of Religious Affairs. On the same date three new religious titles were instituted, to be awarded in recognition for efforts to missionise Buddhism.² New initiatives for training monks to missionise Buddhism all over the world were under way. That same year is the first time since King Thibaw that official recognition was extended to monastic schools.

Around this time newspapers also began to markedly reflect more Buddhist content. Thus, the bottom of the Burmese language *Worker's Daily* of 12 March 1992 first included a reference to the Thirty-Eight *Mangala*, instead of the usual political slogans. This paper had succeeded the Burmese *Mirror* (*Kyei Mon*) and the Burmese *Light of Myanmar* (*Myanmar Alin*) from 18 September 1988, after these had been taken over by the pro-democracy factions during the uprising. When the *Myanmar Alin* was restarted on 1 May 1993 under regime control, the *mangala* had been respectfully moved to the top of the page above the masthead, and from then on one of the Thirty-Eight *Mangala* was cited every day for fifteen days each until today.³ Indeed, the intention behind these newspaper references become clear from *A Guide to the Mangala Sutta*, subsequently published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1994 (see below) where, as we shall see, it aimed to pacify rebellious youngsters.⁴ At the bottom of the front cover of the newspaper would be such political slogans as – 'Emergence of the State Constitution is the duty of all citizens of Myanmar Naing-ngan' – and in the main body of the newspaper would appear the nationalist slogans. In this way, the symmetrically numbered political slogans were legitimated, given credence, by the equally symmetrically numbered scriptural passages that were placed most prominently on the front page.

Penetration of the Buddhist message further permeated government-controlled mass media. For example, in September 1998, out of thirty-two daily television programmes scheduled on Burma's single television station three were explicitly Buddhist. These programmes were initiated in 1997 and implied a shift in the regime's attitude to the role of Buddhism in government.

Similarly spectacular is the frequent appearance of the generals dressed in white robes over their uniform, as if they were observing the eight precepts, or as if they were yogi entering meditation centres. As one observer put it 'they are pretending to be pious, deflecting attention from their political interests'.⁵

The regime has manifold uses for Buddhism, ranging from legitimating itself, inculcating useful values in the Burman population, especially women and the young, to homogenize the ethnic groups, and overcoming the defences of the foreigner. Like Minye Kaungbon's metaphor of Burma's national races as waves diluted into greater waters, he suffixed this characterisation with the statement that it was the water of Buddhism

¹ Callahan (1996a:487).

² In particular qacnaip Bpkm'anasriyBp and qacnaNgBp

³ See below under the Buddhist culture syllabus for the significance of *mangala* in nation building.

⁴ Kyaw Htut (1994:xvii).

⁵ Daw Metta. 'Myanmar: a facelift.' *ASEASUK News*, No. 21 Spring 1997, p. 7.

that was responsible for diluting the races. When the British arrived in 1824 the dilution of the races had supposedly already been completed.

By then, there were no longer any differences in faith, in culture, in customs, habits and laws among indigenous races of Myanmar. Buddhism had by then become bed-rock of the cultures, literature, laws, customs and habits of all indigenous peoples of Myanmar. With the arrival of Buddhism in Myanmar, Buddhist culture spread with the result that with the exception of national races living in remote inaccessible areas, all other national groups abandoned their individual cults and became Buddhists. The light of religions continued to spread to the remaining areas of Myanmar. The culture of all national groups of Myanmar was therefore a unified one.

There was also only one scripture and literature that branched out of religion. A single and unified law also emerged out of customs and habits that stemmed from a single religion. There would also be not very much differences in human conduct and social mores because the roots of all of them are in religion, although there may be slight local variations.¹

The regime's deep involvement in Buddhism had become evident by the time Aung San Suu Kyi was questioned on the significance of the SLORC's actions in the field of Buddhism. Aung San Suu Kyi responded 'I hope that they will pay more attention to the essence of Buddhism, that would help a lot.'² Unfortunately the regime's actions speak for themselves. The informal agenda behind the regime's efforts 'to brighten up Buddhism'³ is to Myanmarify the country, not through Buddhism, as a truly universal value system based on techniques of mental culture that liberates from culture, but Buddhism as an enculturating rule-based transactional system at the apex of which stands the regime itself as the master of all transaction, as the 'selfless' masters of 'goodwill' (*cetana*). Where culture and Buddhism had formerly been carefully distinguished, the former occupying a narrower and inferior domain, under this programme the two have become conjoined in the attempt to broaden the boundaries of the Myanmar *mandala*.

Merit making, restoration of Buddhist heritage, social service

The regime uses merit making to support construction of a new tourist infrastructure, and infrastructure more generally, including roads and other public amenities. Indeed, as we shall see, it uses merit making as a cultural concept to justify its extensive use of forced labour. In a report entitled the 'SLORC's abuses of Buddhism', the regime is depicted as having 'presented itself as the preserver and protector of Burmese culture, including Buddhism. The regime's propaganda, laws, and actions, however, make a cruel mockery of that pious facade.'⁴ The regime put a Buddhist gloss on the unethical exploitation of the Burmese people by calling forced labour the voluntary contribution of labour to gain Buddhist merit. Khin Nyunt cynically stated that 'the people of Myanmar were of the Buddhist faith and were willing to contribute voluntarily to the development projects, believing that they would be the first ones to enjoy the results on Earth and thereafter'.⁵ Furthermore, in recruiting soldiers to the army sometimes use the language of Buddhism to lure youngsters from the countryside to do the most dangerous jobs by playing on the idea that the army defends pagodas and monasteries against attacks from other religions.

The army and merit making

The regime's revived interest in Buddhism is evident from the newspapers, which report acts of merit by the generals such as renovating famous pagodas in which the generals play the chief role, accruing merit. For example, at the Shwe Htidaw hoisting and consecration ceremony of Htilominlo Pagoda in the Pagan cultural zone, attended by Vice-Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) General Maung Aye and wife Daw Mya Mya San

The congregation shared the merits gained.

At the auspicious time, Commander Maj-Gen Ye Myint, Minister U Aung San and Minister Maj-Gen Sein Htwa hoisted the first tier of the Shwe Htidaw.

Accompanied by entourage of celestials and royal entourage of the Ministry of Culture, General Maung Aye conveyed the Seinbudaw, Secretary-3 Lt-Gen Win Myint conveyed the Hngetmyatna and other members conveyed religious objects, various tiers of the Shwe Htidaw and htidaws of cetis circling the pagoda.⁶

Another example is the Bakaya Monastery of Amarapura. The first Bakaya monastery built for King Nyaungyan (AD 1599–1605) was at the forefront of providing the palace with training in occult arts. The

¹ Minye Kaungbon (1994:168–69).

² 'Patience, pragmatism pays off for "the Lady"'. *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

³ Nawrahta (1995:142).

⁴ 'SLORC's abuses of Buddhism'. Buddhist Relief Mission, 12.02.1997 (BurmaNet News, 18.12.1997).

⁵ UNHCR Report, 05.02.1996.

⁶ *NLM*, 11.02.1998.

restored Bakaya Monastery, however, is a later one dating to King Bagan (AD 1846–1853), the son and successor of King Thayawaddy who built it in 1847 under the name Maha Way Yan Bontha, and offered it to the Sangharaja Ashin Pinna Zawta. Reconstruction started on 5 February 1993 and was completed three years later. This monastery was also renowned for its occult arts.¹ Also, there is the renovation of the Golden Palace Monastery (Shwe Nandaw Monastery), originally an apartment of Mindon's Palace named Mya Nan San Kyaw.²

Other merit making activities are regularly publicised. For example, there are collective novice ordinations by army units into the monastic order.³ Also, the cause of the army's fight for the unification of the country is, we are made to believe, supported by the entire country in Buddhist ways. The fight at the front is causing many casualties in particular among the lower ranking soldiers, and so 'every year, dry rations are presented to monasteries and homes for the aged in dedication to the fallen Tatmadawmen and merits gained are shared'. As the army 'is providing every assistance for these disabled soldiers, the public is also taking part in the task with immense generosity, indicating the perpetual unity, goodwill and love between the Tatmadaw [army] and the people toward building the nation's modern armed forces'. It was SPDC Secretary-2 Bureau of Special Operations Chief of Staff (Army) Lieutenant General Tin Oo who urged 'military personnel to value the *cetana* and *metta* of the people'.⁴

Forced labour and merit making

Behind tourism and behind the Burmese national economy lies the question of what the regime calls 'voluntary labour'. It is to permit the tourists to travel safely and admire 'Myanmar culture', and for the businessman to invest, that the soldiers are now fighting to gain control over the areas rich in cultural and mineral resources. It is they who largely provide the finance to make this unification of the Myanmar family possible. However, their concept of development involves using their authority to make people work for them 'voluntarily', for the army replaces the Sangha in the SCORC-SPDC of concept unity.

A UN Rapporteur said that the term 'forced labour' characterises a whole host of activities including what would ordinarily be a meritorious deed:

130. The Myanmar authorities continue to deny the existence of the practice of forced labour in the country. According to the argumentation of the Government of Myanmar, the concept of forced labour is not applicable to Myanmar, because the people of Myanmar are voluntarily participating in labour for community development, such as the construction of pagodas, monasteries, schools, bridges, roads, railways. During the last visit of the former Special Rapporteur, he was told in his meeting with Secretary One that 'stories about forced labour were not true, ... the people of Myanmar were of the Buddhist faith and were willing to contribute voluntarily to the development projects' ...

132. The Special Rapporteur continues to receive numerous reports from a wide variety of sources indicating that the practice of forced labour remains widespread in Myanmar. It has been alleged that civilians are forced to contribute non-compensated labour to certain large development projects. The projects concerned are said to include the building of roads, railways, bridges and gas pipelines.

People living in villages near the various projects are said to be frequently forced to contribute labour under the threat of reprisals if they do not comply with the request. Numerous reports indicate that there is an especially extensive use of forced labour in several railway construction projects. Elderly persons, and sometimes children, have reportedly been seen working along the railway.

According to reports received, the poor conditions at construction sites have led to accidents and illness, sometimes causing the death of several persons.⁵

The regime justifies its forced labour programme in terms of traditional Buddhist concepts of merit making.

Voluntary service in the interest of the community is a deep-rooted and ancient Myanmar tradition. It is based on our world view that man cannot exist in splendid isolation unless he is an Arahant (i.e. someone who has attained a state of liberation from mundane life), and that to succeed in life, a human being must strike a balance between what is good for self and what is good for all. Beginning with the basic unit of family it has been ingrained in our philosophy of life that to thrive, both physically and spiritually, each has duties to perform – duties for the various positions or status one occupies in society throughout the span of life as a human being; as child, parent, teacher, monk, citizen or ruler. But added to this is the Myanmar's innate spirit of generosity and kindness. The bountiful natural environment of the country may have shaped and conferred this special characteristic on the Myanmar people regardless of whether they be Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Bama, Mon, Rakhine or Shan.

¹ *MP*, May 1997.

² *MP*, November 1997.

³ 'Fourth collective novitiation ceremony held in Aung San Myo'. *NLM*, 12.04.1998.

⁴ 'Thanmyanthu presents cash assistance to in-service Tatmadawmen who sacrificed limbs for national cause'. *NLM*, 19.03.1998.

⁵ United Nations (Special Rapporteur Judge Rajsoomer Lallah). *Report of Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar A/51/466*, October 1996.

... People from all walks of life for instance contributed their labour towards the building of the Maha Wizaya Pagoda [Pagoda built by Ne Win], south-east of the Shwedagon Pagoda and towards the Sacred Tooth Relic Pagoda [Pagoda built by the regime to foster improved relations with China], on Kaba-Aye Pagoda Road in Yangon. These are instances of community service on a large and organized scale and it might be misconstrued as something that happens once in a great while and at the insistence of those in authority. That is not the case; it is a daily phenomena, be it in small villages, towns or cities. Prayer halls and the precincts of pagodas and temples large and small, are swept by volunteers daily ...

Since the beginning of their history, the Myanmar people have demonstrated this strong community spirit and service. We willingly give wealth, time and labour for the welfare of the people in [our] community. This community spirit comes to us naturally ...

This has been our national trait and custom since ancient times. The Myanmar people are, by nature, good neighbours both in times of need and joy. One might perhaps think this tradition has declined in the larger towns. But it is not so. Perhaps a very few, who have been brought up in the west and been imbued with western ideas, may look upon all this with jaundiced eyes and call it forced labour. But you only have to see the faces of those at work, to realize that these are people who are happy in service to others and to the community.¹

This view of forced labour as happy, meritorious and cultural behaviour, in-keeping with long-established practice, is not just a one-off invention by a right-wing journalist, but it is the view that the regime is presenting to the outside world. It just happened to be so that the government Tooth Relic Pagoda that housed the Chinese Tooth Relic on an official State visit from China was most certainly built according to independent accounts with forced labour, for Skidmore reports having personally 'interviewed over one hundred families in Mandalay and Yangon' who were 'forced to work on the construction of the Tooth Relic pagodas'.²

In response to questions about forced labour there is not even the semblance of investigative research, for General Able asserted confidently:

Rubbish, these unfounded rumors ... It is the Buddhist tradition for people to volunteer to work for the betterment of the country, because we believe we get merits for the next life. It is the communists and Aung San Suu Kyi who spread rumors of forced labor, and certain writers and reporters who believe in them and write lies to hurt my country. If I had a house and my house needed repair, the entire neighborhood would be there to help me and they wouldn't expect to be paid.³

Usually forced labour is justified in relation to the 1908 Villages and Towns Act which supposedly permits village councils to order citizens to work as forced laborers. However, the act in fact gives village councils the right to impose 'compulsory service for public purposes without any discrimination on grounds of birth, race, religion and class.' Furthermore, the 1947 Constitution stated that 'forced labour in any form and involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall be prohibited.'⁴

The regime is worse than monarchy in the way it has conscripted labour. Even King Mindon, unlike some of his predecessors, had insisted on paying for labour provided by his subjects,⁵ and did not require them to attend court matters while they were busy during harvest time.⁶ Hla Toe, who inspected documentation on debt at first hand for that period, found that until 1868 there was some evidence of corvée labour during Mindon's reign, but 'after the introduction of a coinage currency and the thatha-meida taxation system in 1868, King Mindon abandoned the demand of corvée labor for his irrigation projects by the request of the hsaya-daws of the Di-pe-yin district.'⁷

After the International Labour Organization (ILO) repeatedly pressed the regime on the issue of forced labour and forced portering for the army, the regime argues that the Burmese people delight in giving free labour in return for Buddhist merit. Over the past ten years Burma has the distinction of having a regime with the greatest and most persistent labour violations.⁸ The result was that in 1995 the ILO found the regime's arguments 'so unconvincing that it was compelled to set aside in Special Paragraphs of its final report the conclusions that forced labor must be eliminated once and for all and that unions, independent of the government, must be allowed to exist if workers so choose.' This placed Burma's leaders in the

¹ Hla Myo Nwe. 'Community service, a Myanmar tradition'. (<http://www.myanmar.com>).

² Skidmore (1998:87). See also Schober, Julianne. 'Buddhist just rule and Burmese national culture: state patronage of the Chinese Tooth Relic in Myanmar'. *History of Religions*. 1997; 36(3):218–43.

³ Victor (1998:24).

⁴ Article 19, Section (ii). Bertil Lintner first pointed this out in BurmaNet News, 18.10.1995.

⁵ RO 11 Nov 1854, 7 Apr 1856; 13 Jan 1857; 3 Apr 1857.

⁶ RO 6 Jun 1885

⁷ Toe Hla. 1987. 'Money-lending and contractual *thet-kayits*: a socio-economic pattern of the later Kon-baung period, 1819–1885.' DeKalb: PhD thesis (unpublished).

⁸ Phillip Fishman. 'SLORC's ILO travails'. *Burma Debate*, July–August 1996.

company of Nigeria's notorious military rulers, also cited in a Special Paragraph. However, by 1996, keen on being seen to be honourable in the context of the opening of its Tourism Year,

The SLORC representative no longer denied the existence of forced labor. Nor did he explain to the Committee as he had in the past that there had been a small misunderstanding, that what the international community sees as widespread, systematic use of forced labor to rebuild the country's decaying infrastructure is actually the Burmese age-old cultural tradition of 'voluntary labor' to gain Buddhist merit. This time he triumphantly announced that because the 45-year war with the country's ethnic minorities was virtually over, the government had to find something to do with Burma's 400,000-man-strong military. From now on, he reported, the soldiers' labor would be used to rebuild the country's infrastructure, not the labor extracted by force from the Burmese people.

However, the ILO considered the evidence, and once again decided to cite the SLORC in Special Paragraphs, this time mentioning the case in its report 'as one of persistent failure to implement Convention No. 29 and Convention No. 87,' which in ILO speak is 'the strongest terminology available to the Committee.' The regime's disdain is currently facing a seldom-used ILO procedure 'reserved only for the most egregious cases of abuse', namely an official Mission of Inquiry into alleged use of forced labour with public hearings.¹

The slogan 'Selflessly in the service of the country, work hard, all in our public service' [ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အတွက် အလုပ်အကိုင်ကို စိန်ခံစားရန်] is to be understood in terms of the regime's useful synthesis between concepts of Buddhist culture and free 'voluntarily' forced labour. I will later return to this attitude in relation to discussing the concept of *mangala* and *cetana*.

Buddhism and Myanmar culture

Many aspects of Buddhism are therefore useful to the regime. However, there is much uncertainty about the exact role of Buddhism in this national cultural development scheme. We only have to follow the reasoning of the historian Dr Khin Maung Nyunt (b. 1929) who, as a member (retired Director-General) of the Historical Commission, editor of *Myanmar Perspectives*, and member of the Central Executive Committee of Writers and Journalists Association, is involved in numerous committees, and is most actively involved in thinking out the parameters of Burmese culture on which the future Burmese State is to be based.²

Dr Khin Maung Nyunt is asked questions by an audience of Burmese and foreign scholars on Buddhism.

Dr. Sein Tu asked the author to comment on the role that Buddhism played in the resurgence of the spirit of patriotism, the way it strengthened the resolve of the Myanmar people into a concerted struggle that eventually led to regaining of independence and the part played by the Sangha or Buddhist monks in anti-imperialist agitation. He also wished to know the present and future tasks of religion in nation building.

Reply – The role of Buddhism in the national renaissance is very great. In 1904–1905 there emerged a modern nationalist movement with the formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association on the model of the Young Men Christian Association. Originally this association was religious and cultural and it maintained that to promote Buddhism was to promote Myanmar culture. It was not political in the initial stage but very soon this association assumed a political character and provided the basis of future movements for national independence and the monks also played a role in these movements, as did writers and journalists. So, Myanmar modern nationalist movement was Buddhism inspired.

With regard to the second part of the question, Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt replied that Myanmar is a secular state and Buddhism is not the State Religion although the majority of Myanmar are Buddhists. Due recognition is given to other faiths. But the government recognizes the fact that religion in general, not just Buddhism, has a major role to play to salvage the nation and the people from the ravages of material progress. The Government recognizes that Buddhism as well as other religions play a major role in the maintenance and refinement of the cultural life of the people.

According to this interpretation Buddhism moved from a cultural issue in the first decade to a nationalist political movement in the second. All religions might have a role to play in culture, but in what proportion of importance? If equivalent, then would the plurality of religions not militate against a singular Myanmar civilization?

'Anthropology' Kyaw Win, Deputy Director General, Department of Culture, evidently highly confused but undaunted at the prospect of engineering culture, then makes this inspired comment that 'Union Culture, which includes the culture of the national races needed to be elaborated, especially their intangible culture, since Myanmar culture is Union culture'. To this Khin Maung Nyunt confidently replies affirming

¹ *Ibid.*

² Khin Maung Nyunt was also Chairman of the Committee for Compiling Authentic Facts on the History of Myanmar 1989–93, member of the University of Culture Council, of the Myanmar Traditional Cultural Heritage Preservation Central Committee, and 'Adviser of Cultural Committee of MNWCWA'. On 6 May he gave a paper on cultural issues at a Workshop on the above-mentioned Women's Development of the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs. Source: 'There has never been a problem in Myanmar concerning loss of rights, nor torture and degradation of women'. *NLM*, 7.05.1998.

that ‘Myanmar culture’ is not ‘Bama [Burman] culture’ but ‘encompasses all 135 nationalities [i.e. it is Myanmar culture]’.

Reply – Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt said he used the term Myanmar culture not Bama culture. That it therefore encompasses all 135 nationalities. He stated ‘I first began with indigenous culture and clarified what it meant and put the emphasis on abstract aspect of culture and this I believe includes all the 135 national groups.’ He said he had not gone into details about their special aspects such as the performing arts, fine arts, life styles, and their rituals and ceremonies because that would require an encyclopaedic study.

Having first diversified cultures through diverse religions, and then joined this diversity under the umbrella of an ‘abstract’ unity through Myanmar culture, Daw Kyi Kyi Hla from *Myanmar Perspectives* then asks Dr Khin Maung Nyunt about the maintenance of such integral Myanmar culture in the face of the disintegrating effects of modernization (equated with ‘alien culture’).

Daw Kyi Kyi Hla gave her comments on the question of the alien cultural influences brought in the wake of the changing world and Information Super Highway and stressed that though this was to be expected, we should not let them overcome us; that we should think of ways and means to protect our cultural identity. That, though the Government had done much we should not place the onus of responsibility on the Government alone; that it was time, each and everyone gave a helping hand, especially to convince the younger generation that modernization and progress need not clash with our culture.

Reply – Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt said that this question was pertinent not only to Asian developing countries but even in most developed nations like America. He continued by saying countries like America, Japan, Germany, France were now paying a cultural price and it seems they are about to lose their cultural identity. Even old countries like Britain and France are confronting this danger of losing their cultural identity. That was probably the reason why France is now attempting to build up a French speaking world. And this is a step taken by a country like France, which claims to be the most cultured country in the world. Developing countries like ours have no need worry yet because we still have the basic cultural elements to rely on. Not too much has been lost yet. He said culture can be revived through education and that through religion one could retain culture and also, he said through concerted action with neighbouring countries, like the ASEAN. He added that almost every ASEAN treaty had either a paragraph or article on cultural co-operation and that there was general recognition of the dangers of material progress overwhelming basic cultural values. The media also has an important role to play in educating the younger people on this issue.

So Burmese development in the context of ASEAN should not ‘pay the cultural price’ and follow the western nations who ‘lose their cultural identity’. Developing countries like Burma have the precious resource culture to rely on, which can be retained and developed through education, religion and co-operation within ASEAN. There is a question here over whether emphasising culture does not pose risks with 135 ethnic groups in Burma. Perhaps losing a little culture would not do any harm?

Dr Damrong Wattana, from the Faculty of Political Science at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, perceived a conflict between the emphasis on modernization and on traditional culture. So he asked what the size of the population of Buddhist monks was, whether they were ‘considered as human resources contributing to national development’, and ‘how monks were developed and if there were any plans or policies on that’.

Reply – Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt replied that the Religious Affairs Department would be more competent to answer the question on the size of the Buddhist monk population, which, he said, varies because there are some who are not life-long monks. A rough figure of full-fledged monks would be about 300,000 [about 1% of the Burman population].

Concerning the second half of the question, Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt said that monks certainly were considered a valuable human resource. They play a significant role in monastic education where the monks give the children moral instruction and also teach them the three ‘R’s. The Government successfully has reintroduced monastic education at the primary level. Monks also play an important role in the maintenance of the natural environment, for they not only encourage but actually take the lead in planting trees of all kinds, fruit trees, shade trees and flowering trees. They may also be called the custodians of national culture.

Inculcation of Buddhist values in the youth of Burma and the ecological role of monks may be applauded. However, given the diversity of religions in Burma, there would appear to be some conflict between the emphasis on traditional culture by placing monks as the ‘custodians of national culture’ and the promise of equality within the Myanmar culture family, and also with the desire to modernise.

Mr M. Rajaratnam, Director of the Information and Resource Sector, Singapore, questioned Khin Maung Nyunt’s assumption that the West was on the decline, and he said he thought ‘it was just the opposite’, as ‘Western Civilization was well on its way to being preserved and strengthened with a return to religion in many parts of Europe and America.’ His view was that ‘the open value system of the West had allowed civilization to strengthen itself’. So he asked Khin Maung Nyunt whether he thought ‘an open society would allow our own Asian cultural values to be preserved and strengthened’. Does Khin Maung Nyunt see ‘globalization and the preservation of the deep cultural heritage of Myanmar as two contradictory trends’?

Reply – The speaker [Khin Maung Nyunt] in reply said that he did not say the West was on the decline, but that they were

facing the problem of losing their cultural identity, and that they were trying to revive it. For example, the British and French are trying to preserve things British and French respectively. And the same he said was in the case of the Americans.

The speaker then went on to say that he considered Buddhism an open value system, and that it was why religions before and after it could continue to exist. Thus the open-value system of a country could promote and enable culture to exist and flourish.

Concerning globalization in the 21st century, he said, a global village from the material point of view, the communications point of view and from the media point of view sounds very nice. But there still remains the spirit of nationalism which is very much alive. He said globalization was not a new concept but a new term for the idea of a cosmopolitan state and that this idea had existed since the time of the Greeks. Attempts to establish a cosmopolitan state has been made at every stage of history and much has been written about it but that it had still to be realized. Large empires such as the Roman Empire, the British Empire and the Soviet Union were established which sooner or later broke up again into nation states. So as long as there are nation states there must be a national cultural identity to uphold this state. He added that, in his opinion, a global state or globalization in the 21st century could not be realized. As regards the contradiction between globalization and maintenance of national culture, it does not exist, since the establishment of a cosmopolitan state is unacceptable.

Khin Maung Nyunt seems to think that all political entities ultimately break up into nation states, with monolithic cultures based on some 'common national identity'. Furthermore, in placing this identity firmly into Buddhism as the 'open' religion, this places Buddhism at the centre of Myanmar Culture for all ethnicities and religions. Buddhism, because of its 'openness', is supposedly able 'promote and enable culture to exist and flourish' and thus to serve as a short-hand for a concept of 'Myanmar culture'. In short, Myanmar culture has become 'Bama' culture in the name of Buddhism.

It is quite evident that the regime places a barrier in terms of accepted legitimacy between Burmese and other forms of Buddhism in other countries. Indeed, the openness of Buddhism stops at the Myanmar boundaries and does not extend to other Theravada countries, as is clear in respect of Burma's frosty relations with Thailand. These views demonstrate that there are many hopeless contradictions in the policy makers' ideas on the role of Buddhism in Myanmar culture.

Buddhism and youth training

As already noted, the regime is, of course, not just seeking merit when it supports Buddhism. Currently Buddhism is thought to sustain the core values of Burman identity, or, as Khin Maung Nyunt said, monks are 'custodians of national culture'.¹ In short, 'when people began to take interest in religion, religious teachings began to spread. People became gentle and soft.'²

This is why the regime has decided to give its own Union Solidarity and Development Association training in Buddhism which 'prevents alien culture' and helps the 'preservation of national culture'.

YANGON, 25 Feb—Member of the Secretariat of the Union Solidarity and Development Association Minister for Culture U Win Sein yesterday gave counsel to trainees of Buddhism Course (High level) organized by Sagaing Division USDA.

The minister said there are less adverse conditions in our country due to the teachings of Buddha and people believe their karma.

He said conducting such course prevents alien culture and helps them instil religious culture and it means preservation of national culture.

The minister urged them to distribute the lectures among their village, ward and township.

The ten-day course is being attended by 52 trainees in Sagaing, 33 in Monywa and 21 in Kalay.³

Numerous other reports are available attesting to the regime's declared attempt to inculcate Buddhist values in the USDA,⁴ and it was claimed at the third annual meeting on 12–15 September 1996 that the USDA had at least 1.23 million trainee youths attending courses in 'Buddhist culture'.

Buddhist culture syllabus

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has been encouraged by the regime's culture policy makers to adopt a missionary approach and is making instrumental use of Buddhism to support the State as they envisage it. But what kind of values does it teach? It is worth examining the educational material emanating from the Department for the Propagation of the Sasana [DPPS] since it began publishing these in 1994.

A guide to the Mangala Sutta: the ideology of State⁵

The more one reads the *Guide to the Mangala Sutta*, the more one realises that — in the absence of a

¹ *MP*, March 1998.

² Nawrahta (1995:142).

³ 'Minister for Culture gives counsel to trainees of Buddhism Course (High level) in Sagaing'. *NLM*, 26.02.1998.

⁴ Training in two-week courses is reported of 1500 USDA ('Buddhist courses conclude'. *NLM*, 12.04.1998).

⁵ U Kyaw Htut. *A guide to the Mangala Sutta*. Rangoon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana, 1994. Transl. Daw Mya Tin.

political ideology – this is the regime's equivalent to the BSPP's *The Burmese Way to Socialism* (30 April 1962). However, this rendering of *Mangala Sutta* is intellectually inferior as both a political and as a Buddhist document – it bluntly advocates Buddhism as an instrument of State. The categories of *loka* [1-30] versus *lokuttara* [31-38] remain, however, as stable Buddhist categories. But it is the interpretation of these by the military, who prefer to stick to the *loka* categories to do with 'basic needs' and with 'the stomach'. For the democracy movement, however, the only path to freedom open to them while in prison is the latter path away from *loka* so narrowly defined. To both, however, mental culture represents the philosophy of the State. Nos [31] Austerity (*tapa*) and [32] *Byama-so tayà* precariously balance at the point of contact between both worlds and both political philosophies – who has the better right to proclaim this their political philosophy?

The *Mangala Sutta* is one of the first texts children in Burma learn. It has always been an indispensable part of the syllabus for Burmese children, both as pupils in monasteries and nunneries, and in secular schools. Its importance is derived from its supposed efficacy as the first of the eleven *paritta* texts, recitation of which ensures freedom from danger and fear. It is commonly recited on the occasion of appreciation and recollection of good deeds [*anumodana* **ANemadna**] at donation ceremonies. It is of particular importance in foundation and house-warming ceremonies that involve the initiation of domains and attempts to reconcile cosmic unbalances and changes. It is not so much about prediction by reading supernatural signs and omens to anticipate directions in one's fate, but through adopting correct mental cognition by means of good practice that foster harmony, it is instrumental in securing a balanced and harmonious environment to live in without disturbance or fear of the future. In this sense it is portrayed as equally predictive as the search for omens.

For these reasons it had been emphasised by King Mindon. Apart from Mindon's personal practice of meditation, his questions to his monks on *vipassana* and his encouragement of *vipassana* in the royal court, he also made it known that he despised some Brahmanic ritual aspects. He preached the Mingala Sutta [Sutta on auspiciousness] to Phayre, which 'provides lessons of direct practical application, capable of immediate and fruitful utilization by people in all walks of life, irrespective of differences of sex, status or station, sect, race or nation'. In preaching it, the good king 'told the distinguished visitor ... that [it] could well be the text-book of a world-citizen'. Soni explains how a superstitious Brahmin who throws away his clothing in the cemetery fearing that a bite into it by a rat was an inauspicious omen. As soon as he heard the Buddha picked it up he went to dissuade the Buddha as he worried himself that it would bring inauspiciousness also to him and his monastery. The Buddha, however, brought him to clear understanding that such things as rat-bites are not inauspicious. Indeed, auspiciousness is 'the discarding of all superstitions connected with the "seeing", "hearing" and "touching" of things or persons, also of all superstitions connected with the eclipses of heavenly bodies, dreams and signs in one's surroundings, that leads to auspiciousness and even to the Blessed State'. For Mindon such 'clear' and 'auspicious' vision was not, in the ideal, attained through formal rituals associated with superstition by the advice of a Brahmin. Instead it was attainable, in the ideal at least, through *vipassana* practice.¹

General Saw Maung in 1990 responded to the view expressed by some pro-democracy activists that the core meanings of democracy are encompassed by *Mangala Sutta*. He also responded to the criticism that the army were not adhering in their actions to this Sutta. He said that the lack of discipline among the people indicated to him that these people themselves did not know *Mangala Sutta*.² However, since 1992 this Sutta has clearly been asserted as the formal ideology of the Burmese State, when it came to be extensively quoted in all its newspapers (see above). This emphasis, however, was very much due to the emphasis already placed on this sutta under the U Nu period – this represented an original a democracy sutta. The *byama-so tayà* [32] then became ideology of the Socialist State. Here, its translation as published by the regime has turned it very much into an instrument of authority. So it is worth examining in some detail.

The *mangala* are a core component in measuring appropriate political behaviour, as expressed in many an article and editorial.³ These teachings are presented as 'Myanmar Beatitudes' at the heart of Burmese

¹ Soni (1956:iii,10).

² Saw Maung (1990a:267). He went on to comment that 'It would be wrong to say that only an Oxford graduate [i.e. Aung San Suu Kyi] should govern the country.'

³ e.g. U Nu is presented as admonishing party members prior to the 1960 elections that in contact with the electorate, they 'should behave according to the two mangalas of the Buddhas preachings.' Pe Kan Kaung. 'Past, present and future (8).' *NLM*,

culture, explaining many a Burmese custom such as cultural responses to embarrassment (*anade* [Aa:nat̪y]) and respect for elders (*gadô* [knət̪a]).¹ Indeed, Khin Maung Nyunt said that they represented the essence of Myanmar ethical and moral principles and that ‘one can even draw up plans to gain peace and prosperity for the world.’²

The regime uses this sutta as the guide in its Myanmarification project. But they do so in terms of an entirely different meaning of *mangala*. This association with culture in the Burmese imagination is to be attributed to the association of the *mangala* with the division of Burmese life-cycle rites. The Twelve Mundane Mangala Rituals [el akhng̃a 12p̃a:], including weddings,³ earboring ceremonies, the ploughing festival and the novitiation festivities. In these rituals the honorary Brahmin Master of the Abhiseka [B̃q̃k̃sra] plays an important role by making ‘the occasion auspicious (*mangala*)’. However, these *loki mangala* are of a different kind from the ones mentioned in *Mangala Sutta*. Only the latter are known as the Thirty-Eight *Mangala* without the prefix ‘mundane’ (*loki*), for these were taught by the Buddha and encompass the supramundane fruits of correct mental culture practice.

The guide is based on Kyaw Htut's⁴ *Mangala Sutta* lectures he started in 1967 at the YMBA. National *mangala* examinations started independently in 1944 but were taken over by the YMBA in 1948. Kyaw Htut's lectures to national *mangala* instructors were published three times in Burmese (1976, 1983, 1985) before appearing in English. The Burmese version of this text is prescribed for today's *mangala* examinations. The purpose of the guide is to inform teachers how to teach pupils about the *Mangala Sutta* at three levels – i.e. how to teach to read the Sutta, write the Sutta, and internalize its significance in both Pali and Burmese.

The English edition seems to have been hastily published in order to provide material input into the regime's sudden Buddhicisation and in its desperate search for an indigenous political philosophy.

The Sutta, the second the Buddha delivered after his enlightenment, contains the Thirty-Eight Blessings [mg̃a t̃ra: 38 p̃a:]. The latter guide introduces *mangala* as a prototypical element in Burmese custom through the greeting *mingalaba* [mg̃a ap̃a]⁵ that mostly came into use during the British colonial period as a Burmese equivalent to ‘Hello’ or ‘How are you’. The book draws attention to how the Buddha's teachings fit into the creation of a ‘Mangala State’. Since the first part of the Sutta concerns the creation of order in the mundane world, the booklet presents it as ‘important in the making of a nation of good citizens, and in the building of an ideal State, or a Mangala Country’.⁶ Indeed, it is taught to children ‘not just for the sake of religion’. ‘In social affairs and matters concerning the making of a nation also, the Mangala Sutta is the *dhamma* that gives the right guidance’ because it contains ‘a great deal of social matters and a great deal of other matters concerning the development of a country.’ Indeed, ‘the scope of the Mangala Sutta is so vast that with these ... kings and ministers can govern a country’. There may be diverse political systems in the world, but ‘none of these are outside the scope of the Mangala Sutta’. It forms ‘a sort of planning programme for the development of a country or nation, or indeed, for the development and well-being of the whole world.’⁷ As part of this building up of the country, the YMBA began a course disseminating a

24.10.1996.

¹ e.g. the regime put out in its information sheets an analysis of Sarah Bekker's work on *anade*.

‘When a Myanmar feels *ahnarde* then he or she would deliberately withhold himself/herself from expressing or physically committing something that might hurt the feelings of others. With this in view he or she would keep away, show forbearance and give ground to the other person. His psychological posture does not conform, so to speak, to the don't take ‘no’ for an answer type. A Myanmar tries to be gentle, courteous and considerate of others. He is influenced by the 38 codes of *mangala* sutta – the marvellous Myanmar beatitudes.’ (‘Are you feeling *Ahnarde*?’ *IS*, 03.05.98; Hla Thein. ‘Are you feeling *anade*’ *MP*, September 1997).

‘This respect for others [*gadô*] enjoined by the Lord Buddha in the “Mangala Sutta”, the Thirty Eight Modes of Conduct has permeated every aspect of our culture and society, so that today all Myanmar people irrespective of race or creed, accept it as the proper mode of behaviour. I do not mean to imply that other cultures and societies do not have respect for elders. I simply wish to emphasize the fact that we do so overtly, and that it is a way of life with us.’ (Kyi Kyi Hla. ‘Homage to elders’. *MP*, November 1997.)

² ‘Human resource development, nation building and culture’. *MP*, October–November 1997.

³ The marriage ceremony is known as ‘to do’ or ‘to perform *mangala*’ [mg̃a apt̪yeSact̪y] and the honeymoon is known as ‘the first *mangala*’ [mg̃a ãl̪].

⁴ Dhammacariya Kyaw Htut was Editor-in-Chief of the Board for Myanmar Translation of the Sixth International Buddhist Synod Pali Texts and was Doctrinal Consultant for the Myanmar Pitaka Association, which was incorporated into the Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana (DPPS).

⁵ Kyaw Htut (1994:xi).

⁶ Kyaw Htut (1994:xi).

⁷ Kyaw Htut (1994:5–8).

means to fight against the abuse of narcotic drugs ‘in accord with Mingala Sutta’.¹

Mangala means different things to different people, and it is variously translated as meaning ‘auspice’, ‘good omen’, ‘luck’, ‘blessing’, ‘beatitude’ or ‘fortune’. The guide presents *Mangala* as an ‘unresolved riddle’ that the inhabitants of the world’s Southern Island (Jambudipa) were seeking – some believed it was seen, some that it was heard, yet others believed that it was sensorially pleasant. None could resolve this question. Guardian spirits entered the debate, and controversy resounded for twelve years throughout the celestial realms right into the highest *brahma* realms. When finally Sakka, king of the Devas, and king of the Buddhist and the Burmese pantheon of spirits, said that the discussants were ‘like someone who ignores live coal and tries to make fire from ... a glow-worm’, he sent a deva to the Buddha at Jetavana monastery to find the answer to what the highest *mangala* are.² The Sutta was the Buddha’s response to this question. It reinterprets *mangala* ‘from a practical and more useful angle’, where ‘signs and omens gave way to modes of conduct, family responsibilities, social obligations and training of self’,³ i.e. from a supernatural idea of fate into a system of practice on a path that rewards with the final emancipation from *samsara*. This guide groups the Sutta into seven sections that graduate from building blocks of society to building blocks of the political and economic order, and finally to the attainment of *nibbana*. In other words, these do express the complex relationship in Burmese politics between building a political order and the practice of mental culture and the attainment of *nibbana*.

Discourse of the Supreme Blessings (Mahamangala Sutta)

Bahu deva manussa ca	Many devas and human beings,
Mangalani acintayum	longing for their well-being,
Akankha-mana sotthanam	pondered what constitutes auspiciousness;
Bruhi mangala muttamam	O, tell us, what is the highest auspiciousness

A. Four Foundations of Human Society (1–6).

[1] Asevana ca balanam	[1] Not to associate with the foolish,
[2] Panditanam ca sevana	[2] to associate only with the wise,
[3] Puja ca puja-niyanam	[3] to honor those worthy of honor,
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.
[4] Patirupa-desa vaso ca	[4] To dwell in a suitable locality,
[5] Pubbe ca kata-punnata	[5] to have done good deeds previously,
[6] Atta sammā panidhi ca	[6] to set oneself on the right course,
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

B. Four Aspects of Education (7–10).

[7] Bahu saccanca [8] sippanca	[7] To have wide knowledge, [8] and skill in technology,
[9] Vinayo ca susikkhito	[9] to have discipline and good training,
[10] Subhasita ca ya vaca	[10] to speak what is true and pleasing,
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

C. The Seven Fundamental Principles of Mangala Country – rules of performance (11–17).

[11] Mata pitu upatthanam	[11] To support one’s mother and father,
[12] Putta darassa sangaho	[12] to care for one’s wife and children,
[13] Anakula ca kammanta	[13] to have a blameless occupation,
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.
[14] Danam ⁴ ca [15] dhamma- cariya ⁵ ca	[14] To perform acts of charity, [15] righteous living,
[16] Natakananca sangaho	[16] to help relatives,
[17] Anavajjani ⁶ kammani	[17] and blameless action.

¹ ‘YMBA opens anti-narcotic drug course’. *NLM*, 22.10.1998.

² Kyaw Htut (1994:iii–v).

³ Kyaw Htut (1994:x–xi).

⁴ Kyaw Htut (1994:35–36) justifies *dana* as a way to contribute ‘voluntary labour’ to the community for ‘dana is, indeed, very important in the building of a country’.

⁵ Kyaw Htut (1994:107) translates this in line with the regime’s favourite rule-based interpretation as ‘customary laws’. Rhys Davis’ dictionary, however, translates it as ‘walking in righteousness, righteous living, observance of the Dhamma, piety’. ‘Righteous living’ is the better translation I adopt here. In Burmese Dhamma-cariya is also applied to a preacher or teacher of the Buddhist scriptures.

⁶ Kyaw Htut (1994:38) associates this with ‘welfare and social activities, like building roads and bridges, giving free tuition to the

Etam mangala muttamam this is the highest auspiciousness.

D. The Three Defences of the Mangala Country – rules of restraint and abstinence (18–21).

[18] Arati [19] virati papa	[18] To refrain from evil (in thought, word and deed),
[20] Majja-pana ca samyamo	[20] to abstain from intoxicants
[21] Appa-mado ca dhammesu	[21] to be diligent in doing good deeds
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

E. Preservation of the Mangala Country – the Nine Obligations (22–30).

[22] Garavo ca [23] nivato ca	[22] To be respectful [23] to be modest
[24] santutthi [25] ca kataññuta	[24] to be contented, [25] to be grateful
[26] kalena dhammassavanam	[26] to frequently listen to the dhamma
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

[27] Khanti ca [28] sovaccassata,	[27] To be patient, [28] to be amenable to advice,
[29] Samanananica dassanam	[29] to see often the <i>samanas</i> [holy ones]
[30] Kalena dhamma sakaccha	[30] to frequently discuss the <i>dhamma</i>
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

F. Renunciation of the Worldly Life (31–34).

[31] Tapo ca [32] brahma cariyaca	[31] To practise austerity, [32] and the practice of pure life,
[33] Ariya sacana dassanam	[33] to have perception of <i>Ariya</i> [noble] truths
[34] Nibbana sacchi kiriyaca	[34] to realize <i>Nibbana</i> (through <i>Arhatta-phala</i>)
Etam mangal muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

G. Attributes of an Arahant (35–38).²

[35] Putthassa loka dhammehi	[35] When touched by pain and pleasure,
Cittam yassa na kampati	an arahant's mind is unshaken,
[36] Asokam [37] virajam [38] khemam	[36] 't is free from sorrow, [37] pure and [38] secure.
Etam mangala muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

Eta-disani katvana	Those who have fulfilled these things,
Sabbattha maparajita	are invincible everywhere,
Sabbattha sotthim gacchanti	are safe and happy anywhere,
Tam tesam mangala-muttamanti	this is the highest auspiciousness. ³

About [1–6] it is said that ‘it would be quite wrong for anyone to think there can be progress and development without the ... four mangalas as bases’, and so, ‘whatever one does, whether it concerns religion, economics or politics, one must have these four Mangalas as bases.’ Indeed, in whichever language of whichever country, ‘there is, in fact, no subject, whether it is education or politics or anything else, that can do without the above four bases ...’.⁴ The first thirteen mangala, ‘as one goes through these Mangalas step by step, one completes the building of the Mangala Country’.⁵ As for the first thirty Mangala, it is said that their observance ‘would bring peace, prosperity and well-being to all mankind’, and that these rules ‘must be strictly observed by all national leaders as well as the people’.⁶

Stern warnings apply to Nos [11–17], for these are about obligatory ‘performance’ that ‘must be strictly obeyed or action would be taken against anyone who fails to do so’.⁷ Taking [14], [15] and [17] together, these are used to justify what the regime's critics have called ‘forced labour’. The guide expresses much longing for Burma of the past, as if past good behaviour was a product of royal authority – it justifies the current state of affairs in which power is in the hands of the military. For example, as for [15], charity, ‘in the olden days Myanmar was a Mangala country’, because in those days there was much charity when people ‘built monasteries, dug wells and tanks, built roads and bridges on their own initiative and at their own expense’, so that ‘government had to spend very little on such works’. In this way ‘any gift given for the

poor and other social work during one's spare time’.

¹ Also known as *khanti mangala*, this comprises *garava*, *nivata*, *santutthi*, *katannuta*, and *dhammasavana*.

² Kyaw Htut (1994:xvii).

³ *Sutta-Nipata*, *Khuddakapatha*, chapter 5.

⁴ Kyaw Htut (1994:17–19).

⁵ Kyaw Htut (1994:xvi).

⁶ Kyaw Htut (1994:85).

⁷ Kyaw Htut (1994:39).

welfare of the country is charity or *dana*.¹ Also, in relation to [17], ‘blameless action’ is ‘mainly associated with welfare and social activities, like building roads and bridges, giving free tuition to the poor and other social work during one's spare time.’

The guide also makes the judgment that today people no longer stand up for the truth, for in relation to [14], ‘a Myanmar, by nature, dares speak out the truth’ even when faced with the death penalty, for ‘such is Myanmar pride’, but since World War II (after democracy and westernisation) ‘the number of people who dare to tell lies has increased’.² Nevertheless, not all is lost, for in relation to [19] there are many such holy persons in Burma with whom association is beneficial.³ As for [22–30], it is claimed that these ‘may be applied to all subjects, including organization and administration, politics and social welfare’, and it is relevant for the military, teachers and students alike.

From [31–38] we find reference to several forms of renunciation, techniques of mental culture and various states of mind that ultimately lead to the state of *nibbana* beyond this mundane world. This raises complicated questions. Particularly important to the political order are [31–32], *tapa* and *byama-so tayà*, for these still operate at the limits of the mundane sphere of life. These are attained by few. However, [33–38] are no longer about observances but about ultimate fulfilment. It is only those who have fulfilled the full Thirty-Eight who have attained ‘the highest auspiciousness’, who ‘are invincible everywhere’, and who ‘dwell in happiness and safety anywhere’. This section raises particularly complicated questions about perceptions of the Buddhist State. This is where the discourse of *loka nibbana* is situated as the ultimate goal of the State. However, I shall deal with this in more depth later.⁴

Exams in Buddhist culture

The main book used in teaching the youth and USDA members, and available at all bookstalls, is *The class book for the exam in Buddhist culture* [buddha y'ak'kaem:ppacKn'sa], first published by the DPPS in 1994. This is divided into four main subjects, including Buddhist cultural practice (prayers, taking the moral precepts, duties (*singalovada*) and the meaning of *Mangala Sutta*), Buddhist culture and the Burmese language (dealing with such subjects as Maharathathara's writings *Lokaniti*, *Mahosadha*), Buddhist philosophy (the Abhidhamma), and Buddhist theories about the various constituents of body and mind.

Annual exams on Buddhist culture had already been held since May 1984. However, it was felt that a broader reach beyond the monastic schools was needed, for which this new syllabus was intended.

The teachings of the Buddha (Basic Level)⁵

Divided into nine chapters, *The teachings of the Buddha* introduces the life of the Buddha, how to pay homage, charity, the history of perpetuation and propagation of the *sasana*, social duties, Abhidhamma, moral culture and the Pali alphabet.

The introduction to this book conveys the purpose for which Buddhist teachings are destined. It says that Buddhist ethics prohibits evil conduct and ‘everyone must dutifully perform his duties related to the society, to the State and to the nation, including oneself, one's family and one's relatives.’ It describes the negative legacy of colonialism for Buddhism, and rejoices in the way current government can support Buddhism freely.

Now the Government of Myanmar is trying to build a modern, prosperous and peaceful nation with great effort, and it realizes the importance of Buddhism in the nation-building. If the people abide by the teachings of the Buddha and give a helping hand in the nation-building, the objectives of rebuilding the country will be accomplished smoothly and rapidly.

For this reason, the Ministry ‘effectively supports the activities for propagation of Buddha's teachings throughout Myanmar’, and ‘especially the Ministry encourages the dissemination of Buddhism in hilly regions and border areas in which Buddhism could not flourish in the past.’ In the syllabus, stress is placed on ‘social duties and moral cultures’ for the youth who are not in touch with regular teachings of the Buddha.

Therefore, if the youths thoroughly study this book, they will realize the essence of Buddhism and become good citizens who display a good moral conduct, who love and cherish their mother-land, their nation and their culture. Only such good citizens will be able to repulse decadent cultures that have infiltrated into the country from other lands. So long as Buddhism flourishes

¹ Kyaw Htut (1994:35–36).

² Kyaw Htut (1994:41).

³ Kyaw Htut (1994:83).

⁴ Kyaw Htut (1994:101).

⁵ Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997.

in the country, the Union of Myanmar will be peaceful and rapidly develop in every respect.

The book concludes with a chapter on 'moral culture', which is divided into polite manners or courtesy, gentleness in speech (verbal politeness), and good thoughts (mental politeness). Moral culture is important for the nation, for 'every country or every race has its own moral culture which is the characteristic of that country or that race'. Myanmar's moral culture is based on Buddhism. In its emphasis on culture (Buddhism), however, the authors find an excuse to veer from the Buddha's teachings by including such things as not blowing one's nose or sneezing carelessly, whether at a pagoda platform or school. Indeed, if one wants to fart 'one should go away from the audience'. Also, one should not be 'jealous of superior ones' or 'compete with companions of the same status'.

Buddhist missionary facilities

As the country opened up to the outside, there was much pent up demand for missionising supposedly pristine Burmese Buddhism to the outside world. One of the major growth industries, therefore, has been Buddhist missionary work.

Between 1962 and 1988, while the country was closed, the main missionary groups were privileged organizations associated with teaching *vipassana* contemplation, in particular the Mahasi and U Ba Khin traditions, which had much influence in the military regime. These movements go back to the days of the Ledi Sayadaw's foreign mission in 1913, and Hpo Hlaing's assertion of *vipassana* as the way for Burmese to realise non-self, as opposed to the heathen foreign colonialists occupying Lower Burma.

The missions on the one hand, provided the Burmese communities overseas with a way of keeping in touch with the higher Buddhist traditions of Burma, and provided interested foreigners with instruction on Buddhist meditation techniques as developed in Burma on the other. However, they also provided the Burmese communities in Burma with a regular stream of visitors from abroad, and apart from diplomatic relations this was the only permitted exchange with the outside. The history of its teachers and institutionalization abroad has long exercised the Burmese imagination. In other words, during the period of Burma as a 'hermit nation' it was a modest but important instrument for both the internationalisation of Burma and the 'Burmanisation' of foreigners. Today, with centres all over the world, this form of Buddhism was certainly Burma's major export service industry.

Since 1988, however, many more traditions have been making plans to propagate the *sasana*. Also active, apart from the Mahasi and U Ba Khin *vipassana* traditions, are pupils of the Mahasi Sayadaw, namely Chanmye Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Pandita. The Pa Auk Sayadaw is the contemporary teacher to watch with a large following of foreigners. Among the private initiatives is the Maha Bodhi meditation centre, once documented by Mary Byles, today also building special facilities for foreigners.

Sitagu Buddhist Academy

One of the most spectacular private attempts, however, is the Sitagu Buddhist Academy [နိဂါမိတိကဝိသုဒ္ဓါ] in Sagaing Hills set up by U Nyanissara (b. 1937). In the monastic order since the age of fifteen, he was originally ordained in his place of birth at Thegon Township in Pegu. He was eventually trained by the Sangha University in the English language for the propagation of Buddhism. In 1965, he founded his own college in Lay Myet Hna, and in 1968 he moved to Sagaing. He then spent three years meditating at the Mon forest monastery in Thabeik Aing in Lower Burma, since which he has become known as the Thabeik Aing Tawya Sayadaw [နိဂါမိတိကဝိသုဒ္ဓါ].

In 1979, he moved back to Sagaing where he was offered his own monastery, namely Sitagu Vihara. In 1981, he began to collect donations for the construction of a water supply system to provide clean drinking water to the six hundred monasteries of Sagaing Hill. And in 1987, he began construction of the Sitagu Aryudhana Hospital, a Sangha hospital equipped with modern medical facilities and a permanent medical staff of thirty, that was opened in March 1990.

In 1981, he went on his first missionary tour to six Asian countries, and he visited the USA the following year. He was exiled by the regime for some three years after the 1988 disturbances, but eventually managed to return, receiving several titles from the regime. He made many tours to many countries, eventually resulting in December 1994 in the foundation of the Sitagu Buddhist Vihara in Texas, USA, by the Theravada Dhamma Society of America.¹

¹ See in particular *The voice of the Dhamma*. Austin: Theravada Dhamma Society of America, 1997. Originally incorporated as a non-profit charity in 1992 in Austin by a small group of Burmese laity, the monastery this organisation founded was expecting to

After his return he devoted himself to collecting funds for the Sitagu Buddhist Academy, whose goal is 'to teach and train missionary student monks and nuns in the hope of further spreading the Buddha's teachings'. In huge grounds many strikingly architect-designed buildings have been erected arranged in a large square, with the aim to teach many of the world's major languages so missionary monks may be trained for work abroad, and interested foreigners may be trained in Burmese Buddhism. When I was there in August 1998, this project had not yet been finalised. U Nyanissara has thirty-nine booklets and pamphlets to his name, mostly in Burmese, but some in English.¹

The Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda

One interesting development is official sponsorship of the new Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda built in Birmingham, England. Dhamma Talaka means 'reservoir of truth', and the pagoda is described as symbolising 'peace, compassion and the noble exemplary qualities of the Buddha', and as 'the earthly manifestation of the mind of the Buddha'.

It was built under the auspices of Dr Rewatta Dhamma, the Burmese monk who founded the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara in 1978, the first Burmese monk to have established himself in Britain. He gives classes in *vipassana* in Britain, and was the figure the regime identified as having the potential to mediate with Aung San Suu Kyi, and indeed he was actually involved in mediation attempts. He visited Aung San Suu Kyi on 7 August 1994. She indicated her willingness to negotiate. It would appear from Rewatta Dhamma's account that the SLORC clearance to negotiate came from the highest level and that it was Khin Nyunt who initiated it. Khin Nyunt and Rewatta Dhamma met in May 1994. Because of his mediation, Aung San Suu Kyi met SLORC members on 20 September and 28 October. When Rewatta Dhamma returned to Burma in December, however, and met Aung San Suu Kyi again on 30 January 1995, it became evident that negotiations with the SLORC were not advancing. She had just issued a press release via her husband, delivered in Bangkok, that she was not about to do a secret deal with the regime behind the back of the elected members of parliament, and would only negotiate after having consulted senior members of the NLD and the other parties. This monk emphasized in particular *byama-so tayà* to overcome the political divide between the NLD and the regime (see below).

The grounds of the Dhamma Talaka Peace Pagoda were consecrated in 1990, construction began in 1993, and it was formally opened between 26–28 June 1998. The pagoda was decorated by two craftsmen from Burma and is filled with various items sent by Burmese donors, including a Buddha statue. The project received official sponsorship from the regime, including a speedy customs passage through of items sent from Burma and the active co-operation of the Burmese embassy. The opening ceremony was attended by senior Ministry of Religion officials, including Minister General Sein Htwa and the Chairman of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee.²

International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU)

The regime has put forward various spectacular missionary projects of its own. It has commenced some large-scale building projects for Buddhist missionary facilities at Kaba Aye, including the State Pariyatti Sasana Tekkatho (Yangon), the Convocation Dhammayon Ordination Hall (Kaba Aye) for the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Sayadaws, the Pitakattaik Library, the projected Sixth Buddhist Synod Mawgun Museum at Kaba Aye and the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University Project on Dhammapala Hill.³ It is also renovating the Maha Pasana Cave at Kaba Aye, originally built by U Nu.

The largest project of the regime is undoubtedly the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) which opened on 9 December 1998. Ignoring the other Buddhist countries, the regime proclaims that 'Myanmar is the centre of Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia' and that the 'International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University will stand as a model university.'⁴

accommodate four monks, and to develop into a large meditation centre encompassing a Dhamma hall, twenty-four separate meditation cells and a pagoda similar to the Shwezigon.

¹ U Nyanissara has brought out numerous publications, covering the various lectures he gave abroad (in particular at Van Der Bildt University), and as a result of questions his pupils abroad had about Burmese Buddhism. Some English titles include *Buddhist meditation* (Rangoon, 1995), *The Buddha and his noble path* (Rangoon, 1994), *The essence in life* (1995, 5th ed.), *Biography of the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw* (Rangoon, 1996). The majority of publications, however, are in Burmese.

² NLM, 02.07.1998.

³ NLM, 03.04.1998.

⁴ IS, 17.08.1998.

Attempts were made to set up Buddhist universities before during the U Nu period, when the Buddha Sasana Council Bill resulted in the foundation of the Dhammadhuta College in 1952. However, this was soon eclipsed by the Sangha University founded several years later by the Institute for Advanced Buddhist Studies with money from the Ford Foundation which enjoyed support from the army.¹

Drawing its inspiration to a large extent from U Nyanissara's Sagaing initiative (see above), by bringing him in as an adviser, the missionary aspirations are clear from the way the project is introduced on the brochure. Its claim to uniqueness combines scriptural learning with meditation:

Myanmar has carefully preserved Theravada Buddhism for nearly one thousand years. Now she is sharing her knowledge of Buddhism both in theory and practice with the people of the world to promote their happiness and moral well-being. For the first time those who wish to learn Theravada Buddhist canonical texts and insight meditation in Myanmar tradition, will have a chance to study them at the same institution.

Its objectives are to address the non-Burmese speaking population for whom the existing two State Pariyatti Universities in Mandalay and Rangoon are of little use, as the medium of instruction is Burmese.

to share the genuine Theravada Buddhism with the people of the world, to study and comprehend the canonical texts of Theravada Buddhism as approved successfully by the six Buddhist Synods, to teach the people to abstain from evil and do good deeds, to enable the people to believe in karma and its consequences, to know the difference between mind and matter, to promote the four modes of sublime living (Brahma Vihara) which would lead to the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world, and to encourage and promote knowledge of the Four Noble Truths for Enlightenment.

Described as 'a permanent centre of higher learning of Theravada Buddhism', its grounds surround the Dhammapala Hill on which stands the controversial Sacred Tooth Relic Pagoda, which houses the Chinese Tooth Relic. The Relic was bombed on 25 December 1996, killing four people visiting the Kaba Aye Maha Pasana Cave, supposedly to perpetrate a diplomatic row with China.²

The university has three faculties, namely a faculty of Pariyatti (scriptural learning) with six separate departments (Vinaya, Suttanta, Abhidhamma, Buddhist Culture and History, Pali Studies, Myanmar Language), a faculty of Patipatti (practice) with three departments (Dhammanuloma, Samatha, Vipassana), and a faculty of Religions and Missionary Works with four departments (Comparative Studies of Religions, Missionary Works, Research, Foreign Languages and Translation). The Rector is Agga Maha Pandita Bhaddanta Silananda Bhivamsa.

The main medium of instruction is English, and the full spectrum of university qualifications is offered: one-year diploma course, Dip. (BDh), Diploma in Buddha Dhamma; two-year Bachelor of Arts degree course, BA (BDh), three-year MA course, MA (BDh); and a four-year PhD research programme, PhD (BDh).

Myanmar's keeping Theravada Buddhism pure and intact for many years finally leads to the emergence of the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University. Such a university is welcomed because it will contribute much in sharing the knowledge of Buddhism both in theory and practice with the people of the world and with the noble intention of promoting their happiness and moral wellbeing. For those who wish to learn Theravada Buddhist canonical texts and meditation in depth in Myanmar tradition will find no better chance than at this International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University.³

The regime does not actually provide salaries, but bears the living expenses of staff and students. At its formal opening on 9 December 1998 it was stated that

Foreign scholars and yogis who come to Myanmar to learn Theravada Buddhist texts and meditation methods cannot study at one institution only, so they have to go to various places in the country. The opening of that University will enable the scholars to study Theravada Buddhist canonical texts and insight meditation practice at the same institution. Theravada Buddhism in English, French, German, Arabic, Hindi, Chinese and Japanese at the University will be implemented later ...⁴

Than Shwe concluded his inaugural address saying 'may I solemnly wish that the essence of the Buddha's teaching thrive and remain firmly in the hearts of peoples throughout the world,' and 'may all beings be healthy and wealthy and be able to practise and enjoy the fruits of the Buddha's teaching.'⁵

¹ Mendelson (1975:303–5), Smith (1965:149).

² *IS*, 26.12.1996. This regime sought support for its Sino-Burmese relations by touring the relic around the country. It had been briefly housed in the Atumashi Pagoda. Students and Karen insurgency groups were accused of being responsible for the bombing. Many have been critical of Burma's friendliness with China, a relationship upgraded to common veneration of a relic. The regime's side of the story may be found in Tekkatho Tin Kha. 'Don't try to divide us'. *NLM*, 28.12.1996. This article concludes that 'it is quite different between those who mar and those who make. Those wishing to obstruct the greatness of Sino-Myanmar relations have caused explosions and destruction. But the friendship is not destroyed. Although Myanmar is a small nation, it has no enemies. Those hostile towards Myanmar should not be termed humans. With the obeisance paid to the Buddha's Tooth Relic, I would like to say the truth 'Don't try to divide us who have been united since our birth.'

³ *NLM*, 19.06.1998.

⁴ 'Grand ceremonial inauguration of International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University'. *IS*, 10.12.1998.

⁵ 'Senior General Than Shwe sends greetings to the grand ceremonial inauguration of International Theravada Buddhist

Buddhification as Myanmarfication

Given its sudden emphasis on Buddhism, some have dubbed the regime's efforts to inculcate Buddhist values, in particular through the reports of enforced conversions, as 'Buddhification'.

Indeed, the role of Buddhism in the dilution of ethnic difference was recognized by the writer Htin Fatt when, during the Ne Win regime, he expressed the view that Anawratha was a hero whose unification was accompanied by stressing Buddhist values. Inscriptions recorded in Anawratha's time were multi-ethnic, and were recorded in the four languages – Pali, Burmese, Mon and Pyu. These do not mention the concept 'minority', for the races were 'all one'. He writes,

The banner under which all were united was the banner of the Buddhist religious society, Sasana. All are equal under Buddhism as a way of life. The idea, minority, never dwelt in the minds of the indigenous races of the Pagan days.¹

Htin Fatt is a respected Burmese author and not a propagandist. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand how he is only a small step away from the view of races as 'equal under Buddhism', and the argument that the conversion of ethnic groups to Buddhism is desirable, for it would eliminate their divisive ways and permit Burma to become one.

This was already evident in *A handbook on Burma*, in which 'the peoples of Burma' are described as having experienced 'fusion' under the influence of Buddhism.

From the fourteenth century until the annexation of Burma by the British in the mid-nineteenth century, unification between the three main groups progressed rapidly through the spreading of Buddhist culture. When the British arrived, only the people in the outlying hills remained untouched by the civilizing influence of Buddhism. The rest of the people of Burma embraced Buddhism, thus leading to the growth of one culture, one written language, and one literature in the country.²

Sometimes Buddhism is used to overcome the defences of various ethnic and religious communities and to recruit to the Burmese army. A report on the regime's Buddhist activities suggests that Buddhism, as part of the propagandistic Myanmar cultural system, is as much foisted on Buddhist as on non-Buddhist communities. It is therefore better understood as 'Myanmarize' or 'Burmanize'.

The interpretation of 'Buddhification' however, does not, account for the ruthless oppression of the Mon, the original Theravada Buddhists in Southeast Asia, or of the Shan, the Pa-o, and the Rakkhine who are also overwhelmingly Buddhist. It would be more accurate to say that SLORC is attempting to 'Myanmarize' or 'Burmanize' all the ethnic minorities, regardless of their religion. Burman Buddhists are just now experiencing what ethnic minorities, Buddhists and others, have suffered much longer.³

One context in which this becomes clear is in the case of the Mahamyat Muni Pagoda. The SLORC had supposedly been in search of pagoda treasures for superior instruments that might help them stay in power. The Mandalay Mahamyat Muni statue was broken open, leaving a gaping hole in the statue, and it was generally presumed that the regime was searching for the Padamya Myetshin, a legendary ruby that ensures victory in war to those who possess it. When anger about this event developed, the regime spread rumours about the rape of a Buddhist girl by a Muslim boy to draw attention away from their pillaging of a Buddhist site. The point of the Mahamyat Muni episode is that it expresses a popular sentiment, namely that the regime is prepared to violate the holiest of commemorations to the Buddha for its own selfish ends. No amount of pagoda donation would appear to compensate for this setback.

A distinction is appropriate between 'Buddhicisation', the voluntary inclination towards interpreting through Buddhism, and enforced 'Buddhification', the attempt to convert others. The latter is one element in Myanmarfication. Myanmarfication is intrinsically related to gaining control over, and disseminating and enforcing those cultural forms of Buddhism insofar as these are useful to the State and they enhance its legitimacy. Against this stands Buddhicisation, as the liberating forces of mental culture that are voluntarily applied to cope with the experience of repression and imprisonment, as practised by the political opposition and the repressed. Political opposition is often best coped with, as we shall see, through Buddhicisation.

Myanmarfication and the gender question

Myanmarfication, since it takes place primarily through the instrument of the army, is to a large extent the masculinization of Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi conveys the impression of being a defenceless and fragile woman aspiring to non-violent methods oppressed by aggressive highly armed male generals. Her femininity

Missionary University'. *NLM*, 10.12.1998.

¹ Htin Fatt. 'Stray thoughts on national unity', *The Guardian*, March 1968. Published in Helen G. Trager. *We the Burmese: voices from Burma*. London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, pp. 35–41.

² *A handbook on Burma*. Rangoon: Directorate of Information, Rangoon, 1967. Cited in Helen G. Trager. *We the Burmese: voices from Burma*. London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, p. 15.

³ 'SLORC's abuses of Buddhism'. Buddhist Relief Mission, 12.02.1997 (BurmaNet News, 18.02.1997).

differentiates her from the regime.

Rather than challenging the subordination of women in Burma, the Tatmadaw reinscribes it. The Tatmadaw is the most powerful institution in Burma. As the long arm of SLORC, it is in control of the political, economic, and military life of the country. Almost every high government official is a former or current Tatmadaw officer, and all of these are men. The Tatmadaw relies on an ideology of masculinity which prevents women's participation at the highest levels of power in Burma. It is revealing that the most visible and powerful woman in Burma is Aung San Suu Kyi. It is not possible for any woman to obtain her level of authority within the ruling regime; such power can only be obtained by women outside SLORC and Tatmadaw circles.¹

The regime's journalists confirmed this impression when it is stated that her 'feminist nature makes Aung San Suu Kyi unsuitable to rule'.²

Myanmafication thereby takes on the attribute of being masculine. The gender issue reached a peak when Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, could not deliver her personal keynote address at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women on 'Action for Equality, Development and Peace' in Beijing 1995. Instead, a video was presented and her speech was published. This aroused a great world-wide interest in the predicament of Burmese women.

In response, the regime, not having any high ranking women in the military, and seemingly oblivious to the image it would project in doing so, hastily sent a male army general and cabinet minister to Beijing to read out a statement.³ The general stated that 'it is imperative that the State should make use of the potential of women in national development', and given the poor state of the education system with its facilities long since closed, he said proudly that 'Myanmar statistics reveal that women enjoy equal access to education as men.' Through this inept public relations exercise, the regime provided a great deal of ammunition for women world-wide, and became the focus of critique by the Burmese Women Union in exile and the international press.

To this may be added the lack of sensitivity in the Burmese media when portraying the male members of the NLD, for it is said that 'the National League for Democracy (liberated area) formed with those who skipped out bending under the skirt-hanging clothesline ... debt evading party members and runaway groups'.⁴ In an obvious reference to the dangers of western ways, the party members had supposedly lost their strength because of their proximity to Aung San Suu Kyi. The supposedly westernised dress of Aung San Suu Kyi (a skirt) will destroy a male's quality of *hpon* (glory, strength) by contact with, or placing above the head of women's clothing (in Burma men and women's laundry is always separated). This skirt issue is developed further in myriad ways as part of the regime's policy of psychological warfare.

The regime, sensitive to criticisms relating to Aung San Suu Kyi since 1995, set up several important government bodies to regulate women-related issues, and in particular to guide those GONGOS involved with women. There are so many of these that it becomes more than a little confusing in terms of overlapping aims. It should be pointed out, however, that while the regime trumpets the freedom Burmese women enjoy, yet it places them in prison, deprives them of their brothers, fathers and husbands, and forces them to flee abroad where they have little choice but to support themselves through domestic work and prostitution.⁵ In Chiangmai today it is easier for brothels to employ Burmese women without legal papers, since they can be kept without fear that they might escape – the majority of prostitutes in this region now are Burmese. Already early on General Saw Maung used to describe the great freedoms women had, such as the ability to keep their own names at marriage.⁶ However, apart from placing Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, the regime is not even able to recognize the street-number of Aung San Suu Kyi's house, let alone her full name.

¹ Betsy Apple. *School for rape*. Earth Rights International, February 1998.

² *NLM*, 06.07.1996.

³ UN Women's Conference: statement by Major-General Soe Myint, 4–15 September 1995, Beijing. (Statement by Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and Leader of the Delegation of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace.) BurmaNet News, 23.09.1995.

⁴ 'Very sorry – in the Tawgyi.' *NLM*, 04.06.1996.

⁵ *With migrating hope: Burmese women working in the sex industry in Thailand*. Images Asia, 1997.

⁶ Saw Maung (1990b:338).

Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs (MNWCWA) ¹

The Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs (MNWCWA) was set up on 7 October 1996 'in order to accelerate tasks for promotion of the women's role all over the country'.² This was followed by the formation of various state, division, district and township level working committees for women's affairs, supposedly in order to 'fulfil the commitment made in Beijing'.³

At its 16 January 1998 meeting (Meeting 1/98) it was reported that the MNWCWA was engaged in the Myanmar National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women as part of implementing the Beijing Declaration. 'In striving for advancement of women, it is essential to make their full rights more prominent, achieve harmonious multi-sectoral progress, preserve and promote culture and to safeguard the race.' Also at this meeting, it was noted that 'Myanmar women have no need to demand their rights for they can enjoy their rights on equal terms with men and that in successive eras, Myanmar women have enjoyed full rights and this is due to the people's belief in Theravada Buddhism, social customs, traditions and culture, and customary rules and existing laws.'⁴

Women have a unique status in Burma compared to other Asian countries, and it is, we are led to believe, because of legal measures and a culture rooted in Buddhism.

On the 27th July in Yangon the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs held its Work Committee Meeting No. 2/97 at the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. During the discussions the Myanmar authorities concerned pointed out that tasks are being implemented for development of Myanmar women based on significant aspects of Myanmar's situation and all have to be mindful of the fact that the way Myanmar tackles women's affairs is different from those of other countries.

In the western countries women's and youth's affairs are carried out under a lot of restrictions whereas Myanmar women enjoy equal rights granted to them without discrimination and they always conduct themselves not because of restrictions but basically because of their own cultured manner.

Myanmar has also adopted several laws to safeguard the rights and privileges of women and children and thus, good opportunities are opened to all women and children. Myanmar people always uphold their cultural traits and traditions which are related with their religion Theravada Buddhism and teachings of Lord Buddha. Myanmar women must be nurtured to safeguard and promote the race, language and religion and uphold culture and traditions so as to prevent infiltration of the alien's culture and deprivation of character.

Women's cultural development is the most crucial task of all organizations and it is essential to carry out education and organizational work all over the country, especially the border regions, and uplift all women's health education and social standards, and promote their economy at grass root level effectively.⁵

Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNWC)

The Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs (MNWC) was founded on 3 July 1996. Chaired by the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Settlement, it is designated as 'the National Focal Point for Women's Affairs' as it 'lays down policy for the advancement of women, especially those living in the far reaching remote areas'. Its committee members include deputy Ministers from various ministries as well as the presidents of the three chief women's associations, including the MMCWA, MWSF, MWEA and the MWDA.⁶

All Myanmar Women's Affairs Committee (AMWAC)

The regime also established the All Myanmar Women's Affairs Committee (AMWAC) [အမျိုးသမီးအရေးအခင်းကော်မတီ] with twelve executive committee members and various sub-committees, and it was decided that this committee and sub-committees would become active by 19 March 1997.

Run by 'a grouping of women of such ability, maturity and foresight' the subcommittees would 'deal with health, protection and elimination of all forms of violence and abuse against woman, their rehabilitation, cultural, economic and educational issues and juvenile girl affairs'. Its role was clarified at a meeting on 9 May⁷ and its significance was related thus

¹ Sometimes Myanmar is left off the name and acronym of this group, in which case it is known as NWCWA. In at least one case it has been referred to as Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA).

² *IS*, 24.08.1998. However, its foundation date has also been declared as 3 July 1996 (*IS*, 04.07.1998).

³ Daw Khin Aye. 'Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs'. *MP*, October 1998.

⁴ 'Women's duty to safeguard race, adhere to code of conduct while enjoying full rights'. *IS*, 17.01.1998.

⁵ *IS*, 28.07.1997.

⁶ Khin Aye Win. 'Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs'. *MP*, October 1998.

⁷ Kyi Kyi Hla. 'The All Myanmar Women's Affairs Committee'. *MP*, June 1997.

... Today, there is a lot of uproar in the west over the gender issue. There are even aspersions that the present US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright won out over the other nominees for Secretary of State because of her gender. If it was so, then it was indeed a costly empty gesture.

Myanmar women on the other hand, have always enjoyed their rights, political, economic and social, and our voices have always been heard. Together with independence and now of course with the progress of time, large numbers of women have emerged to take up key positions in government, finance, commerce, education; in cultural, religious and social affairs and in other segments of society. And I would like to add that harassment of women at work is unheard of in our country.

Most Myanmar women are 'no-nonsense' types. They see what needs to be done and they do it either individually or together in a group. But they do not hanker for power or position – there is no need to. They already have the power, authority and influence to do good for the people and the country. So they spout no slogans, mouth no clichés nor do they advertise and publicize their aspirations for the country.

It is not a committee to fight for the rights and freedoms of women. It is a committee of Myanmar women, who like all the rest, are already in possession of these rights by birth and tradition. They are a group of women who have got together to be more organized and systematic in their endeavours to expand their activities in keeping with the vast and momentous developments taking place in our country. The long-term goal is also to organize and educate women from all walks of life to join hands and work for the greater good ... Various subcommittees were formed as task forces to deal with health, protection and elimination of all forms of violence and abuse against woman, their rehabilitation, cultural, economic and educational issues and juvenile girls affairs. It was also decided at this meeting for the committee and the subcommittees to begin functioning in earnest as of 1 September, 1997.¹

Women's days

It was thus in the wake of the regime's public relations fiasco that this large tangle of women committees were founded by the regime. But this in itself proved insufficient. In 1997, a number of human rights groups declared Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday on 19 June as 'Women of Burma Day' so as to 'increase the profile of women from all ethnic backgrounds in Burma's struggle for peace, democracy and human rights.' On the occasion of the 1998 celebration, the regime responded that 'it will amount to an insult to the mother and father who slapped the face of colonialists if attempts were made to designate the birthday of the Veto Lady as Burmese Women's Day.'²

We have already seen how the regime has set up various women government agencies and GONGOs. In a defensive move to counteract Aung San Suu Kyi's mastering of the women's cause, the regime responded by organising a new International (note, not 'Myanmar') Women's Day in Burma on 8 March 1998. In part it is, of course, an attempt to replace the Martyrs' Day celebrating Aung San that it lost to the opposition, for it has introduced a programme of other celebration days (see below).

However, on the occasion of the 1998 celebration, Altsean-Burma produced a bilingual book (English & Burmese) entitled *Burma: voices of women in the struggle*. The book features articles by women inside Burma, along the border and in exile. In her foreword to this book, Aung San Suu Kyi counters the generals' propaganda that she is an outsider by arguing that it is the regime that marginalises women outside society. She says that 'when I think of the women of Burma, I think first not of those who are in fact living in Burma, but of those who are living on the other side of our borders', and 'women are usually regarded as homemakers ... in such circumstances, how can women be expected to exercise their talent for homemaking?'.³

The regime, once again belatedly, realised that its public relations in relation to the women of the world was at a low ebb. It became troubled by this image and set about countering it. At its work co-ordination meeting the week after the International celebration of Myanmar Women's Day, and the day after the announcement of the book on the struggle of Burmese women, the MWAC hastily proclaimed 3 July 1998 as the regime's own official 'Myanmar Women's Day'.⁴ Though this was retrospectively proclaimed as the day on which the MWAC was founded, I have not seen this substantiated, and evidence from the regime's own sources shows that it was in fact founded on 7 October 1996.

The result is that Burma now has three women's days, two of which were instituted on the hoof by the regime barely four months apart. The women issue, therefore, is special. The regime began to pay attention and sought to anticipate the international attention brought to bear on women in Burma when it decided that it needs not just correct the international view of Burmese women, but also needs to address the image of Aung San Suu Kyi as a victim of gender discrimination.

¹ *ibid.*, MP, June 1997; see also Editorial. *The Nation*, 06.08.1997.

² 'Suu Kyi's birthday causes a stir.' *The Nation*, 20.06.1998.

³ BurmaNet News, 19.06.1998.

⁴ 'Myanmar Women's Day observed.' *IS*, 4.07.1998; 'Myanmar Women's Day.' *NLM*, 02.07.1998 (Burmese version).

In a report entitled 'Myanmar women enjoying status equal to men' the regime reports that Burma is doing the women good, that Buddhism already gives them equality, and 'research on elimination of all forms of violence and abuse against women and their rehabilitation is being done, and talks on culture are being held and religious courses conducted to guard against penetration of alien culture.'¹

Cultural or military rape?

The question arises whether, as the regime says, it is foreign cultures that rape or whether it is an exaggerated view of ethnic superiority that contributes to a situation of rape in Burma. In other words, are Burmese women 'penetrated' by an 'alien culture', to which the regime holds up Buddhism as providing the antidote? Or should we focus on the regular reports of rape by soldiers at the front? Is a strong sense of culture not causing rape rather than preventing it?

Evidence of the rape of defenceless women from minority groups is mounting, and one finds regular references from reputable human rights organizations. In spite of the regime's efforts, accusations that women are systematically abused by soldiers arrive faster than they can be replied to. The report *School for rape* by Betsy Apple from Earth Rights International (February 1998) collects some of the evidence and analyses the reasons for the increased incidents of rape in Burma. Her view is that the conditions for rape are created when young soldiers under seventeen years of age are pressed into the army where they are recruited with lies, made to imbibe military ideology, remain without education, are underpaid, receive unpredictable punishment, receive inadequate resources to do their work, become alcohol and drug users, and are inculcated with disrespect for ethnic minority women.²

I have found no attempt on the part of the regime to address this issue, and almost any other serious issue for that matter, with pragmatism and concern. Instead, such allegations are reacted to as if they constituted an attack on 'Myanmar' as a whole. Indeed, when the Rajsoomer Lallah, the UN Special Rapporteur, raised the issue of rape with concern in his report on human rights in Burma the regime replied that

How can this scenario be possible? It simply boggles our imagination. Is Myanmar such a country? Everyone in this room knows for a fact that this is not the case. May I ask is not the Union of Myanmar a remarkably stable country now, where the people are enjoying the unprecedented peace and tranquillity?³

Furthermore, when Human Rights Watch Asia reported on the issue of rape, the regime accused them of 'unwittingly becom[ing] a press office or a propaganda machine for the Anti-Myanmar Government Organizations'.⁴ Since one cannot question 'Myanmar' one cannot, therefore, question the issue of rape. In other words, the Myanmarfication programme which seeks to consolidate the country's unity, will in retrospect be seen to have been responsible for rape rather than preventing it.

Buddhism and women

Support for Buddhism – in the sense of architectural, artistic and moral values – has already been shown to help inculcate the right 'Myanmar' values. In part, this may be seen as a response to the way Aung San Suu Kyi emphasized Buddhism. This has also been extended into education more generally. The possibility that foreigners might influence or take away Burmese women has always been a sore point for the Burmese. Both Hpo Hlaing and Thakin Kodawhmaing presented this as the worst thing to befall the Burmese. The regime has begun to prepare women to protect them from evil foreign influences.

For this reason, it has set up a surprisingly large number of monastic schools to train girls at primary school level.

A nunnery school for girls was inaugurated at Withakha Nunnery in Thingangyun Township (Yangon) on 12 October. Minister for Religious Affairs Lt-Gen Myo Nyunt spoke of the Government's lofty aim for opening monastic education schools to nurture youths to be cultured and educated.

He said that in keeping with the guidance of the senior monks, 1,550 monastic education schools have been opened up to 30 September 1997 and altogether 92,725 pupils are studying there. He spoke of the need for the girls to possess good morals according to Buddhist culture, and stressed the need for the nunnery schools to nurture girls to be cultured and become good daughters of the nation.⁵

¹ IS, 09.03.1998.

² The phenomenon of child soldiers is described in *No childhood at all: child soldiers in Burma*. Chiang Maig: Images Asia, 1997.

³ IS, 09.11.1998. Based on the reply by Ambassador U Pe Thein Tin, the Burmese Representative to the Third Committee of the 53rd United Nations General Assembly.

⁴ IS, 17.01.1997.

⁵ IS, 13.10.1997.

Myanmafication, human origins and national defence

I have already noted that history plays a vital role in the SLORC-SPDC view of itself. Saw Maung, whose mental powers were beginning to fail at the time under the stress of the monastic boycott and the foreign criticism, commented that if American culture is 'very recent ... only 200 years old', Myanmar history 'shows our culture has been here for tens of thousands of years'. There was a great 'difference' between Burma and the rest of the world, and Burma had rubies and real jade that no one else had, and the Burmese did not need airconditioning or wintercoats. Such radically different and unique ancient culture could not permit itself to be enslaved by foreigners yet again. SLORC inevitably had to show some spectacular reason that it was a legitimate government based on 'old' culture.¹ It could only render this believable, of course with proof.

In the opinion of General Than Shwe, the creation of Myanmar represents, take note, not so much fostering respect for the diversity of cultures (plural) within the union, but 'revitalization of a civilization'. Civilization, as we know the concept from evolutionary anthropologists at the turn of the century, involved man historically emanating from a single family, hierarchically ordered depending on their ability to shake off nature through their cultural advances. This is a convenient singular concept, a shorthand for a unified people all related to a single source, but some of whom are in greater need for civilization, and therefore 'development', than others.

Of course, Burmese politicians have always been concerned about the origins of their political system. They often trace the history of the political, social and religious order back to the Brahmas, the celestial deities who came to earth and became the first human beings at the beginning of the world (see App. I.2). The popular etymology of both Burma and Myanmar is Brahma (see App. I.9). This popular myth reinforces *byama-so tayà* as a typically 'Myanmar' practice. For example, U Nu defined his socialism this way, and the practices of *byama-so tayà*, the practices that return to the state of the spiritual Brahma have always been held up as ideal Burmese behaviour.

Hitherto, entertaining such remote origins at the level of myth used to satisfy demands for an ethnic identity. The regime, however, just as it is concerned with Myanmar as an actual unity rather than an ideal, is beginning to formulate the origination of humanity along a very different track based on physical archaeological evidence. It is no longer satisfied with mere 'ideas' about spiritual origination in the texts. It seeks to found a state not on the transformation of human beings through mental culture and spiritual attainment as prior regimes did, but is beginning to take an interest in transforming the status of Myanmar visibly in the eyes of the world, by locating, no less, proof of the origins of *all* mankind in Burma itself. If successful, it would, of course, represent a coup de grace for the generals. Not only would their censorship have succeeded in extending Myanmar as the preferred mode of self-identification right across the English-speaking world, but they would be able to claim that the rest of the world is inferior and less civilized in the family of man. Indeed, it is not impossible that they are motivated in their quest by the very association between the etymology of Myanmar and Burma from Brahmana, the earliest human beings on earth (See App. 1.2 and 1.9). Such equation comes close to the concept of the Ariyan race, which maps mental and spiritual attainment onto the superior physique and racial origins. However, in Burmese the four *ariya* [**Ariya**] attain this status as a product of mental culture alone, not physique, and so the regime needs something more substantive and tangible to tie their Myanmar *mandala* to.

In reporting there is a conjunction between the archaeology of royal remnants and ancient peoples at the beginning of history. One important element is archaeological search to find the oldest forms of human life and to restore its most impressive achievements. The regime sums up its 'culture and traditions' as follows:

Myanmar's existence dates back to many centuries where under the rule of Myanmar kings and its own culture and traditions, civilization flourished. As part of the restoration of the rich cultural heritage of Myanmar, palaces and related edifices of Myanmar kings have been carefully excavated and renovated or reconstructed to their original designs. These magnificent structures clearly depict the once rich and affluent civilization of the Myanmar people.

Moreover, in the Pon-Taung-Pon-Nyar region of central Myanmar, recent discoveries of some primate fossils dating back to some 40 million years may qualify Myanmar as the region where mankind originated. The findings, as recent as 13 April 1997, however, clearly indicate the existence of Myanmar culture and traditions since time immemorial.²

The search for origins is thus a vital component in the Myanmafication of Burma. It is of such great

¹ 'General Saw Maung outlines goals for nation', 10 December 1990. (Weller 1993:221).

² 'Culture and Traditions.' Myanmar Today (<http://www.myanmar.com>).

importance that the more significant archaeological finds require nothing less than the Defence Services Intelligence Unit. Myanmarfication is today of such central importance that the archaeology and palaeoanthropology of Myanmar fall within the realms of national defence.

Ethnic respectability and archaeology

Pondaung fossils

Though the story has earlier beginnings, the contemporary evaluation of the Pondaung fossils as a public national treasure began in January 1997 when General Khin Nyunt learnt of the existence of some very rare fossils from Pondaung, which had been discovered in 1978 by expeditions led by U Ba Maw and U Thaw Tint, members of the geology department of Mandalay University. The potential of the Pondaung region had first been discovered as early as 1914 by a team from the Geological Survey of India. Both teams referred to the discoveries as *Pondaungia*.

Theories had been floated that these Pondaung included fossils of ancient higher primates and General Khin Nyunt decided that these studies should be followed up, and on 12 February 1997 a round table discussion was held on the fossils at the National Museum with six academics, including 'Anthropology' U Kyaw Win. Two days later, Khin Nyunt directed the OSS and geologists of the Ministry of Education to explore and search for fossilized remains in the Pondaung region. By the end of February, during meetings between the Ministries of Education and Defence at the OSS, the (Myanmar) Fossil Exploration Team was put together, including members of the OSS for 'full logistic support' and geologists from the Geology Department. Colonel Than Tun of the OSS was appointed leader of the Expedition.

General Khin Nyunt ordered his team to go out on 'mission' and to 'find evidence ... since it would greatly enhance the stature of the country in the world' as follows:

Secretary 1, and Chief of the Office of Strategic Studies, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, met the members of the Expedition Team at the Dagon Yeiktha of the Ministry of Defence at 1000 hours on 8 March, 1997 to give necessary guidance and counsel. At the meeting, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt stated that it was necessary to search for and uncover further incontrovertible evidence that the fossilized remains of higher primates found in Myanmar could be dated as being 40 million years old, in order to advance the studies into man's origins. The joint expedition team of the Ministry of Defence and the geologists of the Ministry of Education, he said, were being dispatched to search, explore and find such evidence. He emphasized the fact that the mission of this team about to embark on this venture was of vital importance since it would greatly enhance the stature of the country in the world. He therefore urged the scholars to make every endeavour for the success of the mission.¹

Between 9 March and 21 April 1997 numerous visits were made to a number of sites. Excitement mounted as finds were made including an elephant's tusk, about which it is said that 'it is very rare and an exception to find such a complete fossilized tusk. Few countries can claim that they have such a priceless exhibit for progeny. That is why it is a very proud occasion for those who have had the privilege to help the country acclaim such honour.'²

On 11 May, the team's geologists collected of a variety of fossils, including those of primates, namely the *Pondaungia Amphipithecus Mogaungensis*, the *Amphipithecus Bahensis*, and other valuable specimens. They were presented to a gathering of government officials, scholars and media personnel, at the Defence Forces Guest House on Inya Road, Rangoon. On this occasion General Khin Nyunt gave the keynote speech alluding to the discovery as proof that the beginning of human life and civilization began in Burma. The report stated that the recent discoveries illustrated the origins of the great Burmese nationality and the superiority of Burmese culture. The report went on to say that should the academics be able to prove the claims, then Burmese people could definitely say that 'culture began in Myanmar.'³ It was reported that 'analyses reveal that the latest find belongs to the genus of the previously discovered remains of *Amphipithecus* primate ... The new find may be classified as a new species and it is named *Amphipithecus Bahensis* by the exploration teams because it was discovered from a site near Bahin Village, Myaing Township'.⁴ It was also stressed in the reports that it was army officers who had heroically discovered some of the vital human remains in the fossil jigsaw, for 'the left lower jaw was discovered by Captain Bo Bo of the Office of Strategic Studies and Lance Corporal Ohn Hlaing of No. 252 Regiment.'⁵

¹ Kyi Kyi Hla. 'The Pondaung Fossil Expedition.' *MP*, May 1998.

² Tin Thein, Saya Moe. 'Fossil evidence of *Stegolophodon* and *Stegodon* in Myanmar.' *MP*, April 1997.

³ *NLM*, 12.05.1997.

⁴ Lu Zaw, Maung. 'Myanmar: a paradise for anthro-archaeologists.' *MP*, May 1997.

⁵ Tin Thein. 'Primates of Pondaung'. *MP*, May 1997.

Since the military did not have a clue how to interpret the evidence, the next step was to invite foreign researchers to make sense of and legitimize these discoveries. At this stage, entered palaeontologist of Iowa University Dr Russell L. Ciochon, staff of the Museum of Paleontology of California University, and Dr Patricia Holroyd, who studied the fossil specimens at the National Museum between 20 October and 1 November 1997. Dr Ciochon had visited the early 1978 Mandalay University team at the time and was familiar with the debates. He had also made visits in 1982 and 1996, but he was ejected because his visit was unauthorized. The regime's change of mind meant that 'he was highly gratified at the fact that the leaders of the country had expressed such keen interest and opened up a new chapter to facilitate the study of primate fossils, and moreover, that he had been invited to continue his studies.'¹

The American fossil exploration team then made a field trip to the Pondaung Region together with the team between 24 December 1997 and 14 January 1998. The Americans 'were much gratified at the briefing they were given, supported by such detailed records and were highly impressed at the interest shown, and the support and encouragement given by the Myanmar Government leaders.'² Further archaeological discoveries were apparently made from 30 January 1998 onwards.³

A third field survey and exploration took place by Myanmar–France Pondaung Fossils Expedition, a team made up between the original Burmese team and a group of French palaeontologists, including Jean Jacques Jaeger of France's Montpellier University, Stephane Ducrocq, Rose Marie Ducrocq, Benammi Mouloud of Morocco, and Yao Wa Lak Cheimane (Department of Mineral Resources) of Thailand. The team arrived in Rangoon on 30 March, met the Fossil Exploration Team on 31 March at the No. 2 Defence Services Guest House, and visited the National Museum to observe the primate and other fossils. They then performed an expedition between 1–20 April 1998. When they assessed the finds displayed in the National Museum they concluded that these 'may belong to higher anthropoid primate and to the Eocene, which is about 40 million years back', but somewhat disappointingly, they also said that they would need further evidence 'to determine the origin of man and that further study need be made'.⁴ The Myanmar–France Pondaung Fossils Expedition Team held a press conference in conjunction with military intelligence sponsored by the OSS at the Defence Services Guesthouse.⁵

Yet a fourth academic team – the Joint Myanmar–Japan Pondaung Fossil Expedition Team – involved Japanese scholars from the Primate Research Institute of Kyoto University. This team consisted of Professor Dr Nobuo Shigehara and Assistant Professor Masanaru Takai, who carried out studies on the primate and other fossils at the National Museum between 19–25 April 1998 but later returned for a field survey between 6–20 November 1998.⁶

This was followed by a seminar and an exhibition at the National Museum of Ethnology, Rangoon, between 1–2 June 1998 to which geologists, palaeontologists, anthropologists, historians and archaeologists nation-wide were invited.⁷ At this seminar General Khin Nyunt urged the following:

He noted that just as an individual's worth depended on his heritage and his achievements, so also a nation's prestige could be measured in terms of its lineage and historical and cultural background. A nation that can provide historical evidence of its ancient roots and the emergence and growth of its culture, traditions and national traits is a nation in which national fervour and patriotism thrives. It is also a nation whose people will try to perpetuate its identity, sovereignty and independence. He said this was especially true of a country such as ours that had once been enslaved under an imperialist power and had had our history distorted and misrepresented. To right this wrong, the Government of the Union of Myanmar had laid down social objectives which includes the uncovering of true historical records and the resolve to correct the warped and biased versions of Myanmar history as written by some foreign historians. He however acknowledged the fact that Myanmar historians, scientists and researchers had throughout the ages carried out research and study in their own capacity and had been custodians of authentic historical facts. Now however with full government support and sponsorship the results of isolated or individual research could be collated for a correct interpretation and presentation of a coherent authentic history of Myanmar.

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt's in his concluding remarks urged the participants to prove on the basis of the significant and substantial finds of the primate fossils, *Amphipithecus Mogaungensis* and the *Amphipithecus Bahensis* that 'The Myanmar people

¹ *NLM*, 12.05.1997.

² *Ibid.*

³ 'Expert team conducting research on ancient objects unearthed in Budalin Township'. *NLM*, 26.02.1998.

⁴ 'French Palaeontologists discover fossilized remains at Pondaung Region.' *IS*, 20.04.1998.

⁵ 'Myanmar–France Pondaung Fossils Expedition team meets Press to clarify discovery of Pondaung primate fossils'. *NLM*, 08.12.1998.

⁶ 'More primate fossils discovered from Pandaung'. *IS*, 29.11.1998; *NLM*, 29.11.1998.

⁷ 'Scholars, researchers urged to delve into high standard of ancient Myanmar civilization', *NLM*, 02.06.1998; 'Finds indicate existence of 3,500-year-old Bronze Age civilization in Myanmar'. *NLM*, 05.06.1998.

are not visitors who came from a faraway land and settled here. Life began here in this Myanmar environment of land, air and water. Their roots are here.' And that 'The Myanmar people are the true natives, born and bred here, who had matured and flourished as a people with their own culture, art, customs and traditions.'¹

A seminar was further held between 2–4 June 1998 on these discoveries between the Pondaung fossil expedition team (Findings of Pondaung Primate Excavation Group) and the team to study ancient cultural evidence in Budalin Township, Sagaing Division (Sagaing Division Budalin Township Ancient Cultural Objects Research Group), at the Diamond Jubilee Hall of Yangon University. Various historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists were present at this event. It was co-sponsored by the OSS and the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education.²

Pondaung and propaganda

Evidently the Pondaung discoveries have implications well beyond the realms of science. The Pondaung discoveries are portrayed in the regime's publicity as 'taken to indicate the origin of man in Pondaung Ponnay area in the middle Myanmar', after which it launches into the political history of the Union and describes the regime's achievements.³ Khin Nyunt decided that the *Pondaungia* needed to take pride of place at the National Museum. In a review of the new five-floor National Museum at No. 66–74, Pyay Road, it became apparent that the *Pondaungia* were to become central to political propaganda. Building commenced in June 1990, and it was inaugurated on 18 September 1996. By December 1997 it became evident that the Pondaung discoveries would take pride of place in the national museum. In the official museum report it is said that 'arrangements are under way to exhibit ancient Myanmar attire, other cultural objects of national races and fossils including fossilized primates excavated as well as collected by a research team led by Colonel Than Tun, Head of Department, Office of Strategic Studies, from the Pondaung area and others donated by the locals.' The regime then made a grand claim.

Fossils are evidence ... that Stone Age human beings lived in Myanmar and there also existed creatures in Myanmar prior to the period of humans. It can now be firmly said that there were living beings in Myanmar 40 million years ago and if Myanmar scholars can present with firm and full evidence to the world, it can be assumed that human civilization began in our motherland. The Ministry of Education is making arrangements to invite foreign experts to a conference to look into the facts related to the fossils and the Pondaung formation and finally ascertain them.⁴

At Exhibition '98 to Revitalize and Foster Patriotic Spirit, held between 1–30 November 1998 at the Tatmadaw Convention Centre, General Khin Nyunt explained the aims of this exhibition: to promote dynamism of patriotic spirit and national pride; to strengthen the spirit of preserving traditions of origin, lineage and the national character; to contribute towards a correct way of thinking and firm lofty concepts; and to enable the younger generation to learn true historical events.⁵ His major pride was that 'primate fossils found in Myanmar are the evidence of the existence of manlike creatures in the nation 40 million years ago when man had not evolved yet and that this has been approved by international experts'. Furthermore, 'there are firm historical links that Myanmar have evolved through Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age and different stages of civilization in their own nation'. The result of such an excellent history of biological and cultural, superior and independent development means that 'there are records that Myanmar have fine traditions, possessing a high-standard culture, and always repulsed the many foreign aggressions with unyielding spirit throughout various eras'. The essence of the exhibition, he is quoted as saying, is to 'promote dynamism of patriotism and national pride for the youths to possess the conviction to safeguard independence and sovereignty with correct knowledge and view and thoughts in their heart', while 'protecting youths from being deceived by internal traitors to put them under the colonialists' influence'.

Furthermore, under the central heading 'Myanmar Today' the regime's Internet site has a sub-section 'Culture and Traditions' in which the pride of royalty is linked to the Pondaung finds:

Myanmar's existence dates back to many centuries where under the rule of Myanmar kings and its own culture and traditions, civilization flourished. As part of the restoration of the rich cultural heritage of Myanmar, palaces and related edifices of Myanmar kings have been carefully excavated and renovated or reconstructed to their original designs. These magnificent structures clearly depict the once rich and affluent civilization of the Myanmar people.

¹ Kyi Kyi Hla. 'The Pondaung Fossil Expedition.' *MP*, May 1998.

² 'Scholars, researchers urged to delve into high standard of ancient Myanmar civilization'. *NLM*, 02.06.1998; 'Finds indicate existence of 3,500-year-old Bronze Age civilization in Myanmar'. *NLM*, 05.06.1998.

³ *Myanmar Today*. Myanmar Broadcasting Corporation, 1997, pp. 2–3.

⁴ 'National Museum, the symbol of Myanmar pride and honour'. *IS*, 29.12.1997.

⁵ 'Myanmar have evolved through Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, different stages of civilization in own nation'. *NLM*, 13.10.1998.

Moreover, in the Pon-Taung-Pon-Nyar region of central Myanmar, recent discoveries of some primate fossils dating back to some 40 million years may qualify Myanmar as the region where mankind originated. The findings, as recent as 13 April 1997, however, clearly indicate the existence of Myanmar culture and traditions since time immemorial.¹

Critiques of Myanmar archaeology

In the course of exhibiting their finds, the regime had displayed what was supposedly a human fossil from the same region where academics U Thaw Tin and U Ba Maw had found fossils in 1978. Though these two Burmese academics had at the time tried to share their discoveries with the international community, they were arrested and the fossils were confiscated by the BSPP. Since that time, it was not known where these fossils were kept. Khin Nyunt explained that at the time they had conserved the fossils in a secure place so they could be studied for the advancement of the people. However, it would appear that those who had originally discovered the fossils – U Thaw Tin and U Ba Maw – never hypothesised that the human race originated in Burma.²

In a paper delivered in November 1995, well before Khin Nyunt ordered his Pondaung missions into the field, Professor Than Tun, one of the most respected scholar in the field of Burma's historical research (not to be confused with OSS Colonel Than Tun who led the Pondaung Expedition), provided a serious critique of Ba Maw's early work on the Pondaung fossils during the BSPP era. In reference to the jaw bone fragments known as *Pondongia cotteri* he wrote that it 'would be best to refrain from saying that they were the oldest of the kind ever found', reiterating the seven points of criticism of Ba Maw's work made by the Director of Education in 1993, which remain as valid as ever. He concluded that 'I sincerely hope that Ba Maw pay some attention to this criticism', since 'controversies about the early hominids are quite confusing'. He urges that 'we shall have to wait for more discoveries'.³

Professor Than Tun thus found archaeological speculations about the origination of mankind in Burma to be quite ill-informed and based on unsystematic research causing unnecessary confusion in the archaeological world. He has furthermore criticised the general state of archaeological research in Burma.⁴ He says that, though the department of archaeology will celebrate its centenary in 1998, 'its operations are still being carried out in the early 19th century style'. Stronger still, 'like the looters of old, they take what they want and leave what they don't want'. He encourages the keeping of records, the central reporting of all finds, research on them, and accurate dating. Undoubtedly, were there a free press, such criticism would have been amplified and joined by others to temper some of the regime's spectacular cultural and archaeological visions.

If this casts doubt on the regime's archaeological methodology, Win Thein, benefitting from living abroad and the freedom to say what he thinks, has indicated the Pondaung project to be regime propaganda to instil patriotism in the people.

The victories of the Tatmadaw-led investigation are being propounded. General Khin Nyunt is shouting out that human beings and culture originated from Myanmar (Burma).

It is well known that there is no academic freedom in Burma. It is known that the regime has previously coerced academics into writing history as they want it recorded. They are trying to instil blind patriotism among the people.

General Khin Nyunt and his colleagues have been working very hard in Pon Taung region to propound a new evolutionary theory which no one can accept.⁵

One cannot help thinking that the generals are probably less interested in these finds than in the many 'mundane knowledge' (*loki pañña*) myths about the region in which they were found. The Pondaung has been subject to 'tall tales and supernatural mysteries ... fabulous hoards of treasures guarded by ogres and fairies, haunting ghosts and spirits forever hostile to humans, witches and sorcerers who molest visitors, alchemists experimenting with elixirs, powdered the strange fossils they gathered there to mix with their magical potions, etc.'⁶ The uniqueness of the archaeological finds, at a time when Burma is in such turmoil, may lift the spirits of some, but it demonstrates an unhealthy addiction to prove the unique superiority of the 'Myanmar' race. It reveals to us how determined the army are to waste all the public resources they have at their disposal, including army and other intelligence officers, to track down culture, to detect components

¹ <http://www.myanmar.com/today.htm>, December 1998.

² Win Thein in Thailand. 'Generals' new evolutionary theory'. *The Irrawaddy*, 31.05.1998 Volume 6 Number 3.

³ Than Tun. 'Prehistoric researches in Myanmar'. In *Traditions in Current Perspective* (Rangoon: Universities Historical Research Centre, 1996), pp. 25–29.

⁴ Office of Strategic Studies (1997:187).

⁵ Win Thein in Thailand. 'Generals' new evolutionary theory'. *The Irrawaddy*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 31.05.1998.

⁶ Tin Thein, Saya Moe. 'Fossil evidence of Stegolophodon and Stegodon in Myanmar.' *MP*, April 1997.

that may be used to help construct a new Myanmar civilization that ultimately stands in the service of the military.

The generals are striving for the mythological realisation of Burma, and would love it to become the one tourist resort that actually makes its mythology true for, as is written in its tourist travel magazine

‘The first inhabitants of the world,’ is literally what Myanmar means, and is what millions of Myanmar men, women and children symbolically consider themselves to be. According to the legend of ancient Myanmar, Myanmar’s royal families were believed to be descendants of the Buddha’s family. They called their subjects then the ‘Brahma.’ The terminology has evolved over recent years – Mramma, Bamma, Mien, Burma and finally, rightfully, Myanmar. The legend is still there, intact and waiting to be discovered.¹

Unfortunately, many academics either prefer to remain ignorant of the ludicrous use to which their scientific discoveries are put. In spite of this, some foreign scholars are quite happy to continue privileged access to Burma’s archaeological sites in exchange for providing the regime with credibility in their archaeological and cultural propaganda. Apart from the earlier mentioned scholars from France, the United States and Japan, the archaeological research by Elizabeth Moore, Head of Department of Archaeology, School of Oriental and African Studies also spins directly into the propaganda machine of the regime. Long having had an interest in the reconstruction of Mandalay Palace,² she is being gratefully received by the highest government officials, including the military intelligence leaders of the OSS in charge of the Pondaung project³ and the Minister of Education.⁴

Crimes against ‘Myanmar culture’

It may well be true that the earliest human beings originated in Burma. However, true or not, the seriousness with which the military pursues Myanmarfication means, of course, that culture has been placed, like the economy and ethnicity, and virtually everything else, into the realm of national defence. Of course, when a concept enters the realm of national defence, it must then be ‘defended’ and ‘protected’, and it becomes classified as a national secret. The most important archaeological objects were been hidden from view and all forms of inspection during the BSPP era because they were classed as national secrets. Today, however, these ‘secrets’ can be found behind glass in the National Museum where they supposedly engender the pride of race in the Burmese peoples and help unify the country.

Illegalising contesting cultures

From designating something as a national secret that needed to be uncovered and exposed by military intelligence, it is only a small step to also make it a criminal offence to do anything, directly or indirectly, against Myanmar culture.

The 1996 Computer Science Development Law was announced in which, among other restrictions, anyone who ‘is desirous of importing, keeping in possession or utilizing ...’ a computer for purposes other than teaching or business transactions must obtain prior permission from the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs. Failure to obtain permission may result in a prison sentence of seven to fifteen years and a fine.

So far, so good. However, anyone who ‘commits any of the following acts using computer network or any information technology’ shall also be sentenced to seven to fifteen years imprisonment: ‘(a) carrying out any act which undermines State Security, prevalence of law and order and community peace and tranquillity, national unity, State economy or national culture; (b) obtaining or sending and distributing any information of State secret [sic] relevant to State security, prevalence of law and order and community peace and tranquillity, national unity, State economy or national culture.’⁵

In Burma virtually everything is a State secret, and in making national culture part of this it is also

¹ ‘Myanmar travels: worth history’s wait’. *Myanmar Monitor*, Travel Edition, 05.11.1997, Vol. 1.19.

² Moore, Elizabeth. ‘The reconstruction of Mandalay palace: an interim report on aspects of design.’ *Bull. Sch. Oriental and African Studies London*. 1993; 56(2):335–50.

³ YANGON, 9 May – Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt received Dr Elizabeth Moore, Head of Department of Art and Archaeology of University of London, at Dagon Yeiktha of the Ministry of Defence this afternoon.

Also present were Minister for Foreign Affairs U Ohn Gyaw, Minister for Education U Than Aung, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Khin Maung Win, Director-General of Protocol Department – Thura U Aung Htet and Head of Department of the Office of Strategic studies Col Than Tun. (‘Secretary-1 receives Head of London University Art and Archaeology Dept’. *NLM*, 10.05.1998).

⁴ ‘Minister for Education received Dr Elizabeth Moore of London University at his office. They discussed cooperation in education and research’ (*IS*, 18.07.1998).

⁵ *NLM*, 21.09.1996.

criminalised. I do not know of any other country that has made it illegal to 'obtain' and to 'distribute' national culture. I wonder, what would constitute 'any act which undermines ... national culture'? Amnesty International rightly expresses concern over such vaguely worded provisions.¹

The army uses the Burmese legal system to attain its Utopian ideal of Myanmarification, in which all peoples within Myanmar, and all peoples world-wide, will regard Myanmar as the centre of the world from which good disseminates. To succeed in this project, maximum legal leeway is needed, and so anything that could conceivably stand in its way needs to be notionally 'illegalized' so that it can be eliminated at the army's earliest convenience.

Crime and the destruction of culture

Paradoxically, in spite of its claim to stand for the preservation of culture, the regime itself stands accused of criminal acts of destruction of culture. At the start of Visit Myanmar Year 1996, the programme of pagoda restoration in Pagan with UNESCO funds was described as 'disastrous', resulting in irreparable damage to the site due to the regime's authoritarian ministers and officials interference with the meticulous UN restoration practices. Angered at this response, the regime proceeded to collect donations from the Burmese population to do things its own way. Many say that this has fuelled the destruction of Pagan.² Pierre Pichard and other UNESCO-appointed specialists left Burma as a result of the regime's disrespect for archaeology.³

An anonymous Burmese specialist on this subject expressed to me the following criticisms. Many pagodas have been erased to build the grid of roads, the hotels and the golf course. The original pagoda maps were not followed in the reconstruction. In response to protests by indigenous specialists, the regime retorted that the Shwezigon and the Shwedagon had over the centuries been completely rebuilt with contemporary materials to make these as modern and impressive as possible, and they questioned whether Burmese who criticise these actions could be 'proper Buddhists'. No inventories were kept of what was found and where. The unqualified workforce and a lack of qualified supervision resulted in the looting of treasures. Furthermore, corruption is rife and today many archaeology officers have become rich by selling precious antiques.

A Burmese intellectual confided to me that though restoration was achieved with aid and with the money of the people, the credit and the merit are in fact claimed entirely by the generals who proclaimed this as their personal acts of Buddhist merit. Paul Strachan reported that the bricks used for restoration were small modern bricks instead of the traditional large bricks, and that too much cement was used to build it, shortening the lifespan of many structures. Traditionally much less cement was used, which permitted the structures to hold up for longer.⁴ Despite this, the regime insists that the government 'had to renovate or restore them [Pagan pagodas] to their original appearance, maintaining their original designs and patterns', as if this is indeed what they have been doing.⁵ At other times, however, Khin Nyunt has admitted the modernisation of Pagan:

At present, he said, repair and renovation was carried out at almost all the ancient and famous pagodas, Tazaungs, monasteries and lakes with the help of well-wishers, leadership of the government and supervision of local organizations. In so doing, he said, ten traditional arts and crafts were used. This amounts to preservation of cultural heritage handed down by ancestors, he said, adding the newly repaired and renovated edifices would also display modern architecture as well.⁶

The paradox, then, is that while the regime imprisons people for disseminating information on national culture via computers, and proclaims to be for preservation of culture, it is itself in the process of destroying a thousand years of Pagan history. Even in the National Museum there is little or no air-conditioning,

¹ *Myanmar: Intimidation and Imprisonment September – December 1996*. Amnesty International – Report – ASA 16/01/97, February 1997.

² 'The ruining of Pagan.' *The Nation*, 01.11.1996.

³ Than Tun has written two articles during 1995, prior to the UNESCO restoration effort. However, he does not mince his words about damage to Pagan and he is known to be greatly concerned about the regime's restoration efforts. One article is entitled 'Defacing old Bagan' and the other is called 'Depreciation of Bagan art', both published together with their Burmese translation in a collection of articles he edited dedicated to Ludú Daw Amá (ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်တို့၏အာဇာနည်: လူဝတ်ဆင်ယင်မှုများ) (Rangoon: Aung Nyunt, 1996). Though his criticism is mainly of the pre-1988 period, there is no doubt that these articles, and indeed the entire volume, is intended to warn the regime that their work on the restoration of Pagan should be carefully done.

⁴ I am grateful to Paul Strachan for his comments in September 1998.

⁵ 'For preservation of cultural heritage.' *NLM*, 17.09.1998, p. 6.

⁶ 'Theravada Buddhism flourishes in Myanmar thanks to Venerable Sayadaws' abilities to carry out missionary duties'. *NLM*, 05.05.1998.

resulting in insect attacks on the store-rooms and exhibits. I have myself witnessed the way damaged heritage had to be spread out from the store rooms of the National Museum while I was visiting in September 1998.¹

The Japanese factor and Asian values

While government aid and new business investments from Europe and the United States have largely dried up because of the boycott now in place against the regime, apart from China, Japan is the only major economic industrial power that has continued to engage Burma. Japan is an important influence in Burma, largely because of the scale of economic aid it provides, but even more so because of the manner in which aid is delivered. This has resulted in much criticism of Japan from within the politically active Burmese community.²

Seekins has pointed out that the Japanese view their own aid in terms of the warmth of the sun compared to the cold northern wind from the United States. This aid is largely based on the official acceptance of the Burmese military regime, and on personal relationships forged through strategic patronage of important officials high up. Also, government aid is in reality a disguised form of commerce. Japan's method of aid delivery to Burma, he argues, has implications for Burma. Indeed, the Burmese regime itself characterised Japan's relationship to Burma in this way in one of its *Information Sheets*. In its account of Win Naing's conversion from refugee opposition leader to a proponent of the regime while in Japan, it added the following after the title, namely 'the warm rays of sun light are more suitable than the chill wind from the north for the better future of Myanmar, the motherland', bearing out the regime's happy acceptance of what Seekins characterised as Japan's views on development.³ This discourse also penetrates some of the Japanese press that is critical of Japanese and ASEAN support for the regime, where it has been neatly inverted by suggesting that ASEAN leaders have attitudes that are like ice that does not melt under the warmth of Aung San Suu Kyi's words.⁴

Particularly informative on the Japan-Burma relationship is Kei Nemoto's 'The Japanese Perspective on Burma'⁵ and, more recently, another article by Seekins taking to task the Japanese writings of Dr Kenichi Ohmae, 'One trip to Myanmar and everyone would love the country'.⁶

Japan has long viewed Burma, with its natural wealth of resources as 'important to its national interests in terms of the economic strategy and national survival'.⁷ Largely because of its aid projects, Japan was, and still is, Burma's major source for imports, amounting to 40.3% in 1987. Japanese aid to Burma came under scrutiny after 1986, when no new aid projects were approved. Indeed, it has been argued that the crucial factor precipitating the 1988 crisis was that the Prime Minister of Japan, the biggest donor-country to Burma during the final years of the Ne Win regime, informed Burma in early 1988 that basic economic reforms were necessary. Japan had decided that the regime was making poor use of ODA money and that there was no point in throwing good money after bad. As the historically major investor, with very little return on its funds since 1962, it therefore has had most to lose with the 1988 crisis. This, together with the growing influence of China in the region, explains why Japan is impatient to restore its status as major donor to Burma, and why it has a particularly important influence in Burma today.

Support for culture

Outside ASEAN, Japan is the leading sponsor for the currently emergent idea of an Asian value system. We have already noted the Japan Foundation's support for the conferences organized by the Myanmar Historical Commission. However, Japanese support is replicated in the many other projects of historical and cultural research needed to implement the Myanmarfication programme.

Japan supports ASEAN COCI (Committee on Information and Culture) through the Japan Multinational Cultural Mission. It was during his visit to Singapore in January 1997 that Japanese Prime

¹ When I visited the National Museum the insects had seriously attacked and affected numerous items in the store room.

² 'Proposed Japanese aid will bolster Burma's military junta'. NCGUB Press Release, 03.03.1998 (BurmaNet News 05.03.1998).

³ Win Naing. 'Undertaking to Do Utmost for Welfare of Myanmar, the Motherland', *IS*, 09.11.1997.

⁴ '[Aung San Suu Kyi's] Burma letters fail to melt icy Asian leaders.' *Asahi Evening News*, 26.07.1996.

⁵ *Burma Debate*, August–December 1995.

⁶ *Burma Debate* Vol. V, No. 1, Winter 1998.

⁷ I am indebted in my discussion in this section in particular to Donald M. Seekins draft article 'The North Wind and the Sun: Japan's response to the political crisis in Burma, 1988', presented at the Burma Circle, University of Illinois, October 1996, p. 9. Where citations are not indicated these have been taken from this paper.

Minister Mr Ryutaro Hashimoto suggested that ASEAN and Japan should have cultural exchanges. This was approved at the 32nd ASEAN COCI meeting in Langkawi, and the inaugural meeting was held between 4–6 November 1997 in Singapore, in which Singapore and Japan formed the joint secretariat. At this meeting,¹ a Concept Paper was presented on MCM by Mr Asahi, Japan Mission Team member, and an Interim Survey Report was also presented on Japan-ASEAN Cultural Relations by Mr Makita. Particularly relevant to us is that there was a Panel Discussion with eminent intellectuals from Singapore on a broad theme 'Envisioning Asia in the 21st Century World' chaired by Dr Kwok Kian Woon of Singapore.²

On 17 February 1998, the Japan-ASEAN Multinational Cultural Mission (MCM) arranged a conference for 'Myanmar cultural scholars' to discuss 'Myanmar culture' at the newly opened National Museum on Pyay Road, Rangoon, attended by various representatives from ASEAN and others. This conference was seen as being of vital national interest by the highest echelons of the regime. For example, Central Committee Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt made an impromptu arrangement for all the conference delegates to visit the cultural splendour of Pagan. During this time they visited Shwezigon Pagoda, Ananda Temple, Myinkaba Gubyaukgyi Pagoda and Nan Phapa, and studied ancient architecture, murals, arts and crafts, as well as the restoration of ancient pagodas. They also visited the old and new Archaeological Museums and lacquer works. In short, they celebrated the uniqueness of Burman culture at the Burmese kingship's point of origin.

Furthermore, conference delegates were addressed by the very Head of State himself, General Than Shwe, who pointed out that Pagan had been restored and renovated within the short period of three years 'due to contributions of non-governmental organizations and well-wishers in addition to State funds' (necessitated because of UNESCO's hasty withdrawal from Pagan). He 'urged the scholars to frankly discuss preservation and restoration of cultural heritage.' Discussions took place, and Dr Khin Maung Nyunt delivered an upbeat introductory address.

Japan's co-operation in this field of building up cultural assets, however, goes as far back as August 1988, the year of the student protests, when Professor Ishizawa organised an international symposium in Pagan on Pagan under the joint sponsorship of Sophia University (Japan) and the Myanmar Archaeology Department.³

In 1994, the Cultural Division of the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced it would donate \$33 million to UNESCO for restoration work of the ancient Pagodas and buildings at Pagan, involving Professor Yukio Nishimura from the University of Tokyo's Urban Engineering Department, who was to leave for Burma at the end of July. The aim was to use the same high standard renovation techniques as Angkor Wat from Cambodia.⁴ The project also involved as consultant to UNESCO Pierre Pichard. At some stage it also involved Professor Kazushige Kaneko, who also organised a conference on lacquerware in Burma and has publicised his outspoken pro-regime views.⁵

Perhaps more important from the point of view of the current emphasis on palaces and museums in Burma, is the regular training of Burmese at the Nara Institute. The Nara Institute began as an auxiliary

¹ Chaired by Dr. James Khoo from Singapore and joint Vice-chairmanship between Dr. Tamotsu Aoki (Japan) and Mr. Nguyen Van Tinh (Vietnam).

² 'The Asean-Japan Multi-National Cultural Mission'. *MP*, November 1997.

³ *MP*, March 1998.

⁴ *Erawan Journal* (Tokyo), Issue 5, 10.07.1994.

⁵ Kaneko, Kazushige. *The Asia 21 Magazine* (Autumn Edition). 'Contradiction in American oppression on human rights problems' (English Translation, Original Text In Japanese, article 10492, soc.culture.burma):

If Mrs. Suu Kyi did not marry with an English man, will England support her? Suu Kyi left Myanmar when she was 14 years old and returned when she was 44 with the english husband and coloured eyes children. She has two nationalities of Myanmar and England. It is quite unusual thing that such person aims to takes the position of the leader of Myanmar.

For example, if Makiko TANAKA (A member of the House of Representatives, a daughter of late Kakuei TANAKA, the former Prime Minister) stayed in America for 30 years and returned with blue eyed American husband and children, do you think, we, Japanese will make her to be our Prime Minister? Also, I can say, Suu Kyi has no definite policy at all.

Even if she becomes the Prime Minister of Myanmar after this present government, she will not be able to stay in the position more than one week. I believe that the elements which is opposing the present government will not cooperate with her. They will attack her. If such confrontation breaks out, then both England and America will supply weapons to Suu Kyi. Is this the real ideal situation for Myanmar people ? None of Japanese newspapers imagine such situation. Anyone can imagine that if relatively stable present government fell down, great confusion or disorder will occur. If we want to follow America, Japanese mass media should make more work to confirm the good points and bad points of America. It is now the time to consider and criticize after we look back our own history.

organization of the Japanese government's National Commission for Protection of Cultural Properties, but since 1963 gained experience in the conservation of the Heijo (Nara Imperial) Palace, the Asuka and Fujiwara Palace sites. Such experience is invaluable to the Burmese regime, and annually they sent about three scholars at the invitation of the Japanese government 'to study ancient cultural research and museum work'.¹ Finally, various Burmese museum staff have visited the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka in 1993, 1994 and 1997 with support from Japanese foundations. This, Professor Katsumi Tamura assures me, was a private and non-government arrangement, unlike the Nara Institute. Nevertheless, Japan has over the years built extensive contacts with many museums in Burma and has thus crucially assisted Burma in its Myanmarfication programme.

The inseparability of culture from aid

Japanese aid seeks to be like the sun and warm the Burmese people. However, in this approach economic development and humanitarian assistance also become inseparable from 'culture'. Cultural work appears politically neutral, but it is not in the Asian context. Since culture is one of the most important elements in the Japanese approach to aid in Asia the political implications in Burma are more than evident. Furthermore, the Burmese regime has manoeuvred the institutionalization for delivery of this aid in such a way that only its own GONGOs and political projects disguised as 'culture' qualify for support. As we have already seen, it has highly politicised its culture, which has been tied into all kinds of cultural indoctrination programmes and to the 'Buddhification' of Burma.

In March 1998, Japan officially resumed the aid it suspended in 1988.² Of the sixteen projects that had been initiated prior to the suspension, ten were still to be finished. However, it is estimated that the Japanese Embassy had already dispensed US\$1.1 million during the fiscal year before that under a 'grassroots assistance programme',³ and that in 1995 the government had also provided money for medicines under the same programme to the MMCWA.⁴ It is of some interest to note that the Japanese Prime Minister, somewhat insensitively, at the same time as resuming formal aid, also sent a delegation to meet with the controversial USDA on 30 March 1998, who were involved as perpetrators of the attack on the NLD motorcade – characterised as a social welfare group doing good for society, USDA members receive in fact military training to systematically intimidate the political opposition.

This puts Hashimoto's 'Letter to promote democracy' addressed to Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt on 29 May 1998 in rather different light. The letter was delivered by his Deputy Foreign Minister who in the same visit went on to negotiate issues to do with 'economic cooperation'.⁵

The Japanese government is not beyond providing money to projects for which the regime claims Buddhist merit, such as the money for a hospital for the Sangha under the grass-roots project.⁶ Further projects are in store, since further meetings are reported between the Japanese Ambassador and the Burmese Minister of Culture.⁷

Official Japanese government bodies are involved in conjunction with Japanese companies, in helping improve the lacquerware technology for the tourist industry.⁸ Indeed, the Japanese Ambassador was personally actively involved in Burma's export of 'cultural' products at Myanmar Focus '98 in Singapore between 25 April and 3 May 1998, where products of co-operative societies were sold at the exhibition. On

¹ 'Researchers Leave for Japan', *IS*, 30.01.1998).

² 'Officials of Management and Cooperation Agency of Youth Study Headquarters of Japan meet USDA CEC member'. *NLM*, 31.03.1998. A delegation led by Japanese Consul Mr A Watanabe of the Management and Cooperation Agency of Youth Study Headquarters of Office of the Prime Minister of Japan met CEC member of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It is reported that Mr Watanabe explained youth affairs in Japan, bilateral youth cooperation, participation in the 1998 SouthEast Asian Youth Voyage and arrangements for exchange of views.

³ *Bangkok Post*, 28.04.1998.

⁴ *BurmaNet News*, 13.12.1995.

⁵ *Kyodo News*, Japan, 29.05.1998.

⁶ 'US\$ 90 000 for Jivitanada Sangha Hospital'. *NLM*, 10.02.1998; 'Physiotherapy Wing opens at Jivitanada Hospital.' *IS*, 31.01.1997.

⁷ 'Minister for Culture receives Ambassador of Japan'. *NLM*, 28.04.1998.

⁸ 'Minister for Cooperatives received Senior Trade Advisor Ms Saeko Kinoshita of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) at his office. The minister also received lacquerware experts led by Mr Takuji Ogimura of OISCA of Narakawa, Japan. They discussed markets for Myanmar handicrafts including lacquerwares in Japan, technical assistance for preservation of Myanmar ancient artifacts, cooperation for proficiency improvement of instructors of Myanmar Lacquerware Institute and exchange of technology.' (*IS*, 20.02.1998).

this occasion 'the minister gave instructions on publicity for Myanmar resources, culture and handicrafts, dissemination of true events in Myanmar and promotion of pride of the country.'¹

Non-government aid replicates this pattern of support. For example, the Japan-Myanmar Economic and Culture Promotion Association actively provides a range of aid more or less where and when the regime wants it.² The Japan-Myanmar Friendship Association, yet another organization, has also been involved in co-operating with, even providing financial support for, the controversial MNWCWA.³ This Association also donated a primary school to the Ministry of Education on 28 April 1998, somewhat insensitively considering that all Burma's schools were closed and the regime is spending large amount of money on suppressing students and other 'dissenting' elements – over 50% of its money is spent on defense, and only 2% on education.⁴ It has also donated money for the restoration of 'ancient religious monuments' in Pagan.⁵ A donation from the Japanese Ambassador's wife to a training college comes at a similar point in time.⁶

Within Japan, the Japan-Myanmar Friendship Association has furthermore played a role in supporting the Myanmar Embassy in converting key political opponents back towards the regime in Japan. For example, in the regime's *Information Sheets* the story is told of the political conversion of U Win Naing. He arrived in Japan under the sponsorship of a member of the Friendship Association in 1980, but took part in anti-regime demonstrations in 1988, becoming chairman of the Burmese Association in Japan (BAIJ) and a member of the Burma Democratic Council (Chicago). He describes his formal abandonment of his 'confrontational political activities' from 11 November 1996, because now the Burmese regime emphasizes development through foreign investment. He is now organizing 'Myanmar and Japanese friends in Japan to promote such investments in Myanmar'. His conversion was facilitated by Mr Kuwabara, an executive of the Japan-Myanmar Friendship Association, who featured Win Naing's original renunciation prominently in the association's publication, a document later published verbatim on the regime's own Internet site.⁷ In the regime's replication of this article it added the following after the title, 'The warm rays of sun light are more suitable than the chill wind from the north for the better future of Myanmar, the motherland', bearing out the regime's happy acceptance of what Seekins characterised as Japan's views on development.⁸

The Women's Association for World Peace, Japan, has also been involved in strong support for the regime's MMCWA.⁹ This extends to a formal exchange ceremony in which Japanese women present Japanese dances and songs to the organization.¹⁰

This resulted in a discourse of commonality between Japan and Burma in the Burmese national press. In an account of the warm-hearted reunion of these ex-democracy leaders with their families in Burma, it is claimed that the regime is winning the war against its opposition, but also that 'whenever the word democracy is said, Japanese people do not take interest in it', and that 'the Japanese people showed by a vote that economy is more important than democracy'.¹¹

Japanese companies also donate money independently to the GONGOs,¹² as do independent Japanese

¹ 'Minister for Cooperatives meets delegates of Gem, Jade and Woodware Cooperative Societies'. *NLM*, 23.04.1998. 'At 3 p.m. [22 April 1998], Minister U Aung San received Ambassador of Japan Mr Kazuo Asakai at his office. Present were Director-General of Cottage industries Department Dr Than Htaik, Managing Director of Cooperatives Export Import Enterprise Daw Khin Swe Soe, Deputy Director-General of Cooperatives Department U Than Aung and Head of Office U Hla Kyu.'

² 'Syringes and electric organ presented to MMCWA'. *NLM*, 25.02.1998.

³ 'Chairperson of Japan-Myanmar Friendship Association party visit Women's Home'. *NLM*, 15.02.1998; 'Japan-Myanmar Friendship Association Chairperson meets CEC members of MMCWA'. *NLM*, 14.02.1998; 'PRC, Japan Donation for MMCWA' (by Ravac, Japan). *IS*, 01.01.1998).

⁴ 'K 4.5m Myanmar-Japan Friendship School Building handed to Ministry of Education'. *NLM*, 29.04.1998. 'President of Myanmar Social Security, Economic and Cultural Association of Fukuoka District in Japan Mr Shiweru Tajima built the PS-1(6) school building worth K 4.5 million on 200'X140' area in the compound of Basic Education Primary School at Payathonzu in Ward 8, Bago, to commemorate Myanmar-Japan friendship.'

⁵ *NLM*, 14.11.1997. 'Japan-Myanmar friendship association presents \$ 23,640 for restoration of ancient pagodas in Bagan'.

⁶ 'K 350,000 for Kaba Aye Youth Training School'. *NLM*, 22.04.1998.

⁷ Win Naing. 'Undertaking to do utmost for welfare of Myanmar, the Motherland', *IS*, 09.11.1997.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ 'K 120,000 for MMCWA' (by the Women's Association for World Peace, Japan), *IS*, 28.01.1998).

¹⁰ 'Cultural exchange ceremony between MMCWA and WFWP of Japan'. *IS*, 10.11.1998.

¹¹ Tekkatho Myat Than. 'The joy of reunion'. *NLM*, 30.08.1998, p. 5.

¹² 'Nissho Iwai donation for MMCWA'. *NLM*, 20.02.1998.

nationals.¹ Some religious organizations offer money to government initiated projects. Komatsu Chikkosama, a nun from Kyoto, on three occasions donated three million yen to the regime's International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU).²

Many different institutions and agencies are inviting Burmese scholars, students and government employees to Japan. One of the main agencies to do so is Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), which extends technical assistance for national development and human resources development as a part of Japan's Official Development Assistance programmes. Since the agency is unable to choose candidates by its own criteria, it simply accepts the people the regime chooses to send. This in effect means that those who go to Japan under this scheme are mostly USDA members, for whom this is a plum prize for their political loyalties.

Various significant initiatives have furthermore taken place between government agencies.³ The Japanese and Burmese chambers of commerce have discussed economic relationships, trade opportunities and industrial development.⁴

The implications of Japanese aid

There is no doubt that Burma, in spite of its rhetoric of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, is in desperate need of aid from wealthy donor-countries. Undoubtedly, the relations Japan has developed with Burma over the years are doing *some* good in the country. In particular, the Japanese have managed to initiate dialogue with a regime that finds talking so difficult.

Nevertheless, Japan's unique influence in Burma means that it should be especially aware of the implications of its actions. How much aid reaches the people who need it most? How much aid is allocated to the regime and its projects?

There is nothing wrong with supporting cultural exchanges under normal circumstances. However, the fact is that the immense zeal with which Japan has supported the Myanmarfication programme has turned this country, more than any other, into the regime's indispensable ally. Japan has ended up sponsoring the legitimisation of its cultural development that today lies at the heart of Burma's political programme.

In this respect, I would argue, Japan may well retrospectively be seen to have re-enacted its earlier support for Burma in the 1940s, when it trained Aung San and Burma's first modern national army now in its second generation. However, this time it does so at the level, not of training the Burmese army that liberated Burma and permitted pride in Aung San as the unifier of Burma, but of culture as the modern technology for the creation of a Myanmar unity, the Myanmar cultural prison.

For example, General Khin Nyunt, grateful for all the Japanese support for the military regime over the years says that 'we shall never forget the important role played by Japan in our struggle for national independence', and 'we will remember that our tatmadaw was born in Japan'. Meanwhile, critics point out that since 1988 in the schools and the media, the anti-fascist struggle, though it gave rise to the principal parties that inherited power at the time of Burma's first free elections, is now being forgotten and is re-portrayed almost entirely as an anti-colonial struggle against the British.⁵ Indeed, the army labour camps in place today are reminiscent of Japanese war-time methods.

The Burmese regime is understandably appreciative, and has said about Japan that 'Myanmar have a complete understanding with Japan, because the Japanese Permanent Representative, is always trying to provide assistance and help in dealing with the so-called EU and the Western Camp'.⁶ Largely because of the 'warming' character of this aid, and its importance to the regime, the Japanese government was the first to have been informed of Aung San Suu Kyi's release. Indeed, because Japan supports those who are 'in de facto control of the administration of the country or territory regardless of their political legitimacy', it has scored many bonus points with the regime. In Rangoon the Japanese Embassy 'is considered the most important and influential diplomatic mission', which has 'greater access to the junta's highest leaders than

¹ 'Syringes presented to MMCWA [by Mr Jiro Shiobara of Japan]'. *NLM*, 11.06.1998.

² *NLM*, 19.04.1998.

³ 'Seminar on Interaction between Japanese RIPS study mission and Myanmar-ISIS held'. *NLM*, 25.08.1998. This visit to Burma by five members of the Research Institute for Peace and Security (RIPS) includes staff from Meiji Kakuin University, Osaka University and the National Defence Academy.

⁴ 'First joint meeting held on Japan-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and industry business cooperation'. *IS*, 21.11.98.

⁵ Moe Aye. 'Denying the anti-fascist revolution in Burma'. *The Nation*, 26.11.1998.

⁶ Yangon's fourth news briefing, 01.11.1996.

has any Western country'.¹

Nemoto provides a note of explanation on this 'special' relationship between Burma and Japan.

Ever since the compensation after World War II, Japanese influential in diplomatic and economic matters have referred to a 'special relationship between Japan and Burma', or the 'historically friendly relationship.' The thinking behind these expressions is that while Japan brought a great deal of inconvenience to Burma during World War II, it also made significant contributions to the country. Young nationalists such as the 'Thirty Comrades', which included Aung San and Ne Win, were educated by Japanese Army officers known as the Minami Kikan, leading to the birth of the Burma Independence Army (BIA). This army developed into the Burma National Army (BNA). Japan also accepted many Burmese students, providing them scholarships during the war. Many of these people (military and civilians) rose to positions of national leadership in Burma after independence. Therefore, when they stood up to build a new Burma, the feeling was that Japan should give them support.²

However, as Nemoto also points out, after the regime turned to China for help in 1989, and as Japanese companies planned to take their interests in the country further, the friendship between the countries changed. This had an immediate impact on Aung San Suu Kyi, who became a pawn in the SLORC's game to receive renewed ODA assistance from Japan.

As a result, SLORC took advantage of the Suu Kyi card. It released Aung San Suu Kyi unconditionally, but thus far has ignored her request for dialogue. Her release is a nominal concession for SLORC, which is not looking toward promoting democracy or working toward national conciliation. SLORC's aim was only one: Japan's positive response. Japan has not only welcomed the release but also indicated gradual resumption of full-scale ODA to Burma in the near future. For the moment then, SLORC has achieved its goal.³

This leaves Aung San Suu Kyi as a hostage held by the regime in negotiation with Japan, neither of whom has any interest in pushing towards a logical conclusion either way.

The regime is happy to cite at length the positive attitude that members of the Japan-Myanmar Economic Committee have about economic development in the country, as opposed to foreign journalists.⁴ To my knowledge, in no other country outside ASEAN has Burma's new name Myanmar been adopted with such relish, to the extent that even writings of politically aware authors, including Aung San Suu Kyi herself, have their consciously made designation 'Burma' censored in favour of 'Myanmar'. This contradicts the views of leading Japanese linguists of the Burmese language, such as Professor Yabu, Osaka University of Foreign Studies, who insists against all odds that the word *Biruma* is the correct designation for the country according to the history of the Japanese language.

If Japanese money kept Ne Win's regime afloat, the influx of Japanese money today means that another regime is kept afloat. Seekins has argued that the policy of *seikei bunri*, the uncoupling of politics from economic aid in sponsored countries, was 'that generous loan or grants could be given to governments such as Ne Win's Burma, Marcos' Philippines, or Suharto's Indonesia despite their corrupt or authoritarian nature'. Burma provided a brief exception with the '1991 Fundamental Principles of ODA' in which 'full consideration be paid to conditions for the development of democracy, a market economy, and observance of basic human rights in a recipient country'. However, this concept of democracy was hedged in the 1991 DAC report *Development Co-operation*, for it submits the importance of democracy and human rights to 'key areas of debate' between donors and recipient countries, meaning that it is bilaterally negotiable.

It is difficult to debate without involving the key parties representing democracy within Burma itself. There has been no negotiation with the political opposition. On 16 June 1996, Aung San Suu Kyi sent a letter to Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto through the Japanese embassy in Rangoon. She thanked him for Japan's moral support during the period during which NLD members were imprisoned. However she pointed out that Japan, in concert with other members of the international society, should use its economic influence to promote democratization as adopted in the ODA principles. Hashimoto decided that this letter need not receive a reply for the following reasons:

... The reasons given [by the Japanese government, for not replying] were that it was not an official letter from a government agency, and that Tokyo has already been doing what is requested in the letter.

What extreme formalism! It is a letter from the leader of the No. 1 opposition party. Ignoring it is very impolite. The prime minister should frankly write what he thinks, whether it is encouragement or criticism.

¹ Kavi Chongkittavorn. 'Japan sends wrong signal to Burma.' *The Nation*, 02.03.1998.

² Nemoto, Kci. 'The Japanese perspective on Burma'. *Burma Debate*, August–September 1995.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *IS*, 30.12.1997, cites Katsuhiko Fujiwara extensively who wrote 'Myanmar deserves credit for its advances' (*Japan Times*, 01.09.1997). The Japan-Myanmar Committee is made up of 'member companies of the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations, Myanmar government officials and members of the Myanmar Chamber of Commerce.'

If not sending a reply to a letter passes as diplomacy, diplomacy is simple and easy indeed.¹

It is unclear whether those involved are actually conscious of their actions, but it is an undeniable fact that Japan plays the leading role in providing funds for the regime, and generally co-operates with the regime towards the formulation of a new vision of Burma within the framework of both ASEAN and Asia as a substantive cultural region with its own particular attributes (of which Japan is, of course, a part). Understandably, the Burmese regime welcomes this cultural particularisation of Asia for reasons already mentioned. And as Khin Maung Nyunt, the culturalist interpreter of the regime, put it 'it is high time that Asian consciousness and regional understanding be cultivated through the media of history and culture particularly for the new generations who will be the leaders of their respective countries in the 21st century.'²

There are many reasons why people in Japan are in the habit of reacting differently to the Burmese situation compared to Europe and the United States. With most companies' annual shareholders meetings held on the same day throughout Japan, shareholders are unable to attend meetings and raise concerns about investments in Burma with other investors and with company management. Furthermore, consumers in Japan do not take a pro-active stance in boycotting produce of businesses investing in pariah countries. The debates that are generated in the USA and Europe do not arise in Japan, which leaves the Japanese people, including businessmen, politicians and many academics, ill-informed about the Burmese situation. The latter generally rewards a conservative approach to Burma's politics. This is how at a meeting full of Burmese exiles and illegal immigrants, one Japanese lady could begin by congratulating the Burmese for Myanmar having entered ASEAN – a naivety the Burmese can ill-afford.

It would be wrong to characterise Japan as entirely ill-informed or disinterested in Burma's situation without mentioning the Peoples' Forum on Burma. Established in 1992, and with the involvement of two academic specialists on Burma, namely Professor Kei Nemoto and Professor Teruko Saito, and with close links with the Burmese communities in Japan, this forum seeks to make policy makers aware of the situation in Burma and to represent a broad spectrum of informed Burmese views in Japanese policy making.

Aung San Suu Kyi and Japan

I have already noted that Aung San Suu Kyi is an important element in the Japan-Burma relationship. She obstructs formal normalisation between the two countries. The publication in Japan of *Letters from Burma* was a major irritant to the regime. Hence, when Daw Mya Mya Win and U Win Naing, two Burmese dissidents defected from Japan in August 1998 and returned to Burma, their letters were published on the regime's Internet site as a repost, as if people in Japan did not share Aung San Suu Kyi's opinions. They were permitted to travel in Burma and report on their findings by means of letters.³

Meanwhile, controversy has arisen over the views of Kenichi Ohmae who wrote three articles.⁴ The articles received much criticism from journalists in Japan⁵ and abroad.⁶ His views were analysed by Seekins who suggests this 'Japanese-style Orientalism' is influential in Japanese business and political circles.⁷ Ohmae seeks to link Aung San Suu Kyi to the anti-American sentiment felt by many Japanese as follows:

The West knows about Myanmar through one person, Aung San Suu Kyi. The obsession with Suu Kyi is a natural one if you understand that U.S. superficial democracy is golden in the United States; Americans love elections. Just as Myanmar is Buddhist, and Malaysia is Islamic, America has a religion called Democracy. There is merit in promoting democratic reforms. But America is a simplistic country. Americans insist that what works for them should work for others at any time and in any stage of economic development.⁸

He praises the honesty of the Burmese and their lack of money madness. However, being a businessman, rather than having the interests of Burma at heart, he then extols the country as a cheap

¹ 'Burma letters fail to melt icy Asian leaders.' *Asahi Evening News*, 26.07.1996.

² 'The Task of The ASEAN-Japan Multinational Cultural Mission M.C.M.'. *MP*, March 1998.

³ 'BAIJ Chairperson Daw Mya Mya Win, Vice-Chairman Maung Pan Hmwe and member Dr Win Naing return.' *NLM*, 20.08.1998; 'Chairperson Daw Mya Mya Win, member Dr Win Naing of Burmese association in Japan (BAIJ) meet the Press'. *NLM*, 21.08.1998.

⁴ Ohmae Kenichi. 'Mrs. Suu Kyi is becoming a burden for a developing Myanmar'. *SAPIO*, 12.11.1997.

— 'Cheap and hardworking laborers: this country will be Asia's best'. *SAPIO*, 26.11.1997.

— '1997: a year of transition'. *Asiaweek*, December 1997, p. 3.

⁵ Peter Hadfield. "'With Respect" Burma, Generals, Clean Streets ... Omae!' (editorial) *Mainichi Daily News*, 08.03.1998.

⁶ Thomas Caldwell. 'Japan-Burma-Relations.' *Voice of America*, 13.03.1998.

⁷ Donald Seekins. 'One trip to Myanmar and everyone would love the country'. *Burma Debate* Vol. V, No 1, pp. 12–17.

⁸ Ohmae. '1997: a year of transition'. *Asiaweek*, December 1997, p. 5.

source of labour and the regime as largely harmless. Ohmae is influential in the business world, and his work should therefore be taken seriously. His writings form part of a movement towards the 're-Asianisation' of Japan,¹ which represents a 'refashioning of Japan's "identity" as part of Asia rather than an aspiring western-type country'. Along this model of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Asian countries are placed in a hierarchical relationship to its pinnacle Japan.

¹ See in particular Laura Hein and Ellen H. Hammond. 'Homing in on Asia: identity in contemporary Japan.' *Bulletin of concerned Asian scholars*, vol. 27: 3, July–September 1995; pp. 3–5.

Chapter 6

On military authority (ana) and electoral influence (aw za)

Burma is a difficult political terrain to administer for any government, whether it be a government operating on authoritarian or democratic principles. At no time was this more evident than under the U Nu government at the end of the 1940s, when the Karen had captured Mandalay and threatened to take over the capital Rangoon. However, today's crisis results from the reverse situation. It results from the army's excessive reliance on instruments of authority, without being overly concerned with providing tangible benefits to the Burmese people. Under the Ne Win regime it was not sufficient to keep control of independent agencies by licensing them; they either had to be eliminated or nationalised lock, stock and barrel. All independent agencies had to give way to State institutions and personnel. After twenty-five years, in the regime-controlled areas, with the exception of the Sangha, all persons and institutions of independent influence had been eliminated. Only the State remained. The 1974 notional civilianisation of the State was undone in 1988 when the State was once again remilitarised. The current crisis and destabilisation of Burma is a product of that era, in which the army insisted on monopolising the Burmese State.

Authoritarian models of State

In 1987, Robert Taylor's book, *The State of Burma*, was published explaining the rationale of the Ne Win regime. In the absence of in-depth analyses of the State by Burmese academics, Robert Taylor's work serves as the most eloquent analysis of that period. His conclusion was that the BSPP had finally made history by successfully asserting the 'language of the state'.

Personal observation and the research of others suggest that the language of the state is almost universally accepted and that its symbols and ceremonies are widely followed. The all-encompassing ideology of the Party appears to be reflected in public and private discourse and, at least at the verbal level, its message is accepted. People seem also to have developed the capacity (that exists in all societies to varying degrees) to recognize and accept with resignation the gap that exists between the ideals and goals of the state and the actual behaviour of its institutions and personnel. Most people have contact with the Party and the People's Councils in their daily life, and the local agents of the state who live in the community are recognized and used as intermediaries with the authorities at the middle and top levels of the state. For better or worse, the state is accepted as inevitable and dominates other institutions.¹

The author asserted that the Burmese kings only reorganized the State when a dynasty was founded, and that the British 'merely elaborated the institutions of the colonial state' as they went along. However, between 1942–62 Burmese politics saw that 'incumbents attempted to restructure the state nine different times.' During this time, ideas ranged between the revival of kingship, socialism, Marxism, Western liberalism, militarism and centralised Statism.² In saying this, the author conveyed the impression that Ne Win's BSPP finally put order to this period of fruitless and eclectic experimentation and that it was seemingly the least disputed and the most effective permanent contribution that finally brought stability to Burmese politics. Indeed, he went on to say that there is 'general recognition of the *de facto* legitimacy of the present state structure and of Ne Win's supremacy within it'. Taylor described the force of the State for the first time in Burmese history as impersonal when he described how Ne Win took pity on his critics and how he offered them amnesty, demonstrating 'their impotence when confronted with the new state structures'. He then suggests that it is the office of BSPP party chairman that now has the authority rather than the person Ne Win. In short, in his view the most important political structures had been reformed and were now solidly in place for a new political culture to arise.³

Taylor's analysis back in 1987 might not have raised as many eyebrows as it did were it not for an event that proved him wrong. In the event, it was clear that Ne Win's BSPP message was *not* accepted. *The State of Burma* was published in 1987, as one Burmese intellectual gleefully pointed out to me, on the eve of what is now often termed the 1988 'democracy uprising' [သမ္မတအစိုးရတပ်မတော်] that brought the regime to its knees. The author was either out of touch with grass-root developments in Burma, or, for any number of possible

¹ Taylor (1987:372).

² Taylor (1987:218).

³ Taylor (1987:368–69).

reasons, preferred to ignore it.

Remarkably, among the list of political systems analysed in Taylor's book, the concept of 'democracy' is not to be found either in the index nor the text (despite the fact that, as we have seen, Ne Win frequently used the concept), though there are extensive discussions of a variety of political philosophies and there are lengthy paragraphs on the history of the army. To this must be added the reverse, namely that it is amiss of Taylor not to mention anywhere in this book the crucial role of military intelligence in sustaining Ne Win in power. Without his ruthless use of authoritarian instruments, it is unlikely that the BSPP could have pretended its message had been accepted. A third point of criticism of this work is the way it creates the illusion that the military is a secular pragmatic institution – it is in fact deeply involved in magic and mysticism in a way that suggests that the State Taylor sketches has never been secular or pragmatic.

Since many Burmese ideas are linked to democracy, not least the 1990 elections themselves, one wonders how accurate Taylor's analysis of the State can be. The reservations the author expresses about the idea of democracy in later works – though not always without reason – must be read at least in part as continuing an earlier lack of interest in even mentioning the subject.¹ The impression that Taylor's interpretation is only partial is compounded when we study one of his recent articles on the elections. Here he provides an explanation as to why 'the elections of Burma have not achieved any significant policy or power shifts, nor significantly redirected the programs and personnel of the state'.² He views electioneering in Burma as not being about freely expressing one's personal political preferences, but as an extension of the battlefield in which different local armies contest one another. The electorate is swayed by *Bo*, 'local politicians ... risen to positions of great authority in their regions', who have pocket armies and 'came to dominate the local administrative structures, thwarting central planning edicts and creating powerful patronage networks, which could be used at the time of an election to ensure that they or their candidates were returned to power'. He suggests that these *Bo* played the most important role in the AFPFL victories in the elections of the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, in his view the victory of the Clean AFPFL in the 1960 election represented more than a victory against the military, it represented 'a victory of the local *Bo*, against an army that had spent the caretaker period attempting to undermine the independence of their private fiefdoms'.³

As for the May 1990 elections, the author suggests that the regime successfully refused to recognize the election outcome because it played the nationalist card, i.e. it questioned the patriotism of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) in collaborating with unelected armed opponents of all Burmese governments since 1948. The regime also successfully raised doubts about Aung San Suu Kyi's eligibility, since she was married to a British citizen and the NLD received support from foreign sources, including governments and foreign organizations. He then suggests that

Although this does little to change the minds of opponents of continued military rule outside Burma, the juxtaposing of the patriotism of the army, which dies for the nation, against the claims of the ballot box explains in part the success of the army in maintaining power in the face of the results of the elections.⁴

In both publications, the author's emphasis on authority and naked strength means that his view is rather obvious, namely that 'not until those out of power have the organizational means to contest them in a sustained and organized manner, both before and long after the polling day, will election have much meaning.' In this way, he has given no content to NLD politics except as a spontaneous juvenile ballot box acting in response to an army implementing unpopular but necessary things.

One cannot help but be led to think that he wanted this article on elections to prove his personal conviction against all odds that it was after all true that Ne Win had made lasting changes that were good for Burma as claimed in the earlier book. There will certainly be some good things in what Ne Win accomplished. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Ne Win deceived himself into thinking that the BSPP party mechanism was more permanent than it really was, and that it disintegrated so spectacularly the year after the publication of his book. Robert Taylor's analysis turned out to be just as 'misguided' as the previous generation of scholars he criticised. The article on the elections also asserts a stabilising role for the army that belies the political crisis precipitated by the army itself through excessive reliance on the instruments of

¹ e.g. 'One cannot but question ... whether in a country where there has been a long tradition of an army with entrenched political power, reform can take place without the participation of the military' (Taylor 1997a:65).

² Taylor (1996a:179).

³ Taylor (1996a:174).

⁴ Taylor (1996a:178).

authority. The most charitable interpretation of his approach is that he was holding a scholarly debate with an earlier pro-Nu generation of scholars, and that his intention was a novel interpretation covering the areas others had overlooked. Probably his Marxist intellectual sympathies played a role in blinding him to other factors as well.

Buddhism in Saw Maung's elections

Taylor fails to pay attention to ingredients in pre-1962 politics other than that directly linked to the army. Given that he was so spectacularly wrong about the Burmese Way to Socialism, Taylor's analysis of the 1990 elections and, indeed, the 1960 elections, may prove to be guided by a desire to be proved right after all that the army is the only institution that can keep order in society. In this respect, there is one crucial point about electoral politics which he completely failed to mention in his article on the elections. This is the role of Burmese concepts of power and influence, and the role of Buddhist monks and Buddhist concepts more generally. Though in his 1987 book he briefly mentions Buddhism as important, he completely fails to interpret, however, their significance in electoral politics. The monastic order is roughly the same size as the army today, but it is much more influential than the army in electoral politics. This, I submit, was a greater factor in U Nu's 1960 electoral victory than the unpopularity of the army with local leaders and pocket armies, who themselves are also crucially dependent on monastic influence. Some strands in Buddhist and cultural influences actually moderate and affect the very army-centred and *boh* type views that Taylor described as central in his article, and to understand electoral politics properly, these must be first grasped.

Where authoritarian methods prevail, boundary creating practices such as grand charity often become primary elements in politics, whilst the higher forms of Buddhism through which individuals are able to mentally transcend boundaries tend to take a back seat. However, conversely, where situations of unrest become apparent and authoritarian instruments fail, as has happened in the last decade, higher Buddhist practices and concepts are often invoked by both sides in an attempt to stabilise political crisis. This is so for various reasons, not least of which is that Buddhism is about comprehending and transcending *samsara* and coping with change. Politics and the actions of politicians – not just U Nu, but also Aung San and Ne Win – are often portrayed as dealing with *samsara*.¹

General Saw Maung, in his first public address on 12 September 1988, justified the SLORC's seizure of authority. Due to the unruly conditions, he said, the army was unable to 'assist the people with *cetana*'. He appealed primarily to the monks, secondarily to the general population and thirdly to the army. He proclaimed that the State had agreed to conduct multi-party general elections 'in accordance with the request made by the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Sayadaws on 10 August 1988, and in conformity with the demands made by numerous organizations'. He concluded by asking that the elections be free and fair, and that army members should not use their authority or rank to influence the elections.²

This tells us two important features of Burmese politics as expressed by Burmese speakers. First, it tells us something about the nature of authority and influence as conceived in Burma. When the army realised that its authority was at a low ebb, it desperately attempted to restore order by appealing to influential groups throughout the country whom it had been unable to fully co-opt. In this situation, it is significant that Saw Maung appealed in particular to the monks as primary arbiters of influence. The gesture of the elections was presented principally as the outcome of monastic pressure; at this time of army weakness, the army actually came out last in his speech.

Second, Burmese political discourse commonly evokes Buddhist concepts in the search for legitimacy. These concepts often point at superior mental states. Saw Maung justified the army's authority by virtue of a Buddhist concept, namely *cetana*, the unwavering intentionality behind completion of a good deed of Buddhist charity, from which all good and bad is perceived to flow.

In other words, failure and crisis of authority resulted in a moment during which it looked as if a politics of influence, phrased largely in terms of Buddhist concepts of superior mental attitudes, and through the appeal to monks, might well augur a new parliament in which Buddhism would provide a renewed idiom for democracy, as it had been in the anti-colonial resistance and in the language of socialism before.

¹ See below.

² Saw Maung (1990b:5–6,13–15).

The election factor – government, junta and opposition

Much misunderstanding exists over the terminology surrounding government. Three terms – government, junta and opposition – are commonly used in the foreign press to divide up the Burmese political landscape. In democratic societies these concepts are clearly distinct as they clearly distinguish between governments on the basis of an election outcome. Elected governments are legitimate, but juntas come to power in military coups and hence are illegitimate. The status of opposition, on the other hand, is determined by having lost the elections, which therefore makes it ineligible to govern; the opposition can only aspire to government by campaigning and criticising government in a way that would gain influence with the electorate.

The Burmese situation, however, eludes such perfect symmetry. First, the military, though having permitted the elections to take place, by not relinquishing power is not playing the western electoral game. The regime has responded to criticism by saying that democracy, human rights and elections are largely western concepts with no applicability to Burma. It proclaims that local Burmese culture, law and social institutions call for a different kind of political structure altogether. In other words, in this discourse a selection of local concepts are intentionally emphasized so as to subvert the value of more open and universal electoral criteria.

Though the NLD finds universal criteria in Buddhism that are also local and part of a system of Asian values, Burma undeniably does have a particular political culture which operates, as one observer rightly suggests, in a 'time-warp'.¹ It has traditionally been a mono-party political system. Although four national elections for self-government have taken place since 1947, all pertained to single-party politics, involving the election of first Aung San and then U Nu. Beginning as an unlikely alliance between an assortment of nationalists from the entire political spectrum, including communists, with the purpose of liberating the country, the splits that took place in the AFPFL after national independence were the result of its inability to resolve conflicting views. Indeed, political disagreement was widely seen as disloyal to the overarching idea of national unity.

Hence, political opposition parties have not historically been seen as credible or as constructively contributing to government. Since 1962, military politics has merely formalised this mono-party political arena by permanently ruling out the possibility of any party other than the government's coming electorally to power. The 1990 elections are an extension of this situation, for the NLD has neither been permitted to assume control over the institution of government nor to canvass support in the country.

Today, not being permitted to operate as an opposition party and not having control over the institution of government, the NLD is therefore, in spite of the election results, neither opposition nor government. Conversely, however, the generals who desperately seek to retain control over the institution of government in the face of the elections, are neither quite government nor opposition.

Democracy and elections are a bundle of long-term instruments used to defuse political crises on a routine basis. Just as Ne Win called for democracy and multi-party elections when weak in the knees, so Saw Maung called for elections in the same way. That does not mean that they will relinquish control, however. In Burma, therefore, the elections have exacerbated and prolonged the sense of crisis. Had they not been held to defuse the crisis, the regime may well have lost its foothold. This electoral impasse, therefore, calls for an analysis of the cultural and religious factors that were traditionally brought forth at times of crisis and that are currently brought forth to cope with unresolved conflict. In numerous situations of crisis in the past, Buddhism has been an important factor accompanying elections. Where a government has faced erosion of political legitimacy, whether it be Anawratha, U Nu, or Ne Win, it returns to Buddhism. When U Nu emerged from the crisis in the 1960 elections, he emerged on a Buddhist ticket. This Buddhist element in the regime's and Aung San Suu Kyi's politics is therefore extremely important to grasp if we are to understand this crisis; we must deal with this gap between electoral and 'cultural' politics.

Buddhism and democracy

Certain strands of Buddhism have become indelibly associated with electoral politics, for this was an important ingredient in the 1960 and 1990 elections. However, we know from his earlier work that Taylor considered liberal democracy largely irrelevant to Burma, for in the article 'An undeveloped state: the study

¹ Mary P. Callahan, 'On time warps and warped time: lessons from Burma's democratic era'. In *Burma: prospects for democracy*. Brookings Institution Press, 1998, pp. 49–68.

of Burma's politics' he writes that the 'Western students of Burma's politics have not been sympathetic toward the efficacy of pre-colonial patterns of social and political organization', and that 'liberal democracy in Burma's plural society was not appropriate for social reintegration for it led to increased ethnic, party and class conflict.'¹ Emphasising that political culture changes only very slowly, Taylor has chosen to emphasize long-term continuity with the monarchy through the institution of the army, and has chosen to question the Nu AFPFL legacy as inheritors of the country by means of a British constitution. The May 1990 electoral episode is dismissed thereby also as a mere incident in the broader historical sweep of more significant causes.

Is this necessarily so? Analysts may agree with Taylor that U Nu's brand of liberal democracy did not work in the 1950s, but the question at hand today is not so much whether his version of democracy worked at that time or whether pre-colonial monarchy has continuity into the present (in many ways I agree with him on this), but whether military dictatorship is working in the 1980s and 1990s, and whether it can work in the next century. Here most observers would also agree that, however forceful and powerful the military might be, it will find it extremely difficult to keep a lid on Burma forever. The question is not now whether democracy should or should not be implemented, but, as Ne Win himself voiced as long ago as 1965 and repeated at the time of his resignation, it is a question of when and how democratization and multi-party elections should be implemented as a political system. When will there be an attempt to formally represent all minorities and localities at the national level? The current one-to-one negotiations between the army and the ethnic groups will ultimately prove to be divisive and impermanent. Without tolerating any form of opposition within the area currently under its control, how can it be trusted to tolerate opposition once the periphery, where most ethnic groups are situated, also comes under its control.

Influence versus authority

Let me propose one approach to understanding the Burmese political arena that I have found useful, namely in terms of the distinction between two different models for political action: the political model that works on 'authority' and the political model that works on 'influence'.² 'Authority' (*ana*) is centralised, whereas 'influence' (*awza*) is distributed. Burmese military leaders operate on the basis of authority and since they have no interest in transforming their subjects into active citizens, power and agency is not redistributed across a wide range of institutions outside the army. After 1962 there were hardly any NGOs and there was no foreign business. NGOs are still having a hard time operating in this country.³ In this system, influence is only tolerated when it flows through channels of authority. Thus, the situation is created where a breakdown in authority becomes a traumatic event that requires the regeneration of influence for which both monks and elections were deemed crucial even by the military. Since authoritarian systems do not rely on anyone outside the structure of authority itself, this means that it is unable and unwilling to dispense rights and privileges outside its own hierarchy – only obligations can be distributed. Democracy is thus reduced to a form of catharsis, a brief moment of relief through a promise that, like Ne Win's promise, is never realised.

In an influence model, however, since it is based on the idea of dispersal, rather than centralisation of power, individual citizens must continuously be appealed to for support. This then must function on the basis of more than just duties or obligations on the part of its citizens. A system of distributed power simply cannot work without also distributing certain rights and benefits. Once an environment of distributed power exists, authoritarian behaviour is turned into the least efficient and most counter-productive way to conduct politics. Forced labour would not work in this system.

In my view, such contrast helps explain differences between the regime and the democracy movement. Indeed, it permits us to understand many differences in the content of political speeches and the reason why the authoritarian model is so concerned with spatialising, territorialising and placing, while exponents of the democracy are concerned with transcending place and location. To reduce this difference, as the army

¹ Taylor (1983:23).

² My thoughts are structured along the lines of the argument in Stuart Hall ('Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity,' *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 (2):5–27, 1986) and Alejandro Lugo ('Reflections on border theory, culture and the nation' in *Border Theory: the limits of cultural politics*, Eds Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson. University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 48–54).

³ Though since 1989 businesses and NGOs have had some limited opportunities, and they do now play an important role in prising the country open to new perspectives, they have experienced great difficulties in this political environment.

would have it, to a simple opposition between indigenous local patriotism, and foreign values that lead to selling the country out to foreigners, is to oversimplify the local debates that are currently ongoing.

Authority and *cetana*

Authorities frequently appeal to the quality of *cetana* [es̥t̥na].¹ It is an important concept to the regime, and is a Burmese word that crops up not only in the Burmese, but also the English speeches on a regular basis in its Burmese form. We have already observed it as a quality attributed to Aung San as unifier of the country, for U Nu had said it was because of 'General Aung San's goodwill (*cetana*) based on the ingenuity of his steady *samadhi* that success was attained in overcoming the difficulties of unifying the country'.² Usually translated as 'goodwill', in Burmese it means 'a union or accordance of mind with an object or purpose, inclination'. It presumes that for a government to work, all people must share the same deep intentions, and the same object and purpose.

This concept permits overlap between the army's and Buddhist causes, for it means in particular 'to have a fixed purpose to carry out a benevolent scheme'. It means 'to make a religious offering' [es̥t̥na p̥e̯a̯n̥] with the three kinds of *cetana*, namely with steady and firm conviction in the past, present and future.

Maung Maung ascribes Ne Win's journey to power to his *cetana* qualified by the ultimate fear (*samvega*) of the consequences of one's action for the perpetuation of *samsara*; this kind of *cetana* should guide the Burmese people. He begins and ends his biography on this note.³ For the same reason, the 'voluntary' labour issue is expressed in the post-1988 era as the motivation of volunteers, 'masters of *cetana*' [es̥t̥na m̥e̯] contributing to the State's meritorious projects.

Cetana is usually attributed to those in authority, and in particular the government and army, but also parents and teachers.⁴ They carry the onerous duties of the authority and State in a manner that ordinary citizens cannot. Therefore, they are represented as having the greatest *cetana* for peoples for whom they have responsibility – they patronise. Of course, they do so without any self-interest or any desire for power. Such is the disposition of members of the SLORC-SPDC with no reward.⁵ Generals excuse themselves if their good motivation is not apparent, but people must learn to see *cetana* in them.⁶ Generals urge town officials to 'work for the development of the township with *cetana*'.⁷ They assert that graduates of the University for Development of National Races 'are duty-bound to organize the parents of the children who cannot attend school' and must 'work as *cetana* teachers as well as educational organizers'.⁸ Even modern hotels are 'definitely laced with *cetana*', for the concept is supposedly based on the same spirit which built shelters for travellers in old Burma free of charge in the name of Buddhist charity.⁹

Pro-democracy activists and political agitators, however, are portrayed as abusing the *cetana* of the authorities. We have already seen that Saw Maung described the *cetana* of the army as ineffective while the country was in disorder. For example, it is 'deplorable that Daw Suu Kyi ... is misusing and making capital of the *cetana* (goodwill) and magnanimity of the SLORC'.¹⁰ Reformed pupils supposedly bemoan how taking part in the demonstrations meant that 'we had discarded the *cetana* of our parents and teachers and had been instigated by our surrounding to take part in the demonstrations'.¹¹ They are reported to return to their motherland in droves because they acknowledge the *cetana* and the *metta* of the regime,¹² even not returning voluntarily, after being forced to return by the Thai authorities.

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:6,13,76,105,146,158,164,213,238,239,246,251,264).

² Meinmyó Chit Hswei (1970:261).

³ Maung Maung (1969b:i,447).

⁴ e.g. 'We teachers have to teach our pupils with full *cetana* so that, they may become good patriotic people and intellectuals and intelligentsia.' Kaythari. 'Democracy is not power'. *NLM*, 12.06.1996.

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:238–39).

⁶ 'I am saying all this with *cetana* and for the sake of the State' and 'If I am wrong it is only done with *cetana*.' Saw Maung (1990b:146,158).

⁷ 'General Maung Aye arrives Bahtoo Tatmyo in Yaksauk Township'. *NLM*, 15.08.1998.

⁸ 'Senior General [Than Shwe] enjoins UDNR graduates to work with correct outlook, conviction for intellectual development of national brethren.' *NLM*, 27.02.1998.

⁹ 'Old world charms the new'. *MP*, April 1997.

¹⁰ Minye Kyaungbon. 'Protected in the nick of time'. *NLM*, 23.05.1996.

¹¹ See Kaythari above.

¹² Htwe Kyi. 'Absconding students arriving back from Tak acknowledge the *metta* and *cetana* of the Government.' *Working People's Daily*, 05.01.1989.

The regime appeals to its adversaries to demonstrate *cetana*. Internationally, countries should do more than make accusations, 'If they are sincere, have genuine *cetana* (goodwill) towards Myanmar' than 'Myanmar is also ready to reciprocate'.¹ The ethnic minorities demonstrate their *cetana* by laying down their arms. When Khun Sa lay down arms, it was interpreted as evidence that the 'regions have realised the SLORC's *cetana* and turned in their large arsenal of arms and ammo'.² Tranquillity of life in Burma is entirely due to the government's *cetana*, 'since most of the armed groups returned to the legal fold after realizing genuine *cetana* there is peace and tranquillity in various parts of the country'.³ Conversely, the Chinese, a superior power to whom the regime is deeply indebted for arms and assistance, have superior *cetana* towards the Burmese. Indeed, the President of China Mr Jiang Zemin was grateful that the Burmese government conveyed the Chinese Tooth Relic around the country and 'his reply reflected *metta* (loving kindness) and *cetana* (goodwill) of [to] Myanmar.' After all, the Chinese are full relatives of the Burmese and are united with them.⁴ The fact that Tibetan Buddhism has been suppressed in Tibet, and the Chinese long supported the Burma Communist Party, the army's arch-enemy, does not seem to have deterred the authorities when arms and aid were required.

Cetana versus metta

The *cetana* of the generals thus demands a trusting response on the part of the Burmese that all will be well. There is no such thing as questioning the good intentions and there is no such thing as questioning whether by being 'well-intentioned', the regime might still do bad things for the country. Furthermore, the goodness is of a particular type. Differences between groups must be set aside, and shared among all must be the intentionality to participate in a benevolent project conceived of in the singular, and contained within the boundaries of State. In this way, all Burmese people are brought into a scheme of a single project of transactions.

Cetana and charity as conquest

I have already noted how before 1988 national unity was conceived of as an elevated state of mind through *byahma-so tayà*. *Cetana*, however, is much less transcendental, and much more transactional and redistributive, as it takes as its main reference the act of charity, not mental culture. At the heart of *cetana* is the grand donor of Buddhist projects. Kings who conquered domains did so by immediately building pagodas or planting *bodhi* trees within them, thus demonstrating that their fight took place in the name of Buddhism and that they were subjecting these territories to their *cetana*.⁵ This demonstrated domination of the environment along the model of Asoka who, according to legend, built 84,000 pagodas in the communities he conquered. Also, at the beginning of their reign, the kings had the scriptures copied, thus proclaiming to all their *cetana*.⁶ The act of charity was historically the main unifying factor of the kingdom, since it is the first of the Ten *Parami* and also the first of the Ten Royal Duties. The pagoda Ne Win built in the 1980s bears witness to the importance of pagoda building to political authority even for those who are supposedly the most secular of political leaders.

Hence, the concept of *cetana* has overtones that link the transactions surrounding Buddhist charity to building a domain.⁷ The historian Harvey remarked that Bayinnaung's pagodas built at Ayuthia, 'are still to be seen, and in later ages the Burmese would point to them as proof of their claim to rule those countries still.'⁸ Today, Buddhists also proclaim land in Burma as theirs in competition with other Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist communities simply because, they say, there are old pagodas there built by their kings and so it was a Burmese Buddhist domain.

Mindon, troubled by his much reduced kingdom, sought also the instrument of charity (apart from mental culture) to increase his authority over the domain.

Land bounded by the limits ... were (rededicated) to the Pyinya Shwezigon Pagoda.... For all these good deeds may the king conquer all his enemies, solve all his difficulties, grow more powerful, live long and get all he wanted. Finally the king would

¹ Speech by Chair, Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control. '5th Destruction of narcotics drugs ceremony'. 04.02.1992.

² *NLM*, 19.01.1996. Republished in *Burma Debate*, March–April 1996.

³ 'Khun Sa conniving with foreign and anti-government organizations and KNU for his existence'. *NLM*, 02.04.1995.

⁴ Tekkatho Tin Kha. 'Don't try to divide us who have been united since our birth'. *NLM*, 28.12.1998.

⁵ Than Tun (1983–90, X:11, 19).

⁶ Than Tun (1983–90, X:92).

⁷ This transaction, however, is in the name of mental culture and the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment.

⁸ Harvey (1925:172).

like to become the Buddha himself and help everybody else to obtain ... *nirvana*. May the king's ancestors, his ministers and all guardian gods of the Religion share the merits equally with him....¹

This royal infiltration of Buddhist symbolism goes beyond dedicating land and edifices. The umbrellas of the pagodas, ultimate symbols of royal power, are in fact 'a king's crown and no other pyramidal Buddhist monument outside [Burma] has this crown above the finial'. For this reason, from about the beginning of the 15th century 'a [Mon] king invaded the upper land and put a big crown made like his own on each of the pagoda in the land he conquered and it was retaliated by the [Burmese] king by putting the likeness of his crown on each pagoda when he got back his land and in this way the practice of substituting [Burmese] crown with [Mon] [*myan-ma htì chá ta-laing htì tin*] or vice versa was started'. Incorporation of royal elements into Buddhist representations went, in fact, so far as to include to the Buddha images themselves, since old dresses of King Alaungmintaya (1752-1760) were burnt 'and the ash was used to make *Mam Bhura*: [lacquered images of the Buddha]'.²

Cetana and merit

The *cetana* that goes with pagoda building is ultimately based on the idea that merit is distributed by the grand donor to all who live within the kingdom. This permeation of merit throughout thereby reconfigures but also comes to constitute the kingdom. *Bodhisattva* Prince Vessantara – two lives before he became Gautama Buddha – gave away his own wealth and some of his father's in his determination to attain the perfection of charity (*dana*). This caused anger among some, and he was at first banished, especially after he gave away the white elephant to a neighbouring kingdom that was believed to prevent draught. However, the risk was worth the outcome – eventually the king went in search for him, and he rehabilitated Vessantara. The story of Vessantara demonstrates how charity, giving away one's possessions, leads to banishment from the kingdom; and yet eventually this act also gives rise to affirmation of kingship and later Buddhahood. This theme of the gift as, on the one hand establishing the kingdom (by giving wealth away to build allegiance between royal and Buddhist spiritual institutions), while on the other, unhinging the kingdom in the process (by giving all the wealth away to what would be an 'unproductive' purpose) has been taken up by several scholars of Burmese history. Tambiah expresses the relationship between enlightenment and charity rather well: 'if the conquest over the body is the contemplator's profit, the care of the Buddha's bones and relics and their enshrining in a *dagaba*, and the heavenly rewards of pilgrimage, are assigned to the laymen.'³

Charisma and purity do not work for the kingdom until they are harnessed by it: such takes place through the act of royal charity, which brings the renouncer within the orbit of the kingdom and royal influence, and makes enlightenment appear possible by royal piety. The Buddha began to teach after his enlightenment and was soon coveted by the ruling families, as were his pupils and his relics, without which a Buddhist kingdom cannot function. In the Vessantara story, the result was not only that all family members were happily reunited, but Vessantara became a very popular king of a happy kingdom.⁴ In Burmese, concepts to do with charity dominate the domains of social, political and economic transactions and relationships – this is the case with *cetana*, but also expressions such as 'sharing drops of water' [*erskpaty*]⁵ 'sharing a connection' [*ASKhty*], and the term for going on strike is monks 'turning up their alms-bowls [so that they cannot receive alms]' [*qpitmhty*]

In an electoral environment authority cannot afford to be seen to crack down on Buddhism without also

¹ RO, 5 June 1857.

² Than Tun (1983–90,X:119). RO 1 Jan 1760.

³ Tambiah (1987:5).

⁴ See Margaret Cone & Richard F. Gombrich. *The perfect generosity of Prince Vessantara*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

⁵ *Yei sek chá thi* [*kYA nò F mto* 'to sprinkle drops of water'. To pour water [*kYA mQh F m*] after a meritorious deed, a water libation. It is in relation to past acts that the term 'water drop' [*kYA m*] has also taken on the meaning of 'past deed of merit done together resulting in the present or future encounter'. Indeed, to meet as predestined is 'have drops of water [from different persons collectively performing charity] coincide' [*kYA Bìg F m*] or 'come with [shared] drops of water' [*kYA Bìg F m*]. On the other hand, to part ways is to 'exhaust the drop of water' [*kYA mQmF m*]. Mahinda went to Sri Lanka, where he received donations from the king, to which he responded with a water libation, 'by pouring into Mahinda's hand the contents of a water pitcher, as a sign of an everlasting donation' (*Mhv.*, XV, 13-15; 24-25; Lamotte 1988:267). This notion that power is derived from the right state of mind at the time of pouring water, may be contrasted with the saying 'A drop of honey destroys the kingdom' made in Mahayazawngyi in which Sithukyawhtin (1472–82) lost his kingdom due to lack of attentiveness according to this saying (see Stewart 1932:105). This suggests morality and state of mind as causative of war and disaster, on the one hand, and its uprooting through charity of reward and improved rebirth on the other.

initiating and building these relationships that arise through charity. The generals, who have returned *en masse* to pagoda building and to supporting Buddhism in the 1990s, thus attempt to extract legitimacy and conquer the country according to these old models. In presenting the national cause according to these old models of merit-making with *cetana*, they are building a form of national unity that demands a surrender of the people's intentions towards a singular meritorious project, *their* project. The new ruling on cultural heritage means civil servants have part of their meagre pay docked in order to pay for the State's acts of merit, and when the generals arrive in Pagan they requisition the best car in town for as long as they are there, with no compensation to its owner even for consumables such as petrol. One man I met in Pagan had to sell his car because he could no longer afford to own it. The whole argument over 'voluntary' labour is thus tied to the generals' assumption that their acts of charity are the ultimate acts of merit-making, so that all of their projects are deemed 'sacred' projects supported by Buddhism. To participate in this is to become also a 'master of *cetana*' – such privilege deserves no pay.

In the language of the democracy movement, however, there is no presumption of a singular project or of the bounded local environment that *cetana* implies. On the contrary, instead it tends to appeal to *metta*, the unbounded love for all creatures without preference. Its most active vocabulary incorporates *byama-so tayà* and *metta*, which cross the very 'boundaries', 'frameworks' and 'structures' put in place by the army under their protective *cetana*. Through the practice of *vipassana*, it furthermore negotiates the boundaries of prison and mankind. Agency is conveyed onto the individual person concerned who uses *vipassana* to cope with prison and severe repression. It longs for representation of diversity and for self-empowerment that elude the boundaries of State. Hence, to agents of the State, this produces the discourse of foreignness; this produces the Myanmarification discourse that relabels genuine Burmese people as foreigners.

The measure for authority is fear, the measure for influence is respect and loving-kindness. Electoral politics are more crucially dependent on influence than on authority. It is on this basis that the army, which has not practiced the techniques of influence since 1962, lost the 1990 elections. Furthermore, the SLORC permitted elections because it was both, in a state of crisis and it had become complacent about its role in Burmese society. Confusing authority with influence, and fear with respect, it attributed outward signs of submission to its authority to influence. It thought this would translate into votes.

By 1988, it was evident from the protests that Burma had outgrown the authoritarian mode of government. The 1990 election demonstrated that serious changes had to be made. In the political system of influence it is not central authority that counts, but the ability through influence and persuasion to reach across and transcend the boundaries self-interest groups erect around themselves. In such a system the State must derive its power and authority by being perceived by all groups as benevolent. This the regime could not, and will never achieve with its *cetana*.

The regime's respective politics reflect this, for the military is continuously setting boundaries and essentialising identity as substantive. And it subjects everyone to rules of appropriate behaviour appropriate to 'good Myanmar citizens'. The NLD, on the other hand, is continuously transcending these boundaries, de-essentialising identity, and is not playing by the regime's rules. The regime has an interest in creating a closed culture, the NLD in what I call mental culture. Authority is public and attributable, whereas influence is only inferred and attributable indirectly by virtue of certain effects.

The military – bad influence from outside

Focus on Aung San Suu Kyi has drawn attention to the issue of the influence of women, which has absorbed much of the regime's energy (see above). Since the advent of Aung San Suu Kyi, women have increasingly been portrayed as exercising major influence [ZO7] in Burma, in particular on men with formal authority over the house [ZO8]. However, women also need protection from being penetrated by alien values. All that comes from outside is 'bad' influence, and 'alien cultural influences'¹ are highly undesirable. Aung San Suu Kyi is portrayed as responding to these alien values like a puppet on a string [ZO6]. She is so much subject to foreign influence that she is without personal will [ZO5]. On the other hand, she is nevertheless wilful enough to selfishly calculate on becoming the country's leader, though she does so only after coming under foreign influence [ZO3]. It is because of this foreign influence that she had to be restrained and imprisoned, for otherwise she would cause disunity in the army and destroy the country [ZO15]. She is spiteful enough to use her influence abroad to destroy the livelihood of the Burmese people,

¹ See 'Myanmar Culture, Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar', *MP*, March 1998 (discussed below).

and to stall economic and political developments. This foreign influence means she desires power and transgresses the desire of all Burmese people for true democracy from a 'local' point of view [ZO2]. External influences make the NLD unwieldy and unresponsive to local concerns [ZO4] and therefore 'undemocratic'.

In short, the regime asserts that only its own authority and benevolence, based on local authority, laws and customs, can be the sole source of 'good' influence in Myanmar. Any action described as bad, is entirely due to the 'influence' of foreigners or communists [ZO9]. For example, to indicate negative influence it is sufficient to say that it is 'outside influence', for example the press said that 'riot-mongering students got possessed by outside political influences and caused the unrest to grow'.¹ A particular concern is, of course, the American and European boycott, which is referred to as 'the threat or use of economic sanctions' and 'the extraterritorial application of domestic law to influence policies in developing countries'.² However, this 'exteriorisation' of unwanted influence occurs even with those who were themselves by all accounts part of 'the interior' in their contribution to the struggle against colonialism. For example, a group of twenty-three veterans of the national struggle wrote a letter to the SLORC asking for national reconciliation, upon which they were invited to a meeting on 26 November only to be told that they were being influenced by Western countries in their demands. The group replied that they had themselves fought for national independence and that they had written entirely of their own accord, but this was to no avail.³

Nevertheless, certain kinds of influence penetrate from the outside. As one observer quite rightly put it, 'fortune tellers seem to have a significant influence on national policy'. On the whole, however, people on the outside of this limited sphere are interpreted as lacking *metta* and *karuna*, for they are part of the colonialist and fascist legacy outside of Burma, who must be kept on the outside. This view of the outside world was enshrined in the BSPP manifesto [D8], and though socialism has gone, this attitude still remains today.

In sum, from the authoritarian point of view the only 'good' influence is that which flows from within the army's own immediate centralised sphere of authority. It believes it is 'the one and only institution that involves the different nationals, purely nationalistic, with no party influence, uninterruptedly working for the weal of the nation'.⁴

The NLD – bad influence from inside

To Aung San Suu Kyi, on the other hand, bad influence comes not from the outside, but rather from the inside. It comes, of course, from the regime which causes fear in people. However, ultimately, it comes from people's minds, namely through the corruption brought by their own mental defilements. Only a revolution of the spirit can uproot this [S8] (see below), and only when this is uprooted can good influence and true freedom be guaranteed. Since monks are engaged in this quest [E1], their influence on government is for that reason regarded as positive and softening [E13]. It is in the field of Buddhism that momentary respite can be found from relentless persecution by the regime.⁵

Conversely, in NLD discourse, on the whole good influence comes from 'outside' the circle of authority. Influence should go beyond those with authority and embrace all those who have been disempowered and who are poor [ZO1]. In short, to the NLD the whole system of democracy implies a redistributed influence in which people outside the corridor of immediate power also have a role in influencing government. This would even include adversaries, such as opposition parties losing the elections, the regime's own NUP [ZO12], and it would also include foreign governments [ZO13].

Since the regime is unwilling to relate to influence outside its own core of commanders, it is unable to participate in the creation of a party system because it would not be popular enough to receive the votes needed to have representation in government, or even have any weight as a serious opposition party. Indeed, it is unable to rely on the votes of its own subordinates, most of whom voted for the NLD. Yet as a government it can have GONGOS to its name, produced through intimidation and restriction of opportunities by means of authority (see chapter 4). Of course, the army is unable to enter into party

¹ Pe Kan Kaung. 'What is Aung San Suu Kyi? Whither goes she? (IV)'. *NLM*, 24.07.1997.

² 'Statement by U Ohn Gyaw to the United Nations General Assembly'. *Burma Debate*. Sept–Oct 1996.

³ Amnesty International. Report – ASA 16/30/96. July 1996. *Myanmar: renewed repression*.

⁴ Myo Chit. 'Let's tell the truth.' *NLM*, May–July 1996.

⁵ 'Spiritual reprieve from authoritarian rule: respite. *Mainichi Daily News*, 25.11.1996. Republished as letter no. 50 in ASSK (1997:199–205).

political arrangements, and forbade its members from doing so early on because empathy with the people would break the army apart. Membership to the USDA is not voluntary, in spite of the many incentives the regime tries to give to those who join. Albright made a valid point when she commented that ‘authoritarian leaders often delude themselves that they are loved, but the smiles they see are usually prompted not by affection, but fear.’¹

The regime holds that not only is good influence coterminous with its own authority, but in their hard-headed equation between the two, those who are not in authority – such as foreigners, opposition parties and the poor – can have no good influence, deserve no share in power or authority, and merely serve as fallow ground for competing agencies for whom they are ‘pawns’, ‘axe-handles’ or ‘puppets’. Any move by any member of the regime, or even the general public, to listen to Aung San Suu Kyi, would have major implications for its own legitimacy, for it would indicate formal recognition that there is a sphere of good influence outside of the regime’s own sphere of authority. In other words, this attitude makes enemies out of the common people.

Paradoxically, the rhetoric of self-reliance runs counter to the army’s strong dependence on China, Japan and Singapore for material support, but also on individuals such as Miriam Segall, whose embarrassing letters demonstrate the great influence one unethical and opportunistic foreign business woman had on the generals, until she lost her reputation in a law suit.²

To destroy this overlap between the two mandalas – namely of authority and influence – would immediately precipitate an erosion and redistribution of the powerbase. Therefore, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD cannot be met with and negotiated with, for that would be to unravel the platform on which the army itself stands.

It has proved impossible to influence this regime, whether by the Burmese themselves from the inside, or by NGOs or foreign governments from the outside. One journalist summed up the authoritarian nature of this regime in relation to ASEAN when he said that

There’s a foolhardy argument by some ASEAN statesmen nowadays: they say we must admit Myanmar so that ASEAN can exert influence over it. This is flawed. First, ASEAN countries do not tolerate interference by foreigners in each country’s affairs. Second, you do not put a wolf in the middle of chickens. Chickens will never influence a wolf. The wolf will eat them. One by one.³

There has been some debate over whether authoritarianism is good for development or not. Those who believe in ‘developmental authoritarianism’ support investment in Burma, believing that the benefits of economic development are most quickly apparent with an authoritarian approach. Those against speak of the ‘authoritarian disadvantage’ in which all policy tools used by the regime to stimulate the economy are counterproductive.

The regime has been affected in more ways than it cares to admit, and has responded to what it perceives as its opponents. However, it has never openly accepted influence from outside sources. The ASEAN and Japanese ‘constructive engagement’ policy has had as little impact on the way the regime conducts its politics as the economic and political boycott by the United States and Europe. This typical lack of responsiveness Aung San Suu Kyi characterised as the ‘certain rigidity in their outlook’ typical of authoritarian regimes.⁴ It is this ‘inevitable sameness about the challenges of authoritarian rule anywhere at any time’ that produced figures such as Gandhi and Aung San.⁵ There is no doubt that these authoritarian regimes also produced the phenomenon of Aung San Suu Kyi. The paradox then, is that as long as they exist, they will continue to self-produce their own enemies. In short, for the regime to stop producing its own enemies, it will have to admit *awza* into government and relegate *cetana* and *ana* to a backseat.

Ana (authority)

Ana [၎ ၵ ၵ ၵ, Pali *ana* [၎ ၵ ၵ ၵ, means ‘order’, ‘command’, ‘power’ and ‘authority’. It is the most commonly-used concept to characterise the military regimes since 1962.

Let me first cover everyday use of the term. *Ana* is associated with the naked power of the State irrespective of ethics, as involved in ‘instruments of government (owners of *ana*)’ [Aa%apicApsv] who

¹ Madeleine K. Albright. ‘Burmese daze’. *Burma Debate*. Vol. II, No. 4, Nov–Dec 1995.

² ‘How to win friends & influence generals: letters of Miriam Marshall Segal’. *Burma Debate*, Vol. III, No. 1, Jan–Feb 1996.

³ Al R. Dizon. ‘ASEAN watch – humans and Myanmar.’ *Business World*, 05.11.1996.

⁴ ‘Live interview with Aung San Suu Kyi.’ ABC Radio National Australia, 06.06.1996.

⁵ ASSK (1995:184).

‘possess *ana*’ [Aa%apit̃t̃ỹ] either because it ‘seizes *ana*’ [Aa%aq̃it̃t̃ỹ] as ‘dictators (lord of *ana*)’ [Aa%aRe] do, who set up ‘dictatorships (views by masters of *ana*)’ Aa%aRe, or because *ana* is ‘delegated’ [Aa%al̃t̃ỹ] by someone higher, by supernatural sanction or even by elections. Such deferred authority includes the authorised law courts (‘owning *ana*’) [Aa%apit̃t̃ra:] and executioners (‘sons of *ana*’) [Aa%aqa:].

Ana ‘comes into force’ or is ‘established’ [Aa%at̃ṽt̃ỹ] and is ‘stringently enforced’ [Aa%aTk̃t̃ỹ]. To contravene it is to be ‘disobedient’ [Aa%aP̃ñt̃ỹ]. It is viewed as a kind of machinery limited to a sphere (‘wheel of *ana*’ [Aa%ask̃])¹ and a limited period of time (‘*ana* period’ [Aa%aek̃t̃]).

Ana is closely associated with office and rank [raT̃], and *ana* in Burmese history has been significantly sustained by Brahmanic and mundane rituals (magic), including *loki-pañña*.

There is, however, an ethical form of *ana* that is built upon good Buddhist practice and rightful rule. This is linked to the concept of the ‘wheel of authority’ [Aa%ask̃] (See App. I.8) that arises only as the result of correct mental states and intentionality of the king. Furthermore, Aung San referred to democracy as the ‘the people’s desire, the *ana* of the people’ [p̃ṽq̃S̃Ñp̃ṽq̃Aa%a] indicating that the ultimate form of authority is one based on the peoples’ appreciation of what is being done for them, namely ‘influence’.²

Awza (influence)

Sometimes instructors refer to The Three *Awza* [ūq̃zaAa%am̃li 3p̃āx̃T̃C̃R̃H̃K̃h̃ỹ], including: (1) ‘food *awza*, the power that generates the material form of creatures [Asaūq̃za-q̃t̃w̃f̃rp̃k̃B̃s̃s̃K̃c̃q̃t̃]; (2) ‘earth *awza*, the power that makes trees appear [ēūq̃za-q̃s̃h̃c̃t̃k̃ūp̃s̃s̃K̃c̃q̃t̃]; and (3) ‘human *awza*, the power that makes for accomplishment [l̃ūq̃za-Am̃g̃s̃f̃k̃p̃les̃K̃c̃q̃t̃].³

The primary meaning is ‘nutrition’ in the sense of the Pali *oja*, an Indo-European word related to ‘increase’ (Latin *aug* in the sense of augment). It is often used to convey the idea of ‘strength-giving’ or ‘nutritive essence’, as in ‘rich soil’ [ūq̃zaTk̃q̃nt̃ỹ] but it also ‘has flavour’ [ūq̃zael̃:nk̃t̃ỹ] and is associated with ‘nourishment’ [ūq̃zwñ] as opposed to inorganic substance which is ‘without *awza*’ [ūq̃zamps̃].

Secondarily it means ‘influence’ that ‘permeates’ [ūq̃zasl̃t̃ỹ] and one ‘can make someone feel’ [ūq̃zak̃t̃ỹevac̃t̃ỹ] so that it ‘permeates a domain’ [ūq̃zaK̃h̃ỹ]. In this sense it has a fluidity not unlike the English ‘influence’.

When used in conjunction with authority, as in *awza-ana* [ūq̃zaAa%a], it means an authority which is both regarded positively and influential. Such would be opposed to, for example, ‘*ana* of arms’ [l̃K̃h̃K̃Aa%a].

The idea that *awza*, as distinct from *ana*, is nutritious, is related to wholesome elevated personal qualities. In the law text *Manugye*, *nat awza* is used to characterise the only non-material food needed by spiritual beings prior to the decline of human morality at the beginning of the world. Later, men with *awza* had to be elected to exercise *ana* (authority), but they still had to have *awza*, based on their spiritual qualities. In this sense, *awza* precedes *ana*, which is the need to confer authority to the king, and existence by means of *awza* was the ideal State.

Awza, as distinct from *ana*, ‘permeates’. On the other hand, it is inalienable, so that *awza* cannot simply be delegated or inherited, whereas *ana* can. Yet its effect is felt as much more positive and goes much deeper than *ana*. It is important to point out that while *ana* can be and usually is exercised negatively, *awza* is never a negative quality or even a neutral term – it is always a positive quality associated with the positive characteristics of a person.⁴ *Awza* is strongly associated with self-purification and elimination of mental defilements through high morality (*silā* q̃l̃), mental culture (*bhavana* Bawna), and in particular with loving-kindness and compassion as inherent in *byama-so tayā* and *brahma-vihara*. It is associated with voluntary co-

¹ Just as Stalin’s ‘authoritarian encirclement’ worked in opposition to what he conceived of as ‘capitalist encirclement’, drawing into the circle the countries on the periphery, so here he concept of an encompassed circle or wheel distinguishes Burma and other ASEAN countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, from the Burmese generals’ point of view, in particular from ‘the West bloc’.

² Aung San (1971:295).

³ p̃āx̃ūq̃zaK̃h̃ỹ as cited in Awbatha (1975:106).

⁴ This makes *awza* unusable in translation, for example, of the English to be under ‘undue influence’ (e.g. of alcohol).

Buddhism – awza comes prior to ana

Nevertheless, Mingun also points out that Gautama Buddha, when asked about this, refused to make up authoritative rules even where it would have extended the dispensation for longer into the future. He said that there are opportune and inopportune times to develop these rules. It all depends on whether offences were actually happening, at which point some authoritative rules should be developed. If no offences occurred due to the perfection of the monks, then no authoritative rules should be laid down. He compares it to a doctor treating someone who will have an ulcer, but does not yet have one; without showing evidence, the patient will not want to pay for preventative treatment. This suggests that *ana* cannot be assumed without first clearly and credibly demonstrating that *awza* cannot do its work. This procedure was not

⁶ Mingun Sayadaw (1990–96, 4:90–98). see also Mingun (1990–96, 3:14).

followed by the regime in respect of the 1990 election. Furthermore, according to this model, the regime are not even in a position to proclaim *ana* since they have not removed their own mental defilements first, as the Buddha himself had done.

Military *ana* and NLD electoral *awza*

Aung San stands today for both *ana* and *awza*. Aung San was a courageous student who founded the Communist Party, hackled the British authorities, turned on Japan and finally negotiated national independence as a civilian, without relying on his army rank, for he was also founder of the Burmese army. Though Aung San is invariably depicted in uniform, the legacy of Aung San is in fact not so much of *ana*, someone who founded the army, but a person with *awza*, who enjoyed the goodwill of the people, and had influence among them. He resisted the accumulation of wealth for himself and lived with an ideal that inspired the Burmese people. Burma's national independence was attained by Aung San and U Nu as civilians, not soldiers.

The army had not achieved national independence. It was the combination of a particular moment and the personal qualities of two leading and popular personalities of Burma's struggle for national independence that were productive of sufficient *awza* to rally the population along with them. To stay in power the army had to draw on Aung San's *awza*. When Aung San's daughter stood up in his name, the army demonstrated that it could only manage *ana*. However, it was ineffective at managing *awza* outside its own immediate realm without resorting to instruments of authority. It seemed change was imminent when it permitted elections, but as the years passed it then proceeded to arrest and imprison more and more elected members of parliament.

As long as the army reverts to such instruments of *ana*, it will eventually prove unable to contain such crises of legitimacy. Stable political systems must permit *awza* to be the mainstay, and *ana* to be only an adjunct to this. The above distinction between *ana* and *awza* is particularly useful for interpreting the current crisis. It is possible in this way to distinguish between three kinds of politics – *awza* electoral politics of constructive influence, *ana* politics of force and illegitimate government, and *awza-ana* politics of good and benevolent government with the support of the people.

Taylor acknowledged that the modern State 'has a historical lineage that goes back 600 to 1,000 years'.¹ However, elsewhere he also suggests that in Burma there is an 'absence of indigenous theories of the state'. It is, of course, possible to have a State without having indigenous theories about it, but I think that he overlooks the fact that the Burmese State is conceptualized as having originated with the introduction of Buddhism, and that this gives Buddhist concepts enormous force in Burmese politics (App. I.2). Both *awza* and *ana* are based in the Buddhist teachings. Pagoda politics has historically been important in the national independence struggle and continues to be so today, even with the military now rebuilding pagodas in an attempt to augment their *awza* in an *ana* manner.

The transition from the U Nu electoral to the Ne Win dictatorial phase may be read in terms of the vernacular as a transition from the politics of influence (*awza*), in which people warm to the leader because of their personal and other qualities and their ability to converse and influence the public, to the politics of authority (*ana*), in which displays of impersonal and omnipresent strength are required to make people obey out of fear of retribution. In this sense Taylor completely misses the point about Ne Win, for he says that, unlike U Nu 'there has been no obvious and conscious plan to create a cult of personality around Ne Win ... he affects no public poses and launches no crusades; his is the political style of gradual and cautious organization'.² I am not sure to what extent the fact that Robert Taylor was a guest of Ne Win while I was doing fieldwork in 1982–83 has to do with his description. What I do know is that Ne Win was at that time feared by people, and never stood a chance of being 'popular'. Taylor proceeds by describing how Ne Win's charisma 'developed' by citing how he first gathered his political opponents for discussions and then gave no ground to them. This is not an admirable quality.

Aung San Suu Kyi has *awza*. This contributes to her authoritative role in Burmese politics. However, this should not be confused with authoritarian behaviour. She invokes higher ideas, while the regime's *ana* is supported by weapons, military intelligence and *loki pañña*. Post-1962 military regimes have been *ana*-style dictatorships with good reason to greatly dislike personalities with *awza*, who are to them like a 'loose

¹ Taylor (1987:5).

² Taylor (1987:367).

canon'. Ne Win never permitted any officer who was liked by the people to climb the ranks, for such a person might eventually usurp his authority. The result was that the worst personalities, those most loyal to Ne Win himself, rose to the top with no benefit to the people. As we have seen in chapter 1, only the promise of democracy and the periodic gesture of elections could keep *ana* in place.

Aung San Suu Kyi's politics is entirely focused on *awza*, for she has no *ana* as such (except for the elections which many argue did confer *ana* on her). This uncontrollable force of *awza* is the regime's bugbear. This is why the regime must interpret her influence not in terms of 'local' Burmese concept, namely *awza*, but as a foreign concept, namely 'influence'. They attribute to her foreign influence [ZO2], and in doing so they hope to avoid the implication that she has positive influence in this Burmese sense, namely that her personal charisma functions most definitely in terms of traditional ideas of *awza*.

The elections are about the electorate conferring *ana* upon those who have *awza*. Realising this, the current cultural and religious revival that the regime is orchestrating is an attempt to manufacture *awza* under a future electoral polity in which they hope to secure a dominant position. This is a significant change from the previous Ne Win polity. However, they cannot compete with Aung San Suu Kyi, whose *awza* is not artificially manufactured and whose politics actually touches the minds of the people and deeply influence their opinions; the military does not have this capability. It can only pretend to express 'the peoples' desires' [ZM3b].

The regime recognizes this as a problem and this is evident in the way Hpe Kan Kaung, the very same journalist who diminished Aung San Suu Kyi's stature, published a book called '*We are not dictators* [*masters of ana*] *who have seized ana*' [Aa%aqin%eqaAa%art%Asumh%u%pa].¹ In this book he analyses dictatorial systems around the world and justifies the actions of the military, mainly those of the SLORC, but also the 1962 coup. Yet even in this book we find the small tokens of disapproval by the common people, for the slogans prefacing my copy of this book were purposely left uncut, as in many other books I have bought since 1989. These small tokens of disobedience and rebellion by printers and binders are typical of a system relying entirely on *ana* style politics. *Ana* simply cannot penetrate the minds of the people, and merely leads to outward gestures of submission without positively inclining the minds of the people. Were it possible, more of the regime's efforts would be sabotaged. Once again, the regime is creating its own enemies.

The regime knows that in an electoral environment it needs to supplement its *ana* with *awza*. It has tried its utmost to rule out all forms of influence outside its own centre. There is some evidence that this even extends to changing the Burmese vocabulary itself. For example, the latest official government dictionary, published in 1993, interprets *awza* in an *ana* sort of way. It does not so much translate it as 'influence', but rather as a synonym for *ana*. Any subtle distinctions between *ana* and *awza* disappear when no distinction is made between 'making one's *awza* felt' [iqzak%t%y%evac%t%y] and 'having one's *awza* permeate' [iqzas%t%y]. These are all in fact translated in the dictionary as 'asserting one's authority'. In sum, *awza* is invariably equated with 'authority' and with the exercise of naked 'power'. This contrasts with earlier dictionaries such as Judson's and Hok Sein's, who preserve the designation 'influence' for this term. Such collapse between the spheres of authority and influence would explain why the NLD is seen as a threat.

Ana and the limits of Myanmarification

Taylor contributed some valuable conclusions in his work, such as pointing out that there are very few agencies in Burma which have a view of the country as a total entity. So therefore, the role of the army is useful when it comes to unifying the country. Also, there is room for Taylor's focus on 'authority' [*ana*]. Unlike western definitions of government, in which *ana*-style behaviour unconfirmed by elections results in disqualification from government, in Burma *ana* is still seen as a most crucial attribute of government.

However, his approach is so narrowly focused on army *ana* politics that he is blinkered to most other aspects of Burmese politics. His assessment of political values, he admits himself, is entirely based on *ana*, for he analyses the regime and the NLD in terms of 'two contrasting sets of values and political concepts of *authority* in contemporary Burmese political life'.² In such narrow political perspective there is evidently no room for the concept of influence, and we cannot expect an *ana* army-centred explanation to be able to account for electorally-addressed politics, which is about *awza*.

But when exploring Burmese politics, why stop at only explaining the functions of *ana*? Why only focus

¹ ePK%ac%y%Aa%aqin%eqaAa%art%Asumh%u%pa%qt%t%et%any%ac%y%psn%r%nk%ol 1996, pp. 271.

² Taylor (1998a:44).

on the functionality and benefits of *ana* instruments? Why congratulate a cuckoo on the way it keeps such beautiful and tight control over its conquered nest? There is no excuse for replicating the army's views of itself to account for the politics of the whole of Burma, especially when such views are itself productive of the very political disorder the army are supposed to resolve. In particular Taylor's later work fails by not drawing attention to the fact that the post-1988 unrest is self-created, by a regime creating its own enemies by 'foreignising' them. It is also self-created by not permitting agencies independent from the army to develop unhindered in society. Here, *ana* is no longer a unifying force, but a divisive one that leads to the destruction of a country. The regime is repeating the error made by royalty in the 19th century. The reforms proposed by Kanaung and Hpo Hlaing – the men with *awza* – were insufficiently heeded in the period 1850–70. The reason why only the army supposedly can save Burma today, is because it has eliminated the outward signs of anything influential in society besides itself, except for Buddhism. Taylor thus contributes an incomplete perspective to the situation that has serious consequences for Burma not today, but tomorrow. It leaves the army with the illusion that its vision of Burma can be legitimated, whereas it simply can not. If the army had encouraged *awza* from outside its ranks back in 1962, the course of Burma's history would have been different, and today's situation would not have been so uncompromising.

The Myanmar self-sufficiency myth

Harking back to the isolation of the hermit state, members of the regime proclaim that, unlike their unpatriotic political opponents, they are self-sufficient and that their strength is entirely based on internal sources. For example, at the human resources conference, General Khin Nyunt noted that 'we are at present engaged in the task of building a modern developed nation, relying on our own natural and human resources and our own internal strength.'¹

In order to bolster this 'internal' strength, without external enemies to speak of, the size of the army has more than doubled since 1988 to half a million men, and the question arises how large an internal strength does a country need to defeat a threat posed by a non-existing external threat? This growth is primarily financed by the civilian population of Burma who have come to see the army as a major burden – as parasites rather than liberators.

In spite of this discourse of self-sufficiency, the regime has in fact survived only because of support outside its own ranks. It forces the civilian population to surrender its scarce labour and resources for its support with no compensation. Furthermore, it would not survive were it not for relying on a handful of foreign opportunist governments and businesses and on its own businesses such as the UMEH. Instead of the BSPP policy of complete neutrality, the regime has aligned itself in particular with Asian countries for moral and financial support, including China and Japan.

As I have pointed out, much has been financed by government support from in particular countries such as China, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia and Japan, and from businesses world-wide, but mostly from Asian countries. As we have seen, Japan has provided a great deal more than moral support to this regime and is about to re-embark using ODA assistance to refloat the regime. Furthermore, we have also noted how many other private nationals, businesses, governments and NGOs, along with tourists, are involved in keeping the regime in place.²

One issue I have not even dealt with is the Sinicisation of Burma. Subsequent to a major arms deal worth an estimated US\$1 billion with China in 1989, the regime has permitted an open inflow of major investments from China, with the result that, for example, Mandalay, the second largest city of Burma, is now known as 'Second Hong Kong'. It has accepted various kinds of aid and loans from China. In the space of barely a decade the original Burmese inhabitants have moved out and sold their land, and the city is now owned by Chinese traders.³ The idea here is that, as in Thailand, the Chinese will introduce commerce to the country to help generate its wealth.

This regime could not have sustained itself without these foreign supporters. In fact, the regime, has not relied on 'internal strength' at all, but has set itself up to optimally attract foreign funding – it is happy to be floated by foreign money. As I have noted, it has set up various GONGOs and respectable 'commissions'

¹ (Office of Strategic Studies 1998:1).

² 'Majesty Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha and Her Royal Highness Pengiran Isteri Hajah Mariam donate \$ 50,000 to MMCWA'. *NLM*, 02.06.1998.

³ See Frank S. Jannuzi. 'The New Burma Road' in Rotberg (1998).

through which it hopes to attract funds. Furthermore, it has used the propensity of foreign governments to see support for cultural projects as innocent and uncontroversial, to make a case for foreign support of Myanmar culture, which at the official level at least, is separated from Buddhism, though in practice, we have seen that Buddhism is seen as intrinsically part of the total cultural package. In repackaging Buddhism as culture, this has permitted it to attract substantial foreign funds while at the same time attaining its national unification objectives.

In the process, however, the army has lost the ability to unify, for its barracks have become symbols of intrusion in the Burmese villages, where it is impoverishing the countryside through its lack of respect for human life and property. Like a cancer, it is destroying the fabric of society only so that it can keep the upperhand.

Ana and 'foreignizing'

To sustain its preposterous views of self-sufficiency the regime has to 'foreignize' those Burmese people not directly linked to the army. The *ana* approach 'foreignises' genuine Burmese citizens, and 'indigenises' those in authority. In contrast to the large-scale support the regime proudly proclaims it receives from foreign sources in the state-controlled press, every penny the NLD receives is scrutinized by military intelligence and publicised as evidence of support by foreign powers for subversive elements in Burmese society.¹ The SLORC's tendency to publicise Aung San Suu Kyi's every move for propaganda purposes, and its tendency to publicise its own benevolence towards her, meant that Aung San Suu Kyi steadfastly refused to accept any support from the regime. This already began when she refused offers of electricity and food. Indeed, she has sold her furniture and possessions in order to finance her own upkeep.

The regime could not handle this independence. In a society permeated by authority with *cetana* and with the upper hand in the patron-client relationship, not to accept benevolence from the generals is considered a serious snub. The only propaganda they could achieve was to show how she relied on foreign elements. They investigated her every possible connection with foreigners. They confiscated packages sent by her husband and photographed its contents which they published under the heading 'The Lady's privileged foreign connection' in the national press. The packages contained lipstick and a Jane Fonda exercise tape.² They also sought to turn her two sons into foreign subjects by cancelling their Burmese passports in September 1989,³ though they had by local traditions become Burmese men since they had carried out the *shinbyú* novitiation ceremony in Burma.⁴ They highlighted every connection Aung San Suu Kyi has with foreign countries in terms of embassy visits and foreign journalists, to show her as propped up by 'alien' regimes and their agents (journalists) devoted to 'alien cultures'.⁵

Aung San Suu Kyi has set up a trust fund with the 1.2 million dollars that she earned with her Nobel Peace Prize,⁶ which she accepted in the name of the people of Burma and dedicated to the health and education of the Burmese people. Only the royalties of *Freedom from fear*, her own book, were used to fund

¹ Yangon's Press Conference (3), Rangoon, 01.10.1996. Banking secrecy laws to protect the individual do not exist. 'Daw Suu Kyi has opened an account at the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank. Mainichi Shimbun of Japan remitted money, said to be honoraria for her articles nine times. The remittances total U.S \$ 17,000. Misuzu Shobo Ltd of Japan also remitted money twice, U.S \$ 4,054.8, said to be for publishing a Japanese translation of her talks. Prior to the remittances from Japan, La Hayle Books Ltd and Lattaule Bookshop had sent money, over US\$ 3,700, through Barclays Bank of Britain. As you know, some countries conferred awards, including the Nobel Prize, on her for various reasons. So, there is also certain accumulation of money presented for these awards and it needs no special mention. Nevertheless, these cash awards have not appeared in Daw Suu Kyi's accounts ... If the situation is reviewed, it is obvious that organizations of some big nations are providing money for obvious reasons to enable Daw Suu Kyi to base in Myanmar and to finance her political movement.'

² Victor (1998:106–7).

³ Parenteau (1994:126).

⁴ A good photograph of the two boys in monk robes appears in Stewart (1997:63).

⁵ Hpe Kan Kaung (1997:347) lists all these contacts. For example, IS, 06.03.1997, is entirely dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi addressing foreign officials and visiting embassies:

'Mrs. Aris held a press meeting at Vice Chairman U Kyi Maung's residence. On the afternoon of the 4th of March, Mrs. Aris held a press meeting at the residence of the National League for Democracy Party's top official. This function was attended by some diplomats and foreign journalist it is learnt.

Mrs. Aris visited the Italian Ambassador H.E Dr. Benito Volip at his residence on the afternoon of 5th March 1997.

Mrs. Aris visited the residence of the Australia Charge d' affairs, Mr. Jon Philip on the afternoon of the 5th of March.

Mrs. Aris visited the residence of the Japanese Ambassador, H.E Mr. Y. Yamaguchi on the afternoon of the 6th of March.

Source : Myanmar Authority Concerned.'

⁶ Parenteau (1994:125).

her income while she was under house arrest, but the prize money all went into the aforementioned trust fund.¹ However, the regime argues that Aung San Suu Kyi and her family are benefiting from prize money derived from her exploitation of Burma, but meanwhile members of the regime are evidently lining their pockets and living off the backs of those who are having to contribute 'voluntary' labour to the pagodas for which they claim merit.

Victor argues that 'the more SLORC has tried to diminish The Lady's presence and voice by keeping a prisoner in her own house and by refusing even to call her by name, the more she and her now-famous villa have become the Mecca for the international press and visiting foreign dignitaries'.² However, as I see it, the SLORC had a clear objective, which is to manipulate her relation with foreigners with the view to marginalize her within Burma. The more foreigners flock to see her, the more material they would have for their propaganda that she is working against her own culture, religion and race. Furthermore, by 'illegalising' all forms of internal support they hoped that she would be increasingly marginalised within the country.

Instead, the reverse has happened. Not only has her popularity snowballed with the bad press she receives, which few Burmese in Burma I met took seriously, but the regime itself has turned out to be supported by foreigners more than the NLD ever has been. We find foreign governments, businesses and private individuals sprinkling their funds ever so liberally at the slightest hint by senior members of the regime. They distribute their funds, furthermore, towards the causes identified as useful by the Burmese army. This is taking place while NLD members are routinely persecuted and their livelihood is threatened by the regime's actions. The regime uses the guise of 'crime', 'malpractice' or even ordinary traffic accidents to put them away.

While members of the regime benefits from their access to foreign exchange, individuals associated with the NLD have been arrested simply for 'illegally' possessing a few foreign coins.

Another example of the extra-ordinary lengths to which the military regime has gone to get rid of MPs is that of elected NLD MP from Pantanaw township, Dr. Tin Min Htut. The military regime summoned officials from all departments of the town and asked them if Dr. Tin Min Htut had violated any law. When they could not find fault with him, the town police chief ordered his men to find anything that could incriminate the NLD MP. The police searched his house and found two Singaporean coins in a small toy cup his son was playing with. Dr. Tin Min Htut was then arrested for illegal possession of a foreign currency and given a three-year sentence.³

The army itself is ready to accept tribute in the form of donations imported from abroad and denominated in US dollar value from private individuals seeking to curry favour as reported in the national press, and as blatantly sanctioned by the presence of none other than the chairman of UMEH.⁴

Victor, the journalist the SLORC invited to Burma in the hope she would reveal 'the truth' about the country, provides damaging information concerning the procedure whereby ministers of the regime filter foreign currency from official government transactions. For example, the SLORC agrees to sell rice at one \$230 per tonne, but writes a memorandum to the buyer for a sum of \$238, pocketing the difference. These may be small amounts compared to the Marcos and Suharto regimes, where 30–50% kickbacks were not unusual, but it remains a fact that those who are in charge of foreign accounts 'have a licence to steal'. In particular she examines the transactions of General Maung Maung who, as Minister of Livestock and Fisheries, was involved in privatising the first Burmese industries. He accomplished this in particular with the aid of the controversial Miriam Segal, whose life was open to scrutiny after Peregrine, the company who employed her for her connections to the SLORC, sued her in American courts for accepting work from their competitor Mitsui.⁵ Today, General Maung Maung is a Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

There is therefore, an ironic paradox here concerning foreign support,

He [General Maung Aye] emphasized that the twelve political, economic and social objectives of the State are the correct path for the entire public and that all must be vigilant against the destructionists who are attempting through various means to drive a wedge between the Tatmadaw and the people, deviate from the correct path, split national unity and create suspicion among the Tatmadawmen. These destructionists. . . are trying with the support of external elements rather than internal strength to cheat and mislead the public and so, all must ostracize, oppose and crush them regarding them as common enemy

¹ Stewart (1997:100, 102).

² Victor (1998:28).

³ 'Status of MP's'. ABSDF Press Conference Opening Statement on 8th Anniversary of Elections, 26.05.1998 by Aung Naing Oo (Foreign Affairs Secretary) (The BurmaNet News, 27.05.1998, Issue #1013).

⁴ 'Five billiard tables worth US \$ 4,000 donated to 'Tatmadaw Sports & Physical Education Management Committee'. *NLM*, 08.05.1998.

⁵ Victor (1998:167–72).

in accordance with the people's desire.¹

While the regime portrays Aung San Suu Kyi as supported by foreigners ('with the support of external elements rather than internal strength'), I have shown that the regime is itself achieving its Myanmarification programme with foreign, and in particular with Japanese money, and many members furthermore privately take kickbacks. It is therefore the regime that is propped up with foreign money, more than any, for other groups could not possibly receive the funding, even if they wanted to. Not only are there no sources for independent revenue inside the country, but to accept it would mean having one's financial details splashed on the front pages of the regime-controlled press as evidence of 'subversive manipulation by aliens in the internal affairs of Myanmar'.

I have already focused on the problem that, in the absence of a popular party mechanism that could serve its ends, the regime has sought, through its extensive use of GONGOs, to attain total control over the Burmese communities, and to deprive opposition groups of any form of indigenously derived support. Through the UMEH it controls the economy of Burma. In depriving the opposition from indigenous support, this has necessarily resulted in foreign sources being the only viable means of support. People in opposition have only two choices, prison or living abroad. Within this discourse, 'foreignness' conflates at one and the same time the idiom of the foreigner and that of the opposition. It is the regime's own narrow delineation of Myanmar through its Myanmarification programme that Burma's opposition politicians are being turned to seek support from foreign diplomats and foreign politicians. This situation is then, its own creation.

The regime uses the idiom of culture to consolidate its control over channels of support for autonomous agencies operating independently. In supporting the regime to legitimise itself as an architect of a 'national civilization' which threatens to disregard the plural equivalence of cultures, and in rooting political reality ultimately in a singular representation of culture, foreign governments and businesses dealing with the military directly participate in supporting a discourse which permits no opposition. This kind of politics is not capable or willing to address common interests in the greater universal values outside the domain of a very narrow, selectively devised, Myanmar civilization.

In turning all those outside the *ana*-mandala into 'foreigners', it then becomes easy to maintain this approach simply by ruling out a role for 'outsiders' in government. It argues for a new state constitution in which those with foreign relations are not permitted office in the country, yet Ne Win is partly of Chinese background, has German daughter-in-law, and many members of the regime are of mixed racial origin. Furthermore, in order to retain his grip on power and because he had tightened the rules about foreign connections in his concern to foreignise the political opposition, Khin Nyunt had to denounce Dr Ye Naing Win, his own son, who had married a Singaporean.² According to the rules of political office he drew up himself, he would not be permitted to keep office unless he did this.

Conclusion

Ana is an indispensable component in government, but *awza* is more so. To analyse Burmese politics entirely in terms of *ana* is extremely one-sided. For a government to be effective, it must be respected and be able to harness full support from the population. In taking an *ana* army-centred approach, Taylor entered Burmese politics, as does the army, without raising the broader, less tangible, more fluid, local cultural and Buddhist angles that belong in the *awza* domain. This means that he cannot satisfactorily explain the 1960 AFPFL victories nor the 1990 NLD victories except as an expression of authoritarian sentiment by rival local armies. He implies that the victory of both is due to the dissatisfaction of local *boh* and the many pocket armies who rebel against army rule, but he does not explain why the army lacks *awza* among the people. His argument, furthermore, does not explain why the SLORC believed it could win, and yet spectacularly lost the votes of even its own officers and soldiers when it came to the privacy afforded by the ballot box. Furthermore, in not dealing fully with the instrument of military, namely military intelligence, he creates the illusion that the message of the State enjoyed voluntary acceptance, thus lending it an air of legitimacy. Not to deal with 'democracy' was, of course, an error of judgment I need not repeat.

Focusing on the cultural and religious models of Burmese politics would, I suggest, explain a lot of

¹ 'Beware of destructionists attempting to drive wedge between Tatmadaw and people', *NLM*, 23.08.1995.

² Larry Jagan. 'View on Khin Nyunt's disowning of son'. BBC, 26.02.1998. On the business practices of the son, see also 'Open letter to the *Voice of Peacock*', 27.07.1995. *Voice of Peacock*, Aug–Sept 1995, Vol. 2, No. 4.

hitherto unexplained features. First, it would explain why the regime could not have anticipated its failure in the 1990 elections. The regime itself has been fooled by the apparently submissive cultural behaviour that the Burmese exhibit when they talk to an *ana* (cf. *awza*) government. Their sentiments of disagreement do exist, but they remain submerged until the opportunity presents itself to 'show their feelings' [စာတို့] whether it be an auspicious time or day, or at the ballot box. These more submerged concepts of politics require a very different approach; not permitted a life outside, the Burmese are primarily coming to terms with their political preferences through 'mental politics' in which 'mental culture' is, as I shall show, the only one permitted and understood on both sides of the political divide, for it is productive of both *awza* and *ana*.

Second, Aung San Suu Kyi adopted the higher *awza* Buddhist vocabulary to express her opposition to the regime pitched in a battle with *ana* politics. Based on the power of the powerless, it is largely invisible, does not have a single centre, crosses boundaries and is therefore much more difficult to describe. This kind of 'disorganised' *awza* politics is beyond Taylor's approach, fixed on high profile instruments of authority as it is.

Third, as I have explained, the breakdown of *ana* demands regeneration through *awza*. This would explain why the regime itself since the 1988 uprisings has not only organised elections, but has taken up culture and Buddhism as a platform in order to compensate for its facelessness and its lack of charisma. Ne Win's *awza* worked through Aung San, but Aung San has now been re-assassinated. As there is no privileged entry point into *awza* politics, except as what the people of Burma grant the person, the military is now trying to compensate for its facelessness by using culture and Buddhism to gain *awza* style influence with the electorate in a clumsy *ana* sort of way. I propose that its complexity, and Taylor's lack of appreciation of Buddhist concepts, is one of the reasons why he simply did not 'see' this dimension of Burmese politics. I wonder, how will Taylor account for this militarism without the higher ideology of socialism.

Broadly speaking, then, the Burmese themselves, in terms of their outward behaviour, and the way they are spun into a web of patron-client relationships, are in no doubt that the generals in power are indeed a form of government, namely an *ana* government with ultimate power over their lives. However, they are highly ambivalent and suspicious about this power in a way which does not secure or promise their voluntary co-operation. This is what produces the tragic irony of a government trumpeting its own unique 'good intentions' [*cetana*] while building pagodas by recruiting 'voluntary labourers' or 'masters of *cetana*' [*cetana shin*].

Part II
Mental Culture
Transcends Prison

Chapter 7

Mental culture and freedom

I have related the Myanmarfication project to a quote by one of the regime's journalists, namely that 'Myanmar resembled a house that tumbled down. The Tatmadaw had to pick up the pieces and build a new one.'¹ However, there is much evidence that, given their Buddhist tradition, many people in Burma have no desire to live in this house.

I have passed in ignorance through a cycle of many rebirths, seeking the builder of the house. Continuous rebirth is a painful thing. But now, housebuilder, I have found you out. You will not build me a house again.

All your rafters are broken, your ridge-pole shattered. My mind is free from active thought, and has made an end of craving.²

In Part I, I described Myanmarfication as a response by the military to Aung San Suu Kyi's effective challenge and as a compensation for the loss of Aung San to the opposition. It is a political programme to use impersonal means – culture, language, race and Buddhism – to attain to national unity by hegemonizing all diverse peoples in Burma into a singular Myanmar civilization and thereby uproot all opposition for once and all. The neutralizing element of the Sangha is gone, and its place has been taken by the army. Myanmarfication in itself is thus a counter-culture; it is a military response to the challenge posed by the opposition, and in particular Aung San Suu Kyi.³ The army and culture have both proved instruments that work well together since these do not permit rational argument surrounding their objectives. Both are presented at the core of Myanmariness – both are presented as defences against foreign colonialists.

As we have also seen, however, the paradox is that both are propped up by foreign money. I have suggested that foreign support, and in particular Japanese support, for the Myanmarfication project replicates the Japanese support Aung San and his comrades received during the national independence struggle. Also, within these ideas of culture there is a vast difference between the Pondaung archaeology scouts who are ordered into the field to find the earliest Myanmar being, and the regime's cultural advisors who advocate a more spiritual approach to culture. In this chapter I wish to more clearly delineate how these different ideas of culture live side by side and whether there is any overlap between them. Furthermore, how does the democracy movement position itself in relation to culture?

Pagoda culture or mental culture?

Steinberg suggested that Aung San Suu Kyi, because of her confinement and because of the general conditions of censorship, is not able to reach the common people. He recommends she should begin to participate in the platform of 'Burmese culture' by addressing the common Burmese people. He believes she should participate in the grand project of building her own kinds of housing for the Buddha's relics in the manner of King Manuha, who was captured and imprisoned by Anawratha.

To symbolise the psychic constraints to which he was subjected and the resultant emotional stress, he built a pagoda containing three massive Buddha figures. They were completely out of proportion to the space cramped and constrained by abutting walls that constricted their shoulders and a roof that pressed on their heads. This was an innovative, eloquent and politically acceptable means to protest his imprisonment and convey a timeless message. The pagoda still stands today in Pagan.

The Slorc is attempting to make her irrelevant internally. Each side seems to have become more intransigent, and her frustration seems to have become more strident. The Slorc attempts to portray her as a stooge of foreign 'neocolonialism' and 'hegemonism', both led by the United States. But in so far as her message is conveyed only to the outside world, her internal legitimacy may erode, and the Slorc's argument may have more local salience.

To begin meaningful dialogue between the two sides is what realistically the world hopes for at this sorry state of play. To do this requires will on both sides, but whether there are such mutual sentiments is unclear. But in any case, the need for the opposition is to operate within the dominant culture of the country, and deal with the authorities on a common platform, even if the differences are immense. That platform is Burmese culture.⁴

Steinberg proceeds to suggest that Aung San Suu Kyi should follow royalty of the distant past, as did her predecessors U Nu and Ne Win, and build herself a pagoda. Indeed, perhaps Steinberg was prompted by Aung San Suu Kyi's own earlier reflections on Manuha Min's predicament while travelling through Mon country on her way to the Thamanya Sayadaw. She had herself only just been released from house arrest at

¹ Nawrahta (1995:69).

² *Dhammapada* 153, 154.

³ I am indebted for this idea to my discussions with Miyazaki Koji and Setsuho Ikehata.

⁴ Steinberg, David I. 'What medium for the message?' *Bangkok Post*, 16.08.1997.

that point in time, and Manuha's act of building a pagoda while imprisoned in Pagan crossed her mind. Indeed, she identified with Manuha, who had caused Anawratha to experience such great fears. She concluded that 'the sympathetic account of King Manuha is one of the most admirable parts of Burmese history, demonstrating a lack of ethnic prejudice and unstinting respect for a noble enemy'.¹

The Myanmar culture myth

The regime has decided to make Myanmar culture, a singular idea of culture, the centrepiece for all peoples of Burma. Their propaganda has formulated the idea of the Myanmar family, all tied together by the Mongol spot. Against this stand the feeble attempts of the cultural advisers to loosen some of these ideas, but this proves difficult when using only old-fashioned and introductory anthropology textbooks.

Culture is by no means a simple concept, and the Burmese regime has not sufficiently problematised it before its wholesale adoption in their Twelve National Objectives. First, the very concepts of culture the regime employs have not been researched with any seriousness; there is no interest in describing the terminology and values whether in Burmese (*yin-gyei-hmú* ယ်ဂျိယ်ဟမု and *dalei-hton-zan* ဒေါ်တုန်ဇံ) or the other languages in Burma. Second, even the 'international' concepts of culture used are drawn from sources that are not renowned for demonstrating the problems inherent in the concept of culture, but rather, aim to simplify for undergraduate students. Raymond Williams found culture to be one of the two or three most complicated in the English language.² More important, however, is that Kroeber and Kluckhohn distinguished 164 definitions in their famous review of what anthropologists meant by culture.³ However, by today's count such would represent but a fraction of the current range of definitions as one traces the diverse anthropological developments in different countries.

Major changes have taken place over time in the way the concept is understood. The earliest anthropologists at the beginning of this century, while European colonial power was at its height, interpreted culture as a good possessed only by the privileged few. Evolutionary anthropologists such as Tylor saw in culture a development away from the coarse state of nature into which we were born, so that the peoples closest to nature also had least culture. Societies were assumed to move through various phases in cultural development until they attained to civilization. This approach often assumed the conjunction between language, race and culture as joint evolutionary developments. On the other hand, diffusionists, less concerned with evolution according to set patterns of development, saw 'culture circles' (*kultur kreise*) which emanated from the point at which, for example, a pebble hits the water.

In these accounts, whether evolutionary or diffusionist, culture is a privileged centre from which high values are emitted across space and time, that should be gratefully accepted and consumed by weaker peoples; the strongest cultures have the greatest effect on their surroundings. Wright has reviewed the attributes of this old sense of culture as a relatively static culture as follows: unchanging, in balanced equilibrium or self-reproducing; underlying system of shared meanings; 'authentic culture'; identical, homogeneous individuals.⁴

If these early theories saw culture not only as desirable but as privileged central points dominating entire landscapes of human communities, subsequent ideas about culture developed that effectively did away with the view that culture necessarily belonged to the privileged centres of civilization. Culture was no longer inferred from spectacular reports that produced the idea in the early days of 'armchair' anthropology. At the time, fieldwork was rarely performed and knowledge hardly employed first-hand observation and linguistic skills, that are today regarded as vital tools in anthropology. It was in particular fieldwork and participant-observation that radically altered the view of culture. This initially gave rise to functionalist theories, such as Malinowski's fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders, who proposed that culture is produced and maintained independently in all societies, including societies in the periphery of strong civilizations. Also, peoples such as the Australian Aborigines, who had hitherto been assumed had no culture, were demonstrated to have highly sophisticated cultures.

A further step in the democratization of culture took place when Raymond Williams argued that all peoples not only accept and possess culture, but also *make* culture by their own agency. These cultures, in

¹ ASSK (1997a:7–8).

² Raymond Williams. 1976. *Keywords*. Flamingo, p. 87.

³ Kroeber, A.L. & Kluckhohn, Clyde. 1952. *Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions*. Cambridge, MA.: Papers of the Peabody Museum XLVII.

⁴ I am indebted to reading Susan Wright. 1998. 'The politicization of "culture".' *Anthropology Today*. 14, 1, pp. 7–15.

turn, contest the reified cultures of the elite. This permits us to speak of sub- and counter-cultures as appropriate responses to a centralised discourse of civilization.

The regime's culture discourse – in particular as based on the idea of Mongolian racial unity – reads like a standard colonial idea of culture that aims to produce a history consistent with old-fashioned western linguistic, geographic, but in particular racial classifications. It follows up on what historians such as Harvey said, namely that 'the Burmans are a Mongolian race, yet their traditions, instead of harking back to China, refer to India ... the surviving traditions of the Burman are Indian because their own Mongolian traditions died out'.¹ In similar vein, Luce wrote that, 'the Abhiraja/Dharaja legends showing the continuity in the Buddha's Indian lineage with those of Burmese royalty were presumably invented to give Burmans a noble derivation from the Sakiyan line of Buddha Gotama himself. But one only has to put a Burman between a North Indian and a Chinese, to see at a glance where his racial connections lie.'² To fight colonialism with old colonial ideas is the legacy of an army that has its origins and traditions ultimately outside Burma. The paradox is that the army demands the civilian population to wear *longyi* and accuse democracy protesters of westernisation, while they are themselves wearing trousers, the ultimate symbol of western decadence and can seemingly not come up with theories of culture that transcend those of their oppressors half a century ago.

The local values myth

The pagoda is too easy a way out of the culture quagmire. For the regime populating the landscape with bright and shining pagodas at the expense of the civilian population is as useful as is the colonial discourse and search for Mongolian origins in the Mongolian spot. This is based on a reductionist anthropology practised in the colonial idea, which proposed a concept of culture that permitted drawing larger boundaries of communities so as to assert domination over them. The idea that the regime can stand for 'local values' by adopting such discourse of the Myanmar family is damaging the fabric of society.

Anthropologists of the post-colonial period are of the opinion that the creative personal elements of culture are as dynamic as the call for civilisation. The smaller communities at the edges of larger communities are equally creative in developing their cultures. This discovery led anthropologists to realise that the creative aspects of culture always work to counterbalance the inherited and transmitted elements.

The Burmese army realise that it could not recover its Aung San ancestral lineage it had so carefully manufactured now that Aung San's charismatic daughter has entered the political arena. She contested and led the attack on their painstakingly crafted concept of institutional culture that could build some sort of a bridge between the people. It had to grab for what is available beyond Aung San's lineage, and is now rewriting Burma's entire history and remanufacturing and repackaging Burma's culture into a unique sub-type of an Asian value system which, they hope, Japan will finance, the package tourist will consume, businesses will support, the ethnic minorities will resign themselves to, and they will themselves benefit from politically and economically. The resulting cultural unification of the country, they hope, should be sufficient to overcome all forms political opposition.

Aung San Suu Kyi retorts that it is false to delineate such hastily forged ideas of national culture. She says that 'there is nothing new in Third World governments seeking to justify and perpetuate authoritarian rule by denouncing liberal democratic principles as alien. By implication they claim for themselves the official and sole right to decide what does or does not conform to indigenous cultural norms' [Y11].

Politics has thereby been transformed into a debate about what these local values called culture are that might go into local concepts of democracy. Indeed, democracy has become contested at the level of culture. In response, Aung San Suu Kyi perceptively commented on this rhetoric of culture and development at the level of the nation has no meaning without local empowerment, without permitting parallel cultural concepts to operate at the local level.

The question of empowerment is central to both culture and development. It decides who has the means of imposing on a nation or society their view of what constitutes culture and development and who determines what practical measures can be taken in the name of culture and development. The more totalitarian a system the more power will be concentrated in the hands of the ruling elite and the more culture and development will be used to serve narrow interests. Culture has been defined as the most recent, the most highly developed means of promoting the security and continuity of life. Culture thus defined is dynamic and broad, the emphasis is on its flexible, non-compelling qualities. But when it is bent to serve narrow

¹ Harvey (1925:5).

² Luce (1959).

interests it becomes static and rigid, its exclusive aspects come to the fore and it assumes coercive overtones. The national culture can become a bizarre graft of carefully selected historical incidents and distorted social values intended to justify the policies and actions of those in power. At the same time development is likely to be seen in the now outmoded sense of economic growth. Statistics, often unverifiable, are reeled off to prove the success of official measures.

In her view, truly Burmese culture is mental culture – the culture of *Byama-so tayà*. This will be analysed later, but suffice to say her that these express universal and transcendent values – transcendent of material and substantive difference in status and power – in a way, first of all, to which people respond locally, and second, that it is a local ideal comparable to western values of democracy. As we have already seen, all politicians of repute have handled these concepts, and even the regime's own thinkers and journalists currently agree on their over arching importance.

Mental culture – the concept

To think that Aung San Suu Kyi's platform from which to appeal to the generals, or indeed, to the population at large, should be the supreme platform of 'Burmese culture' is fine, but that such culture is equated with material boundaries is, in my view, fundamentally out-of-date. Pagodas reify boundaries and permit call on 'voluntary' labour and the regime monopolises the 'tangible' realm by means of their *cetana*, for they have the authority (*ana*) to do so. Indeed, in a wide-ranging reform of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act and its Amendment in 1962, on 10 September 1998 the regime announced the 'Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law' which greatly restricts the independent building and renovating of Buddhist structures, resulting in prison sentences of up to seven years. It is 'deemed imperative to protect and preserve by legislation a wider range of Myanmar cultural heritage'.

In my view the current battlefield is now over the spiritual and psychological culture. This is something the regime wants to control but, unlike material culture, it cannot possibly control. If pagodas confront the foreigner, *vipassana* eludes such distinction between Burman and foreigner. Nyanatiloka Mahathera (1878–1957) gave a lecture entitled 'Mental culture' in Tokyo in 1920, jointly published with the addition of three other lectures in *Fundamentals of Buddhism: four lectures* in 1994. Hailed as 'the first Continental European in modern times to become a Buddhist monk', his work on Theravada Buddhism is still of interest. Born in Germany, he developed a keen interest in Buddhism in his youth and came to Asia intending to enter the Buddhist Order. He received ordination in Burma in 1903.¹ However, the greatest part of his life as a monk was spent in Sri Lanka, where he established the Island Hermitage at Dodanduwa as a monastery for Western monks. His translations into German include the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Milindapanha*, and he has left a legacy of 'new' Buddhism that now pervades Sri Lanka, known as 'the forest tradition' and which has been adopted as 'indigenous' by many Sinhalese Buddhists. The role of foreign, predominantly German monks in the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka was documented by Carrithers, who treats in detail Nyanatiloka's motivation to becoming a forest monk and the legacy of the Island Hermitage for reviving Buddhist mental culture in the Sinhalese Buddhist tradition.²

In his first lecture he set out 'the essence of Buddhism' in terms of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. He quotes Friedrich Nietzsche's admiration for the 'absolute soberness and clearness of Buddhism'.

Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity. It has entered upon the inheritance of objectively and coolly putting problems. It came to life after several hundred years of philosophical development. The notion of 'God' is done away with as soon as it appears. Prayer is out of the question. So is asceticism. No categorical imperative. No coercion at all, not even within the monastic community. Hence it also does not challenge to fight against those of a different faith. Its teaching turns against nothing so impressively as against the feeling of revengefulness, animosity and resentment.

He places Buddhism, in its emphasis upon mind and the inward condition, in a very different category from other religions and suggests that it is a system that operates beyond tradition and culture, as these are mere conventional templates.

The teaching of the Buddha is perhaps the only religious teaching that requires *no belief in traditions*, or in certain historical events. It appeals solely to the understanding of each individual. For wherever there are beings capable of thinking, there the truths proclaimed by the Buddha may be understood and realized, without regard to race, country, nationality or station in life. These truths are universal, not bound up with any particular country, or any particular epoch. And in everyone, even in the lowest, there lies latent the capacity for seeing and realizing these truths, and attaining to the Highest Perfection. And

¹ For a Burmese appreciation of Nyanatiloka see *မိုးညမ်းအတ္ထုပ္ပတ္တိ*: [Unusual biographies: biographies of foreign (Buddhist) missionaries]. *NHWH* 1980, pp. 57–72. This also includes biographies of Ananda Mettaya (English monk), Lokanatha (Italian monk), Daw Sudhammawati (Nepalese nun), and Col. Olcott (American).

² Carrithers (1983:26–45).

whosoever lives a noble life, such a one has already tasted of the truth and, in greater or lesser degree, travels on the Eightfold Path of Peace which all noble and holy ones have trod, are treading now, and shall in future tread. The universal laws of morality hold good without variation everywhere and at all times, whether one may call oneself a Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Muslim, or by any other name.

It is the *inward condition* of a person and his deeds that count, not a mere name. The true disciple of the Buddha is far removed from all dogmatism. He is a *free thinker in the noblest sense of the word*. He falls neither into positive nor negative dogmas, for he knows: both are mere opinions, mere views, rooted in blindness and self-deception. Therefore the Buddha has said of himself. 'The Perfect One is *free from any theory*, for the Perfect One *has seen*:

Thus is *corporeality*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is *feeling*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is *perception*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus are the *mental formations*, thus they arise, thus they pass away; thus is *consciousness*, thus it arises thus it passes away.

He refers to this liberating Eightfold Path as 'a path of inner culture, of inner progress'. Having thus taken Buddhism out of the realm of religion, competitive faith and culture, into the realm of mental culture, i.e. personally confronting reality through the first-order instrument of one's own physical and mental manifestation, the second lecture he then proceeds to delineate the importance of *karma* and rebirth. He aimed to show that the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth 'has nothing to do with the transmigration of any soul or ego-entity, as in the ultimate sense there does not exist any such ego or I, but merely a continually changing process of psychic and corporeal phenomena', and to point out that 'the kamma-process and rebirth-process may both be made comprehensible only by the assumption of a subconscious stream of life [*bhavanga-sota*] underlying everything in living nature'.

The third lecture is devoted to *paticca-samuppada*, or the theory of dependent origination. Realised by the Buddha at his enlightenment, it represents the practical understanding of 'the conditional arising of all those mental and physical phenomena generally summed up by the conventional names "living being," or "individual," or "person"'. According to this theory, all life-forms arise from the *kamma* generated through ignorance (*avijja*).

The lecture 'Mental culture' is the last lecture. Here, having placed Buddhism, as the system of direct confrontation with reality outside the realm of culture, and having presented ignorance (*avijja*) as perpetuating life-in-*samsara*, he sketches 'mental culture' as the only form of mental training that attains release from the cycle of rebirth.

The whole of the Buddha's teachings may be summed up in three words: morality, mental concentration and wisdom, *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*. This is the threefold division of the Noble Eightfold Path leading to deliverance from the misery of *Samsara*. And of this Eightfold Path, right speech, action and livelihood are included in morality, or *sila*; right effort, mindfulness and concentration in mental concentration, or *samadhi*; right understanding and thought in wisdom, or *panna*.

Of these three stages, morality constitutes the foundation without which no real progress along the Eightfold Path to purity and deliverance is possible. The two higher stages, concentration and wisdom, are brought to perfection by that which in the West usually, but rather ambiguously, is called 'meditation.' By this latter term, the Buddhist Pali term *bhavana* is usually translated.

I have already emphasized Aung San's and Thakin Kodawhmaing's concept of national unity as rooted in *byama-so tayà* and, ultimately, in *samadhi* or concentration. These, together with *vipassana*, the next stage in mental training, are all comprised within the concept of *bhavana*, which represents, in Nyanatiloka's vocabulary, the system of mental culture in its entirety.

The word *bhavana* is a verbal noun derived from the causative of the verb *bhavati*, to be, to become, and therefore literally means 'the bringing into existence,' i.e. producing, development. Thus the development of mind is twofold:

1. Development of mental concentration (*samadhi-bhavana*), or tranquillity (*samatha-bhavana*);
2. Development of wisdom (*panna-bhavana*), or clear insight (*vipassana-bhavana*).

Nyanatiloka draws attention to Sri Lanka being lacking, unlike Burma, in mental culture.

In this popular exposition I only wish to give a general idea of the authentic method of this twofold mental culture, and I shall not be going much into details. It is to be regretted that in Sri Lanka one very rarely meets with laymen, or even monks, who are earnestly devoting themselves to these two higher stages of Buddhist life. In Burma and Siam, however, the other two strongholds of original Buddhism, we still find quite a number of monks and hermits, who are living in the solitudes of deep forests or in caves, and who, detached from all worldly wishes and anxieties, are striving for the goal set forth by our Master, and are training themselves in tranquillity and insight. Undoubtedly, for the real development of higher life, solitude, at least temporarily, is an absolute necessity.

Though the concentration exercises may serve various preliminary purposes, their ultimate object is to reach that unshakeable tranquillity and purity of the mind, which is the foundation of insight leading to deliverance from the cycle of rebirth and misery. The Buddha has said: 'Now what, monks, is Nibbana? It is the extinction of greed, hate and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). And what, monks, is the path leading to Nibbana? It is mental tranquillity and insight.

Mental tranquillity (*samatha*) is the unshakeable state of mind gained through the persevering training in mental concentration. Tranquillity, according to the Commentary *Sankhepavannana*, bestows a threefold blessing: auspicious rebirth, bliss in this very life, and mental purity and fitness for insight.

Insight (*vipassana*) is a name for the flashing forth of the light of wisdom and insight into the true nature of existence, i.e. into the impermanency, suffering and egolessness (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*) of all corporeality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.

Nyanatiloka's account of Buddhist mental culture sketches it as the ultimate goal in Buddhism and as the most accurate culture in its original sense of coping with nature. In that sense, since it is based on self-liberation, it goes beyond the collective aspects of culture.

The news of the Buddha's Awakening sets the standards for judging the culture we were brought up in, and not the other way around. This is not a question of choosing Asian culture over American. The Buddha's Awakening challenged many of the presuppositions of Indian culture in his day; and even in so-called Buddhist countries, the true practice of the Buddha's teachings is always counter-cultural. It's a question of evaluating our normal concerns – conditioned by time, space, and the limitations of ageing, illness, and death – against the possibility of a timeless, spaceless, limitless happiness. All cultures are tied up in the limited, conditioned side of things, while the Buddha's Awakening points beyond all cultures. It offers the challenge of the Deathless that his contemporaries found liberating and that we, if we are willing to accept the challenge, may find liberating ourselves.¹

We are thus left with Buddhism not only as a mental culture, an inner culture, but also a counter-culture. This permits us to understand one strand in the history of Burmese national independence politics of Aung San and Thahkin Kodawhmaing, who recognized in mental culture a vital counter-colonial instrument that permitted transcending factionalism and that would eventually result in national unity. It also permits us to understand why men such as Ba Han, who wrote a book on Blake's mysticism, should sketch 'The Good Life' in *The Planned State*, as the need for 'physical as well as mental culture'.²

Mental culture is 'high' culture

As Tambiah wrote, the ascetic 'erases the layman's cognitive and affective maps by crossing the latter's boundaries of social and physical spaces, culinary distinctions, and pure-impure categorizations', for 'the ascetic who closes his sense doors while the layman's are open is also a *breaker* of conventions, a dissolver of man-made cultural categories by which he orders and reifies the world into a durable reality'. The ascetic here is 'a mindful observer and contemplator of *process*, of growth and decay and dissolution; and what better subject is there for this than the human body and what better viewing ground than a place of cremation?'.³

The advantage of mental culture in a multi-cultural environment such as Burma, is that it permits the creation of a 'neutral' space where cultural differences are erased. Aung San Suu Kyi is suspicious and has expressed criticism of the institutionalization of a 'national culture' that is being devised by a dirigiste regime which she finds 'can become a bizarre graft of carefully selected historical incidents and distorted social values intended to justify the policies and actions of those in power'. 'It is often in the name of cultural integrity, as well as social stability and national security, that democratic reforms based on human rights are resisted by authoritarian governments'. She believes that the poor need more than material assistance, they need 'empowerment' so as 'to change their perception of themselves as helpless and ineffectual in a changing world'.⁴ Such empowerment is supplied not by culture, but by the development of spiritual resources as part of a 'revolution of the spirit'.

Mental culture, which requires very little space and is highly portable, is not visible, yet has a cosmological reach, negotiating the boundaries of the largest domains known to mankind such as self, prison, country, cosmology and *samsara*. By contrast, culture can merely negotiate ethnic and national boundaries.

Buddhism has historically provided the idiom of transcending culture.

... the Buddha's Awakening sets the standards for judging the culture we were brought up in, and not the other way around. This is not a question of choosing Asian culture over American. The Buddha's Awakening challenged many of the presuppositions of Indian culture in his day; and even in so-called Buddhist countries, the true practice of the Buddha's teachings is always counter-cultural. It's a question of evaluating our normal concerns – conditioned by time, space, and the limitations of ageing, illness, and death – against the possibility of a timeless, spaceless, limitless happiness. All cultures are tied up in the limited, conditioned side of things, while the Buddha's Awakening points beyond all cultures. It offers the challenge of the Deathless that his contemporaries found liberating and that we, if we are willing to accept the challenge, may find

¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. 'The Meaning of the Buddha's Awakening'. (<http://world.std.com/~metta/ftp/modern/awakening.html>).

² Ba Han, Maung. *The Planned State: an evaluation of the social and economic foundations of the State in the light of a comparative study of the conditions in the East Asiatic and Western Countries*. Rangoon: n.p., 1944, p. 105.

³ Tambiah (1984:37).

⁴ ASSK (1995:264).

liberating ourselves.¹

High culture is therefore ultimately rooted in a Buddhist spiritual quest. This overcomes difference and transcends locality through understanding, rather than fostering and asserting difference through the production of substantive material and ideological difference on the basis of locality or material culture. Such is an opinion shared with Buddhists elsewhere.² And it is indeed a feature of Aung San Suu Kyi's mental culture of politics.³ However, it is as well to bear in mind, that this concept of culture as mental culture is itself derivative from the very same crisis politics already outlined, which began with Mindon's realisation that reform must be undertaken in the wake of the Second Anglo-Burmese War to keep the long-nosed British, as Hpo Hlaing put it, from 'kissing the girls of Burma'.

When we investigate the meaning attributed to culture by the regime's own advisers, we see an elaboration of what they think are universal ideas of culture, drawn from old-fashioned and introductory anthropology texts. However, the regime's cultural think-tank do not quite see eye-to-eye with the generals on Myanmar culture in terms of locally originating Burmese ideas at all. Khin Maung Nyunt's definition of culture involves a distinction between 'tangible' culture and 'intangible' culture as follows:

Broadly speaking there are two aspects to cultural heritage – tangible and intangible. The tangible aspect covers all material objects of culture such as fossils, artifacts, monuments, antiquities and sites, whereas intangible refers to all mental and spiritual aspects such as belief, value system, custom, tradition, habit, attitude, character, behaviour, life style, etc.⁴

At the 'Human Resource Development, Nation-building and Culture' seminar Khin Maung Nyunt set out the roots of 'Myanmar culture' as close to the spiritual development and ethics as advocated by the NLD. Khin Maung Nyunt proclaims that 'Myanmar ethical and moral principles such as the 38 modes of auspicious conduct (Mangala Sutta) which includes advice for living a good and happy life as well as earnest advice for kings and ministers so that they may govern well and wisely'. He isolates the following as the main features of Burmese culture:

'To cite but a few, are *Majjhimapatipada*, *Brahma Vihara* and *Hiri Ottappa*. *Majjhimapatipada* means the via media or the middle way which avoids the two extremes. It takes a moderate course of actions ... *Brahma Vihara* is a set of four sublime states of living, namely metta or loving kindness, *karuna* or compassion, *mudita* or altruistic joy and *upekkha* or detachment which the Buddha advised men to practice in their social relations. *Hiri* is the shame of immorality and *Ottappa* means the fear of sinning. They prevent us from evil actions. Such Buddhist admonitions of a preventive nature serve as a brake on human greed, conceit, avarice, craving and hatred and minimize the social problems arising out of material progress.'

These moral principles indeed originated from the teachings of the Buddha, but they have permeated and spread and combined with other cultural influences to produce a culture that is uniquely Myanmar.⁵

The cultural adviser U Khin Maung Nyunt ends up saying what Aung San, U Nu, and since 1971 the BSPP, and now the senior members of the NLD also say – this is that *byama-so tayà* or *brahma-vihara*, mental culture, is the way for Burma. Ye Htut also adds to the definition of other speakers that 'Myanmar national

¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *The Meaning of the Buddha's Awakening*. 1997.

² 'A cultured man has grown, for culture comes from a word meaning "to grow." In Buddhism the arahant is the perfect embodiment of culture. He has grown to the apex, to the highest possible limit, of human evolution. He has emptied himself of all selfishness – all greed, hatred, and delusion – and embodies flawless purity and selfless compassionate service. Things of the world do not tempt him, for he is free from the bondage of selfishness and passions. He makes no compromises for the sake of power, individual or collective.

In this world some are born great while others have greatness thrust on them. But in the Buddha-Dhamma one becomes great only to the extent that one has progressed in ethical discipline and mental culture, and thereby freed the mind of self and all that it implies. True greatness, then, is proportional to one's success in unfolding the perfection dormant in human nature.

We should therefore think of culture in this way: Beginning with the regular observance of the Five Precepts, positively and negatively, we gradually reduce our greed and hatred. Simultaneously, we develop good habits of kindness and compassion, honesty and truthfulness, chastity and heedfulness. Steady, wholesome habits are the basis of good character, without which no culture is possible. Then, little by little, we become great and cultured Buddhists. Such a person is rightly trained in body, speech, and mind – a disciplined, well-bred, refined, humane human being, able to live in peace and harmony with himself and others. And this indeed is Dhamma.' Robert Bogoda *Buddhist Culture, The Cultured Buddhist*, Bodhi Leaves No. 139, Published in 1996, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.

³ The preposition 'mental' in 'mental culture', I fear, evokes in English a prejudicial connotation in the sense of 'mental', i.e. a term suggesting 'temporary or permanent impairments of the mind, due to heredity, birth injury, environment, or accident, which usually need special care.' It conveys such ideas as mental breakdown, deficiency, derangement, disease, disorder, handicap, illness, incapacity, retardation, subnormality. However, as Williams points out, the term 'culture' has undergone definite changes. It started life as meaning the cultivation of crops and animals, which remained its main sense until the beginning of the 19th Century. From the 16th Century onwards it was applied metaphorically to the mind, as in Bacon's 'the culture and manurance of minds' (1605). This use decreased after the 17th century. There ought to be a space somewhere in the English language for this concept.

⁴ Khin Maung Nyunt. 'The law to protect and preserve cultural heritage regions'. *MP*, September 1998.

⁵ *MP*, November 1997.

culture surpasses other cultures in subtlety and profundity', but it is not due to Burma's superior material culture. Rather, it is because 'Myanmar culture is culture that promotes spiritual refinement.'

One of the maxims from the Citta Vagga (Mind Section) of the *Dhammapada*, a Niti treatise (Book of Teachings) well-known in the Oriental Culture, which says, '*Cittā dantaṃ sukha vahanā*' which may be rendered into English as 'Mind well tamed by teaching and training brings the three-fold benefit of existence as a human being or a god or the realization of nirvana', points to the fact that Myanmar culture is the culture of the spirit. This maxim is now being put into practice at the University of Culture in Myanmar.¹

His view is that 'Myanmar culture' is 'the culture of the spirit', and the government's 'objective to raise the national character and spirit is now included in the State's [three] social objectives'. The cultural advisers to the regime, therefore, politely but firmly point the generals towards a less reified Myanmar culture that draws the ultimate freedom from Buddhist teachings. U Thittila's view of Burmese concepts of 'high' culture (as distinct from 'Burmese' culture) as ultimately centred upon mental culture, for the Burmese place it at the highest and most central level of their value system. U Thittila, the first Burmese monk to spend many years in Britain, put it that Buddhism is the most significant source of nourishment for Burmese culture. 'Take away our religion and what of culture is left? Just what would be left if you took away from the lotus the life-giving waters ... nothing but the odour of decay'. He defines Buddhism according to the *Dhammapada* as the Buddha's teachings 'not to do any evil', 'to cultivate good' and most importantly, 'to purify one's thoughts'. His definition of culture is therefore a form of spiritual culture tightly integrated with Buddhism.

In the world as a whole there is enough material and no lack of intellect. What then is lacking? The spiritual basis of culture is lacking, the world is disturbed and peace eludes us. Men distrust each other. Conflicts, greed-based conflicts, racial, political, religious, economic, bring war due to the lack of a spiritual basis of culture.

The word 'culture' is here used in the sense of refinement of thought and activity in human life. This term 'culture' is very wide in its significance. It included religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, every human activity. The basic inspiring principles of a man's life or that of a race or that of a country, along with the way of life adopted, constitute the basis of their culture. It is therefore impossible to expect oneness or uniformity or identity of culture. In a profound harmony, it is the variety that gives depth and feeling.

But if culture is to amount to anything worth having and really worthy of the name, it must be spiritually based. With Asians it has been, and still is, spiritually based and a part of and not apart from their religions.²

Having sketched the generals' culture concept as centering upon racial purity and the Pondaung original Myanmar man, on the one hand, and the NLD and the regime's own cultural advisers' preference for Burmese culture as rooted in the spiritual concept of *brahma-vihara*, on the other, perhaps there is scope for their meeting. The *Gya-Aye* song [ဂျာအိယေး] was composed by Pegu U Thet Tin, and deals with the YMBA and the dyarchy question. The last line says '*Brahma-vihara*, the old name for Burma' [ဘရမ္မာဝိဟာရ] [ဘရမ္မာဝိဟာရ] ³ Myanmar and Burma, we are told by many Burmese authors, are words derived from 'Brahma' [ဘရမ္မ] (see App. 1.8). This suggests that the spiritual and the material views of culture may yet be reconcilable. The question is how this reconciliation might be attained. What on earth do these military intelligence Pondaung fossil scouts and civilian practitioners of the *byama-so tayà* social meditation have in common? Are they not both looking for the limits of culture, each in their own way? The difference is that one seeks to assert material difference between outsiders and insiders on the basis of race and culture, while the other opens up the higher Brahma heavens, where cultural and gender distinctions no longer exist because it is beyond the distinctions that belong to material form. One houses it, and the other uproots the very foundations of the house, not wishing to live in it any longer. The question is, which is the more fruitful and beneficial to society?

¹ Ye Htut (1997:179–80).

² Thittila (1996:215).

³ See *emimukvinykKkSsSnktqazatinat:qKc:mb:rnkukqhm:1981xmk-NH2X*

Chapter 8

Democracy imprisoned

'Disciplined democracy' has a peculiar ring to it. As if imprisonment through the web of Myanmar national culture and the framework of the law alone were not enough, the regime has made determined attempts to arrest and imprison all who get in its way. By 19 November 1998, shortly after the regime cracked down on the NLD after its call to hold a Parliament, 182 NLD MPs and 600 other Party members were in detention, 'staying at government guest houses'.¹ They were released on condition that they resign their party activities.

Tin U was in prison when the election results came out. He realised, when the prison was filling up with new prisoners, that the regime was not pleased with the results. He characterised his realisation by saying that at that point in time 'the prison became Parliament', for all prominent leaders had been imprisoned.² From yet another point of view, a BBC journalist wryly commented that Aung San Suu Kyi, together with Nelson Mandela and Terry Waite, provided the BBC with a 'captive audience'.³ Unable to receive independent news coverage they relied heavily on the BBC for objective news coverage, they were both captive and captured, for they were confined between four walls.

Aung San Suu Kyi in 'Locked doors cannot stifle the call for liberty: Czechs and Us' compares the Czech imprisonment experience under the communist regime with that of prisoners in Burma. She argues that in choosing a symbol for the party, forced upon the NLD by the regime, 'it would be very appropriate if the symbol for the National League for Democracy (NLD) were a locked prison door'. Such a choice, she says, would mean that 'everybody would know that such a symbol could only represent the NLD' and so they would not mistakenly vote for another party.⁴ She points out that, unlike the now liberated Czechs who were permitted to write, albeit censored, letters from prison, the military regime of Burma excels in its prison mentality and 'could make a reasonable bid for grade A'. Vaclav Havel 'could write letters to his wife from prison!' whilst 'political prisoners in Burma are not allowed reading or writing material of any kind'. The only way Burmese prisoners can communicate with their families if they are not allowed visiting rights, is by 'smuggling out clandestine messages which often cost them a considerable sum in the way of bribes'.

There is no doubt that the incessant harassment of Aung San Suu Kyi and her many colleagues, their relatives and friends, in terms of arrest, trial and imprisonment, and the invasive nature of this experience, has moved senior NLD leaders. As one observer commented, 'MPs have had to choose one of two ways; either to go to prison or to sign testimonies and documents which state that they do not support the NLD's activities and the Committee Representing People's Parliament', thus defeating the point of their own election.⁵

It has been reported that Aung San Suu Kyi was motivated to organize a committee to collect funds for political prisoners. One thousand Kyat, including one towel and necessary medicine, was collected per prisoner. She also organized money collections for poor family members of those who died in prison, amounting to five thousand Kyat per family. Though at first permitted, by August 1995 these funds were reported to have been confiscated.⁶

Her concern for the prisoners was expressed by one of the soldiers guarding her who was interviewed by Victor.

I asked about her mental state during those months when he guarded her.

"The one thing I remember best about her was how she seemed completely calm and at peace with the situation. I never saw her upset or frightened. There was a great dignity about her and the way she responded to everything that happened and, although I can't mention specific incidents for obvious reasons, I can say that her biggest concern was always about her friends who were in prison."⁷

¹ David Brunnstrom. 'Interview (with Aung San Suu Kyi): Suu Kyi hits out at military gag attempt'. Reuters, 30.11.1998.

² Tin U cited in ASSK (1997b:219).

³ Interview with Aung San Suu Kyi by Steve Weiman. 'Patience pragmatism pays off for "The Lady"'. *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

⁴ 'Letter from Burma.' *Mainichi Daily News*, 11.05.1998.

⁵ Moe Aye. 'Hostages and scapegoats: how long?' *The Nation*, 04.11.1998.

⁶ 'Aung San Suu Kyi's contribution to political prisoners confiscated'. ABSDF *Voice of the Peacock*, News & Views, Vol. 2, No. 4, Aug-Sep 1995.

⁷ Victor (1998:106).

She has repeatedly published on the plight of political prisoners, including her reflection on a poem sent to her by a female prisoner on the conditions of prison for women and the difficulties faced by their relatives. In this way 'one-third [5 out of 15] of the women members of parliament were deprived of their positions and their liberty'.¹ These women, 'confined by the walls of prison and bound in uncongenial companionships must have longed for the wings of a dove that they might fly to gentle lands ruled by compassion'.

The unfortunate ones who are kept in prisons far from their home towns – a gratuitous piece of cruelty – can only look forward to a monthly visit at best. Octogenarian mothers have made this bittersweet trip regularly, determined to exchange a loving look and a smile of encouragement with sons grown gaunt after years away from the comforts and the carefully prepared food of home.

Young wives, pretty brows furrowed with anxiety, try to present a brave image of strength and health as they search for words that will not betray the difficulties faced by families torn apart.

Children chatter inconsequentially, unconsciously following the lead of their elders in the attempt to make the abnormal appear as everyday fare. And all the while they are thinking of the years of separation that still stretch ahead.

In 'Young birds outside cages' she expresses her concern for the devastating effect imprisonment has on relatives, especially the young people who are left outside when parents are 'imprisoned for their beliefs'. Detention without trial can last three years disrupting and damaging parent-child relationships before any evidence of guilt has even been entertained. When Aung San Suu Kyi met her youngest son after being separated for two years and seven months 'he had changed from a round faced not-quite twelve-year-old into a rather stylish 'cool' teenager. If I had met him in the street I would not have known him for my little son.' The children, however, are traumatised even when their parents are released, for they continue to fear their parents being taken away.

When the parents are released from prison it is still not the end of the story. The children suffer from a gnawing anxiety that their fathers or mothers might once again be taken away and placed out of their reach behind barriers of brick and iron. They have known what it is like to be young birds fluttering helplessly outside the cages that shut their parents away from them. They know that there will be no security for their families as long as freedom of thought and freedom of political action are not guaranteed by the law of the land.²

Imprisonment in Burma

In the days of Burmese royalty, those detained for crimes were rarely dealt with lightly. However, long-term prison sentences were never imposed. Indeed, the institution of prison was not even conceptualised. Men would be locked up for an indefinite period, but only awaiting interrogation and court decision.³ Furthermore, there was a long tradition that kings, when they opened up the Throne Room at the beginning of their reign, would release those detained, including those involved in conspiracies along with caged birds, chained bears and confined carnivores. Annually, before the rainy season, captured animals and human beings would be released.⁴ Amnesties were common and frequent.

In many respects, therefore, the long arbitrary sentences handed out to Burmese political party members, and the swelling of the prison population over the last decade with many sentences exceeding a decade, is very un-Burmese. It does not form part of the traditional Burmese value system. It is not a local custom. And it is not within the bounds of the local law however it is interpreted.

The unfortunate fact is that many in Burma have experienced imprisonment, and many have mentally and physically succumbed. There are today many well-researched reports that detail the miserable conditions under which these people come to trial and how they are kept in prison.⁵ After the NLD called for the convention of parliament in August 1988, imprisonment was greatly extended and the regime rounded up virtually all NLD representatives. The regime described it thus: 'we didn't arrest any members of Parliament and members of the NLD. We just invited them to discuss the situation of Burma. We are

¹ e.g. 'The "Fighting Peacock Maidens" of freedom. Letter from Burma by Aung San Suu Kyi.' *The Nation*, 08.05.1997.

² ASSK (1997:23–25).

³ e.g. ROB 3 Jun 1784, 10 Jul 1784; Than Tun (1983–90,X:88).

⁴ e.g. ROB 21 Aug; Than Tun (1983–90,X:87).

⁵ For substantive reports by reputed international organization see in particular: Amnesty International *Myanmar: conditions in Prisons and Labour Camps* ASA 16/22/95, September 1995; *Myanmar: Intimidation and Imprisonment September – December 1996*. ASA 16/01/97, February 1997; United Nations (Special Rapporteur Judge Rajsoomer Lallah). *Report of Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar A/51/466*, October 1996 (see in particular E. Prison Conditions pp. 72–82). See also *Tortured voices: personal accounts of Burma's interrogation centers* (ABSDF, forthcoming). See also Mya Maung (1998a:31–37).

taking good care of them, they are just in our guesthouse.’¹

I could not possibly begin to convey all the details of prison life, and some paragraphs lifted from reports that sum up prison conditions should suffice to illustrate my point here that prison conditions are more than stressful, and are often life-threatening. The *Amnesty International Report 1997: Myanmar* makes much mention of imprisonment, and below are just two paragraphs that convey the overall conditions:

Reports of ill-treatment of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in both prisons and labour camps continued throughout the year. Prisoners of conscience U Pa Pa Lay and U Lu Zaw, two comedians sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment in March for satirizing the slorc, were transferred to a labour camp for several months and forced to work under extremely harsh conditions while shackled. Both men were reported to be in poor health after their transfer to Mandalay prison. Prolonged sleep deprivation was reportedly used during interrogation. In June, prisoner of conscience James Leander Nichols, a Myanmar national of European and Burmese descent, who suffered from a heart condition, died after having reportedly been deprived of sleep for four nights. A close friend of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, he had been sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in May under Section 6(1) of the 1933 Burma Wireless Act for operating unregistered telephone and facsimile lines from his home.

Prison conditions for political prisoners were harsh, often amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Prisoners suffered from lack of medical care and an inadequate diet. From January to April, a group of 29 political prisoners, including prisoner of conscience U Win Tin, were reportedly held incommunicado in dog kennels in Insein Prison. In March, 21 of them were sentenced to additional terms of imprisonment for attempting to pass on information about poor prison conditions to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. In August, U Hla Than, an NLD member of parliament-elect who was part of the group, died of tuberculosis associated with aids, which opposition sources claim he may have contracted while in prison. Hypodermic needles are reportedly re-used without sterilization by medical personnel in Myanmar’s prisons.

Also, the United Nations Rapporteur reported in 1996 on the overall conditions under which prisoners are held as follows:

73. The reports received suggest that ill-treatment is common. Prisoners are allegedly tortured and subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment such as beatings, various forms of water torture and electric shock treatment. Prisoners breaking the prison rules are said to be subjected to harsh punishments, including beating, being kept in the hot sun for long periods and being forced to crawl over sharp stones. The treatment of the political prisoners in Insein prison is reportedly especially harsh. They are allegedly subjected to torture both before and after sentencing and are liable to be sent to solitary confinement in the so-called ‘police dog cells’ (a small cell where police dogs are normally kept), without any bed or bedclothes.²

The UN Rapporteur calls for the regime’s public and military officials to end their ‘culture of impunity’ by instituting disciplinary proceedings against the violation of human rights. Prisoners are denied writing materials, leading in some cases to solitary confinement simply for possessing a piece of paper. Convicts are often ‘taken from prison to serve as porters, often shortly before their sentences are to expire, and then forced to work under very poor conditions long after they should have been released from prison. In Ywangan labour camp, Hanmyinmo Road, Sagaing Division, it is reported that ‘400 prisoners ... died within a month.’³

Insein Prison

Of its thirty-six prisons, Insein Prison, Rangoon, is Burma’s largest prison housing between 9–10,000 inmates, including 400–500 political prisoners among which about 200 are monks. Despite a recent policy to place political prisoners as far away from their families as possible, so as to inflict maximum punishment and inconvenience, the majority of political prisoners were and still are held in Insein Prison.

In *Cries from Insein*,⁴ Win Naing Oo provides a personal account of his imprisonment and an overview of the conditions in Insein Prison. In May, while organising political activities for the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front, he was arrested after which he spent a total of three years in prison, including two years in Insein and one year in Thayet Prison. He sketches for us the structure of Insein Prison, the arrival process, the lack of legal representation, the routine torture on arrival, the punishment, the way hardened criminals are used to inflict damage on political prisoners, the lack of elementary medical care and corruption of prison authorities. Also of particular concern are rape and the spread of HIV, through lack of medical care, with reportedly one injection needle per day for 250 patients.

*Pleading not guilty in Insein*⁵ is the English translation of a report of the trial of twenty-two prisoners by

¹ Moe Aye. ‘Hostages and scapegoats: how long? *The Nation*, 04.11.1998.

² *Situation of human rights in Myanmar*. In Human rights questions: human rights situations and reports of Special Rapporteurs and Representatives. Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 8 October 1996.

³ *Ibid.* See also Amnesty International. *Myanmar – conditions in prisons and labour camps*. September 1995.

⁴ ABSDF, 1996.

⁵ ABSDF, 1997.

the trial judge. Not intended for publication, this report gives an insight into the way political prisoners are dealt with in their repeated trials. Without legal representation, all were uniformly given an additional seven-year prison sentence with hard labour for attempting to pass information about prison conditions to a UN representative in March 1996, and for hiding radio sets and circulating a newsletter in prison. Sentencing does not reflect the crime.

Numerous other reports and comments are available, suggesting that the prison experience is central in the lives of members and sympathisers of the NLD, and central to the regime's political opposition in general. Even ordinary citizens without direct involvement in politics are at risk of various forms of unpredictable punishments, or requisitions of labour or portage 'for the good of the country'.¹

From these reports it is clear that the prison experience, quite apart from depriving a person of freedom, has been designed to inflict maximum physical and psychological damage. It is more than a punishment, for it is used by the State to reaffirm its own narrow and bizarre vision of normality. The prison has now also become a 'work house', an excuse for harnessing free labour for the sake of enrichment of the elite. For example, the Burmese press reports that on 22 July 1997 at a meeting of the Prisons Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Lieutenant General Mya Thin, the Minister for Home Affairs, recommended the use of prison labour to develop the country as '... the persons serving sentences at prisons constitute a considerable labour force. They too are members of the public but their performance gets wasted in the prisons'. He spoke of 'the need to make use of their working abilities in nation-building work. He said the Prisons Department is involved in agriculture and livestock breeding and quarry as well as regional development projects.'²

The fact is that even 'members of the public' have their labour requisitioned. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been working on roads, dams, railway lines and other state-sponsored infrastructure projects under the rubric of 'voluntary labour'. The tragedy was summed up by Christina Fink.

What is really pushing people to the margins of survival is the extensiveness of forced labor. Virtually every railroad, irrigation canal, reservoir, and road are constructed with forced labor. When an infrastructure project is being carried out in a particular area, adults from each household must either go to work or pay a large sum instead. Schools are closed for the duration of the project, because teachers must go out and supervise the work or even do the digging as well. No food, money, or medicine is provided, and for people who are living from day to day, the loss of a day of labor means a significant cut in food supplies.

Mothers must bring their small children with them to the project sites, and in some cases, these children have died of heatstroke because of the lack of shade. With teachers also forced to participate, there is no one to teach the older children. In fact, children are spending fewer and fewer years in school. Most drop out after the third standard, and only 25–30% of the students complete the fifth standard.³

Courage in prison

In spite of the imprisonment conditions, many claim to have been strengthened by the prison experience and to have found dignity in their suffering.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent six years under house arrest⁴ between 1989–95, has often made the comment that 'we are prisoners in our own country'. By this she refers to the serious lack of freedom of the Burmese people as a whole. She first used this in reference to Martyrs' Day on 19 July 1989, when the military declared a curfew and used force to keep people in their houses, making quite clear that it would use its battalions to shoot those who joined the march. In the event, she was forced to cancel the march to her father's Mausoleum in order to prevent bloodshed. At around that time many of the NLD Executive were being arrested. At this point she said, 'let the world know that under this military administration we are prisoners in our own country'.⁵

Ironically, it was the following day, 20 July 1989, that she was herself placed under house arrest. She

¹ Reports on prison conditions and arrests by journalists and observers of human rights in Burma include: Aung Zaw, '1997 HIV scare in Burma's Insein,' *The Nation*, 19.10.1997; Mahn Nyunt Maung, 'Experience of a political prisoner,' *Burma Issues*, January 1994; Thet Hmu, 'Darkness to light' (*Burma Debate*, Sept–Oct 1997); Moe Aye, 'The last days of Mr. Leo Nichols,' *Burma Debate*, Vol. V, No. 1, Winter 1998, pp. 18–20; Aphaluck Bhatiasavi, 'Released prisoners talk of terrible jail,' *Bangkok Post*, 14.11.1997.

² *NLM*, 22.07.1997.

³ 'Notes on a trip to Rangoon,' *BurmaNet News*, 28.06.1995.

⁴ Some have characterised her house arrest as a 'private prison' (Victor 1998:27).

⁵ ASSK (1991:315) citing AI (1989:65).

went on hunger strike, demanding to be transferred to Insein jail to be kept under the same conditions as other prisoners. The regime did not dare imprison her. She ceased her demands only upon being assured that the prisoners would not be subjected to ‘inhuman interrogation’ and that ‘due process of law’ would be exercised.¹

One of her biographers summed up her attitude to house arrest as follows:

Despite the barbed wire around her house and withering garden, Suu Kyi didn't feel imprisoned, at least not in her mind. She hardly noticed the soldiers outside. Because she was unafraid of what SLORC would do to her, she felt free.²

About her period of arrest she says ‘... I always felt free because they have not been able to do anything to what really matters – to my mind, my principle, what I believe in. They were not able to touch that. So I am free.’³ She proclaims inspiration from the Indian nationalist Rabindranath Tagore's poem ‘Walk Alone’ [Z]8]. She says she is not bitter about her own experience but has expressed worry about the general conditions of repression throughout the country. As she says, ‘most of our people who have lived under far worse conditions than I, in Insein jail and other jails, have no ill feelings ... I was under house arrest ... All right, this is not the most beautiful house in the world but it is a lot [more] comfortable than Insein jail or any other jail in the country.’⁴ As for the fears for her own safety, she says ‘the official papers are always talking about “annihilating” our forces (she laughs again)’ but ‘we don't think about that too much’ [Z]7].

Her struggle is to accomplish ‘a sense of security that as long as we're not doing harm to others, as long as we are not infringing the laws ... we should be able to rest secure in the knowledge that we ourselves will not be harmed’ and that ‘the authorities cannot remove you from your job, kick you out of your house, throw you in prison, or have you executed, if you have done nothing to warrant such actions’ [Y23].

In their attempts to gradually arrest all those she relies upon, in August 1997 three members of her family were sentenced to ten years imprisonment, so that in total four members of her family are in prison.⁵

Apart from her house arrest, however, there were also several episodes known as her ‘car arrest’, in which Aung San Suu Kyi was confined in her car because her road was blocked by the military to prevent her from visiting NLD township officers.

The regime explains confinement of Aung San Suu Kyi in terms of its concern for ‘her own safety’. It proclaims that her life is in danger because of her unpopularity caused by her call for boycott of investment and tourism and her support for sanctions.

U Kyi Maung

U Kyi Maung, who spent eleven years in prison,⁶ has said ‘I don't base decision on whether I would be rearrested. I couldn't care less ... However, I always consider myself a free man.’⁷ Imprisoned for the first time at the end of May 1965, he said that ‘on the third day of my incarceration I overcame the feeling of loss in a flash, and quite unexpectedly at that’. He says that ‘ever since, I believe I have been able to manage my life, to live with a degree of success on a path free from excessive anger and frustration’.⁸ He is no longer worried about going to prison, for he says ‘I am as free in prison as I am in my own home’,⁹ and ‘you don't seem to understand that imprisonment is not a concern of mine’.¹⁰ In reply to the question whether he and his colleagues have the stamina to continue going to prison he replies ‘you can ask Abel [Brigadier General David Oliver Abel, minister for National Planning and Economic Development] whether he could stand the stress? How long can he survive under the strain and the peace pressure? [giggling]’ [Z]5].

Tin U

NLD Tin U, who spent ten years in prison,¹¹ says that he ‘never felt the slightest bit bored throughout

¹ Kreager in ASSK (1991:316–17).

² Stewart (1997:101).

³ BBC interview, ABC Nightline, 13.07.1995.

⁴ *The Nation* (Bangkok), 02.08.1995.

⁵ ‘Military govt. sentences Suu Kyi's relatives to 10-years jail. *Times of India* (New Delhi), 19.08.1997.

⁶ Twice imprisoned for a total of seven years between 1962–88, one month in 1988, and four-and-a-half years between September 1990 and March 1995. ASSK (1997a:173–74), ASSK (1997b:76–77). He was again arrested for five days on 23 October 1996 in the wake of a protest by students of the Yangon Institute of Technology on 20 October.

⁷ ASSK (1997a:174).

⁸ ASSK (1997a:185).

⁹ ASSK (1997a:191).

¹⁰ ASSK (1997a:199).

¹¹ Sep 1976–80, July 1989–1995 (ASSK 1997b:206), ASSK (1997a:76–77).

the time I languished in prison.' He adds, 'it comes and goes. And without attachment to it there's no problem. It's just a thought. That's all.'¹ About the prospect of going to prison again, he says 'Why should I be concerned with things that are out of my control? I'm fully prepared to be taken away day or night.' Also, his view is that 'the momentum for democratic change' is there, so that going to prison 'would do nothing to stop it, in fact, if would only serve the cause',² for 'incarceration didn't impede our struggle, it enhanced it.'³

NLD Tin U sums up the general state of the country when he says that 'we are prisoners within a prison', for imprisonment is a double concept that extends beyond the confines of the prison-cell itself. Like Aung San Suu Kyi, he views the experience of imprisonment as encompassing the country as a whole and as inescapable for the Burmese people over this last decade. I will return to Tin U later, for his experiences exemplify the hopes of many Burmese, namely the transformation of a repressive Burmese General into a civilian supporting the democratic cause.

The main point, however, is that the experience of imprisonment may be used to sum up the absence of legal space in Burma for any form of political activity independent from the army. The NLD as the elected party is the largest form of organised opposition, and has become the regime's most important target for repression. As Tin U put it in his recent address to the International Bar Association members, supporters and sympathisers of the NLD are kept under close surveillance 'as though they were habitual offenders' and

Intimidation, harassment, oppression, violation of basic rights and perpetual persecution are daily fare for us. Legitimate, democratic activities are deemed to be against the law. Political prisoners are detained for indefinite periods before charges are brought against them and they are not given the dignity of a proper trial. They are kept in unhygienic, crowded cells. Without adequate water or food and medical care is almost non-existent. Due to lack of required treatment, the spread of HIV in the prisons is alarming. There have already been a number of deaths and all prisoners can be said to be endangered to some degree. Worst of all, political prisoners are at times beaten and tortured cruelly and made to languish in solitary confinement at the whims and fancies of jailers, who usually operate in accordance with the instructions of the military authorities.

'Spiritual strength' from within prison

The senior NLD leadership, in spite of its predicament, sees positive developments in this extended period of political crisis. Indeed, as Aung San Suu Kyi said, 'I think a lot of us within the organization have been given the opportunity to develop spiritual strength because we have been forced to spend long years by ourselves under detention and in prison. In a way, we owe it to those people who put us there' [S5]. She also says:

Political prisoners have known the most sublime moments of perfect communion with their highest ideals during periods when they were incarcerated in isolation, cut off from contact with all that was familiar and dear to them. From where do those resources spring, if not from an innate strength at our core, a spiritual strength that transcends material bounds? My colleagues who spent years in harsh conditions of Burmese prisons, and I myself, have had to draw on such inner resources on many occasions. [Z]6]

She then proceeds to say that 'we may not be able to control the external factors that affect our existence but we can decide how we wish to conduct our inner lives.'

However, she was aware of this very early on, even before her house arrest and before the NLD crackdown. During her tour of the Irrawaddy on 4 April 1989, prior to her own house arrest, she said

... feel always free. Keep it always in your mind. Nobody can detain someone else's mind though they can detain the physical body. Therefore, if you were master of your mind nobody can abuse you. We need to remember this very very much.

...t *၈၂ ဖဲ ယဲယဲဂ်, နံ 'ဂွ ဝဲပဲက ဝဲက မှီဂ် ဝဲပဲက ဝဲက, ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက / ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက*
*ဝဲက ဝဲက, နံ ဝဲက ဝဲက, ဝဲက ဝဲက, ဝဲက ဝဲက / 'ဂွ ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက ဝဲက, နံ*⁴

It may well be asked what this 'spiritual strength' and this concept of 'master of your mind' is based on? What is the meaning of prisoners conducting their 'inner lives'?

It is common in prisons all over the world to find substance abuse to help the mind cope with the boredom and suffering in prison. However, Burmese use of mental culture is a home-grown solution to a problem based entirely on techniques to focus and develop the mind.⁵ The 'spiritual strength' these leaders have shown in the face of their confinement has been much misunderstood. It unambiguously refers to a

¹ ASSK (1997a:218).

² ASSK (1997a:208).

³ ASSK (1997a:209).

⁴ Kei Nemoto transcript of Aung San Suu Kyi's video campaign speeches.

⁵ An example of substitution of meditation for substance abuse is found in Mambuca, Annette, ed. *Free at last – daily meditations by and for inmates: the dramatic promise of recovery from substance abuse*. Park Ridge, IL: Parkside Pub., 1994.

change in perception as the result of the Buddhist practice of ‘mental culture’. Aung San Suu Kyi has often described the conditions of her entire country in terms of the discourse of imprisonment (‘Let the world know that we are prisoners in our own country’) and she has characterised the struggle by her colleagues and herself as ‘the second independence struggle’. She has also suggested, however, that the state of imprisonment has naturally led to the adoption of mental culture (‘meditation’) as an instrument for liberation:

Aung San Suu Kyi: ... I suppose one seeks greatness through taming one's passions. And isn't there a saying that ‘it is far more difficult to conquer yourself than to conquer the rest of the world’? So, I think the taming of one's own passions, in the Buddhist way of thinking, is the chief way to greatness, no matter what the circumstances may be. For example, a lot of our people [political prisoners] meditate when they're in prison, partly because they have the time, and partly because it's a very sensible thing to do. That is to say that if you have no contact with the outside world, and you can't do anything for it, then you do what you can with the world inside you in order to bring it under proper control [C23].

Buddha's disciple Ananda said, ‘by virtue of cultivating and developing fourfold mindfulness, I know the thousandfold world’.¹ The main technique of mental culture that helped her cope with her house arrest is *vipassana*. She said that ‘Like many of my Buddhist colleagues, I decided to put my time under detention to good use by practising meditation. It was not an easy process.’ Without a teacher she found her early attempts ‘more than a little frustrating’, and sometimes failed to discipline her mind ‘in accordance with prescribed meditation practices’. She followed, however, her teacher's advice accepting that ‘whether or not one wanted to practise meditation, one should do so for one's own good’ [C10].

Indeed, Aung San Suu Kyi says that ‘I am very grateful to the Slorc that I was allowed this period in which to practise my meditation’ [C5], ‘house-arrest has given me the opportunity to try to overcome my own weaknesses and faults, especially through meditation’ [R13], and ‘I think a lot of us within the organization have been given the opportunity to develop spiritual strength because we have been forced to spend long years by ourselves under detention and in prison. In a way, we owe it to those people who put us there’ [S5]. This strength is an ‘inner strength’, ‘the spiritual steadiness that comes from the belief that what you are doing is right, even if it doesn't bring you immediate concrete benefits. It's the fact that you are doing something that helps to shore up your spiritual powers. It's very powerful’ [S6].

Apart from *vipassana*, an important technique for overall coping with the social dimensions thrown up by house arrest, she points at *samatha*, in particular *byama-so tayà* (*metta* and *karuna*). While under house arrest, she attempted to address ‘the wrongs’ of people with *metta* [E24]. She furthermore suggests that, while fear reigns on the outside of prison, ‘It's only *metta* that is strong enough to keep together people who face such repression and who are in danger of being dragged away to prison at any moment’ [E11], and ‘many people are afraid to visit families of political prisoners in case they too are called in by the authorities and harassed. Now, you could show active compassion [*karuna*] by coming to the families or political prisoners and offering them practical help and by surrounding them with love [*metta*], compassion [*karuna*] and moral support’ [D6]. She sometimes cried for the imprisoned students, and it is this *byama-so tayà* practice that allowed her to feel she provided assistance when ‘she sent them blessings through her meditations’.² As we shall see later, her concept of democracy is also subsumed by these practices.

Furthermore, *vipassana* also greatly helped her colleagues cope in the much more cruel environment of the prison. For example, when U Kyi Maung declared that during his prison sentence he continued ‘to struggle from within’ [C30] while in solitary confinement he means that he coped by practising the *anapana vipassana* technique.

Aung San Suu Kyi's personal advisor, U Win Htein, also managed to get through his prison term by practising mental culture [C8–C9]. He lived in solitary confinement witnessing how his prison inmates ‘were broken’ and ‘suffered severe mental disorders’. Their experiences in prison resulted in suicide attempts, paranoia, and he had to live in absolute silence so as not to provoke these disturbed fellow inmates. Yet Win Htein says, ‘I could withstand solitary confinement due to reason, plus meditation’ and that ‘I always tried to occupy my mind with something sometimes reciting the sutras, sometimes meditating, sometimes keeping my consciousness on whatever I was doing.’ His main fear was that if his mind was not occupied, he would be overcome by ‘angry feelings about the fate I was suffering, the injustice’. In short, he says that he ‘was basically successful in curbing my bad feelings with my meditations’ which he learnt after visiting a Buddhist monastery in 1982. It was his meditation that helped him ‘greatly in dealing with the

¹ S.N., V:299.

² Whitney (1997:100–1).

solitary confinement ...'.

Monywa Tin Shwe, a lawyer at the High Court and founder member of the NLD, died in Insein prison on 8 June 1997. He had been arrested in 1990 and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment under Section 5 of the Emergency Provisions Act. He was found on the morning of 8 June 1997, 'collapsed in his cell while he was meditating', and died on the way to the in-jail hospital.¹

When Tin U speaks of his impending arrest on 20 July 1989 on the charge of 'endangering the security of the state', he says that he prepared himself through meditation [C11]. Commenting on his psychology while confined in jail, he felt that mental culture provided him with the strength to carry on. He says that he adjusted to prison and joined those who used 'the isolation and cruel living standards to their favour' because he 'had ways to keep my spirit alive'. Although his hut within the prison compound was completely encircled with barbed wire and he spent all his time indoors, 'the wire was a constant reminder of how precious freedom was' and it gave him joy to find that, 'like in the Buddha's teachings, obstacles can be seen as advantages; the loss of one's freedom can inspire reflection on the preciousness of freedom.' He knew from his time as a practising monk the benefits of *sati* – mindfulness meditation because 'everything you see, hear, taste, think, and smell becomes simply an experience, without anything extra placed upon it. Just phenomena.' This is how 'in that way too, the thought of imprisonment, is seen as just a thought. It comes and goes. And without attachment to it there's no problem. It's just a thought. That's all' [C12].

Emphasising mindfulness (*sati*) as 'the key to sanity', Tin U says that if you do everything with mindfulness 'there is no room in one's mind for negative thoughts' and this way he could keep his 'mind free of unobstructive emotions that might otherwise upset me' [C13]. The best way in solitary confinement is to 'overcome any inner hindrance', which means 'to train yourself in *sati* – mindfulness or awareness – it's shining light on one's darkness' [R4].

This emphasis on mental culture is repeated among some of the students, such as Zaw Zaw. He had also been imprisoned and tried to meditate and calm down, but had difficulties concentrating.² Victor also cites 'William', who spent six years in solitary confinement in Insein prison without trial for supporting students financially, where he says:

I survived because I'm a Buddhist and I meditated – that gave me great solace – and because I believe that human beings are resilient and can survive almost anything. Eventually, I learned to sit for hours without moving a muscle or blinking.³

Finally, as Aung San Suu Kyi points out, it is the mothers, the fathers, the wives, the husbands, and the children who are having to cope with the threat posed to the lives of their loved ones. In good Burmese tradition, for them too, asceticism and meditation are one of very few instruments available to transcend their misery. Thus, Aung San Suu Kyi points out she knows a mother

who made a vow to wear the tree bark brown colour [of the hermitess] of ascetics for the rest of her life if her son was not released by her 60th birthday. That birthday has come and gone and her son remains in prison. She continues to face each another step with pride, her sad face beautifully above the sombre colour of her clothes.⁴

¹ Statement No. 06/97, NLD, 10 June 1997.

² Whitney (1997:72).

³ Victor (1998:92).

⁴ 'The "Fighting Peacock Maidens" of freedom.' Letter from Burma by Aung San Suu Kyi. *The Nation* (Bangkok), 08.05.1997.

Chapter 9

Transcending boundaries: samsara, the State, the prison and the self

So far, I have traced the coping mechanisms of imprisonment, both for the prisoner and their relatives, to the Buddhist practices of mental culture. The purpose of mental culture is very much to understand and uproot the ultimate causes of confinement, namely confinement to bodily existence and its implication of suffering. Since the possibilities of developing a political philosophy for the NLD are limited, the ideas surrounding the prison experience itself, I will show in a later section, informs what is becoming a particularly rich political philosophy that is close to addressing the common peoples' suffering. Here I wish to investigate more closely the role of mental culture, in particular *vipassana*, as a historical tradition of coping with imprisonment beyond the particular conditions of the NLD.

'Buddhist' imprisonment

In the Burmese context imprisonment may be regarded as something very different from the way Foucault has used the concept, in particular the way he used it prior to his technology-of-the-self period.¹ Of course, unlike Foucault, my focus here is not on the means whereby the individual and the population of prisoners are isolated into victims in a social and institutional sense. I am not writing a total history of the prison as a Burmese institution. Nor is my focus on the history of discourse on discipline and punish.

I adopt here a minimal definition of imprisonment as an undesirable condition arising from the application of superior institutional powers to confine and isolate persons or groups of persons through instruments of institutional repression. These instruments can take the form of imprisonment, house arrest, car arrest, exile, hostage-taking, bondage through forced labour and portering and forced relocation. The concept of imprisonment flows naturally from the regime's Myanmarification policy of spatialising and territorialising its concept of purity. Today it is being extended to health care, whereby HIV patients are now being placed behind barbed wire in camps.² Indeed, it extends to the wish that Saw Maung expressed that democracy and politics does not spill over into public institutions but remains within the confines of the home.³

My primary interest is, however, does not lie in the technology of confinement, but rather in the technology of liberation from the prisoners' point of view. And in particular, I focus on the imprisonment concept as the Buddhist idea applied to samsaric existence. It is this latter idea which permits transcending the dichotomy between the jailed and the jailers, and offers prisoners dignity in their suffering, for both are subject to the same laws of impermanence. Furthermore, this allows analogies between the political order and the condition of imprisonment to be made.

The most common word for prison in Burmese is *htaung* [eTac]. As a verb this means to 'set a trap', 'entrap' or 'catch', in the sense of animals. Alternatively, it means to 'erect' as in the walls of a house or a marriage (literally 'to fall into an erected house' [AinTack]). It can also mean to build as in a country as in the 'Union' of Myanmar ('erecting a country by gathering together' [pvATacsu], or a family ('erecting a house by joining together' [AinTacsu]. The meaning of binding is implicit in the older concept of prison as meaning a cage or 'house which binds' [eNidAin]. One is not simply imprisoned, but one 'falls into' [eTackqvu] or 'is made to fall into the trap (prison)' [eTackqv].

When we translate Aung San Suu Kyi's words that 'we are prisoners in our own country' and Tin U's 'we are prisoners within a prison', we find a wordplay on the use of 'prison' or 'trap' (*htaung*) as a component in the concept for 'nation' (*pyei htaung su* [pvATacsu]. This is an extension of the common

¹ He wrote his work on the prison prior to his interest in technology-of-the-self bloomed in the context of his own suffering as the result of his contracting a terminal illness in the early 1980s. Shortly before his death in 1984 there was evidence at a seminar at Vermont in 1982 that he had changed his views on power from an instrument of confinement and self-confinement (as in the institution of the prison), to a personal instrument of liberation. See Leter H. Martin *et al* (eds). *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1988.

² Bryer (1998:12).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:162–63).

wordplay on the concept of getting married, which literally means ‘setting up a house’ [အိမ်တည်ခြင်း] but can also jokingly be used to say ‘falling into the prison of the house’. The meaning then can be elaborated into various alternative puns, so that the NLD and all the people in Burma are characterised as ‘assembling in the country [state] prison’ [နိုင်ငံတော်ဒဏ်ခံရခြင်း].

It is based upon this experience that Moe Aye writes that ‘in Burma, if you ask someone which prison they would prefer, the answer is that there are only two prisons, the one with walls and the one without.’¹ Indeed, this concept of ‘country prison’ resonates with the Cambodian expression of ‘prison without walls’ (*kuk et choncheang*), used by Cambodian survivors during the genocidal Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea regime between April 1975 and January 1979.² This gives rise to the commonly made characterisation of Burma as ‘a country of 50 million hostages’.

This concept of imprisonment of the entire community resonates with Burmese interpretations of the entire world-system (*loka*) as a form of prison, having its locus in ‘I’-ness and embodiment. According to Buddhist interpretation, the ultimate form of imprisonment is neither family, prison, nor country, but it is inherent in the concept of ‘I’ [အတိတ်] which maintains ‘mundane existence’ (*loka*) or the samsaric life-cycle itself. Craving makes one attain new lives (houses) within *samsara*, and by uprooting this one becomes truly homeless:

I, who have been seeking the builder of this house (body) failing to attain Enlightenment which would enable me to find him, have wandered through innumerable births in *samsara*. To be born again is, indeed, *dukkha*!

O housebuilder! You are seen, you shall build no house (for me) again. All your rafters are broken, your roof-tree destroyed. My mind has reached the Unconditioned (i.e. *Nibbana*); the end of craving (*Arhatta Phala*) has been attained.³

If the Myanmarification programme is about confinement – by erecting real (prison walls, national boundaries) and metaphorical walls (culture, law) – then mental culture breaks down these walls that are responsible for people’s ignorance and isolation. The freedom that prisoners in isolation experience through mental culture in isolation means that Insein Prison itself has become an instrument of liberation. The prison, on the one hand, is dubbed ‘Moscow University’ and ‘The University of Life’, drawing attention to the harsh regime of deprivation of freedom within. However, on the other hand, in an inversion of this concept, newly arrived prisoners are known as ‘New York’ [နယူးယောက်], as if they were entering a new phase of liberation. Ultimately, to draw attention to the prison as an instrument for self-liberation, the prison is also known as *Insein taw-yá* or ‘Insein forest (monastery)’, a place dedicated to the practice of mental culture.⁴

The Buddha, and much hope is invested by Buddhists in particular in the future Arimettaya Buddha, ‘sets free *Samsara*’s captives by his holy word’.⁵ Among the omens of Gautama’s birth inaugurated the breaking up into pieces of ‘prisons and fetters keeping men in bondage’, including the ‘elimination of the conceited notion of “I”’.⁶ After seeing the Four Omens – the old, the ill, the dead and the ascetic – he realised that ‘all beings who have not yet discarded craving for sensual pleasures have to remain like prisoners amidst the swords or spears of the five sensual objects aimed straight at them in whichever existence they might find themselves’.⁷

However, Gautama was unable to set free the prisoners tied to the wheel of rebirth merely by preaching – he had to liberate himself first. He needed first to practise the Thirty Perfections (*parami*) throughout his countless lives, and to apply himself to mental culture. The fact that Burmese kings and politicians are proclaimed, and sometimes proclaim themselves, as *bodhisattva* means that much of Burmese politics is

¹ Moe Aye. ‘Hostages and scapegoats: how long?’ *The Nation*, 04.11.1998.

² Hilton, Alexander Laban. ‘Why did you kill?: The Cambodian Genocide and the dark side of face and honor’. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57, no. 1, February 1998, pp. 93.

³ *The Dhammapadam* Translated by Daw Mya Tin. Rangoon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana, 1993, pp. v, 54 (verse 153–54).

⁴ For example, the regime makes a cynical reference to its right and power to take action against the NLD as a communist-influenced party, which would result in their imprisonment as an acolyte in ‘Forest Monastery’ prison Insein. ‘Had the government, true to its nature as a military government; taken drastic action according to ordinances and laws there would surely have been a row of *phothudaws* (white-robed acolytes) spending time in white robes at Insein *tanya* (hermitage far away from habitat).’ ‘Very sorry – in the Tawgyi’. *NLM*, 04.06.1996.

⁵ Alaungsitthu (1131) in Pe Maung Tin & Luce (1960:379,382–84); Sarkisyanz (1965:62–63).

⁶ ‘(7) Prisons and fetters keeping men in bondage broke up into pieces. This was the omen presaging his complete elimination of the conceited notion of “I”.’ (Mingun 1990–96,2.1:34)

⁷ Mingun (1990–96, 2,1:140).

necessarily based on this concept of prior self-liberation through mental culture before social and communal liberation can take place.

As a result of Gautama's realisation, he taught the methodology of mental culture. And as the Dhammapada states, 'those who enter the path, and practise meditation, are released from the bondage of Mara'.¹

Mara is often identified with mental defilements and with *loka*. The point I wish to make here is that collective freedom in the Buddhist tradition is thus necessarily preceded by mental culture practised to first liberate oneself. In the Buddhist texts, true freedom is a mental disposition attained only after release from the Five Hindrances (*nivarana*), namely 'sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and sceptical doubt'. Release ensures 'unindebtedness, good health, release from prison, freedom, a place of security'.² Such hindrances 'envelop the mind' and prevent all forms of mental culture.

The Buddhist concept of true freedom is about the encouragement of certain mental dispositions that must be attained by oneself before it can be encouraged with others. So also the techniques which senior NLD leaders advocate are about personal spiritual freedom which must necessarily precede the institutional political concept of freedom. In conjunction with morality (*sila*) and one-pointed mind (*samadhi*), *vipassana* promises liberation from the wheel of *samsara* into the state of bliss that is *nibbana*. In adopting *vipassana* as their instrument of liberation, Burmese political prisoners thus shift the agency and locus of imprisonment. *Vipassana* is the ultimate instrument for liberation, for it liberates from the prison within, in relation to which freedom is attained from all other conditions of imprisonment. Thus it is possible to attain mental freedom from all forms of imprisonment even though physically they may be still imprisoned in the other respects in the sense of prison, household or country.

Vipassana furthermore asserts a very different agency, both taking responsibility for maintaining the conditions of imprisonment and as the subject of imprisonment itself. Foucault argued, in his last phase of scholarship before his death, that he regretted his view of humans as unwilling victims of the power of discourse. It is in fact possible to develop a technology-of-self to assert one's own sense of reality and dignity against that of the State and the prison authorities through the techniques of dreaming, writing reflexive diaries to oneself (meditations), and through meditation. However, here we have a technique yet more radical than this. As a technology leading towards the realisation of non-self (*anatta*) it transcends the dichotomy between the jailed and the jailers, for the ultimate laws of existence are the same for them also. There is no-self (*anatta*) to experience, and so there is also no-jailed (self to isolate and confine) and no-jailer (self who isolates and confines another self). Through self-observation of all mental processes, furthermore, the agency of Bentham's panopticon itself is internalized – mental culture is paradoxically both a technique of liberation and self-control. I will return to this later.

¹ Dhammapada 276.

² § 134. Suppose that a man, taking a loan, invests it in his business affairs. His business affairs succeed. He repays his old debts and there is extra left over for maintaining his wife. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, taking a loan, I invested it in my business affairs. Now my business affairs have succeeded. I have repaid my old debts and there is extra left over for maintaining my wife.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man falls sick – in pain & seriously ill. He does not enjoy his meals, and there is no strength in his body. As time passes, he eventually recovers from that sickness. He enjoys his meals and there is strength in his body. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, I was sick ... Now I am recovered from that sickness. I enjoy my meals and there is strength in my body.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man is bound in prison. As time passes, he eventually is released from that bondage, safe & sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, I was bound in prison. Now I am released from that bondage, safe & sound, with no loss of my property.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man is a slave, subject to others, not subject to himself, unable to go where he likes. As time passes, he eventually is released from that slavery, subject to himself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where he likes. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, I was a slave ... Now I am released from that slavery, subject to myself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where I like.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man, carrying money & goods, is traveling by a road through desolate country. As time passes, he eventually emerges from that desolate country, safe & sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, carrying money & goods, I was traveling by a road through desolate country. Now I have emerged from that desolate country, safe & sound, with no loss of my property.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

In the same way, when these five hindrances are not abandoned in himself, the monk regards it as a debt, a sickness, a prison, slavery, a road through desolate country. But when these five hindrances are abandoned in himself, he regards it as unindebtedness, good health, release from prison, freedom, a place of security. *M.*³⁹

Practise of *vipassana* changes the locus of the battlefield from a conflict between people and institutions organised as political rivals, to a conflict within one's own mind. This totally changes the concepts of 'friend' and 'enemy', as we shall see later, to mean states of mind – the friends are mindfulness (*sati*) and loving-kindness (*metta*), and the enemies are the 'mental defilements' (*kilesa*). The ultimate form of liberation is realisation of 'no-self' through elimination of the mental defilements that cloud a wrong-viewed vision, perpetuating samsaric existence.

The Burmese prisoners restore dignity to themselves by mentally internalizing agency and domain of conflict. This technology of non-self helps the prisoner literally rise above their imprisonment. They need no other instruments, just their own minds and bodies. In reference to this attitude, Guha, a barrister, characterises it: 'I have seen [Burmese] prisoners condemned to death, talking and behaving normally without any worry, nay, assuring grieving mothers not to be unhappy'.¹

Furthermore, the technique is sufficiently portable for prisoners and refugees stripped of their possessions and marks of identity. Unlike space-intensive leisure activities, *vipassana* can be practised anywhere and permits even full practice in the tiniest of confined spaces. *Vipassana* is self-sufficient for unlike *samatha*, which often requires a suitable external object and a suitable place, in this practice only the body and its senses, in the context of daily life, are the universe. As the Buddha put it:

What monks, is the universe?: The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, the mind and mental objects.²

The concept of imprisonment is therefore not just a two-fold concept – a prison (the prison establishment) within a prison (the country) – but rather a three-fold concept, including Buddhist ideas of imprisonment in *samsara* or *loka*.³ It is through self-reliant liberation by means of the practices associated with this third concept, namely through mental culture (through *samatha*, including *byama-so tayà*, and *vipassana*), that the individual prisoner is empowered to find freedom and dignity, in spite of apparent continuity in terms of imprisonment in the first two senses. Aung San Suu Kyi's concept of the 'revolution of the spirit' in the context of Burmese history is therefore a necessary self-reliant attainment that must prelude the attainment of democracy in the collective sense.

Imprisonment and the Hpo Hlaing lineage of practice

In the previous section I have demonstrated there is a 'Buddhist logic' to mental culture in that it permits release from imprisonment within all kinds of domains, and not merely the prison. I have slipped a few hints as to the particular historical relevance of mental culture to imprisonment. However, I have not indicated in any concrete historical detail how such response to imprisonment by means of mental culture was perpetuated in Burma prior to the 1988 situation.

I now wish to demonstrate, by focusing on a number of historical personalities known for their involvement in the *vipassana* movement prior to the SLORC-SPDC conflict, that in their lives also there is use of mental culture in the search for freedom from constrained environments. Techniques of mental culture sharpened as tools for the release from the bonds of *samsara* are conceived of as the ultimate instruments of liberation from all prison-like conditions and, therefore, from those political conditions that give rise to imprisonment – embodiment, household, prison, and country. Furthermore, mental culture is not just about liberating from, but also transformation of these very domains. I am thinking here in particular in terms of the relationship between government reform and *vipassana*. This practice addresses a myriad of positive benefits – it promises national independence, harmony, law and order, good government, good health, and all that requires some kind of transformation of identity for the good.

The history of *vipassana* popularisation goes back to Mindon's reign immediately after the Second Anglo-Burmese War. Its history correlates to the increased experience of repression from the days of British colonialism in 1823 to today. Through political support for the practice of mental culture, its profile as the

¹ Guha (1960b:51).

² S 35, 23, 3 IV p.15 cited in Hans Wolfgang Schuman *Buddhism: an outline of its teachings and schools*. Quest : Quest Books, 1974, p. 48. Also, 'within this very body, mortal as it is and only six feet in length, I do declare to you are the world and the origin of the world, and the ceasing of the world, and likewise the Path that leads to the cession thereof' (Conze 1959:97).

³ It may be argued that the contemporary meditation centres even aim to recreate something alike to prison conditions for its practice for as a yogi entering such a centre one is confined to it for the duration of practice. One cannot leave the centres without special permission. The daily schedule is also highly regimented and visitors are also discouraged. Bodily positions are closely scrutinised, and reading and writing is against the rules.

only 'legal' and officially sanctioned technique of liberation has been enhanced. It was during Mindon's time that state sponsorship of lone reformist forest dwellers, emphasizing mental culture over scriptural learning, caused major sectarian fission within the Sangha,¹ which in turn had a significant impact on reforms in royal government. Below, I would like to trace the involvement of four particular individuals influential in the application of mental culture to imprisonment, two of whom – U Hpo Hlaing and U Ba Khin – were particularly significant in their attempts to reform government. The four are historically linked through the lineage of Buddhist practice – U Hpo Hlaing, the Ledi Sayadaw, U Ba Khin and Goenka.

The central focus is the employment of a connotative language rooted in practice, and not an explicit and rational fully-thought-out ideology. The power of this lies in its opacity which permits it to operate beyond the prying eyes of the authorities. In other words, it is not contaminated by any one particular framework outside the practitioner's control. Thahkin Kodawhmaing's discourse of political transformation was very effective, and every page of his many writings contains several allusions to mental culture. With this language he sought to overcome the British authorities. However, he was never arrested because the British could not penetrate the significance of what he wrote. Thus the internal cultural debate surrounding political dissent makes use of a connotational language, which evokes and resonates with people's religious and cultural value systems without appearing to be political; in other words, it is not denotatively political.

Yaw Atwinwun U Hpo Hlaing (1829–83)

U Hpo Hlaing [ɛyaAtəwɪn\IBu] was the most significant advocate of political and economic reform during the closing period of the monarchy before the British seized Upper Burma, the last remaining area under the Burmese monarchy. His life and works have been described in at least three different booksize biographies published between 1960 and 1997.²

The English had already annexed Lower Burma during the first Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1824. He joined the monkhood in 1845, and in 1852, just after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, he disrobed to join the Mindon rebellion, to which he made a critical contribution because of his bright intelligence. He was appointed Minister of the Interior under Mindon at age 29 and was assigned to carry out collection and preservation of the Tipitaka and the stone inscriptions, which he did until 1868.

Together with Prince Kanaung, King Mindon's brother and Crown Prince, he sought to encourage learning of European knowledge in Burma for which he arranged meetings between youngsters and he sent 90 scholars to countries such as France, Italy and England – Yaw was made responsible for this plan.³ He encouraged foreign learning while yet retaining Burmese ways.⁴

He wrote at least twenty-two works, and biographers characterise his writing as partaking of both the mundane (*loki*) and the supramundane (*lokuttara*). These touch upon politics, Buddhism, science, grammar, medicine, alchemy, and many other topics learned persons pursued in those days. I will below briefly touch both on his political writings and on his writings on *vipassana*.

Political writings

Hpo Hlaing served under King Mindon and King Thibaw. He held many titles and responsibilities, but under Mindon and Thibaw he served for the most part as Minister of the Interior. He was also of great significance in taking charge of foreign policy matters.

As Maung Maung explained in his section 'the choice of democracy' in Burma's 1948 democratic constitution, it was U Hpo Hlaing who first introduced Burma to democracy. Hpo Hlaing had 'tried to press upon him [Thibaw] a democratic constitution'.

¹ Mendelson (1975:49).

² Though there have been several articles and chapters in books on Hpo Hlaing, going back to as early as 1937, the following are to my knowledge the principal booksize biographies on his life. Number 1 is the earliest book-size biography I know, first published in 1960 and reprinted in 1962. Number 2 was first published jointly with *Companion of Dhamma for Royalty (Raja-Dhamma-Singaha-Kyàn)* in 1979 and reprinted in 1983. Number 3 was first published in 1997.

(1) Xaylt a 'It cAn (eRe) pvaT Kk bV Kba qmnapvarehW\inkl q tincYkl mcN ItcKac'qhQ BpeyaAtəw\ 'Bū SAt tēirnkayw 1960 (1962)x mlkN 259X

(2) XemacTcneyamcYkl 'IBū SAt tēir > razDmīqgbk'x rnkoks py\saepx 1979 (1983)x mlkN 476X

(3) XerBūnk'x mhal bV Kherapvinkl 'IBū SArnkoksaeabinak 1995x mlkN 139X

I am grateful for having had the privilege to attend to Professor Tin Soe's interesting seminar entitled 'Political economic ideas of U Po Hlaing' at the Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 25.12.1997.

³ Htin Hpat (1979:365).

⁴ Htin Hpat (1979 :363).

U Po Hlaing at the height of his power on the ascension of Thibaw to the throne had submitted a constitution, or a treatise of rules for the King, by which the King would draw a salary and reign as a constitutional monarch, while the affairs of state would be conducted by a bicameral parliament of the people and the aristocracy, and a cabinet of ministers. The ideas were drastic then, and the absolute King and his weaker ministers rejected them, and U Po Hlaing was stripped of power and turned out of office.¹

An independent thinker, he was forced into exile by Mindon in 1871 for misdemeanour. This prompted him to write his first work on *vipassana*. He was exiled for holding the view that beer is like a medicine in relation to the five precepts, not a form of alcohol. This was tantamount to questioning inherited tradition and less tolerant kings than Mindon would have executed him, as Tharrawaddy did his father. However, as Mindon found him particularly useful, he was reinstated within six months of his dismissal. He remained outspoken, in particular on the necessity to reform Burmese kingship towards a constitutional model. He was dismissed no less than four times for his impertinence, twice for pressing government reforms home.

He is referred to by some as 'Burma's Adam Smith' for his advocacy of economic reform. Among his twenty-two books on varied subjects, from the point of view of the politics of democracy, there are three important treatises. The first he wrote in 1871, was *An analysis of the Maha-Thamada* (*Maha-Samata Vinichaya Kyàn* [mhaqmtwĩsĩykyā]). His main purpose was to revive the idea, and remind the king, that the head of State (*Thamada*, the Burmese word for President) does not rule by divine right, but has a social contract with the people. And this social contract should be respected (see App. 1.2).

In 1878, he wrote *Companion of Dhamma for Royalty* (*Raja-Dhamma-Singaha-Kyan* [razDm̄qggbkyā]) which he gave to Thibaw. This was his fourth and last impertinence, leading to his dismissal in that same year, less than a before the British annexed Upper Burma, bringing the whole of Burma under British control.

In the latter book he advocated a change in the mode of government towards a constitutional monarchy, under which the King and his royal functionaries as well as the nobility were to draw a salary. He reminded the royal government of the social contract between the monarch and the people. Under his proposal government would be conducted by a bi-cameral parliament involving representation by the people, the aristocracy and a cabinet of ministers. This meant that the king would no longer rule directly but indirectly.

The concepts he proposed were drawn from Buddhist teachings of the Seven *Aprihanriya* Principles [Aprhany tra: 7-pā] that prevent deterioration and ruination of the country, as preached initially by the Buddha to Lissavi Prince.² He proposed major economic reforms, including restrictions on royal expenditure, establishment of a banking system, encouragement of agriculturists and traders. In particular he enunciated the Four Singaha Principles and analysed the causes of decline in the Burmese population, who were escaping excessive taxation by moving to the British-dominated southern Burma.

These radical ideas were rejected by Thibaw and his other ministers and he was dismissed from office within fifty days of its submission.³ Had Hpo Hlaing's suggestions been taken on board by King Thibaw, and had the monarchy reformed itself at that time to his plan, Burma might have escaped annexation by the British and might never have had to experience the current crisis.

Hpo Hlaing has been characterised as 'a great Burmese politician' [QgkYd gvOMEd] who 'wanted to bring the politics and government of Burma up-to-date'.⁴ Prince Kanaung and Hpo Hlaing sent many Burmese abroad to study western ways of government and technology. After Kanaung's death, Hpo Hlaing was the best-informed member of the Burmese court regarding the ways of the world outside Burma, and in particular those of the west. He is described as having great curiosity [[ā QSa F m̄] as having great daring [\\ M̄] as being objective in speech, and inclined towards 'revolutionary ideology' [kMazomv kvāMyā : p̄mF m̄].

Because of this, contemporary Burmese accept him as a leader with a revolutionary mind.⁵

Writings on vipassana

Apart from his political work in which he advocated radical reform, he also wrote on mental culture and advocated radical Buddhist reforms. He wrote the first of three major works on *vipassana* while exiled to

¹ Maung Maung (1959:91).

² The original teachings on this are found in Mahāparinibbana Sutta in Maha Vagga, Digha Nikaya. These have been expounded in Mingun (1990–96, 3:191–99); *Gradual Sayings* IV, III, 'The Vajjians'.

³ Maung Maung (1959:91).

⁴ Htin Hpat (1979:363).

⁵ Htin Hpat (1979:366).

Amarapura by King Mindon in 1871. *The taste of freedom* [၁၈၇၁ ခုနှစ်] he wrote ‘for the benefit of yogi who desire to attain to the path and fruits of *nibbana*’ [၁၈၇၁ ခုနှစ် ဘုရားရှင်တို့အတွက် နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] This competent work in modern vernacular style comments on *vipassana* practice. It compares the Noble Eightfold Path in east and west and included ‘revolutionary interpretations of past views’ [ကမ္ဘာတစ်ဝှမ်းရှိ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] Its distribution was intensely supported by Mahawithokdayon Hsayadaw [မဟာဝိသုဒ္ဓိဝံသထွန်း] Divided into eleven numbered chapters plus an introduction, it contains 109 numbered sections, and in particular attacks wrong view [မိမိအမြင်] associated with self [အတ္တ], characteristic of Hindus, foreigners and the peoples at the beginning of the world who lived in a state of *jhana*;² only knowing no-self [အနတ္တ] through mental culture, in particular through *vipassana*, will truly liberate one and attain *nibbana*.³

There are two particularly important political messages buried in this work. First, he wrote that ‘the Buddha taught generosity only for the sake of very ordinary people such as the rich man's son, Singala’, meaning that there are higher and more noble ways of practicing Buddhism.⁴ This confirms the view that merely pagoda building is not something the political opposition, the intellectuals at least, pander to.

Second, he wrote about a king finding his happiness by delegating State power and administration to eight righteous ministers abiding in the *dharmma*. The eight ministers represent the eight kinds of *vipassana* understanding (*nyana*) which are accessories to the king's Thirty-Eight Factors of Enlightenment (*bodhipakkhaya nana*). The implication here is that the king should increase his understanding by taking advice from his ministers, so that the State as a whole should function like a fully enlightened person. Hpo Hlaing concludes his work with a prayer that reads: ‘May our king who owns all lands and waters look after all his subjects justly and fairly like his own sons as all the righteous and Bodhisattva kings did to their subjects in ancient time.’

His second work on *vipassana* is *Contemplation of the body* [၁၈၇၅ ခုနှစ်] he wrote in 1875 at the request of Salin Myōsa Princess [အိန္ဒြာဝတီ] daughter of the king. Inspired by an Italian book, he took into account what westerners call ‘anatomy’ [အာသိပ္ပာနိကဗေဒ] and some have mistakenly assumed this book to be about anatomy. This is not about anatomy but about its Buddhist equivalent, namely the *vipassana* contemplation technique on the body (*kaya nupassana*) as impermanent and void of enduring substance.

In this work he ‘reconciled truths which arise from meditation (*kammathan*) with views prevalent in western science’ [၁၈၇၅ ခုနှစ် ဘုရားရှင်တို့အတွက် နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] This volume is divided into an introduction and colophon plus 16 chapters, including: on the 28 material entities [၂၈ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်],⁶ exposition on the corporeal collections [၂၈ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] on (re)birth [၂၈ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] on aggregates such as virtue [၂၈ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] an exposition on the ways of taking the objects of meditation [၂၈ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] the cemetery meditations [၂၈ နိဗ္ဗာန်သို့ ရောက်ရှိရန်အတွက်] chapters on taking as meditation object flesh and bones,¹¹ heart, liver and intestines.¹²

In 1877 he wrote his third work on *vipassana*, namely *The ten kinds of vipassana insight* [၁၈၇၇ ခုနှစ်] at the request of the monk Hpōndawgyi Hpayā [၁၈၇၇ ခုနှစ်] I do not have a copy of this work and so cannot comment on it.

It would appear that *vipassana* had the capacity to reconcile between divided worlds and it permitted joining of Western-style worlds and politics to Burmese ones, just as it permitted mapping of Western concepts of anatomy to a Burmese system. U Hpo Hlaing, apart from his involvement in foreign affairs, furthermore, had a great interest in science and he invented the Burmese system of telegraphy code.

¹ It may also be translated as *The Essence of Emancipation*. This was first published in 1904 with a print-run of 10 000 books and has been reprinted several times since then, including reprints in 1928 and 1961.

² Hpō Hlaing ([1871]:49–61).

³ Hpō Hlaing ([1871]:62–131).

⁴ Mingun (1990–96,1:1:36).

⁵ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:366).

⁶ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:5–65).

⁷ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:66–73).

⁸ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:74–89).

⁹ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:90–126).

¹⁰ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:127–149).

¹¹ Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:158–190).

¹² Hpō Hlaing ([1875]:191–202).

Hpo Hlaing suggests several important historical precedents and continuities with today's culture of imprisonment. First, of course, there is the conjunction between imprisonment and the practice of *vipassana*. U Hpo Hlaing was pitted against the rule of authoritarian kings, just as the senior NLD leaders are pitted against the military regime. He never forgot how his father was killed by King Tharawaddy, and he was convinced that the Burmese system of royal government was outmoded and in need of change. Both Hpo Hlaing and NLD members develop *vipassana* as an instrument of liberation and as a hope for transformation of government and its enlightenment.

Third, there is the link between demands for political and economic reform and general critique of government as a *cause* of imprisonment. In other words, through the intermediary of imprisonment, there is a conjunction between *vipassana* and political reform. *Vipassana* emancipates from ‘wrong view’ and from personal conditions of imprisonment. However, as ‘wrong view’ is characteristic of foreigners and bad government, also needed is *vipassana* to assert a traditional yet radically renewed sense of Burman identity based on a different concept from the one handled by the government. Interestingly, it proves to be the ultimate instrument of liberation accepted by jailers and jailed alike. Mindon did listen to his criticism and did introduce *vipassana* into the Burmese court, and he also introduced several important government reforms, as we shall see later. These reforms, however, were not extensive enough. Nevertheless, this suggests that *vipassana* historically provided a practice – a mutually acceptable idiom for – advocacy of government reform.

Like Thibaw, the military regimes since 1962 have ignored demands for reform and asserts purely 'indigenous' elements against foreign influence. However, this has taken Burma destructively down the Thibaw road. To deny reform, called for under the influence of *vipassana* a century ago, is to deny the wisdom that one needs to adopt good government practice from whichever part of the world it might originate. Burmese ideas about identity as associated with *vipassana* practice would appear to provide sufficient dynamic to help conceive, formulate and advocate such a change, while at the same time it provides the instruments for coping with the consequences of doing so in terms of imprisonment. It does so furthermore, by techniques sanctioned by local cultural and political tradition. U Hpo Hlaing therefore provided one example of how Burma proposed its own democratisation through 'local' and 'Asian values'.

Finally, it is ironic that U Hpo Hlaing is selectively cited on the very cover of Maung Maung's Burmese (not the English) version of Ne Win's biography as having justified 'harmony-unity' (more fully cited in chapter 2):

¹ Kodawhmaing (1938:221).

² *The Nation*, 6 December 1950; Smith (1965:173).

arising from disharmony-disunity and dispute
 Having recognised that free from danger happiness prevails
 harmony-unity must be developed through assembly without dispute
 As successive Buddhas have taught
 ‘May harmony-unity prevail amongst all of you’¹

As I already pointed out, it was Maung Maung who was not only the author of Ne Win's own sanctioned biography and legal architect of the BSPP period, but who also appreciatively pointed out in his book on the constitution that Burmese democracy began with U Hpo Hlaing. In conclusion, then, a uniquely Burmese concept of democracy may be traced back to Hpo Hlaing, for whom *vipassana* was a practice at times of political crisis, to whom has been attributed the idea that unity proceeds from harmony among the monks observing their Vinaya and frequently assembly, and for whom advocacy of political reform towards ‘traditional democracy’ coincided with *vipassana* practice. Thahkin Kodawhmaing, Aung San and U Nu had appreciated these ideas. Under the military regimes since 1962, however, and in particular since 1988, in spite of Maung Maung's high estimation of the man, Hpo Hlaing's ideas have been impoverished to mean unity *without* regular assembly and without enlightenment and internationalisation.

The Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923)

U Hpo Hlaing was a significant influence on many revolutionaries. He also significantly influenced the famous *vipassana* teacher, Ledi Sayadaw, who, while engaged in his studies at the Sankyaung monastery after 1869, used to visit Hpo Hlaing's house. The Ledi Sayadaw imbibed Hpo Hlaing's scholarship and clarity of expression in vernacular Burmese. At that time Hpo Hlaing had a reputation for his independent and insubordinate (lit. ‘revolutionary’ – see chapter 11) stance against the king [kMazQm] and Ledi Hsayadaw also took up writing in a way which was insubordinate [kMazQm] to established custom [V wu o kU Xi B k' a-ma g F kMazQm S F m]. In contemporary parlance we would say that the Ledi Sayadaw was a ‘leftist’ [Z: hB Qm F m]. From this we can conclude that the Ledi at that time held views which belonged to ‘a revolutionary person outside of his time’ [‘Iva% f Tsi' k ySKkt iH ekt pcat a h r: p q d t i f ySKkt h: P sonepmvX].²

The Ledi Sayadaw was worried about the British designs on Upper Burma. His biography describes how, immediately prior to British capture of Burma, this monk faced the dangers of the foreigner's impending destruction of Buddhism. When the Ledi Sayadaw learnt that Burma was likely to be governed by foreigners, he said:

‘If foreigners are to rule Burma, it will cause many terrestrial animals to be killed and destroyed. The reason is that western foreigners are the type of people who have appetite for enormous quantities of meat. If they arrive, they will set up killing factories of cows, of pigs, of goats, where so many such creatures will meet their death.’ After musing thus, he spoke the following to the monks: ‘... When they rule, many creatures are likely to die. Among these creatures, it is the cow that is the saviour of man's life. This animal is both our mother as well as our father, and mankind is much in debt with them. Therefore, from this day onwards, I shall not eat cow's meat, and please I implore you not to eat it either. From the day he had spoken like this, he eliminated cow meat from his diet.’³

A common perception of the capture of King Thibaw with his queens was that our kings ‘were captured and taken away like chicklets, like small birds’ [kKkK hma i kRm: S i eK i e S a c q a d k p l e n a k].⁴ It should be remembered that to him removing the great sponsor of the *sasana* from political power meant the immanent destruction and imprisonment of Burma. When the British took Upper Burma, the Ledi Hsayadaw prepared himself for the ‘destruction of the era’ (*kalá pyet thi*); on 15 February 1887 he ‘retreated into the frightening Ledi Forest of which many alleged that there were malignant ghosts, that it was rough and a spooky forest’. He found a big tree, and resolved, ‘that tree is an excellent place, and he meditated under it’. Through the Ledi Sayadaw's presence, the forest became a friendly forest.⁵

The Ledi Sayadaw came out of the forest experienced in mental culture and strengthened with a mission. After his sponsors established him in a monastery, pupils soon flocked to him for his teachings. It was ‘from round about 1896 after his studies’ that ‘he toured the various parts of Burma and spent many rainy seasons in various places ... to preach and treat people to that medicine which is the cool water of

¹ Maung Maung (1969b), inner front cover.

² Hla Baing (1967:63–66).

³ Wunnitá (1967:28).

⁴ Ludú Daw Ama (1976:46), see also Lwin (1971:31). In contemporary NLD discourse, what Ledi felt was that ‘we are prisoners in our own country’.

⁵ Wunnitá (1967:29).

⁷ For example on Thibaw (Archepony) *kl nt tIBBwbet anKh-km'p'an:el* (*Khy-k'g dngong* 20: *t p mH 11* January 1924, p. 117) and on U Wisara (Aghisar) *km'p'an:gaTax arahny kmH 13x* (30 *rkksk'tcBax* 1969) sa 15x).

Vipassana played a role in his attempt to transform the accountancy office from an ‘Indian office’ populated almost entirely by Indians into a Burman office.

During the war, Ba Khin's responsibilities in government increased as the British and Indians were leaving the accountancy department.¹ It was during this period that he taught various government ministers *vipassana*, including Myanmá Alin Û Tin, Prime Minister U Nu and Minister of Education U Hlá Mìn. They all could only reach the level of breathing as the object of meditation (*anapaná kamahtàn*). Ba Khin arranged for these ministers to practise with his teacher Hsaya Thet Gyi, but government responsibilities prevented them from travelling. It thus fell upon Ba Khin to assist them with their difficulties. Saya Thet Gyi impressed upon the ministers that Ba Khin was like a doctor taking care of the sick. They should listen to the teaching (*tayà*) given by Ba Khin, and his morality, concentration and wisdom should be accepted. The British returned after the war, and Ba Khin was promoted on 16 May 1945 to the rank of Deputy Accountant General. After independence he was further promoted to Accountant General.

In 1951, while Burma's pride was heightened in their Buddhism after national independence with the celebration of the Sangayana, the institutionalization of his methods truly began. On 18 July 1951, Ba Khin set up the Accountant-General Vipassana Research Association. The more substantive Accountant-General Vipassana Association was launched on 24 April 1952, and teaching began at the centre in a temporary hut early May. On 8 May, construction of the Damáyaungchi Pagoda began which was completed on 9 November 1952, when its umbrella was hoisted. The International Meditation Centre came into being.²

What matters to us, is that Ba Khin responded to national political events with *vipassana*. Ba Khin's response to separation from India and to oppression by foreigners was by means of *vipassana*. Furthermore, the World War II experience motivated him to teach future ministers of cabinet, including U Nu. *Vipassana* became institutionalised as part of the glorious feeling that national independence gave. Furthermore, he advocated the elimination of corruption from government departments through the practice of *vipassana*.

Prime Minister U Nu

Inspired by his practice of *vipassana* during World-War II initially under U Ba Khin and later the Mahasi Sayadaw, U Nu incorporated mental culture into his programme for national independence from the British. In a sense, he would appear to have answered Hpo Hlaing's call to involve *vipassana* in a reformed government. Through teachers perpetuating the techniques taught within the U Nu initiated Mahasi empire, NLD Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi came to practice *vipassana*.

First, I have already drawn attention to how U Nu went on a nine-day pilgrimage retreat straight after signing the Nu-Attlee national independence agreement. He went to the pagodas around Keilatha Hill from 28 October 1947 where he practised asceticism and is reputed to have encountered numerous yogi and ascetics.³ It is no surprise that the new Prime Minister of a newly independent country should look towards new beginnings, and the significance of this region is that the Buddhism King Anawratha instituted in Pagan originated here in Mon country. Here, many saintly and enlightened yogi had, to paraphrase a complex verse, ‘put fright in the supernatural forces by the achievements of their *jhana*’.⁴ In this text, a conjunction is made between the original efforts of Buddhist missionaries and Nu's objective in government. Nu's visit, subsequent to the national independence negotiations he had just concluded, is juxtaposed with the story of Sona's and Uttara's enlightenment in this region during the reign of Thiridhamma-thawka. Through their missionary efforts, Buddhism spread across the country.

Second, a week after his return from pilgrimage, Nu founded the Buddha Thathana Nuggaha Association (BTNA) at a meeting in his house on 13 November 1947, together with eight other persons: two other cabinet ministers, two high-ranking functionaries,⁵ and four rich traders and industrialists.⁶ This

¹ During the period of Japanese occupation (1942–45) Ba Khin was Director of the Accountants and Auditors Department (Ko Lei 1980:592).

² Apyi-byi hsaing-ya Padípattí lokngàn Htaná (Ko Lei 1980:100).

³ *Sangayana Monthly Bulletin*, 1, no 6 (Oct 1953:10); *BTNA* (1958:10–15); Mendelson (1975:265–66).

⁴ *BTNA* (1958:11)

⁵ Other ministers: Minister of National Planning, Commerce and Industry; Minister for Finance and Revenue. Other functionaries: Accountant General of Burma, Commissioner of Income Tax.

⁶ Mendelson (1975:297) says about the founders that they were ‘men whom one could describe as British-educated, right-wing gentlemen of the old school, members of important families which had assumed or received office under the British regime and had been to a large extent dispossessed of office by the younger Thakins who led the 1936 university strike’.

initiated important Buddhist projects and structures later taken over by national government organizations.

The most enduring project to emerge from BTNA was the support of *vipassana*. It set up what is still the most powerful Burmese *vipassana* centre, nationally and internationally – that ‘mansion of science’ (*theikpan beikman*), the Thathaná Yeiktha (TY) in Rangoon, or, as it is also referred to after its former head teacher, the Mahasi Yeiktha, and it became the headquarters of the BTNA.

The Mahasi Sayadaw was a forest monk who had already been carefully investigated in August 1947, two months before U Nu signed the Nu-Attlee agreement. He was investigated by Sir U Thwin, later to become President of the BTNA. The Mahasi Sayadaw began to teach *vipassana* in 1938 in Hseithkun village, and later in Moulmein. However, U Nu did not invite the Mahasi to teach *vipassana* until after another forest *vipassana* monk had been investigated, namely the Sunlun Sayadaw. The Mahasi was appointed in November 1949, almost a year after independence. Nu favoured the Mahasi since he was renowned not only for his fine scholarly learning and his mental culture, but in particular for his ordination, regional affiliation and practice lineage within the pure forest tradition of the Thilon Sayadaw so favoured by King Mindon and his successor King Thibaw.

He describes how he established the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha in Rangoon for observance of morality, concentration and insight, and how he himself regularly visited it.

Soon its instructors were able to report that the results were astonishing. With the attainment of *Thawtapatti Megga*, the primary plane of spiritual experience, the minds of the devotees seemed to undergo a change. U Nu, wishing to experiment, sent a friend to the centre. This was a notorious person of whom the people went in dread, because he drank, lied, stole, fornicated, and would not have stopped at murder. On completion of the retreat at the centre, he emerged a reformed character. He himself was so impressed by the religious experience that he brought his wife to share in the experience.¹

Elsewhere, Nu describes how he went with his rebellious daughter to the insight centre, who ‘came out loving and obedient to her parents’. She no longer begrudged her father for giving her a beating and ‘was no longer capable of being rude to her mother’.²

And, ‘with this evidence before him, the prime minister felt encouraged to erect meditation centres throughout the country’. Though advised by colleagues and friends not to get too involved in religious matters, he saw government as concerned with helping Burmese citizens in the attainment of *nibbana*.

U Nu's contention was that the people had voted the government into office so that it might bring them benefits. Religion was a beneficial institution and those who would gainsay it were wrong. If the government could provide for a life of one hundred years on earth, why should it feel deterred from providing for countless existences afterwards? He would not deviate even slightly from his path.³

Expansion in the number of Mahasi insight centres under U Nu's patronage was rapid. Before such patronage, the Mahasi opened only one centre every three years in different parts of the country. Once invited to teach under the umbrella of the BTNA in 1947. However, growth accelerated, culminating in a total of 293 centres by 1981 in Burma alone; additional centres were opened abroad in Thailand,⁴ India, Sri Lanka, Britain, the United States, Japan, France and other countries. Between 1947–95 the Mahasi *stipatthana vipassana* method is proclaimed to have been taught to 1,174,255 yogis in over 358 centres spread across thirteen states of Burma. This includes the ethnic minority regions – including eight centres in the Kachin State, five in the Karen State and one in the Kaya State.⁵

The majority of Burmese Buddhist monasteries established abroad draw their monks from the Mahasi tradition and at the same time offer *vipassana* lessons to foreigners. Some of the centres in Burma take in substantial numbers of foreigners to practise *vipassana*. In 1995, the Thathana Yeiktha alone counted 152 foreign yogi from twenty-seven different countries.

Around 1954, Nu sought to co-opt some of the many other independent teachers of insight through a government subsidy programme. Though by 1957 there were 207 ‘Government Aided Centres’, the attempt to impose total control over these other centres proved difficult.⁶ The implication is therefore that not all

¹ Nu (1975:198–99).

² Nu (1975:299).

³ U Nu (1975:199). U Nu writes of himself as ‘U Nu’ in this auto-biography in time-honoured Burmese fashion. ‘I’ (*kyun-daw*, [the holy king's slave]) is rarely used in Burmese writing for oneself.

⁴ Mahasi TY (1974:18) has it that the Thai Sangharaja supported the introduction of *vipassana* in Thailand and that no less than 300 Thai centres were teaching the Mahasi methodology.

⁵ This involves counting, I think, entries of yogis into the centre for purposes of meditation. Since one person may enter more than once, it does not quite mean the total number of individuals who meditated.

⁶ Nu (1957:113).

methods of liberation could be brought under the roof of one government, and under today's standoff between the regime and the NLD we see divisions in patronage across different traditions of *vipassana* practice.

The attempt to institutionalize *vipassana* was accompanied by an attempt to bring *vipassana* as a reformist influence into government institutions. Jail conditions are so suited to *vipassana* practice that in 1957 U Nu introduced insight programmes into Burma's prisons. 'Prisoners from 22 jails have expressed their desire to practise *vipassana-bhavana* on their holidays' and classes were opened in 13 jails in October 1957.¹ The practice of *vipassana* also became a precondition for promotion in government office.² He ordered government departments to dismiss civil servants half an hour early if they wished to meditate, and he commuted the sentences of prisoners who studied Buddhism.³

These developments prompted characterisation of the U Nu government as seemingly 'convinced of the practical utility of meditation, since it supports meditation centres, grants leave for meditation purposes in some cases, and utilises the services of notable meditators for teaching its personnel.' His critics point out that the danger seems to be 'that the modern enthusiast may think to find in the meditation centre the answer to all his nation's problems, and dangerously undervalue the other factors in social progress.'⁴ This did not deter U Nu from leaving the country after the 1962 coup, first to fight the Ne Win regime from the Thai border, and later spending seven years in Buddhist contemplation in India before returning to Burma under an amnesty in 1980.⁵

The Mahasi tradition was of significance, as we have seen, in the way Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi coped with their political confinement. *Vipassana* is not partial to any one culture because it is 'a-cultural', and it therefore reaches out beyond all boundaries. With the British Empire crumbled, it culminated in the end of a permanent British navy presence in South East Asia. In a melancholic mood Rear Admiral Shattock, the last retiring Rear Admiral of the South East Asian fleet, returned home via Burma specifically to practise at the Mahasi centre. He ended up writing several books on meditation in his retirement.⁶ There is irony here, for King Mindon had taken to finding solace with forest monks, including the Thilash Sayadaw under the aggression of British colonials. To him the Mahasi traces back his lineage of practice. In other words, the laws of impermanence suggest that all political domains also initiate their eventual dissolution. All that remains for all actors in this mundane play – whether Burmese or British, whether military or civilian – is to come to terms with the laws of impermanence through the practice of *vipassana*.

Furthermore, the theme of imprisonment is also evoked in *Prisoners of karma*, a story by Sinhalese Suvimalee Karunaratna, who practised *vipassana* under the Mahasi Sayadaw.⁷ This story focuses on the encounter between an elephant, a peacock and a tortoise engaged in the discussion of the nature of *karma*. All three reflect on mental culture as a way to free themselves from the self-made prison of past deeds, not least the turtle, confined as he is to his shell.

The Mahasi and his pupils have written an enormous library of books – in the many hundreds of books – and there is really no point listing these here. There are also numerous biographies of the Mahasi Sayadaw. I have analysed some of this material in my thesis. Suffice to say here that this tradition is highly influential in Burma.

Phra Phimontham (1901–?)

Phra Phimontham (sometimes also referred to as Phimolatham) was the Thai Minister of the Interior in the Sangha. He practised *vipassana* under the Mahasi Sayadaw. A member of the Mahanikay monastic sect

¹ NBTA (1958:9).

² Brohm (1957:350–51).

³ Butwell (1969:65).

⁴ King (1964:218).

⁵ Smith (1991:291). U Nu published a great deal on *vipassana* practice while in India during the years 1978 and 1979.

⁶ Shattock, EH (Rear-Admiral). *An experiment in mindfulness*. London: Rider & Co., 1958; *Meditation: seven steps towards understanding*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1988.

⁷ Bodhi Leaves No. 125. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991. Suvimalee Karunaratna was born in Sri Lanka in 1939 and received her early education in Washington, D.C. and in Colombo. While living in Rangoon, where her father was posted as the Sri Lankan ambassador to Burma from 1957–61, she received meditation instructions from the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw and the Ven. Webu Sayadaw. Her first volume of short stories was published in 1973, and several of her short stories have appeared in anthologies of modern writing from Sri Lanka as well as in literary journals. She is the author of *The walking meditation* (Bodhi Leaves No. 113) and *Prisoners of karma* (Bodhi Leaves No. 125).

and abbot of the Bangkok Mahathat Monastery, which historically lost out for the king's favours to the Thammayut monastic sect, he incurred the wrath of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat for his independent views on Sangha reforms. In 1960, he was stripped of his titles on trumped up charges of sexual misbehaviour. In 1962, he was arrested on charges of supporting communism and as posing a threat to national security, disrobed and jailed.¹

The underlying reason for this treatment was that he refused to be co-opted by the secular political authorities. Under pressure from reformist monks, the Thai government released him from prison in 1966, three years after Sarit's death, and cleared him of all charges. He became a rallying point for reformist monks who continued to exert pressure on the establishment. In 1975, this ensued in the reinstatement of his titles and finally in 1981, he was reappointed to his former position as abbot at Wat Mahathat. In 1985, he was reluctantly awarded one of the coveted six Somdet titles.

His decline and subsequent rehabilitation reflects national political developments. These developments were marked by the 1941 and the 1963 Sangha Acts, leading to democratisation, and the converse, hierarchization of the Sangha respectively. Thai politics had taken a dictatorial turn after a brief period of democratic reform in the 1940s and 1950s, largely initiated by the military in opposition to royalty, which came to power under Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn in the 1960s and early 1970s, which had come to arrangements with the monarchy and with the Thai middle class. However, rapid economic growth in the 1970s contributed to the diversification of the middle class, which had by then outgrown the old patronage relationships. These became increasingly influential in their own right, resulting in an increased pressure for the diversification of power.

In the open climate, as the result of the 1941 Sangha Act, Phimontham rapidly ascended in rank and in 1947 was appointed abbot of the influential Wat Mahathat – he was even regarded a contender for the highest position, namely of Sangharaja. However, he earned the label of being a communist supporter when he refused, on doctrinal grounds, to implement a directive to forbid ordination of Communists issued by the regime that came to power in the 1947 coup. He was a critic of the new regime's appointments in the Sangha hierarchy. This contributed to the final denouement unfolding of events, as the appointees schemed with the regime to have him disrobed.

Phimontham developed his interest in *vipassana* around 1955 as the result of connections with the Mahasi, and from around this time Wat Mahathat became the centre of the dissemination of *vipassana*. A programme was conceived that involved the setting up of many urban and village meditation centres country-wide for nuns and pious laymen 'to find relief from worldly cares and burdens' instead of forest hermitages, populated by monks. It was in particular this lay participation that Tambiah isolates as the major threat the Sarit regime perceived in Phimontham.

We can now surmise why this popular program and the influence wielded by the monk sponsoring it might have been construed as a political threat by Sarit and his military colleagues. It is clear that the program served as a basis for marshaling the support and loyalty of several monks and laymen. Most importantly, that *political* power was grounded theoretically in a monk's *spiritual* excellence and *religious* achievement. This source and basis of power were inaccessible to lay politicians and soldiers whose power rested on the control of physical force. Insofar as there exist mechanisms within the sangha for generating a collective support in society that can be claimed to be independent of and immune to naked political power, the political authority will seek to curb them. This is indeed why Sarit would and did try to taint Pimolatham's activities as 'politically subversive'; and this is indeed why a seemingly religious project for the revitalization of religion could be branded as a 'political' attempt to amass power dangerous to the regime.²

This, what would appear to be the original Mahasi-Nu Burmese model of the BTNA plan to distribute *vipassana* centres across the country, was later also emulated by the rival Sangha sect Thammayut oriented around the royal sponsored Wat Bovonniwet, a competitor to the Pimontham's Wat Mahathat. Tambiah records this tension in the words of an anonymous commentator, Mr X:

Seeing the success of Phra Pimolatham's [the abbot of Wat Mahathat] program of popularising *Vipassana* meditation throughout the country Wat Bovonniwet engaged in the counter-campaign of popularising and celebrating the achievements of the provincial forest meditation teachers like Acharn Mun, Acharn Fun, Luang Pu Waen, and Acharn Maha Boowa, who are all of the Thammayut sect's sponsorship of these so-called provincial 'saints'.³

Phimontham was thus imprisoned *after* his practice of *vipassana*. Like the Burmese Interior Minister Hpo Hlaing, he was 'at the centre of efforts to democratically reform the administration of the Thai Sangha in the

¹ See in particular Jackson (1989:94–112). See also Tambiah (1976:258–61).

² Tambiah (1976:258–60).

³ Tambiah (1984:154–55).

twentieth century'.¹ He also wanted to set up *vipassana* centres all over Thailand, but accused of being a Communist and for disrupting the cosy Sangha hierarchy sponsored by the State, he was disrobed and discredited. This bears out the characterisation of both Hpo Hlaing and the Ledi Sayadaw as revolutionaries. The revolutionary nature of *vipassana* is that it questions inherited tradition and only pays attention to the moment. This means that *vipassana* is not just tailor-made to the culture of imprisonment, for in a prison one is intentionally cut off from one's habits, customs and traditions. *Vipassana* is also a technique adopted in protest and transformation, which ironically leads to imprisonment and repression *because* of the liberal ideals it fosters in intolerant political environments.

Goenka

As already indicated, *vipassana* is an 'a-political' technique because of its 'a-cultural' approach. As such it had no problems proliferating abroad. The technique came to be used in the broadest sense of coping with imprisonment spread beyond Burma. This was so, in particular through the influence of S.R. Goenka.

Goenka was one of U Ba Khin's Indian pupils while engaged in transforming the 'Indian office' into a Burmese one. In 1969, Goenka took it upon himself to missionise the Ledi *anapana* method in India, the homeland of Buddhism. Of particular interest to us is his introduction of this method into the Indian prisons of Rajasthan.

The first course of Vipassana in an Indian prison was conducted by Mr. S.N. Goenka at the Jaipur Central Jail in October, 1975, as was arranged by Mr. Ram Singh, who was at that time the Home Secretary of the State of Rajasthan (similar to a Governor of a state in America). The following are comments of Mr. Ram Singh about that first course.

Another big problem came when the course was just about to start. At that time leg irons and handcuffs were used for hardened criminals. Four such prisoners were brought into the meditation hall locked in these fetters. Mr. Goenka was walking nearby and when he saw this, he was amazed. He asked me what was going on, and I told him that these were very hardened criminals. He exclaimed: 'How can people in chains be put before me to meditate? This cannot happen. Remove the chains!'

But the Inspector General of Prisons (IG) said that this could not be allowed; the security in the jail was his responsibility; he could not remove the leg irons or the handcuffs. However, Mr Goenka was firm. He said he could not teach Dhamma with people sitting before him in chains. He was giving Dhamma; he had come to remove the chains. The IG told him he could remove the chains from within, but not the outside chains! Mr. Goenka insisted that those who were meditating must not be in chains. This was a big dilemma, a big problem!

The IG was a very experienced officer. He asked me not to force him to relax security requirements for those prisoners. He said any one of them might try to be a hero, and strangle Mr. Goenka or me to death in the snap of a finger. We discussed the problem and finally came to an agreement to remove the chains and fetters. An armed guard would be posted at a strategic point to shoot any prisoner who started to advance much turmoil changed and their faces beamed. Tears streamed down their cheeks. Tears also rolled down my face; it was a rare moment filled with joy after such high tension.

The introduction of this particular tradition to Tihar Central Prison (New Delhi) in December 1993 has been documented by Tarsem Kumar in his *Freedom from behind bars*.² Indeed, a film has been made about how Kiran Bedi introduced *vipassana* in Tihar jail entitled *Doing time, doing vipassana*.³ When it won the Golden Spire Award in San Francisco the judges found that they were 'moved by this insightful and poignant exposition of Vipassana. The teaching of this meditation as a transformation device has many implications for people everywhere, providing the cultural, social and political institutions can embrace and support its liberating possibility'. Its successful application led to the spread of this methodology into British prisons under Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation which has been introducing prison courses to much acclaim.

Other prison experiences

So far I have noted that the NLD are not facing a unique experience, either in Buddhist terms or in terms of general Burmese history – all are imprisoned in *samsara*, but some are more aware of it than others.

I have noted that Burmese concepts of imprisonment range from the conditions of confinement in the individual to the general condition of confinement in the country as a whole. In this tradition, there is a blurring between personal and national concepts of imprisonment, and its converse, the political struggle for freedom. It is through the Buddhist idea of imprisonment that political prisoners find an ultimate sense of freedom and find the inspiration to maintain the momentum of their struggle. However, national politics, as we have seen from Aung San's view of national independence as *loki nibbana*, and national unity as based on *samatha* practices, and the nationalist struggle as conceived by Thahkin Kodawhmaing, are also closely

¹ Jackson (1989:94).

² Delhi: Saurabh Publishers, 1995.

³ Produced and directed by Ayelet Menahemi & Eilona Ariel by Karuna Films Ltd, 1997, for Vipassana Research Publications.

related to mental culture.

Having placed the notion of liberation from *samsara* at the heart of the Buddhist concept of imprisonment, I have also broached the notion that the political struggle for liberation, whether of person or country, has come to be seen as a quest resolvable through personal application in mental culture. Furthermore, given the support which *vipassana* provides to those who are repressed and persecuted, it is no coincidence that the *vipassana* traditions have arisen and have been popularised in response to British colonialism and the repeated political crises since World War II.

This correlation between imprisonment, martyrdom, and the steady popularisation of the practice of mental culture cannot be uncoupled from one another during these conditions of extended political crisis.

U Ottama (1879–1939)

The monk U Ottama went to prison twice in the fight for Burma's national independence. In October 1924, Ottama was arrested seven days after making an inflammatory speech at the Lanmadaw cinema. Apparently, he had made the speech after he had 'decided' to go to prison. The monks present at his trial refused to stand up as the judge entered the courtroom, and so their chairs were pulled from under them by police guards. Ottama was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, but he managed to avoid hard labour with the help of his jailkeeper. Doing light cane work, he spent the rest of his time in meditation. His biographical account concludes by citing a Jataka and noted 'that the imprisonment amounted to little more than throwing a turtle back into its lake'.

Mendelson analyses his biography and writes that Ottama's deeds are compared 'with acts of the Buddha, as embryo Buddhas of the past are always sacrificed self for the benefit of their tribe or country, there being no value in coming into the world if it is for one's own benefit alone.' In addition, 'whenever interrupted by adversity in his labors, Ottama devoted himself – in prison especially – to meditation and religious self-improvement'.¹ Moreover, while imprisoned in Sagaing, Ottama was known to be meditating when the Saya San rebellion broke out at Tharawaddy.²

U Ottama argued that during the time of the Buddha it was possible to work to attain *nibbana*. However, as the Burmese are enslaved to the British, people should not ask for *nibbana* yet. So the techniques that build towards, but do not actually consummate *nibbana*, namely *samatha*, were most relevant to the national liberation struggle. This emphasis is confirmed in Thahkin Kodawhmaing's political writings.

Meditating on the impermanence of the British

In some respects, of course, the entire condition of the country was seen as a form of imprisonment under British colonial rule also. I have already noted U Wisara's equation between meditation, national liberation, and *loka nibbana*. U Wisara's political philosophy was closely related to his episodes in British prisons – indeed, he died fasting in prison. While in prison he was disrobed but retained the monastic rules and practised meditation [Bawnapaḥ].³

At least some other movements sought to deliver Burma from its captors by meditation on impermanence. One monk wrote a pamphlet, outlawed by government in 1927, on how to meditate on the impermanence in relation to the British occupation.⁴ Also during this period, people were prepared for prison by learning the 'story of the Bodhisattva's escape from prison'. And rather than learning British laws, they should 'only worry about the laws or teachings of the Buddha' and keep the Buddhist precepts.⁵

Ludu U Hla

In *Prison and people* [eTacNeA qja:]⁶ the prison experience is enriched by mental culture. Ludu U Hla collects twelve contributions by various authors on their prison experience prior to the 1962 military coup.⁷ He describes prisoners who, among various activities, carry out 'duties towards the Buddha' [Bra:wt t k] and partake in 'counting the rosaries' [pū l s p] and 'sending loving-kindness' [em t apu].

¹ Mendelson (1975:222).

² Ottama biography, p. 57

³ *Ibid*, p. 131

⁴ See chapter 11. This has also been expressed as 'having all villages and townsmen meditate on the impermanence of the British' [qK t r a: k i a n l m p ā k s i l p n e s a k t v i n]. See 1252 e t a c q U y q m a: A e r: e t a p u n k o k s a e p m a n k p. 51.

⁵ Herbert (1982:9).

⁶ Mandalay: Lu-du Newspaper, n.d..

⁷ Possibly translated in 1986 into English as *The caged ones* by Dr. Sein Tu (Callahan 1996:489n106).

Part III
Mental Culture
and Liberation Politics

Chapter 10

Political opposition and Buddhism

Aung San Suu Kyi once commented that she wondered 'if the countries that embraced Buddhism did so because they *needed* it, because there was something violent in their societies that *needed* to be controlled by Buddhism.'¹ In saying this, she sought to explain the role of Buddhism as a critical value to those opposing repressive government in Buddhist countries, both in supporting the cause of the opposition, and in providing an acceptable idiom with which to tone down the authorities' intransigence. In this chapter, I wish to ask a relatively simple question, namely whether political opposition has historically been phrased most effectively and most peacefully in terms of Buddhist concepts and in mental states, rather than in people grouping together under the banner of a party. In saying this, I am not arguing that there is no scope for a secular political party. I am merely seeking to understand why the idiom for political opposition in Burma necessarily draws so heavily on Buddhist vocabulary. In other words, is *nibbana*, besides representing the ultimate form of national independence *and* freedom, as well as national unity *and* harmony, not also the idiom *per se* for opposition?

The nature of opposition

If the concept 'government' is inadequate for either the generals or the NLD, so also is the concept of 'opposition' to designate the NLD. Opposition is generally taken to mean those who are in opposition not to the Government in power, but to government – i.e. 'anarchy', 'insurgency', 'terrorism', 'foreign interests'. The same ambiguities in the idea of government are therefore replicated in the concept of 'opposition'.

The regime and the national and international media persistently sketch Aung San Suu Kyi as constituting and representing opposition. However, Aung San Suu Kyi questions the connotations of this designation for ‘the word “opposition” when applied to a party which won the unequivocal mandate of the people takes on a peculiar ring’.² Victor was able to interview SLORC-SPDC members and academics, provided she agreed not to contact ‘The Lady, or anyone else from what the government referred to as the “political opposition”.’ She pointedly commented that ‘the fact they referred to Aung San Suu Kyi and other pro-democracy advocates as the “opposition” was erroneous’, and proceeded to suggest that the regime’s choice not to recognize the election results ‘made *them* the “opposition”’.³

The question is what idiom the opposition uses. The monastic population in 1997 was 167,562 monks and 239,341 novices, making a total of 406,903 incumbents in 51,322 monasteries (the number of nuns is recorded as 24,043). This is around the same size as the military. Even Saw Maung hesitated when the opposition phrased their demands for democracy in terms of the Buddhist *mangala sutta*, as he was forced to characterise them as ‘all of them are good laws’.⁴ It is perhaps no coincidence that Aung San Suu Kyi should have designated (though prompted by Clements) the role of opposition in democracy as playing ‘the role of Devadatta for any legal government’ as ‘it stops the ruling party from going astray by constantly pointing out its mistake.’ Devadatta was the principal detractor of the Buddha and if we are to take the NLD as representing government, this would equate the generals to Devadatta. In my view, Buddhism is the only idiom open to the opposition that elicits any sort of dialogue – such is not open to ‘secular’ opposition.

Opposition is illegal

Judge Rajsoomer Lallah, the United Nations Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, concluded in October 1996: 'there is essentially no freedom of thought, opinion, expression or association in Myanmar. The absolute power of SLORC is exercised to silence opposition and penalize those holding dissenting views or beliefs'.

What is opposition in Burma? Except where it concerns opposition to the foreign invader, in Burma the concept of opposition [**AtkAKISnkerk**] is broadly associated with negative qualities in the context of

¹ Victor (1998:208).

² ASSK (1997a:164).

³ Victor (1998:8–9).

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:266).

Fourth, and as a result of this, opposition in post-colonial history is seen as posing an immediate threat to national independence, for in disagreeing they are weakening the hold of authority over the national boundaries. Opposition is, therefore, particularly interpreted as foreign influence and non-Burman behaviour.

Fifth, and this is the highest order perception, opposition is frequently associated with being ‘wrong-viewed’ in the Buddhist sense. The boundaries here are not just boundaries of the state, but they are portrayed as the righteous boundaries determined by right and correct behaviour based on Buddhist morality and Buddhist principles.

Though the very concept of political opposition is being altered by recent events, these attributes of opposition are therefore a singularly unattractive proposition for increasing one's following as an opposition leader. Only when the regime is perceived as absolutely illegitimate by acting against Buddhist interests, and when people see that their battle is not only a fair one, but one that can be won, as when they could play off the British and Japanese interests in Burma (it would be a fight for both freedom *and* national independence), can the opposition have the power to move things along.

Though the army has been less tolerant than most, the struggle for national independence itself did not lead to a marked increase in tolerance for the political opposition on the part of the majority of Burma's colonial and post-colonial political leaders. As Nemoto points out, the idea implied in the Dobama ‘Us-Burmans’ movement that arose in the 1930s is that, while Dobama were positioning themselves against the British, they were at the same time excluding any claims by their political opposition represented by ‘Their-Burmans’ [တို့ဘုရား] who were sympathetic to the British. The army grew out of this movement, and it has perpetuated this intolerance for opposition. Throughout post-war democratic political history there was a one-party system, albeit an elected one, until 1962. This is the legacy of the collective fight by most political factions under the umbrella of the AFPFL in opposition to the Japanese, and later the British. So opposition has unqualified positive connotations only where it aims for the united liberation from foreign powers so as to secure and maintain national independence. However, wherever opposition threatens the ideal of unity that permits this fight to succeed, the concept has historically had negative connotations. The current regime sees itself as both government *and* opposition rolled into one.

In other words, in Burma opposition very quickly becomes a choice between imprisonment, excommunication, exile or death. At the best of times, these are not an attractive proposition for increasing one's political following or public reputation.

The fact that the co-operation Saw Maung demanded for this ‘traversing period’ has already lasted a decade, and mirrors Ne Win's regular promise of moving towards democracy between 1962–88 leaves little faith in the view that we are moving into an era of multi-party representation. The fundamental flaw is in the military regime itself for not recognizing the concept of opposition as valid, for not incorporating the principle now, and for asphyxiating all indigenous support for organised opposition.

Despite the regime having hampered the movements and activities of the opposition in every imaginable way, making it quite incapable of functioning as an opposition party, the regime feels it has to go so far as to accuse the opposition for actually being responsible for holding up the process of democratization. For example, by October 1998 the NLD, tired of the derailment of government reform, called for the meeting of parliament. The regime responded saying that ‘efforts made for the establishment of a genuine democratic nation and bringing about all-round national development are delayed and dimmed due to the acts of NLD to obstruct all undertakings of the Tatmadaw government.’¹ This does not square, however, with the accusation also made of Aung San Suu Kyi that she is ineffective among Burmese people, and only cohorts with foreigners. The press is full of statements that she has no following and that all Burmese oppose her. If Burma is, indeed, a totally self-sufficient country her actions certainly would have no adverse effects.

Furthermore, military intelligence serves as the regime's arm of ‘wisdom’. In short, it has a conspiratorial view of the political landscape in which the communists and foreign interests manipulate opposition groups such as the NLD entirely for selfish ends, and so its depiction of these groups is largely of the ‘puppet-mode’ type, in which the opposition is directly tied to strings pulled by its unpatriotic, selfish and un-Burman masters.²

¹ ‘Attitude of political parties’. *NLM*, 29.10.1998.

² For example see ‘The involvement of the Burma Communist Party (UG) and its underground members in the student

Buddhism and humanitarianism

What can political opposition do when there is no political space? At Aung San Suu Kyi's keynote address presented as a video at on 31 August 1995 to NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95, Aung San Suu Kyi argued that the Buddhist monastic tradition of mutual forgiveness (*pavarana*) was 'a forerunner of the most democratic institutions, the parliament' [Y20], [I2]. Furthermore, she implied that the international UN organizations are a much needed neutral ground for Burma, much in the way that the monastery is: 'the watchfulness and active cooperation of organizations outside the spheres of officialdom are necessary to ensure the four essential components of the human development paradigm as identified by the UNDP: productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment'. To permit some limited role for opposition, then, it is necessary to draw on Buddhist terminology.

If Aung San Suu Kyi sees in the Buddhist tradition a ground 'outside the spheres of officialdom', this function is indeed born out when we look at the history of the Sangha. Monks have historically interceded to abolish or reduce the sentences of prisoners. For example, under Bayinnaung (1551–81), after his march on Chiangmai, rebels destroyed Pegu in 1564, and Bayinnaung rounded up several thousand rebels and put them in cages to be burnt alive. However, it was the Burmese, Mon and Shan monks who came out to feed the caged prisoners, who were not allowed food, and who entreated his Majesty so that they 'finally obtained the lives of them all save seventy ringleaders'.¹ Sangermano describes an extreme example when Bodawpaya's predecessor ordered capital punishment, upon which monks 'issued from their convents in great number with heavy sticks concealed under their habits, with which they furiously attacked the ministers of justice, put them to flight, and unbinding the culprit conducted him to their [monasteries]'. This habit of monks interceding on behalf of prisoners meant that they were often forbidden to attend executions.² Monks have also cared for lost sailors, who would have been seized with ship and all by the king. Here, 'as in so much else the harshness of the rulers was mitigated by the humanity of the monks; if the distressed mariner wandered into a monastery he was sage, for the monks would bind up his wounds, feed him, clothe him, and send him as if in sanctuary from monastery to monastery till he could reach Syriam, there to await the chance of some passing ship.'³

Monks have also sometimes acted to protect the King himself, as was the case with King Thalun (1629–48) when several hundred monks defended him with sticks against his enemy.⁴ And furthermore, they have acted as intermediaries and on peace missions; to Yunnan with the Chinese under Narathihapate subsequent to the successful Chinese advance in 1283; in a mission to Sri Lanka by Bayinnaung in 1574; and on several other occasions.⁵

Though not always, these efforts by monks often elicited a response, where the perpetrator sometimes showed mercy. When King Minhkaung (r 1401–1422) suffered defeat under Razadarit, and was at a loss as to how to respond, an eminent monk Pinya came forward 'saying he had eloquence enough to persuade any king in the universe, and he would undertake a parley'. This resulted in the monk speaking 'holy words on the sin of bloodshed and Razadarit inclined his ear ... He consented to withdraw ... he even rebuked his men for taking the heads of forty of the Shwekyet pagoda slaves.' Similar peace missions, to which aggressors responded positively, took place under King Tabinshwehti (1531–50), and under King Alaunghpaya (1752–60).⁶

Some have attributed the relatively rare large-scale slaughter of monks by kings in Burmese history to the idea that kings recognized the monks' political influence, and that in order to gain complete victory they also had to eradicate this form of opposition. Thus the killing of 360 monks by the Shan king Thohanbwa in 1540 has been attributed to his perception that 'the monks led the people in resistance'.⁷ Again, Alaunghpaya (1752–60) supposedly threw more than 3000 monks to be trampled by elephants for their part in the defence in Pegu.⁸

movement'. Special News Briefing by General Khin Nyunt, Rangoon, 31.12.96 (*IS*, 31.12.96).

¹ Harvey (1925:177).

² Sangermano (1893:95), Harvey (1925:278), Sarkisyanz (1965:77).

³ Harvey (1925:205–6).

⁴ Harvey (1925:193).

⁵ Harvey (1925:68, 173, 244).

⁶ Harvey (1925:88, 158, 233, 251).

⁷ Harvey (1925:107).

⁸ Harvey (1925:235).

It has been common practice at momentous state occasions, such as the coronation of the king, to release detained persons and animals, and for a short period not to hunt or catch animals such as fish. Such occasion of liberation would be the time for the king to affirm his vows to rule as a righteous king respectful of Buddhist precepts and the sanctity of life. ‘On 16 June 1854 the ceremony of Opening the Throne Room shall be held; synchronising with the time of this ceremony set free all prisoners without exception and all caged animals and birds; this Order applies to all captives in both capital and provinces ...’¹ In Burmese this is known as ‘cleaning’ or ‘emptying the prison’ [eTackKá]. This is also done to gain the approval and co-operation from monks country-wide who, as the main educators and guardians of the Burmese value system, are the most influential and omnipresent force in the politics of the country.

Burmese kings historically aspired to the ideal of *bodhisattva*, and strove after their own eventual enlightenment with the aim to emancipate all creatures from *samsara*. In other words, their duty is not to imprison, but by the instrument of their own eventual Buddhahood, to behave according to the Buddhist code of ethics and deliver substantial benefit to the people, including setting them free from *samsara*, the ultimate Buddhist concept of imprisonment. Thus, King Alaungsitthu prayed in 1131 that ‘as this great being [the Buddha] has fulfilled the Ten Perfections (*parami*) and attained omniscience, releasing all from bondage, so may I fulfil the Ten Perfections and attain omniscience and loose the bonds of all ...’. He hoped that his works of merit would lead him to build a causeway across the river of Samsara where ‘all folk would speed across’ so that he can ‘drag the drowning over’ and himself ‘freed, set free the bound’. He would also want, with his act of merit, to behold Arimettaya, the future Buddha, who ‘sets free Samsara’s captives by his holy word.’²

Harvey refers to the Sangha as ‘representing the public conscience’, the approval of which ‘every king strove to win’.³ As Rewatta Dhamma said with reference to the regime, ‘in Buddhist countries an expression of the social dimensions of Dhamma is the guiding and softening influence which the ordained Sangha has traditionally exercised over rulers. Where this influence declines, we see the rulers become ever more cruel and irresponsible ... No amount of pagoda building or formal respect for the Sangha can substitute for their mutual [including the Sangha] responsibility to serve the people and the Dhamma.’⁴

Monasticism and career mobility

Members of the Sangha and their close relatives were traditionally free from taxation and services, and had unparalleled independence when compared to the ordinary villager who was obligated to the king in various ways. Certain privileges were even extended to villagers cultivating monastic lands, thus permitting the idea that performing work for monks permitted some protection from an unjust government.⁵ This was in part related to the monastery as an institution that legitimated the king, but the institution was also the recruiting ground for the king.

Burma inherited a new form of government at national independence, very different from that of the royal period. No longer could the monk’s career path end in high government service. A seemingly impermeable barrier was now placed between humanitarian, freedom-loving and fiercely independent monks, and the career path of the civil servant, bureaucrat and politician. Prime Minister U Nu sought to reintroduce permeability by fostering Buddhist practices – and in particular *vipassana* practice – in government, which he hoped would be adopted in secular political life, and imbue it with the ethical values that might moderate the excesses of greed and corruption that was quickly overtaking inexperienced government officers.

However, by imposing a secular model on government, and centralizing power in the army which no longer allows monks to follow the career path to government and office, the regimes since 1962 have kept at bay this tradition of accommodating Buddhist ethics which might have ameliorated their excesses and greed. By substituting it with the ethics of a professional army, based on hierarchy and command, and demanding unwavering loyalty, a political environment has been created which is less amenable to yielding in compromise and humanitarian gesture than was even the royal system of government, which was inflexible

¹ RO 27 May & 30 June 1854. See also Sarkisyanz (1965:76–77).

² Luce (1969b:379,382–84), Sarkisyanz (1965:62–63).

³ Harvey (1924:199).

⁴ Rewatta Dhamma. ‘Dhamma, ethics and human rights’. Lecture delivered at the Asian Leaders Conference (Seoul, December 1994).

⁵ Lieberman (1984:24).

enough. No U Hpo Hlaing could emerge in this system, who left the monkhood to become Minister of the Interior and who advocated liberal values and reform in government along the *awza* principles I elaborated earlier. After 1992, the use of Buddhist concepts to justify this state of affairs adds to the indignity of what is still regarded world-wide as the most intensely Buddhist country in the world, governed by a group of officers apparently little moved by calls to adopt higher Buddhist practices and to work on the basis of legitimacy through *awza*.

Monasticism, revolution and political opposition

Monks maintain a vow of chastity and their mobility, together with their independent minds sharpened by mental culture, makes them, like young students with no family responsibilities, revolutionary kegs that could light up any time. The difference with monks, however, is that they have grass-roots influence in the remotest villages where they are trusted and where their advice is sought. They are, therefore, potentially the more significantly revolutionary force than the students.

Monks have played an important role in particular in the early anti-colonial movements of the 1920s, but also in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the greatest limitation on the revolutionary role of monks has been their inability to keep up with secular political ideologies. Nevertheless, since leftist ideologies have adapted Buddhist terminology, it is often difficult to separate leftist ideology from Buddhism. This has ensured perpetuation of the relevance of the practices of mental culture even within otherwise secular ideology. Buddhism has thus always been an indispensable element in revolutionary politics, even in communist and socialist ideology.

It is this autonomy of the Sangha which permitted the emergence of 'political monks' such as U Ottama and U Wisara who were very effective in organising protests against the British in the 1920s. U Ottama did 'for nationalism in Burma part of what Gandhi did for it in India by transforming an essentially political problem into a religious one'. They presented Buddhism as 'allegedly being attacked; the monks were being mistreated by police and courts; the dignity and pride of the Burman nation was, therefore, being outraged ...'. They used prophecies and magic as well as direct agitation to turn the people 'against the foreign government, the police ... the tax collector and even the village headman'. Their overt political role did cause some splits within the Sangha, but through their political associations, such as the General Council of Sangha Associations (GCSA), founded in 1922, they provided the force in the villages which aspiring nationalists needed, and if 'nationalist politicians in Burma wanted popular backing, they had little choice but to line up with the political *pongyis*, who alone swayed the village *Wunthanu Athins*'.¹

Not having permitted any sort of alternative political organization, and in the absence of credible local leaders in whom the people have confidence, the military regimes since 1962 have left themselves entirely open to the reassertion of local monastic leadership, which in more recent times organised and kept order at the protests and rebellions under the the SLORC–SPDC, in particular in Mandalay. The sudden shift in formal support for Buddhism on the part of the regime did not come until 1992, when it realised that it was without means to influence the population. This explains, as I have already noted, why Saw Maung called the elections 'in accordance with the request made by the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee Sayadaws on 10 August 1988'.

Buddhism and the idiom of liberation

I have already noted that the Sangha provided the discourse for national unity. However, here we have seen it does more – the Sangha also provides an idiom for opposition, a softening influence on government, and a career for government servants in the past. Also, as we have seen, the Sangha provides the idiom of liberation in terms of which the avenue to freedom may be conceived. In practice this idea of freedom can take many forms, but it must always in some way relate to the ultimate concept of freedom, which is *nibbana*. This is how we must understand Aung San's characterisation of national independence as *loka nibbana*.

This transcendental aspect of Buddhism is a fundamental aspect of the traditional Burmese State, and it is unimaginable to propose a system that brings political order without this. It was used by Anawratha to weaken the feudal hold local spirit cults (and local landlords) had over the Burmese population,² and

¹ Cady (1958:232–33) cited in Mendelson (1975:200–1); see also Smith (1965:106).

² Trager (1966:127).

permitted new forms of inter-ethnic and inter-state forms of politics not hitherto possible by means of the feudal model. It permitted much mobility and cross-regional co-operation. The introduction of a universalistic Buddhism, therefore, necessarily involved coming to terms with the limitations on the powers of the local spirit cults (a common belief is that practising *vipassana* means no longer fearing spirit ‘possession’). The delicate balance between these two systems helped propagate the unique qualities of the Burmese Buddhist state.

The spirit cults provide the immobile centres which orient themselves towards the royal and supernatural centres at Pagan, Mount Popa and Taungbyon, and which play a role in conceptualizing duty towards the state; the monks, on the other hand, in their aspiration to unconditioned *nibbana* with no duties or obligations, provide an element of centreless mobility by means of which geographical and ethnic opposites can be reconciled. Though kings and their subjects wavered between the two systems, and interests were by no means perfectly synchronised between these systems, both were necessary to keep the political system in balance during the royal period. This mechanism was in play when Htin Aung observed in the advent of Buddhism that ‘the [Burmese] outlook suddenly became international’ so that ‘the pattern of Burmese history became a chequer board with black squares of insularity and white squares of internationalism, with the Burmese sometimes fleeing to the safety of a black square, and at other times going forward along the white squares.’¹ U Hpo Hlaing and U Nu, as well as the senior NLD leaders, mostly stand on the white squares hemmed in by the forces of *ana*, which is why *vipassana* was an important element in their politics; the current regime, however, developed the idea that they can redesign the chequer-board, for the black squares have been invaded by ‘foreigners’ who must be expelled onto the white squares to which they belong. In doing so, not only are they, like a small child angry at losing, altering the rules of the game, but the game has also thereby become unplayable for, in not permitting white squares as ‘Burmese’, they have lost their legitimacy and the ability to influence.

With its roots deep in every village where people have integrated support for the Sangha into their everyday lives, and a long history of monk mobility all over the country, the Sangha exercises a formidable influence on political opinion. They are the custodians of the techniques of mental culture that, as we have seen, permit liberation from the prison-as-*samsara*.

Kings not only authorize inter-regional monastic exchanges, but they need it. Lieberman once described the monk as allowing the king ‘to advance the spiritual welfare of the population’ which was ‘the ultimate purpose of Burmese monarchy’.² Sometimes this support permitted an avenue of escape from persecution. For example, during the large-scale conscription under King Nandabayin (1591–99), a large number of Mon sought to free themselves from their obligations by entering the Sangha.³

Unprepared to elevate the Sangha out of ordinary human society by permitting them their own courts, the British nevertheless were forced to recognize that monk prisoners should have some form of separate legal space. Though monks were not permitted to wear their robes, Sir Reginald Craddock nevertheless permitted prisoner monks to keep their *uboneí* twice a month within a special temporary ordination space (*thein*) of an open space ten feet by ten feet, marked off by temporary posts within the prison.⁴ U Nu had been working towards a separate legal space for the Sangha to keep them out of prison altogether. The introduction of the 1950 Vinicchaya Act took the monkhood out of the secular legal space which the British had imposed, once again permitting them their own law courts. Furthermore, U Nu's policy of cleaning up Buddhism through positive support for its activities, rather than repressing the institution itself, which the military regime has done in the 1980s and 1990s, was responsible for actually raising the leverage that government was able to exercise over rogue monks while at the same time developing a ‘distinctive nationhood’.⁵

Without a separate space for secular political opposition within Burma's political culture, this would explain why Aung San Suu Kyi has developed special relationships with the Sangha and its transcendental Buddhist idioms. Historically this has been the only autonomous institution mastering the only ideology and

¹ Htin Aung, U. *The stricken peacock*. Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1965, p.10.

² Lieberman (1984:109).

³ Harvey (1925:180).

⁴ *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget*, 12.06.1922; Smith (1965:100–101).

⁵ Brohm (1957:393).

practices of freedom to operate in Burma that are capable of organising opposition to the state.¹ This legally independent space was legitimated by the Buddha himself. Immediately after his enlightenment, the Buddha instructed his five disciples at Isipatana, the deer sanctuary, saying: 'I am free from all bondage and shackles; you all are free from bondage and shackles too. Go now, Bhikkhus, wander through the land as teachers out of compassion for the pain-ridden world, for the good of many, for the welfare and happiness of many, for the benefit of men and devas.'² This freedom transcends the grounded black squares of the spirit cults as much as it does the casual reach of the royal or military arm and the prison.

The Sangha and Ne Win

The Sangha took the lead in questioning the legitimacy of Ne Win's post-1962 regime. In particular, they questioned the wholesale nationalisation of production methods in the name of socialism, which were interpreted contrary to first precept not to steal, and as a form of communism, which would end up starving the monks of their means of support. This was first tested in April 1963 with the Mahamyatmuni Pagoda, when monks successfully protested and the Ne Win regime backed off from taking custodianship of this nationally famous pagoda. In October 1963, the 83 year old monk U Kethaya made speeches to crowds of up to ten thousand people, arguing that General Ne Win would meet his death in due course. Monks also protested against demonetization that had impoverished their supporters.

By 1965, the Ne Win regime repealed all U Nu's acts in support of Buddhism which observers predicted would lead to future problems for the regime with the Sangha.

Unlike all previous governments of independent Burma, the present Ne Win regime has adopted policies which are clearly inimical to the long-range prestige and power of the Sangha. Unlike all previous governments, it does not enjoy the support of any significant monastic organization. It seems likely that more active Sangha opposition to the regime will be one factor in future developments.³

In that same year in Hmawbi, monks refused to accept government control over them and Ne Win arrested more than seven hundred monks, some of whom were abused and imprisoned.

During the arrangements for U Thant's funeral in 1974, several monks were bayoneted and six hundred were arrested. In 1976, the regime sought to discredit La Ba, a monk persistently critical of the regime who was accused of murder and cannibalism. In 1978, more monks and novices were arrested, disrobed and imprisoned. Monasteries were closed and their property seized. Also in that year Sayadaw U Nayaka died in jail after being tortured.⁴

Despite efforts since the 1980s to unify the Sangha, Mendelson's generalization still holds that the strength of the Sangha in Burma is found 'not in its national ecclesiastical structures', but in 'such fundamental areas as its adherence of the Vinaya, its *taga* and *tagama* [sponsor] relationships, its role as culture carrier in education, and, most importantly, its ability to discipline itself through the formation of small, (self)governable monastic groups such as *taiks* or sects, which are the Sangha's best defense against the efforts of those who would use it for secular ends.'⁵ Any Burmese government must come to terms with this heritage of the Burmese Sangha as an independent decentralized force, but one that needs material support and protection, and therefore can be persuaded to support certain causes. Paradoxically, it is only when the Sangha is supported, that it can be won over to support national development; this is something this regime cannot credibly do.

In separating the state from Buddhism, and in making political parties illegal, the problem emerged of the use of Buddhism by political groups. The Ne Win regime attempted to constrain the monastic prerogative to ordain and liberate people from all backgrounds by declaring the validity only of Nine Sects in Buddhism. The regimes since 1988 came to view senior monks who ordain men irrespective of background as 'acting in collusion with illegal political parties'.⁶

The Sangha and the democratic movement

Smith argues that 'Buddhism is not only compatible with democracy but also provides some important

¹ Maung Maung Gyi (1983:25–26).

² Ko Lay (1991:49).

³ Smith (1965:306).

⁴ 'SLORC's abuses of Buddhism'. Buddhist Relief Mission, 12.02.1997 (BurmaNet News, 18.02.1997).

⁵ Mendelson (1975:172).

⁶ *Party Seminar 1965*, pp. 62–63; Taylor (1987:357).

values which strongly support it'.¹ Since 1988, the Sangha has played a vital role throughout the period of protests. This force of the Sangha was recognised when Saw Maung called the elections, he said, after being persuaded by the Sangha. The fact is, the Sangha is the *only* entity that the regime recognises it can not incorporate into its 'legal fold'. Though they wish to exercise underhand influence by corrupting the Sangha with expensive luxury donations, for such would weaken strong monks, even in their concept the Sangha does not belong in the legal fold.

Of course, in the 1920s, following the assertion of Buddhist culture in the guise of the YMBA, but before the appearance of secular political parties, monks like U Ottama and U Wisara rallied Burmese political consciousness by becoming martyrs for the cause of freedom when they were imprisoned in colonial jails. The British saw them as 'political monks'. In this decade of Burmese powerlessness to advance their nationalist cause, the Sangha has also taken up the mantle of political opposition, for there is no alternative space for opposition.

Monks similarly played a leading role in the 1988 protests. According to some estimates, six hundred monks were killed during August and September 1988, and when Saw Maung took over on 18 September hundreds of monks fled to the jungle near the borders. This was followed by an increase in surveillance, harassment and arrests of monks suspected of having been involved in the protests. In June 1989, a young Mandalay monk U Koweinda was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison, extended to fifteen years in 1990 supposedly because he was a leader of a Mandalay prison riot. He died there in October 1994, only in his early thirties. Another U Kowainda, was arrested for his involvement in the 1988 protests. Accused of being a communist, he died in by September 1991. It is suspected that both monks were tortured to death. On 6 July 1989, the army barricaded Shwedagon and searched all pilgrims, and at a scuffle attributed to the army, eleven monks and seventeen students were killed.²

Hence, by end November 1989 the regime had used up any goodwill it might have had from the Sangha. The regime, however, accused the Sangha of harbouring political opposition. Saw Maung, for example, asserted on 10 November 1989 that the army knew what students were doing in which monasteries, but that they took no action as they 'were worried there would be religious problems'.³ In particular, he suspected that insurgents would come 'disguised as monks'.⁴

Democratic parliament under the Sangha

In the face of the SLORC's stalling, and its clampdown on all forms of political opposition, monks took over the leading role in the demand for parliamentary democracy. As I have already pointed out, not only were they the primary agency to whom the military offered the 1990 multi-party elections, but members of the Sangha offered to house parliament in a monastery themselves. For their front line role in the demands for government reform, the Sangha was subject to increased repression by the army. This took the relationship between the Sangha and the regime to an extreme low, prompting the Sangha to call a strike against the regime, never before recorded in Burmese history.

The events unfolded as follows. When elected NLD representatives met at Gandhi Hall on 29 July 1990, they issued the so-called Gandhi Declaration in which they called upon the SLORC to transfer power to the NLD in accordance with a revised version of the 1947 constitution, to convene the parliament (Hluttaw) before 30 September, to permit freedom of expression, and to release NLD members and leaders from prison and house arrest.⁵ However, the SLORC in anticipation of the Gandhi Hall meeting, issued Declaration 1/90 on 27 July, which stated that the SLORC 'is not an organisation that observes any constitution, it is an organisation that is governing the nation by martial law'.⁶ Instead, citing the need to protect ethnic minorities in particular, the SLORC proposed that no parliament could convene until a new constitution was drafted.⁷ In proposing such delays, and in proclaiming that the leading role in any future

¹ Smith (1965:310).

² 'SLORC's abuses of Buddhism'. Buddhist Relief Mission, 12.02.1997 (BurmaNet News, 18.02.1997).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:268).

⁴ Saw Maung (1990b:238).

⁵ Weller (1993:227–229).

⁶ Weller (1993:236).

⁷ It was not until fifteen months later, end September 1991, that the regime formulated its plan to hold a National Convention to draw up guidelines for a new constitution. This would stall hand-over to the parliament indefinitely, for only after which the Elected People's Assembly would consider drafting the constitution, which would have to be returned to the military authorities for approval and to the people for a referendum. See Weller (1993:7). This was formally announced in 'Address by Foreign Minister U Ohn

government was to be played by the army, the regime affirmed that it was unwilling to hand over power under an interim constitution.

The NLD was coming under increasing public criticism for inaction, while the SLORC experienced great fear of popular revenge by the people.¹ Indeed, during this general state of fear in this very year Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom from fear* came out. U Kyi Maung said in a broadcast that 'people such as Khin Nyunt might reasonably feel themselves pretty insecure', to which Khin Nyunt replied that he was a soldier and 'I never anticipate fear'.² In the ethnicity question the SLORC saw an opportunity to find outside support and leverage its influence over the NLD. It proposed to give all parties equal representation, which would enhance not only the ethnic minority representation, but would also give the NUP the same representation as the NLD. They even proposed to create new ethnic states. However, about half of the ethnic minority vote with the NLD anyway, and there was no prospect of the ethnic minorities entering into a political alliance with the army.³

Impatient with the delays, monk and student organisations came forward promising to provide three thousand monks and two thousand students to keep order if the NLD was prepared to hold its first parliamentary session in defiance of the SLORC in a monastery in Mandalay.⁴

On 8 August 1990, over seven thousand monks and novices walked in line accepting alms in Mandalay in commemoration of the second anniversary of the 8.8.88 massacre. Soldiers confronted the line and shot four people dead, two of whom were monks and several others were wounded.

This moment of crisis brought to the fore struggle in spiritual terms, or as Mya Maung put it, '... the tradition-bound Burmese ... turned to traditional protests by reading signs, symbols, and omens for the downfall of the military junta'.⁵ By the last week of August, it was reported that the left breast of a Buddha image near Mandalay was swollen. This sign soon spread to other Buddha images across Burma, including the oozing of blood from the eyes of the Buddha. The military surrounded the pagodas and cut off access to the shrines, taking away images. This was popularly interpreted 'that the next ruler of Burma is going to be Daw Aung San Suu Kyi'.⁶ In other words, the swelling of the breast indicated a woman would take over leadership of the country.

The monastic boycott

On 27 August 1990, at a meeting of more than seven thousand monks in Mandalay, mostly belonging to the Monks' Union (Sangha Sammagi), senior monks led by U Yewata called for the ultimate and final instrument of disapproval of government at their disposal, namely a boycott against the military. Known as *pattam nikkujjana kamma*, 'overturning the bowl,' it signified that alms would not be accepted from military families and no services would be performed for them. This is sanctioned in the Vinaya, which permits ostracising of laity who commit any of eight offences: striving for that which is not gain, striving for that which is not benefit, acting against a monastery, vilifying and making insidious comparisons between monks, inciting dissension among monks, defaming the Buddha, defaming the Dhamma and defaming the Sangha. These infringements permit the Sangha to refuse all contact. It did not remain with sanctions, as some monks were reported as kneeling in front of soldiers, intending to elicit shame and fear.

On 30 August the NLD and the second largest vote-winning party in the 1990 elections, the United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), announced they would jointly set up parliament in September. In the course of September senior NLD leaders – including U Kyi Maung – were arrested.

It became clear from Saw Maung's press conference on 7 September that he saw the monks as belonging to an entirely different legal sphere, equivalent to the international 'white squares' mentioned earlier, where he could not get at his political opponents. He said that:

For members of the religious order, we have respective rules. For us Buddhists, there is Vinaya and prohibitions. As for those [lay people] residing within the territories of Myanmar, there should be a constitution, as a country should have a constitution in order to conduct its international relations.⁷

Gyaw to the UN General Assembly', 04.10.1991.

¹ Smith (1991:415), ASSK (1997b:200).

² 'Khin Nyunt responds to claims about transfer of power.' 100th Newsconference, 13.07.1990; Weller (1993:189).

³ Smith (1991:417–18).

⁴ Weller (1993:237).

⁵ Mya Maung (1992:162).

⁶ Mya Maung (1992:162, 184).

⁷ Weller (1993:199).

By contrasting the proposed National Constitution with the Vinaya code, and by referring to himself as functioning like ‘a king’, in this speech it was clear that Saw Maung was again dealing with the underlying Buddhist meaning of national unity discussed earlier. The king's *cetana* creates balance in the relationship between the black and the white squares. At this point Saw Maung was unable to reconcile his politics with the animosity of the monks, and he became increasingly irrational. General Khin Nyunt took over the press conferences.

The SLORC's stance against the monks was first intimated in Khin Nyunt's press conference of 11 September, in which he informed monks that he would remove ‘bogus monks’ from amongst them, while nevertheless attributing national unity to their influence. Khin Nyunt warned the monks not to be misled by the Burma Communist Party.

At this point, I wish to make this appeal to the senior abbots, the monks and holy people. In the same way as we, your humble disciples, have been doing everything possible to make the country peaceful and prosperous and the teachings of noble Buddha flourish in a pure, stable and glorious way, may you – our teachers – bless us with Buddha's teachings and help make the whole country peaceful. Amongst you, holy people, who have attained such a pure and high standing simply by being monks, are bogus monks who are trying to blemish Buddhism and lower your prestige, and I believe they should be removed with proper caution.¹

The NLD made overtures for negotiation with SLORC on 19 September, which were rebuffed. By 17 October the NLD had seen no progress in its relationship with the SLORC, and so it announced that it would convene a new national legislature and would be holding its first meeting on 22 October, and it would prepare to draft a new constitution and set up departments that could evolve into ministries.

The next day, on 18 October, Saw Maung met with senior monks. He demanded an end to the boycott and characterised his actions against the monks as bearing comparison to King Anawratha's purification of Buddhism (See App I.7).

However, monks were not taken aback by this. The sanctions had by then already spread to Rangoon by 13 October, and all over the country monks refused alms from, and refused to attend religious services organised by military personnel and their families. On 15 October, leaders of the Committee of Monks in Mandalay called for General Saw Maung to apologise to monks on radio and television, to release all arrested monks and not to keep troops in religious buildings. The regime, in despair, began to invite Thai monks for donations.

On 19 October, Yaiwata, the most politically active Buddhist monk, was arrested, jailed and disrobed. The monks were mainly accused of possessing anti-SLORC literature, including articles by the NLD, and writing inflammatory poems in their diaries and notebooks. However, monks were also accused of breaking the Vinaya by gambling, illegally possessing jade and heroin, and were even accused of rape. Announcements on the radio, however, merely confined themselves to accusing the monks of working with the Communist Party of Burma.

On 20 October, Saw Maung issued Order 6/90 that banned all ‘unlawful’ Sangha organizations, except the nine sects, which had been declared legal in 1980 under the Ne Win purification of the Sangha. This made action possible against political parties for the ‘misuse’ of religion for political purposes. Also, he demanded revocation of the religious boycott against the military.

On 21 October, SLORC Order 7/90 was passed which authorized army commanders to bring monks before military tribunals for ‘activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism.’ These tribunals imposed punishments ranging from three years’ imprisonment to death, and military commanders were empowered under martial law to disrobe and imprison monks for boycotts or protests.

Finally, on 30 October, a code of conduct was issued for Buddhist monks to observe, with penalties attached for its violation.² In November the regime then clamped down on the Sangha.

Monasteries were surrounded by armed troops, and monks were trapped inside. Electricity, water, and communication lines were cut, and monks were prevented from going on their daily alms rounds. After maintaining the blockade for one week, armed troops entered the monasteries and arrested the leaders. People living near some of the monasteries were also forced to move, and their homes were destroyed. More than 350 monasteries were raided, and more than 3,000 monks and novices were arrested. Twenty monasteries were seized and expropriated.³

An explanation of these actions was not given until Khin Nyunt's press conference on 7 December, in which he delineated the whole thing as a conspiracy against the State by the Communist Party, the NLD,

¹ ‘SLORC 104th news conference by Khin Nyunt, 11 September 1990; Weller (1993:208).

² SLORC Law No 20/90 – Law concerning Sangha Organizations; Weller (1993:210–211).

³ ‘SLORC's abuses of Buddhism’. Buddhist Relief Mission, 12.02.1997 (BurmaNet News, 18.02.1997).

various other factions, and monks organisations. The SLORC tried to remove evidence of the arrests. However, Amnesty International compiled a list of seventy-five monks, 'arrested in October and November 1990, solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association.' In their search of the monasteries the regime proclaimed to find evidence of Communist affiliations and many Vinaya irregularities.

Therefore, monks have most certainly fulfilled a vital role in maintaining the impetus in the fight for democracy, while people and elected politicians were prevented from acting. Many monks were punished for their role in the boycott. Here, I will just mention the two most senior monks. U Thu Mingala was arrested after he refused to condemn the boycott on legal grounds. A highly respected monk, he was abbot of a monasteries at Kaba Aye in Rangoon, and one of only five monks in modern Burma to have memorized the entire Buddhist canon. He was disrobed and sent into internal exile in Kachin State, but continued to observe the Vinaya as best he could. After his release in 1995, he returned to Rangoon where he managed to resume his monastic life. Another senior monk experiencing SLORC vengeance was Jotika, a professor at the Sangha University in Rangoon. Despite suffering from intestinal cancer, he was denied medical treatment and died shackled to his bed in December 1992.¹

Also, it was reported that in May 1996, a monk named U Kaythara was arrested near Bandoola Park for writing on the palm of his hand that the SLORC should have a dialogue with the NLD and for holding a piece of paper also saying that the SLORC should start a dialogue. It was further reported that his trial took place on 15 August and that he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment under section (5)j of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act.² Sporadic protests by monks continued while I was in Burma in September 1998.

Since the Sangha is the only institution that has any potential to operate 'outside the fold of the law' withing government controlled territory, it fulfils a vital function for political opposition. However, as the Sangha could provide no shelter for the NLD, ultimately the NLD took the decision that there was no prospect for convening parliament in Burma – on 18 December 1990 was set up the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) in exile, the only place left where the regime could not get at the opposition.

Democracy and economics

Democracy is often described as a system crucially founded upon constitutional liberalism, in which a free market exists, and where there is true freedom to raise and accumulate capital and economic resources in private and non-governmental hands. However, such independent sources of income would permit a political opposition to strengthen itself considerably. When the British introduced constitutional liberalism in Burma, the liberalisation of markets was a major affront to established interests on the part of the Burmese nobility. When the economic crisis hit Burma in the 1930s, Burma's politics made its transition from resistance phrased almost entirely in terms of Buddhism, to a mixture between Buddhism and 'external' ideas, in particular Marxism and socialism. Both Buddhism and Marxism, however, fit the general idea that property needed to be centralised outside private hands. In Burma independent wealth was viewed suspiciously, in particular during army rule between 1962–88 when nationalisation took place of business and severe censorship was introduced. Only the former has been loosened out of economic necessity, but the latter remains more firmly in place than ever. We also know from the discussion above that, in spite of the free-market reforms reform since 1988, the UMEHL remains the instrument perpetuating army control over the main production factors.

This attitude towards independent wealth is related to the system of royalty. The royal mode of government in Burma was mostly incapable of dealing with status and influence arising from the accumulation of wealth by agencies independent from the state. Winichakul has argued that Thai royalty thought economics as divisive, and that King Vajiravudh (r. 1910–25) even banned the first economics text book, because 'economics might cause disunity of disruption because it concerns social strata of rich and poor'. His view was that economic philosophy should simply be based on the Buddhist precept 'that one should be satisfied with what one has'.³ In Thailand, legislation against the teaching of economics was passed

¹ *Ibid.*

² United Nations (Special Rapporteur Judge Rajsoomer Lallah). *Report of Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar A/51/466*, October 1996, Paragraph 36, 90.

³ Winichakul (1994:4).

in 1927, and writing on economics was forbidden.

With no free-market system, independent wealth was not tolerated. However, since surplus wealth was mostly spent on Buddhism, independent political opposition in Burma has always worked through Buddhism where the nation's wealth has been historically concentrated. The SLORC-SPDC are extremely fearful of finance for political parties, such as during the election campaigns, when on 3 October it threatened legal action unless all political parties cleared their campaign expense accounts with them within two weeks.¹

Unlike Thailand, where the Sangha is centrally controlled by a hierarchy of ministers parallel to government, and where monasteries and ordination may not take place without permission from these ministers, in Burma the Sangha has operated with great independence from the state, in particular during and since the colonial period once the appointment of monk Patriarchs called *thathana-baing* [တထာနာပိတ] fell into disuse. The modern state never was able to assert the kind of control over the Sangha that had been asserted in Thailand. Despite efforts by the Ne Win regime to subordinate the Sangha, Burma has no king, and therefore has no symbolic central supporter of the *sasana*. With the military's commitment between 1962–88 to divorce Buddhism from government, it was unable to generate sufficient support to reinstitute constraints on the Sangha, for its interference in Buddhism was not seen as motivated out of a desire to patronise benevolently. Today the regime is attempting to compensate for the bridges that were burnt during that period by becoming more 'Buddhist' than any government before. But what kind of Buddhism is this?

Conclusion

The above then, are some of the reasons why not only imprisonment, but also political opposition, inclines people in Burma to Buddhism. No secular ideology could possibly suffice to penetrate and come to terms with this prolonged suffering under this authoritarian regime. This experience is routinely addressed through Buddhism. It is historically through Buddhism that the arguments for government reform are made, and it is in the shadow of the Buddhist monasteries and pagodas that historically opposition to government has operated. It is no surprise, therefore, that many prisoners and potential prisoners have found protection in monasteries and have found their dignity through Buddhist practice. Not only does the monastic population provide numerically a counterbalance to the army, but it provides the transcendental element that places limits on the authority of the king, general and politician to invade peoples' lives. This is how we should read the appeal of Buddhist values.

The generals argue that human rights are a foreign invention incompatible with 'local' values. The concept 'human rights' once translated into Burmese becomes 'the matter of human permissions/rights' [*lu hkwín yèi* လူ့အခွင့်အရေး]. This does not warm peoples hearts for several reasons. First, the term is a recent invention in Burmese and bears no deep, or even superficial relation to Buddhism, thus losing the overlap with Buddhism as the avenue for freedom *per se*. Second, *hkwín* အခွင့် means both 'permission' and 'rights and privileges', suggesting that one first needs permission to have rights – i.e. as a concept it is unable to shake off unjust authority (*ana*) in favour of freedom. Third, the idea of linking rights to the status of human beings timelessly as against other forms of life militates against the ideas in a society where life goes through rebirths, and where many other forms of life have been or will eventually evolve into human beings. To talk to the generals about 'human rights' does not elicit a meaningful response. However, to say that local people do not conceive of human rights at all is to miss the point that these rights are attained through the idiom of Buddhism, not culture. When Aung San Suu Kyi spoke about human beings as having the ability to attain *nibbana*, and the possibility for human beings (*lu*) to eventually attain Buddhahood, the implications of this statement reverberated right across the country, eliciting immediate responses from monks and generals. If human rights do not touch the heart strings of the Burmese masses, *nibbana* will. We must accept and be sensitive to the fact that certain idioms such as human rights come across very differently in the Burmese vocabulary compared to the English. Nevertheless, though this is a locally held value, it is a comparable one, for it proposes universal freedom transcendent of the bounds of *loka* that aim to tie people into *samsara* as created through the Myanmarification programme.

¹ Weller (1993:210).

Chapter 11

Concepts in liberation politics

Sarkisyanz's *Buddhist backgrounds of the Burmese revolution*, despite slight deficiencies, demonstrates a grasp of certain fundamental emic (internal to) concepts of Burmese political culture. Most historians and political scientists have realised that the enduring symbols of national unification, and the most appealing electorally, are drawn from the domain of Buddhism. However, few have realised that these are drawn in particular from the practices that make up the category I have called mental culture.

Mental culture is capable of establishing and maintaining homologous domains. Shwe Zan Aung (1910: cover page), influenced by Ledi Hs's work, cites the Buddhist texts:

'Tis even as a border town, having strong walls and six gates ... with a wise and prudent gate-keeper ... Thither should come from the East swift twin messengers, asking for the lord of the city ... he sits in the midst of the crossways. And they twain, having truthfully delivered their message, should regain their way. And other twain messengers should come from the West ...'

... The town is this body; the six gates are the six senses; the gatekeeper is mindfulness; the messengers are calm and insight; the lord is mind; the message is Nibbana.¹

Such might also help explain why the Buddhist kingdom is so crucially dependent on enlightenment experience – it was the Buddha's *bodhi mandala* around which it evolved (See App. 1.7, 1.6).² Burmese conceptualization of national liberation politics cannot divorce itself from personal liberation through mental culture. The more centrist and the less embedded they are in ethics, the more they veer towards the 'Hindu' model of control over *loka* and towards *samatha* and 'mundane knowledge' (*loki pañña*). The less centrist and more broad-minded they are, and the more embedded they are in ethics, the more they veer towards *lokuttara*, towards *vipassana* and 'transcendental wisdom' (*lokuttara pañña*). Military politics draws firmly on the former tradition, as it is founded on power and control, and focuses on and locates itself in particular domains. Aung San Suu Kyi's politics, on the other hand, draws mainly on the latter, as it is founded on purity and wisdom, and seeks a more universal good, seeking to transcend place and the particular location. However, no government in power in Burma can neglect either; as Aung San himself argued, politicians must 'clean up' dirty politics by raising their minds to a higher level. This is achieved by selectively emphasizing certain techniques of mental culture.

Here, I explore six key concepts in Burmese political tradition that have hitherto passed by unanalysed, but which are a measure of the importance of mental culture to Burmese political tradition. Two of these – *yantarà* ('mechanism') and *sakka* ('wheel') – deal with ideas about order and how government is presupposed to maintain it. Three – *tawhlanyei* ('revolution'), *wunthanú* ('patriots') and *htwetyak gaing* ('freedom bloc') – deal with the process and institutional manifestation of rebellion and revolution. A fourth, *azani* ('martyr'), deals with the meaning of personal perfection in Buddhist and political tradition.

Government (Yantarà)

Government is not just in the hands of human beings, but is very much in the hands of supernatural forces. These supernatural powers range from low predators, assigned the duty to guard treasures, trees or other landmarks, to the highest noble deities such as Sakka, the Buddhist King of the Gods, who oversees all from his seat in the heavens, and the Brahmas, who can be appealed to for wise and powerful help. Consequently, techniques of government address more than issues pertaining merely to the human plane of existence. Hence, to understand government, we must understand these forces.

One commonly used concept associated with government, apart from *asòyá*, is *yantarà* [ယန္တာ]. For example, General Saw Maung in one of his speeches said that 'the machinery of government have now already ceased turning' [ယန္တာတို့ လည်နေရုံသာရှိသည်။]³ In Burmese this concept is commonly used to

¹ S.N., iv, 194.

² Research on space-time orientation of Tibetan meditators indicate that some types of meditation permit switching off input into the areas of the brain that control space-time orientation. This would make useful at times of confinement as it permits a no-space and no-time experience. Such might also play a role concepts of space and domain and in political transformation. Andrew Newberg and Gene D'Aquili. 'A neuropsychological analysis of religion: attempting to determine why God won't go away.' *Zygon: Journal of Science and Religion*, 1993

³ Saw Maung (1990b:99).

Even Ne Win, supposedly the most secular and ‘un-Buddhist’ of indigenous politicians, has been presented by his biographer as working within the boundaries set by the laws of *samsara*, the laws of conditioned existence. For example, the first sentence with which Maung Maung introduces Ne Win says that ‘*samsara* revolves around ceaselessly’ [ပဋိသန္ဓေသည် အတိတ်မှ ဖွယ်၍ အနာဂတ်သို့ ပြောင်းလဲနေသည်။] and he explains that all conditioned phenomena in this world are subject to the same laws of birth and death. Not only is this a common ploy in starting out writing Burmese historiography, but as I will explain later, this conveniently explains how Ne Win can be justified to have deposed U Nu, for he took over government in the name of his superior vision of the laws of *samsara* that U Nu had disregarded and misjudged. In other words, U Nu's *nibbanic* state has been replaced by another *nibbanic* state, supposedly more pragmatic and more down-to-earth, but *nibbanic* in formal ideology at least.

Mostly, however, it is used in the sense of a supernatural instrument created so as to gain power.³ Evidently the BSPP was not immune to this supernatural element, as we shall see later, in the ‘mundane techniques’ employed by its leadership. This element of supernatural power is also evident in the naming of the BSPP Cadre as *amyūtei* [𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖜: 𑖠𑖩], ‘cadre of immortal jewels’, from (Skt) *Amrita-dhani*. Note that not only does this terminology draw heavily on magic, in a way that shades into and runs parallel to meditation, but *nibbana* is sometimes also expressed as ‘immortal country’ [𑖦𑖳𑖫𑖜: 𑖠𑖩].⁴

⁴ Bo Maung, Thathanayē ūsi Hītanā Kyānpūyūmū, who in 1978 published the book *Amātābāwdani mi thāw amīyūtei lōkyak kyān* [ဘုမ္မာပုဂ္ဂိုလ်အား ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာတော် (A treatise on the work of immortal jewels, known as Amrita-dhani). Rangoon: Dept of Rel. Affairs, pp. 200. This book introduces mental culture as a supreme form of medicine. Playing on the correlation between *weikza* and it culminates from one kind of medicine (that practised by the Vedic Sanskrit-inspired *weikza* into that of another (the techniques of samatha-vipassana in the Pali tradition). The reference to the title implies alchemy, as does the term *Nirvāṇa*. 75). In the introduction Bo Maung correlates (a) doctors in Burmese training in medicine with (b) Indian medicine and (c) with the practice of *vipassana*. Divided into 7 parts: 1. the four satipatthanas (pp. 1–6); 2. the four satipatthanas in more detail (pp. 9–44), incl. that v. can be an instrument by means of which one can attain the power of immortality (‘immortal country’ is commonly used to signify *nibbana*); 3. on the seven factors of enlightenment (pp. 45–85); 4. on the attainment of *vijja-vimutti* (pp. 86–120), which ‘is the attainment of immortality’ (p. 98), ending with a diary of a yogi’s experiences who visits various teachers; 5. on the fruits of the path to immortality, which includes the various kinds of spiritual intelligence (following one to see things as they really are (121–154); 6. on the 37 elements of enlightenment (pp. 155–67); 7. on the relationship between ‘purity wizardry’

[it] generally refers to any constructed, artificial instrument or device, and also denotes a 'magical diagram' somewhat akin to a mandala. Like a mandala, it is essenceless in its outer aspect, but is constructed in such a way that it can contain within it an essence that can be found by the wise. In fact the word 'mandala' means an 'enclosing of essence.' As one etymology defines it: 'manda' means essence (or 'pith') ... '-la' means seizing that – thus 'seizing the essence' (mandala).¹

The wheel and dhamma

This concept has as many as eighteen different meanings in Burmese,⁴ of which the following is but a summary.

- i) a wheel of a carriage or machine [A ¹ m̥]
- ii) a discus [A ¹ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥] any of the supernatural weapons [QMA n̥ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥] The latter includes the thirteen types of visible manifestations of the *mandan* [VRQm̥ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥] which ensures freedom from danger, including: the Buddha's 108 marks, the fourteen dhammas, the nine sangha, the colours radiated by yāhandas and silent Buddhas, lineages of special teachers, Sakka King with his thunderbolt, the galon, the weapon of fire from the mouth of the naga, and so forth.⁵
- iii) a disc or circle as a characteristic mark of a superman (*mahapurisa*)
- iv) a [circular] array of troops [A ¹ ʊ̃ a]
- v) a thunderbolt [Vg m̥ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥]
- vi) authority [ʔ ¹ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥]
- vii) a circular mark indicative of excellence, privilege or authority [A ¹ ʒː ɔ̃ a] such as the 108 marks of the Buddha's foot [kū̃ k̥m̥] These are also supposedly present on the foot of kings [kū̃ [ɛː ɔ̃ m̥] deities, and monks, who do not 'walk' but 'raise their circular marked [feet]' [A ¹ k̥m̥ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥]
- viii) a circular charm buried in the flesh [ʔ ¹ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥]
- ix) a circular object set up for marksmen to shoot at [SQA n̥ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥]
- x) a world system [A ¹ ʔ a]
- xi) agency aroused by medicine and witchcraft
- xii) the Buddha's teaching [ʔ ¹ ɛː ɔ̃ m̥]

The wheel is a symbol of the *dhamma*, indeed represents the *dhamma* visually.

The wheel, the traditional symbol of the Dhamma, expresses these points in a visual form. The Buddha states [§195] that when he gained full knowledge of all four truths on all three levels – recognizing the truth, recognizing the duty appropriate to

[[*ḡāyī*] and ‘the taste of immortality’] [*v̥kM Y a*] (168–83). The colophon ends with the statement that this practice leads to elimination of wrong view. The author proclaims to have been influenced in particular by Dipēvīn Hsayavadaw.

¹ Strong, John S. 1983. *The legend of King Asoka*. Princeton, pp. 149, 155–56.

² Pe Maung Tin (1921–25:827).

³ Mahasi (1979,4:531–33).

⁴ Htun Myín (1968:52–54); Pe Maung Tin (1921–25:827)

⁵ Awbatha (1975:213) A: m^hMBXInSá

⁶ (Mingun 2.1:54-55). Enumeration of the 108 marks in the Burmese version are taken from *Gulhatthadipanai*, Vol. 1, by the Taunggyin Sayadaw, Head of the Sangha.

⁷ See also *van-ta-ra*.

⁸ ၵုကမာဏသီ ဝါသ သီ သိအံး သီ အံး ငါးပဲၤ မိမိဝါးစံး ပရိဘောဂ်၊ Preface to Rangoon: Hanthawadi, 1276 edition.

⁹ Vsm. R&D

it, and realizing that he had fully completed that duty – he knew that he had attained full Awakening. He elaborates on his assertion by setting out a table of two sets of variables – the four noble truths and the three levels of knowledge appropriate to each – listing all twelve permutations of the two sets. This sort of table, in Indian legal and philosophical traditions, is called a wheel. This is why the discourse in which he makes this statement is called ‘Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion,’ and why the wheel used as a symbol of the Dhamma has twelve spokes, uniting at the hub, symbolizing the twelve permutations that merge into a singularity – knowledge and vision of things as they actually are – at the still point of non-fashioning in the midst of the cycle of kamma.

Because new input into the causal stream is possible at every moment, the actual working out of this/that conditionality and dependent co-arising can be remarkably fluid and complex. This point is borne out by the imagery used in the Canon to illustrate these teachings. Although some non-canonical texts depict dependent co-arising as a circle or a wheel of causes – implying something of a mechanical, deterministic process – the Canon never uses that image at all. Instead it likens dependent co-arising to water flowing over land: lakes overflow, filling rivers, which in turn fill the sea [S.238]; while the tides of the sea rise, swelling the rivers, which in turn swell the lakes [S.XII.69]. This imagery captures something of the flow of give and take among the factors of the process. A more modern pattern that might be used to illustrate dependent co-arising is the ‘strange attractor’: an intricate, interwoven pattern that chaos theory uses to describe complex, fluid systems containing at least three feedback loops. As we will see below, the number of feedback loops in dependent co-arising is far more than three.

The self-sustaining nature of dependent co-arising makes it easy to see why many non-canonical texts explain it as a wheel. However, the many openings for feedback loops among the various factors – creating smaller cycles within the larger cycle – make the process exceedingly complex. This explains why stress and suffering are so bewildering. If they were a simple cycle, there would be little or no variety to the sufferings of living beings, and the process of suffering would be easy for everyone to predict and understand.¹

In Burma most Buddhist wheels, including those represented on the fans of monks, are twenty-four spoked wheels (based on the *patthana*). However, the twelve-spoked wheel is that of the Dhamma (Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path).

The wheel is also more than this, for it also spontaneously appears as a symbol of the righteous universal king. To prevent the Buddha from accomplishing his renunciation after seeing the omens, Mara told the Buddha that ‘on the seventh day from today, the celestial Wheel Treasure for you will certainly make its appearance’. The Buddha replied, ‘I already know even before you that the divine Wheel Treasure will certainly arise for me. As for myself, I do not have the least desire to become a Universal Monarch ruling over the four Continents’ and told Mara to go away.² Also upon encountering King Bimbisara, who offered him kingship, he thought that ‘it would have been certain that I would become a Universal Monarch’.

In a similar way Burmese kings had the *dharmma* wheel appear. Manuha Min was reputed to be possessed of the wheel, and in the following paragraph it is clear how this symbol is closely related to pagoda building and royal authority:

Now the glory of king Manuha, it is said, was this, that whenever he spoke a wheel issued radiant from his mouth. So when Manuha visited and bowed his head before Anawrahtaminsaw, that king was aghast, and his hair stood on end. Thereafter, in order to demean Manuha's glory, dominion and power, he caused his food to be always prepared upon a jewelled salver and first dedicated to a pagoda and then set before the king. And king Manuha took no heed nor scrutiny, but ate of it. Thus after a while the radiant wheel that issued from his mouth vanished. Then only, when it vanished, it is said he set his heart at rest, saying, ‘Plot I never so shrewdly, it may not be!’ Then stricken with remorse, he built a colossal Buddha seated with legs crossed, and a dying Buddha as it were making *parinirvana*; and he prayed saying, ‘Whithersoever I migrate in *samsara*, may I never be conquered by another!’ The temple is called Manuha to this day.³

Kyanzittha is also supposed to have been in possession of the wheel ‘because of his wheel-mark of royalty, and because the *waterpot fell back* when they gave him to drink, he is also written Kayalanzittha.’

[*kyān gā mā tī rā nī tī jn: yā z h f mē k: a dā p: yā z ā mā d ā j z f d k y d t f jn*]

[after Anawrahta had killed many thousands of babies and boys hoping to kill Kyanzittha] Now Kyanzittha's mother entrusted her son to the king's chaplain and he became a monk. And the masters of white magic and black spakke yet again, saying, ‘He hath become a monk!’ And the king asked them: ‘How may this be known?’ And they answered: ‘Invite thou them to a meal, and when it is ended offer them water in a water-pot; and lo! from the mouth of him who shall be king the wheel-mark will stand out radiant.’ So the king invited all the monks in order; each day he served and gave them to eat. One day he invited Kyansittha and served him and gave him to eat. When the meal was over, in due time he offered him drinking-water in a waterpot. And lo! from Kyanzittha's mouth the wheel-mark stood out radiant [*Ng; á*]

: *Qā mā d m tī rā nī tī jn: m f jn* and the king saw it and was aghast, and the pot fell back. And the king cried, entreating him: ‘Wilt thou rob me of my throne?’ And the masters of white magic and black [*ā dā p dā f g l g*] spake into his ear, saying, ‘He shall be king in the second generation after thee.’ And the king said: ‘Ye tell me this but now. Alas! I have killed many, thinking he would rob me of my throne!’ And he made Kyanzittha become a layman, that he might attend in his

¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *The Wings to Awakening*, 1997.

² Mingun (2,1:146-47).

³ Pe Maung Tin & Luce (1921–25:79–80).

presence. He took pity on him being his own son, and named and called him Kyanzittha.¹

When Anawratha sought to overcome Utibwa, the Chinese king in Gandala, and instructed the Shwehpyi brothers, ‘he sleepeth guarded by a wheel [kYA RuBmF] man engine worked by water. Suck out all the water with a tube, and mark three lines on Utibwa’s body.’

Revolution (tawhlanyeì)

The above discussion suggests that the mechanism of government is not conceived as independent in and of itself. Rather, these depend on and derive legitimacy from larger ideas about order governed not by ordinary secular laws. The idea that government is maintained, on the one hand, through supernatural magic in order to manipulate *loka*, and on the other through mental culture to transcend *loka* remains with us at all times. Hence, one would expect that the concept of political opposition and resistance would partake of this quality also. Let me consider here to what extent Burmese concept of ‘revolution’ draws on such meanings.

The term for revolution in Burmese is *tawhlanyeì* [တော်လှန်]. *Taw* in this context is an affix that denotes power, sacredness, reverence or royalty, as in ‘sacred relics’ [တိရစ္ဆာန်], ‘holy abbot’ or ‘teacher of royalty’ [ဓာတ်တော်] or ‘royalty’ [တော်]. *Hlan* means to change the position of things, such as ‘to turn inside out’ or ‘to turn up’. It thus means ‘inversion’ or ‘revolution’.

Robert Taylor’s analysis

In his article ‘Burmese concepts of revolution’, Robert Taylor analyses the concept of revolution in the context of modern politics since the 1930s. On the whole, he makes an interesting argument over the distinct uses of the terms *ayeidaw bon*, as a lesser concept for revolution implied in the 1948 struggle for national independence, versus *taw hlan yeì*, the ‘real’ concept of revolution as implied in the 1962 Ne Win revolution. So far, so good. However, Taylor makes this sweeping statement that ‘in the classical, precolonial Theravada Buddhist-derived political thought of Burma, the concept of political and social revolution did not exist’, and that ‘political change meant primarily the substitution of one ruler by another of the same kind.’ While saying this, he proposes no reference to the Buddhist interpretations of the term. At least he could have browsed through Sarkisyanz’ *Buddhist backgrounds of the Burmese revolution* to know that the meanings he attributes to the *taw hlan yeì* concept need some reference to Buddhist ideas in order to work.

As I see it, there are three problems with Taylor’s work. First, his perspective on Burmese politics is blinkered on the Ne Win period, as if 1962 was the magic moment that made everything right. Second, he generalises about other periods as if they were inferior, unchanging, always in turmoil, and so forth, as compared to the post-1962 era, which was revolutionary, well-calculated and pragmatically conceived. Third, the way he illustrates these concepts has remarkably limited depth, as if only Ne Win’s ideas mattered, and as if he had finally re-engineered the Burmese language to correctly express appropriate political ideas.

There follows below a corrective of his arguments that in pre-colonial Buddhist-derived political thought ‘the concept of political and social revolution did not exist.’ I have already shown in chapter 9, how the early personalities advocating *vipassana*, in particular U Hpo Hlaing and Ledi Sayadaw, were characterised as ‘revolutionary’ (*tawhlan yeì*). In chapter 10, I argued that, in the absence of a secular political space, the Sangha is the custodian for harbouring rebellion. Here, I will argue that the concept of ‘revolution’ can be interpreted in a radically different way from Taylor’s approach, taking into consideration a broader range of meanings over a longer period of time. These indicate that revolution has always been there, but it is conceived of as primarily realised in the person, not the collective – this point Taylor misses entirely.

Early uses of taw-hlan-yei

There are at least three early uses of this term. First, the redemption of Vessantara’s children from Zuzaka, the Brahmin, is sometimes referred to as *taw hlan thi*. Prince Vessantara, who was to become Gautama Buddha two lives later, gave his children away to Zuzaka, the Brahmin, in his quest for the perfection of ‘charity’, and said ‘take them as their master’. However, when Vessantara’s parents eventually redeemed the children, it was expressed as *tawhlan thi*, indicating that they had freed the children from ownership by this Brahmin who behaved so despicably towards them.

Second, royalty and monks, i.e. those who are not in bondage to the king, are sometimes able to go

¹ Pe Maung Tin & Luce (1921–25:69).

⁵ Teizàw batha [e te zabaq] (Buddhist University). *Revolution against the self* [A tē tāk hā:]. Rangoon: Ohn Nyunt, n.d., pp. 108.

‘greater’ revolution. I therefore believe Taylor is quite wrong even to characterise the Ne Win period as revolutionary – it was Hpo Hlaing, U Nu, and now Aung San Suu Kyi, who are the revolutionaries. They motivate people, Ne Win did not.

Hence, to understand revolution it is not enough to juxtapose an unchanging pre-colonial Theravada idea void of revolutionary potential against Ne Win's modern idea – the two blend and the later concept feeds on the earlier. Ne Win's concept was never as radical as what Taylor imagined it to be. The revolution was one of the spirit which it was in the interest of the army, in control over *loka*, to deny.

Village Nationalist Associations (Wunthanú Athin)

If government and revolution both address superior spiritual and supernatural orders, and are underpinned by Buddhist practice and secular magic, then we would expect to see this in concrete examples of the organization of Burmese resistance against colonial power. How much of this do we observe here?

Two forms of rebellion

Widespread rebellions occurred during the period between 1930–32. Two types have been identified, both closely related to organizations called *wunthanú athin*.¹

(i) The most effective rebellions were those which also had the strongest *wunthanú* membership. Sometimes *wunthanú athin* were renamed Galon *athin*. This includes the rebellions of: Saya San who was a village *wunthanú* leader; of Yazeinda in Henzada District, which originated with the campaign to collect funds for So Thein GCBA in a *wunthanú* meeting; of U Thattalawka in Yamethin District, where the main leadership was drawn from the chairman and executives, and almost all members of the group were members of local *wunthanú athin*.²

(ii) Other rebellions took place by self-appointed leaders who, though not themselves members, nevertheless worked in close co-operation with *wunthanú*. These include San Pe, Maung Mya, Shwe Yon, Saya Nyan, San Mya, and Pyon Cho in Gyi.

Both rebellions stress (a) the importance of ‘medicine’ (*hsei*) which includes tattooing and making oneself invulnerable to weapons; (b) the revival of kingship, in which the leaders are proclaimed king or prince, whose duty it is to defend and revive Buddhist practice and Buddhist learning.

The earlier philosophy of non-co-operation and self-sufficiency was advocated by the monk U Ottama. U Ottama as early as 1911 had used the concept *wunthanú rehkitá* in his preaching. U Ottama preached that nationalists should wear home-made cloth, and boycott tinned and other goods of foreign manufacture. *Wunthanú Athin* [ဝုၤနၢၤအိၣ်] eventually became the name used for the collection of rural nationalist grass-root village organizations encouraged in the 1920s by the GCBA during its 1921–22 protests against taxation. Operating nation-wide, these organisations were later given a more explicitly political basis by CP Hkin Maung, the publisher of the YMBA's annual conference records and author of political works.³

Beyond providing the rebellions with manpower, the *wunthanú* groups were, furthermore, the grass-root support organizations from which eventually the Thahkin and the secular political parties evolved in the 1930s. Furthermore, they also point at an early concept for the army in Burmese mythology. It has been variously translated as ‘racially faithful ones’⁴ and ‘Nationalist Principles’,⁵ and characterised as a ‘patriotic title’.⁶

Confusion of meanings

Though Burma's nation-wide anti-colonial struggle originated with the *Wunthanú Athin*, I believe that the Buddhist and cultural themes underlying the meaning of *wunthanú* are still misunderstood. First, members of the British colonial regime do not seem to have appreciated its meaning.⁷ Indeed, in my view,

¹ Ino (1987:240–41,239).

² The Court of the Special Judge, Henzada, *Criminal Regular Trial no 1 of 1931, Judgment*, pp. 403–493 In Political and Judicial Correspondence, file no 7349, *Burma rebellion trials and appeals*. India Office Library and Records.

³ See Khin Maung (1924), (Herbert 1982:8–9).

⁴ Ba Maw (1968:7).

⁵ Mendelson (1975:202).

⁶ Ba Maw (1968:426).

⁷ Collis (1953:162) translates *w. a-thin* as ‘Happy Associations’, mistaking *wunthá* [ဝုၤနၢၤ], ‘lineage’ or ‘race’, for *wuntha* [ဝုၤနၢၤ] ‘happiness’: ‘The members of the societies (called *wuntha-nu a-thin*, happy associations) were so muddled and suspicious that it did no good to explain to them that the British had granted dyarchy as a first step towards a full constitution. They did not properly understand what dyarchy was nor what a constitution implied.’ Even the GCBA Collis (1953:163) referred to, mistakenly, as the

⁹ There are three common references incorporating *vamsa anurakkhita*. One is in conjunction with ‘family’ or ‘clan’, namely kulavaṁsaṃ anurakkhituṃ (*sākkhandhavagga-abhinava-jūḥ-2 – Mya.: 259, sākkhandhavagga-aññakathā – Ro.: 262*). Another reference is in conjunction with *ariya* as in *ariyavaṁsassa anurakkhakāṇṇaraddhavatīti* (*nidanavagga-jūḥ – Mya.: 140*). A third reference deals with the Buddha, namely *buddhaṇubuddhavaṁsassa anurakkhakopa* (*visuddhimagga-mahājūḥ-1 – Mya.: 120*).

For this Elder [Buddharakkhita *Võle M*],¹ eight years after his ordination, was once seated in the midst of thirty thousand monks who were possessed of psychic powers [*MQm*] and had come to minister to the sick Elder Mahārohanagutta at Therambathala. He saw the king of the Supanna birds (Galon) [*< KQm*] dashing across the sky with intent to seize the king of the Nagas [*Qm*], who was offering rice-gruel to the Elder, and immediately created [*TQm*] a mountain into which, catching him by the arm, he made the Elder enter. The king of the Supannas struck the mountain and flew away. The Elder said, 'Friends, if Rakkhita had not been there, all of us would have deserved blame' : *Man nSa Fm*...²

The 'King of the Nagas' is associated with guarding enlightenment and the Buddhist realm. He receives the bowls used by a succession of impending Buddhas to feed themselves immediately prior to their enlightenment. Given the critical importance of Buddhas for orderly proceeding of the cosmology (and the political order), he therefore also plays a role guarding the entire cosmology and its inhabitants. Since without the Buddha there would be no Sangha, he is therefore also regarded as protector of the Sangha. Since without Sangha there would be disorder in society, he is regarded as a protector of society also. In this particular example, the King of the Nagas affords the power of protection to the most valuable senior members of the monastic order responsible for maintaining its continuity and for that of the political and social order.

Reinterpreting Burmese political naming

In my view, to understand *wunthanú* properly means to understand government as addressing the machinery considered earlier, namely the higher order of *samsara*. It means to understand the importance of mental culture and supernatural power to the Burmese polity and Burmese genres of history. Indeed, to understand this, in turn, means to understand a range of other symbolic representations used by Burmese political leaders.

The galon-naga opposition. In Burmese myths, the *naga* is closely associated with the earth and water, as opposed to the *galon*, who guards the sky. The Burmese have often represented conflict between the British and the Burmese, on the one hand, and inter-generational conflict between Burmese politicians, on the other hand, in terms of the conflict between the *galon* and the *naga*. For example, U Saw and Ba Maw were conceived as lining up with the *galon* of Saya San against the British representing the *naga*. However, with the new generation of politicians, such as U Nu, the *naga* came to be emphasized, instead, against the *galon* enemy of the earlier generation of politicians.

In Burmese political history, competing political agencies are thus expressed in terms of the tension between the *galon* and the *naga* because these are supernatural agencies that are widely considered to be powerful in affecting the machinery of government and because of their role affecting and facilitate the machinery of *samsara*. This is also evident in the propaganda against Aung San Suu Kyi, where she is portrayed, not as the *galon* but as the Myayngu bird, a dangerous irrelevance to the battle between the *naga* and the *galon*, for its excrement permits the passing of seeds of the Banyan tree that destroys pagodas.³

Patriots (myò-chit). Translation of *wunthanú* as 'patriot' (*myò-chit*) makes a case for seeing continuity of this concept into U Saw's Myochit Party, sometimes translated as Lovers of the Nation, Lovers of the Land⁴ or Love of Country⁵ Party.

Legitimacy and meditation. In the above example, entry into *jhana*, by means of the earth device, permitted the creation of earth to defend continuity of the Buddhist realm. This demonstrates how practising concentration on the earth device and mastery of habits [*ā f*] leads to the attainment of these *jhana*.

There are various examples of the use of *samatha* terminology as permitting the creation of and control over earth, and governing and defending of domain. This has already been noted in Thahkin Kodawhmaing's characterisation of Burmese self-rule and in the concept of Aung San unifying through *samadhi*. I have also already cited the example in which a monk published a leaflet calling for *Wunthanu* members 'to pledge

¹ The term *Ugō M*, has been interpreted to mean 'protected by the Buddha' (Hok Sein 1978:546); here there is some ambiguity as to whether the lineage protects or whether it needs protecting.

i) The term is used in: *Vis. 99, Jataka IV 444, Dhammapada Anguttara*, III 386.

ii) In early Burmese sources *wunthanú* is used in: Kodawhmaing (1927:225), Tin (1931–3: má 186). *Wunthanú rekhhítá* is used: by \ Z [a] fQ in [a] Pá UWN Ym (Rangoon: Thudamawadi, 1931), written in [1837/1199], p. 106; EZ Mm 866–1921) ASX S-IMÉ (Rangoon: Ka-wí, 1934, p. 56).

² This episode is in *Visudhimagga* 99 in Pe Maung Tin (1920–25:178, 435–36) and Mahasi (1979,I:478).

³ Pyitha. 'Democracy equals birdshit?'. *NLM*, 19.08.1996.

⁴ *Myochit*, U Saw's 'Lovers of the Land' party (Tinker 1967:xiii). '*Myochit* (Lovers of the Nation) Party led by the ambitious and thrusting U Saw' (Tinker 1967:5).

⁵ Cady (1958:391).

themselves not to forget the lawlessness of the English, and to meditate throughout the day on the law of impermanence [presumably of British rule].¹ The result is the same – bring us back control over our land.

Freedom Bloc (Htwetyak gaing)

By now it should be evident that there is something in the view that, because government addresses mechanisms of a higher order, mental culture, taken in its broadest sense must play a role in qualification for government. I have already indicated that Aung San's unification of Burma was perceived as due to his *samadhi* or one-pointed mind associated with the practice of concentration meditation (*samatha*). I have also indicated the importance of *byama-so tayà* to national harmony (unity), as pointed out by Thahkin Kodawhmaing. Here, I would like to demonstrate how the Freedom Bloc [တပ်မတော်], that nation-wide alliance against British colonialism that later evolved into the AFPFL, expresses this link also. This illustrates the power of the link between the struggle for 'freedom', in an absolute sense as freedom from *samsara*, and 'national independence', as the freedom to control *samasara*. This freedom, once again, is conceived of as arising in terms of the shape of the circle – in this respect it resembles the ideas we have already looked at, namely the *yantarà*, *mandala*, *sek*, and the *dhamma*. However, it is not just the similarity in shape and the emphasis on mental culture, but to this is added also that it is conceived of as the only 'true revolution', a concept we have also already investigated.

Dr Ba Maw (1893–1977) was a politician who consciously understood the importance of these higher forms of address to ideas of government. Indeed, as a Christian himself, he may be said to have used meditation sect symbolism instrumentally to further his political career.² Though much disliked by many Burmese, and in particular Burmese Buddhists, for his collaboration with the English and the Japanese (he was a 'Them-Burman'), Dr Ba Maw was Burma's most important public leader over a fourteen year period between 1931–45. Ba Maw was born in the Delta town of Maubin on 8 February 1893. His father U Kye, also known as U Shwe Kye, having knowledge of both French and English accompanied the first Burmese mission sent by Mindon to Europe. His father was also author of the Kinwun Mingyi's diaries. He was educated at Rangoon College where he received his BA in 1913, and he received his MA from Calcutta University in 1917. He was at Cambridge University 1922–23, was called to the bar in London in 1924, and received his doctorate in Bordeaux also in 1924. He was the first Burmese to be appointed at Rangoon College, where he was a lecturer in English between 1917–20.

Like Saya San, he joined the GCBA. He qualified as a lawyer in 1924 and first came to prominence in 1931 with his defence of Saya San in the colonial courts. Though he lost the case, 'Ba Maw's attempt to champion the cause greatly enhanced his popularity ... and upon this wave of popularity Dr Ba Maw rose to political fame.'³ In 1936, he founded the Sinyetha (Poor Man's) Party, which was influential in Burmese politics of the 1930s and early 1940s.

He was a leading politician in terms of public office (though not always with the support of the public) until the British returned to Burma in 1945. In the dyarchy cabinet of 1934 he was Minister of Education, and became Burma's first Prime Minister under the new constitution in 1937, a position he held until his government was brought down by the Rangoon University students in February 1939. By October 1939, he became leader of the Freedom Bloc, a new political alliance.

Under the Japanese, he later became Chief Administrator of the Burma Executive Administration in 1 August 1942.⁴ He was appointed formal leader of the indigenous administration of Burma under the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere in August 1943 which lasted until the end of the Japanese occupation in April 1945. He was at that time Head of State (*Adipati*), Prime Minister and Supreme Commander of the Burmese Armed Forces. During his 'coronation ceremony', Thahkin Kodawhmaing gave him the oath of office as if he were a king: '*Adipati Ahinmingyi, Oh King! dost thou promise to rule this land with justice and mercy? O King, dost thou solemnly pledge to rule as your forefathers ruled, upholding the laws of time immemorial?*'⁵

Subsequent to the return of the British, he founded the Mahabama Party in 1946, although the limelight which the thirty Burma Independence Army comrades achieved in the liberation of Burma, and his

¹ *Burma Gazette*, pt. II, 1927, p. 921; Moscotti (1974:183); Cady (1958:261).

² Law Yone (1981).

³ Khin Yi (1988a:14)

⁴ Ba Maw called himself 'Prime Minister' but the Japanese term was 'Chief Administrator' (Maung Maung 1959:56).

⁵ Maung Maung (1959:60–61).

Ba Maw's political career

Second, as a recently qualified lawyer, in 1931 he took on the defence in the colonial courts of this very active element of mysticism in Sava San, who posed the greatest challenge British authorities had met.

Founding the Freedom Bloc

We chose the name of the alliance in the same way, empirically. We realised at once the importance of finding a name that would capture the Burmese masses. It had to be simple, nostalgic, if possible with a touch of race or religion, and inflammatory without being too openly so, in order to keep clear of the new defence regulations.³

The freedom Ba Maw sought to put forward to the public, is the kind won in particular by means of *samatha* or concentration meditation, for Bo Bo Aung, the supernatural character around which the mythology of this movement revolves, is a patron of practitioners of *samatha* who is portrayed usually with a rosary around his neck in a meditation position. Ba Maw's actions reverberated among the members of these cults. For example, in one biography of Bo Bo Aung published in 1939, the year the Freedom Bloc was founded, the Freedom Bloc was identified as appearing 'like the sun and the moon' the promise of benefits for all Buddhists who supported the *sasana* upon the instructions of the 'higher teachers' ၊ N: **ဓိယာ** ။⁵

(~~et al.~~ ~~Mr. Kac~~ ~~Sac~~). Since politics is so closely tied into this *samatha* discourse and the control over *lokai* that this implies, defense of Saya San in the colonial courts launched Ba Maw into his political career. From the Saya San rebellion he learnt many a lesson as to how to masterfully manipulate the Burmese millenarian belief-system surrounding Bo Bo Aung to rally the Burmese peasants for the Freedom Bloc.

¹ Reviewed in *JBRs*, Vol. XV, 1925, pp. 89–91. Of interest also is that his brother, Dr Ba Han, published by 1927 what was probably his doctorate, which he had taken in France, *William Blake: his mysticism*. The latter was reviewed in Furnivall (1927)

² Ba Maw (1968:51–102).

³ Ba Maw (1968:64).

⁴ Tinker (1967:57).

⁵ Sein Gán (n.d.:5)

6. *erew Sra-Mpa klon naza B-er Sra-M klon nka* n.p., 1968 *Kwazip Agp tk nka* Nattalin: Loki Theikpan Office, n.d. The earliest of these was written in 1917 and first published in 1927.

'a new sort of relationship among us, something deep and mystical, like a revolutionary comradeship'. But it was also more than that, for the choice of Burmese name of Freedom Bloc was meant to appeal to the Burmese masses, and yet its political significance be sufficiently impenetrable to the British.¹

Bo Bo Aung

Ba Maw's description of this Burmese dimension to the Freedom Bloc is instructive for it directly associates personal spiritual emancipation with the power of kingship. He begins this description by recounting the story of Bo Bo Aung (see also on Aung San below, who some thought a manifestation of Bo Bo Aung). Towards the end of the 18th century and during the 19th century, there was a friendship between three persons: a) a man who later became a hermit to attain 'emancipation'; b) U Waing who founded a great kingdom; and c) Bo Bo Aung who accomplished both.

Just at that time [of the foundation of the Freedom Bloc] an old Burmese legend mysteriously revived across the country. It relates the story of three school friends who entered into a pact to remain loyal to one another through life. In after years, one of them became a hermit and attained the supreme goal of emancipation; another, U Waing by name, became a king and founded a great kingdom. The third among them, however, proved to be the greatest; he achieved the mystic's dream of complete power and transcendence.

He then goes on to recount the life of Bo Bo Aung, who accomplished both the transformation of himself and the restoration of the new kingdom.

One day the mystic, whose name was Bo Bo Aung, visited the king in his palace in Amarapura. The king resented the existence of anyone in his kingdom who could even remotely be a threat to this life and throne; he believed that Bo Bo Aung's mystical powers were palpably such a threat, and so he decided to do away with him. Knowing the king's thoughts, Bo Bo Aung walked boldly into his presence, wrote a single *O*, which is the Burmese letter called *wa*, on the wall, and defied the king to rub it out before he dared to think that he would succeed in killing him. As soon as the king had rubbed out that *O* two appeared in its place, and the two when rubbed out became four, and four became eight, and so it went on doubling with every attempt till all the walls were covered with the writing. Convinced now that Bo Bo Aung had attained complete mystical powers, the king repented, renounced his throne and family, and became a lone recluse.²

So Ba Maw recounted here how the reigning king gave way to the power of the mystic cum ruler-to-be, and how this disappointed king himself went out into the forest to apply himself to becoming a recluse.

But his talk is of more than mere mystique. Finally, Ba Maw goes on to assess the concrete relevance of bringing Bo Bo Aung into the politics of Burma's liberation as follows:

The story had an astonishing effect; it aroused a great longing for the past, its belief in magic, in mysterious powers and agencies in constantly shaping our lives, in the messianic dream of a being who, having himself attained deliverance, will one day deliver the Burmese from their bondage. A popular song about Bo Bo Aung which appeared at the same time caught on everywhere. It declared that Bo Bo Aung still lived, that he would save the Burmese; through his mighty arts and spells Burmese glory would multiply as unconquerably as Bo Bo Aung's *wa*'s did once.³

This concentration meditation symbolism was truly a significant political weapon as it rallied the Burmese masses.

The Bo Bo Aung mystique was wonderful material for us and, by its appearance at that moment, convinced large numbers among the unbelieving that Bo Bo Aung or some mystical power he symbolised was preparing to help the Burmese. I decided that the alliance must get Bo Bo Aung and his innumerable following on its side, and so I proposed that we call the alliance *Htwet Yat Gaing*. U Nu, who is very much inclined to believe in the occult supported me. The rest left it to me, and so that name was adopted with results which were almost as magical as Bo Bo Aung's magic itself. The strength of the alliance increased like his *wa*'s, especially in the monasteries and rural areas where the ancient legends still live on as potently as ever. The Sinyetha Party, with its strong monastic element, sang Bo Bo Aung's song at its mass meetings. It also dug up old oracular sayings which were believed to contain deeply veiled meanings and predictions, always taking care of course that these sayings could be made to mean that British rule would end and the Burmese would be free again. They stirred up the most powerful folk memories and yearnings.

With the strength of this symbolism, 'Mandalay was ours; and by the time we got back to Rangoon, the Freedom Bloc had become a full-scale national movement and force'.⁴

Subsequently, during the June 1940 Sinyetha Conference in Mandalay, as Ba Maw recounted the history of the Freedom Bloc, 'a compulsion stronger than ourselves seemed to be driving us like a fate into the vortex of the world storm' so that he 'spoke for the first time of a resort to force'.

'Cowards and fools,' I said, 'according to the intelligence reports, call us fools for talking of force when we have nothing in our hands, no guns, not even sharp knives or needles. Don't believe them; they will give you every reason for doing nothing, for

¹ Ba Maw (1968:67–71, 92–94, 139).

² Ba Maw (1968:67–68).

³ For the Bo Bo Aung song, composed by Khin Maung Yin, see *emimikvmykpkssskt'pazatiant:qkt'nb:rnkna qhmcx 1981xmkNA-98-99x*

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 71.

just talking about freedom and doing nothing to gain it. I tell you that there will be plenty of weapons in this war. Weapons are not only those you make for yourselves; they are also those which come into your hands without your making them. Have no fear. Look at your hands. They are empty now. But they won't be empty always.' Then after a pause to obtain the greatest effect, I said, 'Bo Bo Aung will give us all we need.'

The [colonial] intelligence men felt cheated, but the people who heard the mystical name suddenly uttered knew the meaning and roared in excitement. After that speech there was no holding back those who spoke after me night after night. It was as if you watched a people's struggle taking form and shape under your very eyes. It is said that when historically static nations start to move forward they do so in sudden leaps and convulsions. The Burmese at that moment were almost visibly tucking up their loin cloths, as we say in Burmese, to take such a leap forward.

Hence this story about the supernatural powers of Bo Bo Aung provides the link between leadership and the masses. Almost as soon as he gave this speech, an incident occurred which demonstrates, as Ba Maw himself said, 'how wide the leap [of the masses] was'.

The incident occurred on the first night of the conference. I had mentioned in my speech that Burmese strength would multiply like Bo Bo Aung's song and the large crowd listened enthralled. The next morning some of the early worshippers at Maha-myat-muni Pagoda, the most famous shrine in Mandalay, perhaps still dreamy with the words and song they had heard at the meeting the previous night, saw in the wind-blown light of the candle flames faint circles glowing on the soft and uneven gold of the great Buddha image. What some saw at first all began to see in time, and the number of circles also began to grow. The story went quickly round that Bo Bo Aung's O's had appeared at the most sacred pagoda in the town. Our conference was at once called Bo Bo Aung's Conference.¹

Ba Maw recounts how various 'cryptic signs and sayings' appeared spontaneously which 'were believed to foretell the defeat of the British and their departure from Burma'.² At this very time of mass unrest, it dawned on Ba Maw that 'the mass emotions ... would now have to be controlled and directed properly', for if it should 'get out of hand ... too soon', this 'could be a serious setback for our cause and struggle'.

I therefore decided to change the power structure of my party into a dictatorship. The conference had convinced me that a revolutionary situation was definitely shaping so that the party would have to get ready to meet it in the revolutionary way; that is, by a concentration of power and leadership during the struggle. Every revolution I know has had to resort to such a form of authoritarian leadership during a transitional period.³

This need for the application of a 'concentration of power' was his justification for nominating himself as a 'dictator' ('Lord of ana' *Aa%aRtE*), he needed to make sure that the energies aroused by this concentration symbolism would be properly orchestrated.

Ba Maw, in his conversation with Aung San before the conference, indicated that the appeal of the *Burmese Freedom Bloc* was the link between political leadership and the Burmese masses, necessary for a true revolution, as opposed to a conspiracy (leadership only) or an insurrection (the masses only).⁴ The significance of this concentration symbolism for the success of a true 'revolution' should not be underestimated:⁵ its power, of course, is derived from its capability as a technique to transform both the mental defilements in the person and the world, and both the mystic and the king.

It is clear that the story of *htwetyak pauk* is recognized in the Burmese encyclopaedia as a story which contributed to the revolutionary ideal of Burma's liberation from the British, for it is said that

In the struggle to win back the freedom (*lutlakyei*) Burma had lost: the YMBA and the GCBA; the student strike; the 1930 Saya San led revolution (*tawhlanyeï*) of the hill people and peasants; the 1938 oil strike by the workers led by Thahkin Bò Hlá Aung; the Burma Freedom Bloc (*bama htwetyakgaing*); the Burma Revolutionary Party (Bama Tawhlanyeï Pati) – these are all significant mile-stones in the history of Burma's revolution (*tawhlanyeï*).⁶

In his 'Sub-commentary on the red dragon (or serpent)' (*Nagà tika*), Kodawhmaing suggested that Dr Ba Maw 'was the chief of the Burma *htwetyat*-sect', the Burmese workers, peasants and students were its

¹ This is confirmed by Saw Tun (1961) who wrote: 'I remembered clearly in 1940, just before I left Burma for the United States, there was a stir because "O"s were supposed to have appeared on the pagodas, on the statues of Buddha and the sacred banyan trees. The Burman interpreted this as a sign of approaching freedom from British domination.' (See also Mya Maung (1991:226)).

² Ba Maw (1968:94). It goes like this: 'Upon the fishery [Ava = mouth of fishery] the *hintha* bird [the Mons] will descend; the *hintha* will be shot by the hunter [the last Burmese dynasty began with Alaunhpaya from a village called "Hunter"]; the hunter will be struck down by the umbrella rod [the English]; the umbrella rod will be shattered by the lightning [the Japanese, Mogyo, the name later given to Suzuki, commander of the unit liberating Burma].' Colonel Suzuki (alias Minami), received the name of 'thunderbolt' in adaptation from this saying as a symbol of the destruction of British rule. Another version is that the British destroyed the Shwedagon during the Anglo-Burman War I of 1824, and was thus symbolic of the fall of Burmese royalty (Cady 1958:437). However, Bo Mogyo was popularly perceived as the son of the late Prince of Myingun who had returned to liberate the Burmans (Nu 1954c:20,24; Tun Pe 1949:43–44; Cady 1958:437).

³ Ba Maw (1967:95).

⁴ Ba Maw (1968:74).

⁵ See Taylor (1986) for a comparison between the two concepts of revolution of Saya San and Nei Win.

⁶ MSK (1954–76,10:22).

members, and Aung San was the Deputy Chief. For the aforementioned, 'England's hardship is Burma's chance' (*Ingaileik ahket bama achyek*) during which 'under the flag of Burma's *htwetyak gaing* Burma's political *gaing* [note: he uses sect as opposed to party] will unite'.¹ Kodawhmaing wrote of uniting the Thakins and the Dó-ba-ma into concentration sects (*htwet-yak gaing*). Nu also attributes reference to the concentration sects to Dr Ba Maw.² Thahkin Kodawhmaing, who already characterised himself as a yogi, seemed quite prepared to interpret this characterisation seriously in terms of the authority concentration meditation conveys over space, much as a yogi is no longer confined to place or constrained in movement.

The Japanese occupation of Burma began in December 1941, and was fully completed by the end of May 1942. On 1 August that year, Ba Maw was appointed head of the executive government (*Ana shin*). His cabinet replaced the earlier unsuccessful *Baho* government, constituted mainly by members of the Burma Independence Army. Ba Maw adopted royal airs, also employed by U Chit Hlaing, elected president of the GCBA,³ Saya San, U Saw and his 'Patriot' (*Myòchit*) Party. This indicates how closely tied are attributes of kingship and leadership to mastery of *yantara*, *sek* and *loka*.

By December 1942, Ba Maw was somewhat jealous at the success of the independent East Asia Youth League which had been set up by Judson College graduates on 28 June 1942. This was the biggest youth organization in the country and concerned itself entirely with non-political measures such as safety shelters, sanitation measures and library and education activities, which had received the support of the Japanese. He sought to bring this youth league under his own official National Service Association (*Myanma Wunthanú Ahpwé*), also known as the Circle Army (*Wa Tat*), launched in December 1942. As Cady put it,

Dr Ba Maw's 'Circle Army' or *Wa Tat* was based on a Burmese legend according to which a magician astrologer demonstrated his superiority over the king by drawing a circle which multiplied itself in spite of royal efforts to erase it. The circles of service units should likewise magically multiply. The idea was cleverly conceived, but the needed spirit was lacking.⁴

It is evident from his book that he was unsuccessful this time in adapting the concentration symbolism to his political ambitions, unlike 1939. He declines to mention this episode in his book.⁵

However, Ba Maw had a more comprehensive vision of what *samatha* is about. When he developed the New Order Plan he said that 'we must substantiate our independence', declaring:

This [substantiation of independence] can be done only by action; and we who have got the power must act. Even action is not enough, for there must be quick results as well. In these breakneck days when, speaking quite plainly, a world revolution is taking place and everything is in the melting pot, only action and its results matter, revolutionary action to suit revolutionary times ... And behind the revolutionary action there must always be the revolutionary will as the driving force. Our old world has gone to pieces and no political magic root or spell exists which can put it together again or get us safely out of it. Only action will do it, our action. A revolutionary period, as someone has said, has no use for witch doctors ...

We have therefore accepted today a revolutionary task rather than an office. That is the right way of looking at ourselves in the service of a state which has not only won its independence out of a war but is also fighting a war to save that independence from the fires of a world conflagration ...

If 'witchdoctors' were no longer of any use in actually completing the revolutionary task, nevertheless, the need to plan involved much the same skill as Saya San had demonstrated in his rebellion – the skill of concentration (*samatha*, *samadhi*) but placed beyond the reach of *loki pañña*. He proceeded to declare:

All planning is concentration: of power and control, of action, of means and ends. Looking at it as a structure, a plan just follows this theory logically to the end, and by doing so generates its own power. The ground elements in planning are really concentration in one form or another, mass organisations, national unity, mobilisation of wealth and labour, collective action, leadership and so on ...⁶

Ba Maw found planning to be an activity of 'concentration'. The association between concentration, nationalism and the circle (or *yantara*, *cakka*, or Bo Bo's *wa*) is complete when we consider how the chapters of Ba Maw's last book are punctuated by the circle with the peacock at the centre. After declaring that the world and truth are 'round', where the West sees reality 'as a being, changeless and individual', the East sees it 'as a transcendental ever-changing flow and becoming' through the cycle of rebirth; in his conclusion he ends on the following reflexive note about this roundness of truth.

¹ Thahkin Kodawhmaing (1938) cited in Myín Hswei (1977:579–91).

² 'The leaders of Dr Ba Maw's Sinyetha Party and the thakins conferred among themselves several times and decided to form a Freedom Bloc. This was a brainchild of Thakin Aung San's which Dr Ba Maw christened Htwet-Yat Gaing (a pun on a mystical sect and singularly appropriate because it combined the words "out" and "stand" and could thus be rendered in English as the Standouts)' (Nu 1975:100).

³ Sarkisyanz (1965:132).

⁴ Cady (1958:451n70,465). The League did eventually join the Antifascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) in late 1944.

⁵ Tinker (1983–84,1:67).

⁶ Ba Maw (1968:281).

My last words at this moment are that we should not go awandering again after those false gods who have clearly messed up the world and our lives too, but to search the atlas diligently and reverently and learn the truth from its maps and facts, especially from the greatest fact of all, that the earth and its truths are round, that nothing is true by itself but only as part of a whole, and that whole is made up of opposites that balance and complete each other.¹

These last words were issued from Sugamo prison in Japan, where Ba Maw was incarcerated by the British between December 1945 and July 1946 after the allied invasion of Japan. This is reminiscent of Manu's attempt to find the truth about the universe in concentration meditation while focusing on the earth *kasina*. Manu, with whom he shared the legal profession, had also been disappointed with his wrongful judgements which prompted him to renew his familiarity with the world, the cosmos. Ba Maw was further imprisoned during the U Nu regime, between August 1947 and July 1948, and imprisoned again by the Ne Win regime in May 1966 until 1968. He died in 1977.

The Martyr (Azani)

So far I have demonstrated that machinery of government is not conceived of as addressing primarily a secular world. It addresses the world of *samsara* and of the three *loka*. Since mental culture brings superior vision of the cosmological laws, mental culture is the ultimate qualification for leadership. The core values of revolution are thus mental culture mixed in with magic for added control over *loka*.

Azani [အာဇာနည်], the Burmese concept of martyr, is commonly invoked in political songs and documents that celebrate and seek to encourage the right state of mind for the fight for national independence and freedom. However, it is as well to point out some significant differences in the Burmese Buddhist concept from its Christian counterpart.

The Christian concept of the saint is that of a martyr, a term which also came to have important political connotations. In Christianity this has two meanings. On the one hand, the early meaning was 'witness'. Later, the concept came to signify 'suffering', the ability to withstand great hardship and death in order to witness the truth according to one's convictions. As Tambiah points out, this change in meaning is to some extent bound up with the changes in the religion itself. In the early phase of Christianity, establishing the truth of religion was the most important, while in later times it was the ability to identify with a model Christian life placed under duress.

Today, *azani* is commonly glossed as a 'person with discrimination and courage of his convictions' or 'hero who is prepared to sacrifice his life for a good cause'. However, this is an inaccurate and incomplete meaning that surrenders too early to the Christian connotations of martyr. This glosses over its particular Burmese Buddhist meanings. The Buddhist concept of saint is not primarily that of witness or sufferer, but that of a renouncer engaged in mental culture. The relics are not of those who suffered a violent death in witness to conviction, but the relics of ascetics practising mental culture and compassion. The political overtones of this concept are also different.

Azani is being used, of course, to refer to those who die as the result of the political struggle. Ba Yin describes U Sein Hla Aung, the nationalist monk U Ottama's defence lawyer, as *azani* after he died of dysentery. There are various current classifications of the *azani*. The Nine *Azani* refers to Aung San and his eight cabinet colleagues who were assassinated, and whose remains were placed in the Rangoon Martyrs' Mausoleum (Azani Beikman). The Seventeen *Azani* arose from the 1920 demonstrations in Mandalay. Ne Win gave this concept an entirely different slant when he attempted to coin a new socialist vocabulary by referring to the 'worker *azani*' [အလုပ်သမားအာဇာနည်].²

However, it is more difficult to explain why monks who do not die for a political cause, but merely successfully pass a difficult examination should be designated an *azani*. Furthermore, why would (1) the lion (2) the elephant (3) the horse³ (4) the cow (5) the human and (6) the *yahanda* be grouped together as the Six *Azani*? To understand this we must reveal further layers of meaning.

The Six *Azani* are also known as 'the six creatures able to tell the truth about cause and effect without fear' [မေ့လျော့စရာမရှိဘဲ အကြောင်းသိရသူများ] [မေ့လျော့စရာမရှိဘဲ အကြောင်းသိရသူများ]. The sixth has a special status as the only one who was fearless as a result of being free from mental defilements. The other five, however, lose their fear for the wrong reasons, namely as the result of having a strong 'self view' [အာရုံစိုက်မှု].

¹ Ba Maw (1968:42).

² Maung Maung (1969b: ၁၁၁).

³ အာဇာနည် (Pali အာဇာနည်, supernatural), n. a kind of fabulous horse (Judson :123).

and ‘false view of individuality’ [qk̥yɔ̃m̥].¹ In all cases, however, they imply that mental and physical training is involved across lives, which ultimately produces a gifted person whose physique and mind work perfectly in tandem.

This idea of *azani* implies a degree of control over cosmology. For example, the monk-author Shin Maharatathara wrote ‘as for human *azani*, men are not tied to the six spirit heavens’ [I ʔazanv̥k̥ eyak̥k̥q̥v̥l̥ ʔẽk̥ak̥p̥v̥h̥t̥k̥p̥mk̥pel̥ p̥k̥],² indicating that human *azani* could attain to the Brahma heavens that lie above the human realm and the six deva realms. Thahkin Kodawhmaing, furthermore, subscribes to the view that the practices suited to *azani* themselves propel them to the higher heavens. He wrote that ‘*azani* are of course the *byama-so* sects’ [Aazanv̥k̥ ʔh̥s̥ĩg̥ʔẽt̥p̥k̥], underlining the importance of the *byama-so* ‘social’ meditations to the nation and to national unity.³

A more accurate rendering, and more in-keeping with its original meaning as ‘training’, is the definition of *azani* as ‘one who is capable of bold action because of the ability to instantaneously discriminate the proper from the improper’ [q̥h̥q̥k̥k̥p̥k̥t̥q̥j̥ r̥p̥s̥ʔẽs̥ak̥h̥ẽn̥q̥j̥]. It means ‘one who knows instantaneously’ as derived from ‘swiftly’ [I ʔad̥ ʔh̥n̥s̥ʔẽ Pali a Aa] and ‘one who knows’ [q̥it̥ t̥q̥j̥ Pali janiya zanỹ].⁴

Derived from Pali *a-ja-niya* [Aazaenỹ] the concept is related to Sanskrit *ajati* ‘good birth’ or ‘thoroughbred’ (*a* plus *jan*), but Buddhaghosa associated its Buddhist meaning with ‘to learn’, ‘to be trained’ (*a* plus *jñā-*). The contracted form *ajañña* was almost exclusively used for thoroughbred horses, also applied metaphorically to a man of noble race, namely ‘a steed of man’ (*purisajañña*).⁵

In Part II Concentration (*samadhi*) *Visudhimagga* there is Chapter III entitled ‘Exposition of the acceptance of the subjects of meditation.’ In Section IX on ‘the book’, the penultimate impediment of the Ten Impediments is the development of concentration (the tenth is psychic powers). The Elder Abhaya (The Fearless), a specialist in meditation, wished to expound the Tipitaka without learning the commentaries. His recitations were rejected by the monks as he had evidently not learnt them from teachers. He was advised to learn the commentaries from the Elder Mahadhammarakkhita who knew the whole scriptures, where he went with five hundred monks. Abhaya recited by day and Mahadhammarakkhita explained by night. At the end, Mahadhammarakkhita is persuaded that mental culture is the ultimate route to knowledge and he becomes an *azani*.

And sitting down on a mat in the presence of the Elder Abhaya, he said, ‘Friend, teach me a subject of meditation.’ ‘Sir, what do you say? Is it not to you that I have been listener? What shall I teach that is not known to you?’ The Elder said to him, ‘Friend, different is the path if thou hast been along it before.’ It is said that the Elder Abhaya then became a streamwinner. And he gave him a subject of meditation, and after his return heard that the Elder had passed utterly away while reciting the Law at Lohapasada. Having heard it he called for his robe, attired himself and said, ‘Friends, befitting is the path of Saintship [*Azani* Martyrdom] to our teacher [c̥ā̃t̥ĩt̥ĩf̥ Srãq̥v̥p̥ac̥(̃ v̥)ʔẽp̥ac̥t̥f̥x̥ Aazanv̥h̥ẽTr̥(̃ v̥)ʔs̥ə̃p̥f̥x̥]. Our teacher, friend, was upright, noble. In the presence of his own pupil in the Law he sat on a mat and said, ‘Teach me a subject of meditation.’ Friends, befitting is the path of Saintship [*Arahat*] for the Elder [Ar̥h̥t̥ĩq̥v̥l̥ ʔk̥p̥t̥l̥ ʔq̥v̥]. To such as these study is no impediment.’⁶

Azani in this context, therefore, refers to the correct perception of the importance of meditation training, and actual success in its practice (as opposed to scriptural learning) prior to death. The meaning was evidently not lost on the Ne Win regime, since Maung Maung couched Ne Win’s message from the very beginning as the ‘working *azani*’, who, though aiming for *nibbana*, must work to fill their stomachs first.⁷ The journey through *samsara* by the individual, the community and the nation is here subordinated to their basic needs of food and shelter that underpin spiritual quest in mental culture. This divides the spiritual quest into two phases, but unlike the U Nu government, who thought of it all as one path on the way to a final goal, the spiritual phase lies outside government’s immediate brief. Nevertheless it needs to be addressed in advance as an ultimate goal of the purpose of human life and human politics – such is the machinery of government that must address the machinery of *samsara*. This can never be a secular politics as we know it. To pretend it is, as Taylor did, is to fundamentally misinterpret the broader Burmese concept of State.

¹ ʔd̥k̥g̥p̥f̥x̥ p̥k̥ 76 ʔk̥ 51ʔ s̥t̥k̥g̥p̥f̥x̥ ʔk̥ 292; Awbatha (1975:72).

² ʔẽt̥ac̥k̥p̥(109)

³ ʔm̥ĩq̥ẽt̥g̥ ʔp̥n̥lẽl̥ :K̥h̥j̥k̥h̥; Myint Hswei (1977:540).

⁴ Myint Hswei (1977:422–423).

⁵ S III.91; *Th* I, 1084; *Sn* 544; *Vv* A 9.

⁶ Pe Maung Tin (1921–25:112–13); Mahasi, 1:304

⁷ See introduction in Maung Maung (1969b).

Chapter 12

Aung San and the 'religion question'

So far, I have argued that the practices that make up mental culture are the key concepts that underlie Burmese political culture. In the analogy between body, prison and state as all subject to *samsara*, the solution to realistic work with these entities is to purify the politician's mind so that he or she may see truth in the world and take the right action. Neither government, nor revolution, can be based on anything other in popular perception. However, these would be nothing but concepts were it not for the personalities and their ideas that brought them to life in this century of struggle for freedom and national independence. I have shown that preoccupation with mental culture on the part of the political leadership in Burma is the rule, not the exception. To understand both the army and the NLD, we cannot avoid coming to terms with Aung San, the spiritual father of both. At first sight, taking into account Aung San's treatment by some Western analysts, the NLD is entirely out of kilter with Aung San on the question of religion. However, as I will show, a closer analysis of the Burmese version of his speeches tells us a very different story about Aung San that seems to have eluded those who relied on the English versions.

We already know something about the way he framed his politics in terms of Buddhism for, as already noted, Aung San followed the nationalist monk U Wisara in expressing national independence in terms of *loki nibbana*. He also followed Thahkin Kodawhmaing's emphasis on *byama-so tayà*. Aung San's unification is conceived of as having been accomplished through his *samadhi*. The question arises, how did Aung San stand on the issue of religion. How did he distinguish between mental culture and culture, and to what extent did Buddhism play a role in his political philosophy? In what way did he meet his fate of having become a 'martyr' in the specifically Buddhist sense of *azani*?

'Religion' in Aung San's speeches

General Aung San was the leading young politician of Burma during the turbulent eight-year period 1939–47. He has so far been portrayed as making a firm division between 'religion' (including Buddhism) and 'politics'. Silverstein, in his second and latest edition of *The political legacy of Aung San*, describes Aung San as having a belief in 'the clear separation between politics and religion', as 'never having identified with the Buddhist political leaders', and as not employing 'religion in the service of politics', so that 'under his leadership, the movement was predominantly secular and impartial on the religious issue'.

Such views of Aung San's politics are commonly held among western scholars. For example, Cady argued that Aung San was a popular hero in his own right who did not need or want religious support.¹ Largely because U Nu, Aung San's successor, placed such great emphasis on Buddhism, its role in Aung San's politics has usually been dismissed out of hand. Brohm finds that Aung San 'was never noted for any outstanding religiosity of his own'.² Even Mendelson finds that Aung San was 'thoroughly unsympathetic to any political role whatsoever being played by members of the Order, and there are some indications that he wanted to limit recruitment to the Sangha and control it very severely'.³

Of course, Aung San, when compared to U Nu for example, was not given to grand public expressions of devotion to Buddhism, nor was he known for elaborating at great length on Buddhist ideas in his speeches, nor for ostentatiously practising personal Buddhist mental culture. He did not develop a complete Buddhist ideology of government the way U Nu did. Also, it is quite clear from his earliest speeches that he did indeed argue for some sort of a boundary between Buddhism and politics. Already in the early 1930s, during a student debate at Rangoon University, he argued for the motion proposed by his elder brother that monks should not participate in politics.⁴ Also, as we will see, he argued during the Japanese occupation for a limit on recruitment to the Sangha. Finally, he is known to have regularly emphasized freedom of religion,⁵ though in this respect he is not particularly different, as U Nu did so too.

Though both accepted the involvement of monks in pre-independence politics, some have argued that

¹ Cady (1953:156), Brohm (1957:370).

² Brohm (1957:370).

³ Mendelson (1975:262).

⁴ ASSK (1991:7).

⁵ e.g. *esaka: l aqkicp'j Kkcsu bmaerleSact'c'sa*, 09.02.1947; Sagaing Han Tin (1975:259).

the most important difference between U Nu and Aung San's attitude towards monk involvement in politics is that Aung San felt it would be 'anti-modern', whereas U Nu held that it would be detrimental to the purity of the Sangha.¹

As part of the Dobama heritage of political leadership, Aung San was critical of the early YMBA forms of Buddhist leadership, as it seemed to lack an understanding of the role non-Buddhist political revolutionary philosophies played in uprisings and wars internationally, and the monks who headed these movements were too backward-looking. In particular, he was critical of the YMBA rally cries 'our race, our religion, our language!', which he said 'have gone obsolete now', as 'race' has no tests, and religion should be 'a matter of individual conscience'.² He repeated this, asking whether politics is 'slogan-shouting alone, "race, religion, language," as we used to shout?'. And he answered

Religion is a matter of individual conscience, while politics is social science. We must see to it that the individual enjoys his rights, including the right to freedom of religious belief and worship. We must draw a clear line between politics and religion because the two are not one and the same thing. If we mix religion with politics, then we offend the spirit of religion itself. Politics is pure secular science.³

However, scepticism about the role of Buddhism in politics, and in particular monks in politics, was extremely prevalent among Burma's younger modernist generation of political leaders right up until July 1948 shortly after Aung San's assassination. U Nu is widely regarded as an advocate of Buddhism in politics, and there is no doubt that he was after World War II a more active Buddhist than Aung San was before he met his death. Nevertheless, we must remember that even U Nu was openly critical of monk behaviour in his early days, as was clear from his 1937 preface to the book *Modern Monk* (*Tet Hpongyi*).⁴ By 1954 he had not only withdrawn his preface, but he had even banned the book. He did not advocate a direct role of Buddhism in government until after national independence was attained. Brohm points out that until 1948 there was no evidence whatsoever in U Nu's speeches or his appointments that he wanted to involve Buddhism in national politics. The decisive moment was the second split of the AFPFL in July 1948, which took place after Aung San's assassination. The increased emphasis on Buddhism in Burmese politics ensued from the weakening in party unity.

Had Aung San been alive at the time of the second AFPFL split, he too may have responded to the need to solidify his power base. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Aung San was more given to employing Buddhist terminology after he himself expelled the communists from the AFPFL in the first AFPFL split in October 1946.

Silverstein argues that 'Buddhism – an integral part of Burmese tradition – did not provide Aung San with a dominant theme in his political thought, as it did with several of his contemporaries, nor did it provide a basis for his speeches and actions'.⁵ In the absence of a detailed analysis of his speeches delivered in Burmese, however, which is the language he used to address the Burmese people, it is difficult to say exactly what role Buddhism or religion in general played in his politics. There is a wide gap in the way material appearing in the two languages turns out to use a very different language and vocabulary. This is nowhere more apparent than in Maung Maung's biography of Ne Win which appeared in both languages at the same time in the year 1969. The English version is much shorter than the Burmese (323 pages as against 469 pages in Burmese) and is less clearly divided (10 as against 21 sections in Burmese), but it eliminates much of Maung Maung's attempt to justify Ne Win through internal cultural criteria. The result is that Ne Win comes across in the English version as a secular pragmatic person, but in the Burmese version he comes out as a man with Buddhist sentiments (such as his *cetana* with which the Burmese version begins and ends but the English never even mentions). To interpret Ne Win's legacy on the basis of the English rendering of his life is therefore to leave out the vernacular Burmese political values from analysis.

The lack of attention paid by western academics to Aung San's Burmese writings, and a lack of attention to shifts in opinions as these young nationalists matured is, in my view, the principal reason why his politics has been fundamentally misunderstood. In saying this I am not arguing that he was an extremely devout Buddhist; I am arguing that he could not but help bring Buddhist sentiment into his speeches, if only because he was addressing Burmese people, the majority of whom are Buddhist, and because his ultimate

¹ Guyot (1966:28n2). She cites in particular Nu (1954f:90–92).

² 'Let us unite' (11.02.1947) in Maung Maung (1962:123).

³ 'Problems for Burma's freedom' (20.01.1946) in Silverstein (1993:96).

⁴ Nu (1937), Brohm (1957:375–76), Mendelson (1975:214–21),

⁵ Silverstein (1993:5–6).

goal was socialism after democracy, and socialism had been translated into Burmese by Buddhist concepts.

We know that as a youth he had Buddhist sentiments, was educated in a Buddhist monastery, and wanted to ordain a monk and learnt Pali.¹ Indeed, Aung San Suu Kyi points out that though popular opinion often casts Aung San ‘in the role of a completely political animal’, he in fact ‘had a deep and abiding interest in religion’.² At the beginning of his days at Rangoon University, he admired U Lawkanatha, an Italian Buddhist monk. And while himself a monk between 1932–33, he asked his mother whether he could follow Lawkanatha. Also,

Even after he [Aung San] had entered the world of student politics which was to absorb him so completely, he wrote to one of his closest friends of his ‘pilgrimage in quest of Truth and Perfection’ and of his conscious striving after ‘sincerity in thought, word and deed’. He also expressed his concern over the ‘spiritual vacuum ... among our youth’ and the fear that ‘unless we brace ourselves to withstand the tide ... we will soon be spiritual bankrupts *par excellence*’.³

One observer has argued that to the Burmese ‘Buddhism was in fact the very ethos of the traditional Burmese state and culture’.⁴ This would mean that a modern Burmese politician would have to come to terms with this political Buddhist heritage in his speeches. Though much has been published on Aung San, so far no one has raised a distinction between the English and the Burmese versions of his speeches and writings. To suggest that Aung San merely confronted Buddhism is to oversimplify his position on this matter. As I will show below, he did indeed use many Buddhist terms and expressions in his Burmese speeches, but of these we find little or no trace in their English versions. So far, no analysis has been performed on the Burmese terminology in his speeches, and to understand his views more fully, we need to look more closely at the particular Burmese expressions he used. In particular I take issue on the following points.

(1) The diverse Burmese terminology for ‘Buddhism’ and ‘religion’ have been translated into singular concepts, and their nuances have been lost. The English versions cannot be relied upon for judgments about Aung San’s stance on Buddhism and religion in general. In Aung San’s view, some kinds of high Buddhist practice are outside the category ‘religion’.

(2) Silverstein has overlooked the fundamental importance of pagoda politics. Aung San’s most important political speeches were given at the Shwedagon Pagoda. The backdrop of the pagoda lent the liberation struggle legitimacy. Pagoda building and uniting in joint acts of merit remain important concepts in the idea of national ‘unity’ as expressed by Aung San. Translations of the speech titles of the speeches into English have sometimes removed the Buddhist ambience. For example, the English title ‘Problems for Burma’s Freedom’ is very different from the original Burmese title ‘Speech on the Middle [Shwedagon] Platform’ [အလယ်မြို့မိန့်ကြားခြင်း].

(3) Silverstein has argued that Aung San believed ‘monks should have no political role in Burma’.⁵ Such is a rash judgment, and Aung San had a much more complex perspective on this issue.

(a) First, we cannot collapse Aung San’s views on Buddhism into a singular judgment applicable to his whole life. He seems to have held different views of the role of Buddhism depending on the political conditions. The assertion that Aung San did not identify with the cause of Buddhist leaders is misinformed, as he did refer appreciatively to political monks leading the struggle against British colonialism, such as Ottama and U Wizara, as martyrs [အာဇာနည်များ].

(b) Second, Aung San believed that certain monk activities constituted what he termed the ‘highest form of politics’. Aung San saw the period approaching national independence as inaugurating an era in which Buddhist monks should start to play a different role in politics. The ‘highest form of politics’ he envisaged monks engaging in was the improvement in the overall harmony and tolerance of difference amongst the general population by preaching the practice of the higher forms of mental culture, such as *byama-so tayà* and *metta*. These would foster national unity everyone craved for.

(c) Third, he uses party unity by analogy of harmony within the Sangha by expelling ‘false’ monks.

(7) The Burmese concept for ‘martyr’ [အာဇာနည်] which Aung San used for the heroes of the past

¹ ASSK (1991:188) describes Aung San as ‘the product of a Buddhist monastery school’, who ‘would have acquired early the concept of strength as a mental and spiritual force.’

² ASSK (1991:8).

³ Aung San, letters to Tin Aung c. 1935, extracts quoted in Tin Aung, ‘My recollections of Bogyoke Aung San’, *Guardian* (Rangoon), August 1971, p. 15; ASSK (1991:8); Aung Thàn (1964:19).

⁴ Brohm (1957:363).

⁵ Silverstein (1993:6).

including 'political monks', and which was used for himself by his admirers, has important meanings in Buddhism in respect of mental training in the sense of the practice of mental culture. This has important hitherto unexplored Buddhist dimensions.

(8) Silverstein presents Aung San as having a 'secular' view of politics, much as political scientists might have today. However, for Aung San 'secular' means *loki* [el ak] and calls forth its opposite 'transcendental' *lokuttara* [el akṭṭa], which is associated with the highest forms of mental culture in Buddhism. The former he regarded as a social goal involving social means, whereas the latter he regarded as an individual quest based on individual means. My view is that in his designation of politics as 'secular', Aung San was primarily concerned with distinguishing one kind of secularity from another – he argued against certain prevalent interpretations of politics which linked it to low forms of magic (*loki pañña*). He was against interference in politics by certain kinds of 'contaminated' Buddhism, as oppose to the higher forms of Buddhist practice with social implications, such as *byama-so tayà* mental culture, which he admired and observed as the most vital component in the politics of a socialist society, indeed, as *representing* socialism.

(9) Aung San often used small Pali phrases with Buddhist implications either in the main body of his speech or to conclude (e.g. *tumhe ganhatha*,¹ may you be free from danger [Aewraehant vera-hontu]).²

(10) Aung San, like all politicians, needed journalists to mediate and translate his ideas into popular concepts to broaden and deepen their appeal to the masses. It could be said that the public perception of Aung San as a nationalist politician was considerably influenced by the writings and speeches of Thahkin Kodawhmaing in particular, and by Ba Maw's support. They skilfully translated Aung San's politics into traditional symbolism.

Since politics is a 'mundane' affair that – unlike the issue of *nibbana* – does not excite the Burmese people, what we discover in Aung San's speeches is a struggle to find respectability for politics in the Burmese system of thought. He takes as his reference two indigenous models for political behaviour. The highest politics is historically *lokuttara* politics, which takes as a reference point the attainment of *nibbana*, conceived in terms of monastic support and pagoda building, but primarily as personal practice of mental culture. This is based on the view that if mental defilements are reduced throughout the country, then people will prosper and there will be no disasters. The second is the *loki pañña* path, based on low and 'dirty' opportunist practices of astrology, magic and wizardry, that leave the selfish mind intact with its defilements. Aung San, in his early schoolboy politics, attempted the second model. Towards the end of his university days and in his early Thahkin period, he abandoned the second path to find a synthesis between the first model and Marxism. By the end of his life, just prior to national independence, he synthesised a redefinition of Burmese 'secularism' while on the path to the first model, and incorporating democracy and socialism, as an extended path centering on the ideal of *byama-so tayà* as a 'social' meditation.

A note on the sources

There is a large amount of literature in Burmese on his speeches and his life.³ However, there are to my knowledge only three main works in English and one in Japanese that deal with his life and works in any detail.⁴ The conspiracy behind his assassination has also attracted much speculation in the works of others. The full extent and range of Burmese sources are generally not reflected in English, though Nemoto's work in Japanese does come to terms with many Burmese sources.⁵

It is interesting to note that Aung San usually composed his speeches in English, and then presented

¹ e.g. Aung San (1971:317).

² 'Time for a show of Burmese blood, daring and courage'. *bma.ekt*, 02.12.1942 (Sagaing Han Tin 1975:85).

³ The following are just some further Burmese books on Aung San's life (apart from collections of his speeches and volumes analysing his writings):

bu qin Sabu Kpa Aac Sn At fe bu Kpa k v hok t t k 1951X
kek knc emac bu Kpa Aac Sn f ncb Mglic rnk asipn nck 1969X
xt k qunw c Am t r bu Kpa Aac Sn x e r u t saepx 1997X

⁴ Sources on Aung San's life include: Kei Nemoto. *Aung San: a sealed dream of an independent Burma* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 1996). Joseph Silverstein. *The political legacy of Aung San* (Cornell University, 1993, 2nd ed.). Aung San Suu Kyi. *Aung San* (University of Queensland Press, 1984); republished as *Aung San of Burma: a biographical portrait by his daughter* (Edinburgh: Kiscadale, 1991) and in *Freedom from fear* (Penguin, 1995, pp. 3–38). Maung Maung Aung. *San of Burma*. Yale University, 1962. Aung San's brief autobiography was published in English and Burmese in his *Burma's challenge* (Rangoon: New Light of Burma Press 1946) later republished (Tathetta Sarpay Taik, 1968, pp. 9–14) and finally included in Silverstein's *The political legacy* (pp. 75–76).

⁵ I am extremely grateful to Kei Nemoto for opening up to me his extensive library on Aung San. This has been invaluable.

them in Burmese.¹ This is reflected, for example, in the English title of his 1946 *Burma's challenge*, which is transcribed in Burmese as [Ba:ma:Klu:ç]. When he translated his speeches into Burmese, he used a very different vocabulary, evoking entirely different worlds. There are many significant differences between the Burmese and English versions, which offers a very different perspective on Aung San's views on religion.

Surprisingly, in his assessment of sources on Aung San, Silverstein expresses the view that ‘thus far, no official or authoritative biography of Aung San has been written’, and that ‘no systematic collection of his speeches, writings, and papers has been published’. He attributes this to the way the post-1962 regimes have kept the archives of the Burma Defence Services Historical Research Institute closed to researchers.² However, he jumps from Aung San's writings in 1946 directly to the English sources and mentions only one Burmese source, of which only the English versions are reproduced. This glosses over a great deal of work done in Burmese before 1962, when the archives were still open to researchers, and work done after the closure, by selected Burmese scholars. It also overlooks the entire dimension of Aung San as a Burmese politician addressing the Burmese in his native language.

It is not true that there is no authoritative biography of Aung San. If authorisation is taken to mean expressing approval of the work by writing a foreword or preface, then Bo Thein Hswei's *The biography of Aung San* was authorised not only by Aung San's political and spiritual mentor Thahkin Kodawhmaing, but also Aung San's close comrade Prime Minister U Nu and Aung San's wife Daw Khin Kyi. Furthermore, the revenue from the book sales are pledged to the Bogyok Aung San Library [bU Kapsaik vphōk t t k], which was originally headed by Bo Thein Hswei, the author himself. Published in 1951, it contains two essays written by Aung San in Burmese: one essay on his birth and school days,³ and another essay on his own possible origination from a famous rebel.⁴ They bear little resemblance to the original English versions included in Silverstein's collection of speeches, and are of some interest as they reveal a very different side to Aung San's views of politics from what has been presented in the English language thus far – in particular on his interest in numerology and astrology, and in his maternal grandfather U Min Yaung. The editor, in co-operation with people close to Aung San, composed a biography on Aung San for the substantive period from his birth up until the foundation of the Burma National Independence Army.⁵ The longest section is made up, however, of reminiscences by individual acquaintances in twenty sections.⁶

A second biography *Aung Than on Aung San* [eAacqñ:f eAacSn] was first published in 1964 by his brother Aung Than. Aung Than writes in his preface that the government was writing a biography of Aung San which had not yet materialised. He claimed that there were biographies on other leaders, but that as yet there was no biography on Aung San (he clearly does not acknowledge the Thein Hswei biography). Though he acknowledges other attempts at writing Aung San's biography, he feels that these do not highlight Aung San's political achievements. Aung Than was part of a biography committee set up by the AFPFL, but the committee never convened and so he decided finally to write a biography of his own.

It is also of interest that Bo Thein Hswei (1919–1976), the author and editor of the first ‘forgotten’ biography, was also Ne Win's bodyguard during the war, and had been in charge of the unit that liberated Rangoon. He became a monk in the Sunlun Sayadaw *vipassana* tradition. He is also the author (under his monastic name of Thathana Wíthokdí) of the first known Burmese national history of Buddhist practice (mental culture) entitled *Myanma Naingngandaw yahànda ariya-myà i hteirokpattí padípatthí thathanawinkyàn* (*The biographies of the enlightened and those on the path to enlightenment in Burma's tradition of practice*) which covers the history of *vipassana* tradition in particular.⁷ It is thus interesting to note that it should be a soldier involved in

¹ See the back cover of Aung San (1946).

² Thein Hswei (1951:1–2).

³ Thein Hswei (1951:1–18).

⁴ Thein Hswei (1951:19–29).

⁵ Thein Hswei (1951:30–132).

⁶ Thein Hswei (1951:133–346).

⁷ Thathaná Wíthokdí (1977) (also known as Bo Thein Hswei or Maung Thàn Sein) is suffixed with a biography of the author (pp. 453–68). Born in Nga-thaing-chaung-mýò in Bassein on 7 Mar 1919, the author schooled in a municipal college after which he attended Rangoon University. He participated in the strikes as leader of the Bassein students and was a scoutleader. He was a leader at the Rangoon University union. But after four years of study World War II broke out. He fought in Bassein and Moulmein and later retired from the army in Rangoon. He was bodyguard to Ne Win (p. 454) and prepared a biography of Aung San for publication (p. 455). He was the army major in charge of the unit which liberated Rangoon from the Japanese occupation. During his post as secretary of the government Information Department he became interested in library studies and after national independence he travelled a great deal for his studies in Europe. Upon his return to Burma he became a monk in 12 July 1954 at

the liberation of Burma who wrote the first national history of *vipassana*, the technique of ultimate liberation from *samsara*. This thus suggests more realistic overlap between the discourse of mental culture in the politics of the self, and the politics of the country.

As for why Silverstein did not report these two important Burmese biographies of Aung San in his latest edition, we can only surmise that it was, first of all, because he does not read Burmese. Second, it was because neither Maung Maung nor Aung San Suu Kyi mention these two volumes, and so he could find no reference to them. Possibly, Aung San Suu Kyi was not able to get hold of this source while writing in England what is largely a personal profile of her father. However, there is little excuse for Maung Maung not to have mentioned these sources – he collected the contributions for his volume in 1961, well after the first volume was published and after the first 1958 Ne Win Caretaker Government. Perhaps Maung Maung judged much of this material irrelevant to the English speaking public.

It would appear, however, that authors of Aung San biographies rival among oneanother to portray him in a particular way, and to prevent emergence of a more diverse and rounded view of Aung San as a human being with changing and sometimes conflicting ideas. Maung Maung had the motivation to interpret Aung San in a particular way. Since Maung Maung served later as Ne Win's biographer and was in charge of the legalities of developing the Burmese Way to Socialism, and eventually became the token civilian Prime Minister of Burma selected by Ne Win between 19 August and 18 September 1988. This would mean his political interests would have prevented him from dealing with Aung San disinterestedly. If Silverstein inherited his view of Aung San mostly from Maung Maung, then this may be a very selective portrayal of Aung San, perhaps more consonant with Ne Win's view of the political arena than with Aung San's.

Aung San's life may be divided into four main periods youth, university days, the early period in the Dobama party as a Thahkin, the period of his relationship with Japan and the post-war period. However, he may be seen throughout as essentially a unifier of the country, as he was personally involved in all, and took the initiative in most, major attempts at unifying diverse interest groups during the period 1939–47.¹ He received no better compliment than that of Churchill who identified him, from the British colonialist point of view, as the 'traitor rebel leader' of a 'quisling army'.²

Education

Born in Natmauk in 1915, he began his education aged seven in 1922 under Sayadaw U Thawbita's monastery in Natmauk Myo. In 1928, he moved to the National College at Yeinangyaung. In 1932 he joined Rangoon University aged 18. As editor of the university journal, he was held responsible by the university authorities for not revealing the author of the article 'Hell hounds at large', in which senior university staff were criticised. His dismissal from the university provoked the 1936 student strike. He became President of the Rangoon University Student's Union between 1937–38, two years after U Nu's presidency.

While at the university, his first essay was 'Burma and Buddhism' in *Gandha-loka* Magazine, April 1935, in which he set out what he calls 'the Buddhist Middle Way'. The Buddha invited everyone for themselves to ascertain truth for themselves, and he encouraged a spirit of criticism which is 'the vital essence of Buddhism', against excessive attachment to past cultural tradition. This vital essence is lacking in Burma and 'the Burmese people should dive a little deeper than they seem to be doing at present and not be content with mere superficial observation'.

In the Ratana Sutta the hollowness of the forms and ceremonies is mentioned. Yet Buddhism as we find it in Burma, remains only in form and so too the civilization. The spirit requisite for the growth of our civilization has died down. It is therefore the bounden duty of every true Burman to revive the spirit of criticism, inherent in Buddhism, and apply it to every

Kyūntāw monastic cluster with the name Thondará for 49 days and after reading much (incl. Visudhimagga) he decided to leave the monkhood to practise mental culture, which he did with the Sunlun, after which he reentered the order and continued his practice for two rainy seasons at Sunlun. His mother and relatives offered him a new monastery in Rangoon where he periodically returned. After five rainy seasons as monk his mother died, and he subsequently travelled to India and Ceylon where he visited all the historical sites. On his return he found many errors in the scriptures and commentaries as these had been printed in Pali (he points out six works with errors, and he quotes a letter from the Mahasi Hs. about the corrections he sent to him), in Burmese and in English. After 12 rainy seasons in the Sangha he renamed himself: he took *wi* from Sunlun's name Kawi. He took his second ordination in 1965 at Sunlun's monastery, and he took as many as 12 more; he returned in 1970 and also visited the Sunlun's monastery in the Shan states. He finished writing on 2 July 1971 (p. 43) and died on 19 July 1976. See also his personal account of the war in *blu qinē Sāē āē pō: t k p p n k u m i v ā s a e p x* 1967X

¹ Kyaw Zaw (n.d.:82–83).

² Winston Churchill. House of Commons Speech, 1947.

problem affecting Burma. If Burma is to regain her freedom and prosperity, the feeling of uneasiness in eradicating the fetish of tradition must be overcome and the ancient civilization of bricks must be displaced by the civilization of hewn stones.

He took an interest in his maternal grandfather U Min Yaung, who had led an early rebellion against the British. Aung San himself wrote two articles on this. In ‘Mingyi U Min Yaung who was beheaded and was not crucified’ [ကားစင်္ကြံတစ်ကြောင်းပေါ်တစ်ကြောင်းမှလွတ်မြောက်ခဲ့သူမင်းကြီး] (*Thuriya*, June 1935) he writes about his family relationship to a rebel leader. ‘Was U Min Yaung the rebel leader Bo La Yaung U Hkaung or not?’ [ဘုရားရှိခိုးမင်းကြီးဟာဘုရားရှိခိုးမင်းကြီးမဟုတ်ဘူးလား] was also published in *Thuriya* in August 1935. This would have come to the attention of Thahkin Kodawhmaing, who used to be editor of this magazine, and would explain Kodawhmaing's early support for Aung San.¹

Thahkin

In 1938, some time after his term as RUSU President was over, he joined Dobama Asiyone together with U Nu. Both began to use the title Master (‘Thahkin’).² The nationalist Dobama Asiyone had already taken in a first wave of memberships from students after the February 1936 student strikes.³ Young students joining the party were a vital element in the split of the party itself, in which the Thein-Maung faction supported their active involvement at executive level. Both Aung San and U Nu were ‘unconstitutionally’ elevated by this faction to the Dobama Executive Committee as ‘organizers’ on 18 August 1938.⁴

In the course of this year, a split took place in the Dobama Asiyone in which U Nu joined, together with Aung San, the radical ‘internationalist’ Thahkin Kodawhmaing faction rather than the ‘nationalist’ Ba Sein faction. The latter faction included Shu Maung, later to become General Ne Win responsible for the 1962 coup against Nu: this faction tried hardest to keep out ‘new blood’ in the central committee of the Dobama.⁵

Though by no means radically committed to communism himself in terms of ideology in his later life, together with students, ex-students and some others, he founded the Communist Party on 15 August 1939, of which he became General Secretary.⁶ An illegal organization at the time, this group mainly met for discussion, and for Aung San his dedication to ‘the Communist Party slowly faded away’ in favour of the Dobama Asiyone.⁷

From our point of view, it is most significant that in October 1939, as representative of the Dobama, he joined Ba Maw and others in the formation of the Freedom Bloc (*htwet-yak-gaing*) of which he also became General Secretary. This brought together a broad range of Burmese factions engaged in the struggle for independence.

The relationship with Japan

The relationship with Japan began for Aung San when the Japanese intercepted him in China while looking for international help for Burma's struggle for national independence. He arrived in Japan in November 1940. The relationship was formally ended when the Japanese surrendered on 1 August 1945, though it became clear much earlier that there was no future in associating the Japanese with Burma.

As we have seen, Bo Bo Aung escaped from political authorities, and the Freedom Bloc was founded on this idea of unconstraint. While some leaders of this Freedom Sect, including U Nu, were arrested by the British, Aung San had escaped Burma on 8 August 1940 eventually ending up in Japan, where he organised the Burma Independence Army (of which he became Chief of Staff). Because of his role in founding the army, Aung San came to be regarded as the father of the Burmese army.

Aung San realised that the Japanese were not liberators but occupiers, who were not intent on giving Burma its independence. The Communists were aware that Japan was not aiming towards Burmese national

¹ Reproduced in Myá Han (1998:71–74).

² The exact time they joined is unclear. It is generally thought to have been 1937 (Butwell 1969:26), but Nu claims it was definitely after Aung San's period of presidency of RUSU, thus making it after May 1938. Nevertheless, Nu (1954c:128) also proclaims 1930 as the date, which is when he sang the Dobama song.

³ Khin Yi (1988a:884–85).

⁴ Khin Yi (1988a:92–93). Tinker (1967:6) suggests that Nu became the treasurer ‘without a treasure’ of the Dobama: this is not borne out by Khin Yi, Butwell or by Nu himself. He did become treasurer later of the Freedom Bloc.

⁵ Khin Yi (1988a:89).

⁶ Observers have often noted the influence of the Saya San library of radical books and of Nu's Red Dragon Book Club in stirring revolutionary sentiment (Fleischman 1989:4; Lintner 1990:4).

⁷ Maung Maung (1962:11).

independence, and they went underground in spring 1942. In late 1942, after the Japanese set up a subordinate Burmese administration, the Thakkin inner circle began to take precautionary measures with the aim of safeguarding the Burma Defence Army. Discussions to organize resistance against the Japanese started in October 1943, soon after Aung San's return following the Japanese declaration on 1 August in Tokyo of Burma as an independent nation and coequal member of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. A Karen unit of the Burma Defence Army contacted the British in October that year with a view to co-operating with the Allied Forces. However, concrete steps were not taken until the foundation in August 1944 of the nationalist coalition known as the Anti-Fascist Organisation.

Though Aung San was at times critical of the Japanese, for a time in his public speeches he played up Japan's positive contribution in helping the Burmese to oust the British and gain independence. This praise can be found in his speeches up to and including the occasion of the Japanese declaration of Burma's independence on 1 August 1943. It was his speech at the unveiling of the statue of U Wisara in early October 1943 that he first began to publicly question and express doubts about Burma's national independence under the Japanese, for he said 'the independence we have achieved is not permanent. Only if we win this war will independence be permanent. As we have not yet won the war, we are unable to taste *loki nibbana*'.

Speeches during the Japanese occupation

During the early part of his relationship with Japan, Aung San delivered a number of speeches which indicated that Japanese ideas had a significant influence on him at the time. He gave few speeches in which Buddhism figures as a subject.

However, in one speech he indicated that he was unhappy with the quantity of monks and nuns in the country. In the speech 'The art of warfare' [၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇] given in early November 1942, he first worried about the size of the population of China and India in comparison to Burma, and then

Speaking frankly, we do not need more monks and nuns in Burma. In my view I do not want one monastery per village. I want them to live in only one monastery per five villages. However, the public is unlikely to like these words. But like it or not, if we are to look at it in terms of development of this country this is the truest thing to say. Japan also is a Buddhist country. But when it comes to warfare of the nation, monks cannot remain, they have to fight. If you want the nation to advance, the *loki* to advance you will have to set aside the otherworldly matters [၇၇၇၇၇၇]. It is not possible to combine and develop the two at the same time. What is needed in this country today is to issue laws which people must obey and which people may not like.¹

The change came about in Aung San's speeches after the Japanese declaration of Burma's independence in August 1943. Disappointed with the Japanese handling of Burmese independence, he airs his grievances quite openly in the speech 'The ceremony opening the U Wisara Statue' [၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇] in early October 1943. This was a suitable occasion since U Wisara was at that time regarded as the greatest Burmese martyr, now only exceeded by Aung San himself. He recounts how U Wisara died on hunger strike in prison after 166 days of incarceration under the British. He honours all the martyrs who renounced their lives for the country. Now there is no need to think of sectarian issues during U Wisara's time. He pays respect to this martyr's 'irrepressible spirit, patriotism, mind like an immortal jewel (Skt *Amrita-dhani*)²' [၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇]. He courageously faced his fate alone in prison without companions. At that time, Burma was not independent and was classed under 'wrong-viewed' [၇၇၇၇၇၇] (which is the way U Wisara persistently characterised the British occupiers).

That is why it is important that we now also breed this martyr spirit [၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇]. He then says 'As the national independence we have attained is not yet permanent, as we have not yet won this war we are unable as yet to enjoy the taste national independence, of *loki nibbana*'.³ I want us to, even if we are the last ones remaining, from today to develop this martyr spirit [၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇၇].

Towards national independence

By October 1945, the British had returned to govern Burma. From that point until national independence in January 1948 there was a period of intense political manoeuvring on the part of the AFPFL Thakkins for recognition of the Burmese people. They wanted to be recognised by the British as the most

¹ **bmækt** ၇ November 1942; Sagaing Han Tin (1985:47).

² The concept **Aime t** was later used in the Burmese Way to Socialism to mean Party cadre members.

³ Originally published in **Bmækt** ၇ October 1943; Sagaing Han Tin (1985:74).

The Anti-Fascist Organisation was renamed the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL) in August 1945. However, it had already issued its party manifesto on 25 May 1945 that advocated a democratic constitution for the government of independent Burma.¹ This party received broad support, including from the army, though the army eventually withdrew its support in 1958. Aung San headed the early AFPFL mission in negotiating the terms for national independence, but was assassinated prior to independence on 19 July 1947.

In one of his works, Thahkin Kodawhmaing describes Aung San as follows:

with your meritorious glory and *metta*

⁷ ASSK (1995:5).

In ‘I want to implement land reform’ [eṃsṃk iṃpṃcṃpṃc N kṃt y] given on 5 February 1947, he says ‘I cannot provide you instantaneously, like *zawgyi-weikzas*, with what you want’ [eṃzṃgṃyṃiē t bṃi Kchṃ: tṃi kṃt a tṃbṃṃkṃc N pṃpṃ: NṃBṃ].¹

Bo Bo Aung

Aung San also denigrated use of Bo Bo Aung in politics. In his speech ‘Please change your minds’ [sṃtṃpṃc: sṃpṃ] in April 1947, he said to the people of Nat Mauk, his birthplace, a town close to Salei [sṃl] where there is a pagoda dedicated to Bo Bo Aung, that he would help them as much as he could, but

Although I will help, I can only do my best in my capacity as a human being [I pṃp] We do not have a relationship with Bo Bo Aung [kṃp tṃiṃ BṃBṃAṃcṃp SṃkṃqṃBṃ].²

Having thereby denied a link with Bo Bo Aung, he goes on to gently point out that people should not follow Buddhism wrongly with such beliefs:

It was the Buddha who preached this. Although the Buddha preached with the aim of improvement of sentient beings, if you do not know how to do it, if you cannot follow it, than it is useless. Leave it alone. It will only be right if you want to do it, and you can do it.³

He then goes on to say what has been commonly repeated in Burma since 1962. ‘If you want to encourage attainment of *nibbana* then practise *tayā* [nṃbṃrṃkṃsṃkṃl ṃbṃrṃkṃkṃc tṃ rṃ: kṃkṃ]. If you want independence, then practise the method by which independence may be attained [I ṃl pṃr: I kṃkṃ ṃl I ṃl pṃr: rṃrṃkṃc: kṃtṃ: a: kṃpṃ].⁴

Again, in the same speech under the heading ‘Burma will be free’ he says:

As for Burma, don't ask for astrology [ṃbṃc] don't ask for Bo Bo Aung, as we will absolutely and certainly attain independence. This is the era of bombs. If people do not keep up with the times, than government officers cannot keep up. If you see it from their point of view, such would be the fault of the people.⁵

In sum, the implication is that belief in Bo Bo Aung and reliance on Bo Bo Aung and astrology are not in accord with Buddhism, but are also not in accord with modern times in which modern weaponry is required. For politicians to make progress people need to change their views and catch up. Furthermore, though the path to *nibbana* is superior to mistaken belief in Bo Bo Aung, and runs in parallel with politics, the *nibbana* and the political paths run separately: the first is about the individual and the second about a collective quest.

This does not mean, however, that Buddhism has no role in politics. Later in the same speech, he argues for the inclusion of some of the higher Buddhist practices such as *metta* in the form of government he advocates. Indeed, he says:

I will govern with loving-kindness and truthfully. If it is for the right cause and for the truth, I dare to lay down my life. [kṃpṃkṃtṃ ṃlṃqṃsṃkṃrṃpṃ: ṃlṃpṃkṃpṃyṃl tṃkṃl ṃkṃc tṃyṃṃtṃy tṃkṃl RṃBṃAṃkṃsṃpṃyṃ].⁶

Quoting U Hpo Hlaing ‘If people do not know, they will fear’, and ‘If you are courageous, you may not die – if you die, you need not go to hell’, he says that

If you act boldly with truth and one-pointed mind [sṃmṃdṃhṃ qṃmṃdṃ] you will succeed. If leaders work without covering they will succeed. If our army is secure, others are unable to come and fight. [rṃpṃcṃkṃ: qṃsṃqṃmṃdṃṃlṃ ṃlṃ ṃlṃAṃcṃṃBṃpṃkṃyṃtṃ ṃlṃ ṃlṃtṃ: kṃ I ṃmṃtṃṃNṃBṃ].⁷

This means that, though Aung San does not accept Bo Bo Aung, he does accept ‘one-pointed mind’ (*samadhi*) and ‘loving-kindness’ (*metta*) as part of the political quest. Both of these are part of the ‘*samatha*’ range which explicitly addresses the mundane sphere (*loki*), but are superior to magic (*loki pañña*). However, *samatha* is also an integral part of *vipassana* and therefore cannot be separated from the supramundane, for it is preparatory to it.

The practice of *metta* and attainment of *samadhi* are part of politics and this is confirmed in another speech, in which he refers to socialism as ‘underpinned by *byama-so*’ [ṃhṃsṃtṃ rṃ: kṃlṃAṃkṃpṃcṃpṃ “Sṃyṃl sṃcṃ:”.⁸ This characterisation, which to my knowledge has only been made once in his speeches, has been used in the leaflet distributed on the occasion of 35 years commemoration of Martyrs’ Day to

¹ Aung San (1971:184).

² Aung San (1971:284).

³ Aung San (1971:284).

⁴ Aung San (1971:285).

⁵ Aung San (1971:286).

⁶ Aung San (1971:287).

⁷ Aung San (1971:287).

⁸ Aung San (1971:62).

indicate that

General Aung San, in establishing Burma, is not a person possessed of self-view who put himself forward merely to gain independence for his country and nationality. He is a socialist who, having taken as his basis *byama-so tayà* practice, looked after the people. [bunKhaAacSnqVinnhaNhaAakUtaChaTaminthpVNeN hāi aē pā:At tēkqā eRhinTcpl
eSackKqVAt tādqma:mdpX dhōsūt tra:kiAekKpMl hāer:tra:kpāRōcqlpōqVStyā shādīt 'īpsqVX]

This publication goes on to characterise Aung San as both ‘following the way in conformity with the dhamma’ [tra:eqanvN mīm:PC] and in ‘striving for independence’, entirely ‘without serving his own interests’ [kiyKpKBP]

This suggests that socialism is conceived of less as an ideology than a long-established practice of mental culture rooted in Buddhism, to which the advocates of the Burmese Way of Socialism between 1971–88 in particular would appear to subscribe. Aung San's characterisation of socialism as *byama-so tayà* was to preface each BSPP document published after 1971.

Indeed, Aung San is on record for having criticised Didok U Ba Cho. About whom he says

Didok U Ba Cho knows how to embarrass people with some of his views (for example by following caballic squares based on letters and numbers, and mantras [pma Ac:AchinNra: I ksa:KcY]). Though we youngsters do not agree with him ... Because he is a true *wunthanu* person ... we wished him all the best in carrying out his responsibilities for national independence and for the good of the country.¹

Aung San extended this criticism to include U Ba Cho's desire to constitutionalise Buddhism as the national religion, which Aung San saw as seriously impairing national unity.²

I have already mentioned how in 1940, signed as a Thahkin, he wrote an interesting two-part article called ‘Various kinds of politics’ [NchaMamim].³ Below follows an abstract of these articles.

He starts by reviewing various local ideas about politics, which includes ideas about ‘new fashioned gods, magicians, and wizards’ [Ba:I kōsāt tēmiSraet tēpTmSraet tē]. He repeats U Ba Pe's view that ‘politics is such very dirty work’, and U Thein Maung's view that ‘as for politics, it is a gramme of merit, but a pound of hell’. As for U Saw, he merely encourages bad people. Dr Ba Maw supports Stalin and Hitler.

Reflecting on these views, he asserts ‘I believe that politics is science [el akDāt]. It is about ‘cause’ [AekacY] and ‘effect’ [AKY], and this is also ‘the basis of the Buddha's teachings’ [Ēka:Ba:tra:I v:psqV], and is the natural order in everything. This is why the Buddha taught the inhabitants of the world. After analysing Greek etymology for the European-wide concept, he views politics as a social science, and therefore a science. If in the past it concerned government of countries, now politics is concerned with developments world-wide. Politics centers on human beings, who differ from animals in intelligence, and who are able to represent and manipulate letters and numbers.

He finds that the Burmese also trace the origins of political life back to the humans in the era of the *padesa* tree, when the *thamada* was elected. Government had to be invented because humans had deteriorated through their mental defilements. Government comes about because people are unable to observe the law [tra:mesacNc]. If they could, then there would be no need for government. According to Burmese texts, a primary cause of the inability to observe law is greed [el aB]. Greed resulted in accumulation of private property and the wrong-viewed [qkīydM] concept of ‘mine’. Because of greed the fire of anger [edāqmi] arose. Because of these two, ignorance [emah] arose. The fighting arose. The result was a desire for government. This is different from ‘democracy’, in which, on the contrary, it is government that serves to follow the wishes of the people [pVqSNaR]. Democracy may be the foundation, and is the ultimate truth [prmt tra:] of politics.

So politics is seen to be of benefit, but is based on a serious study of complex causes in which there are many options. It is about coming face to face with a substantive reality [nPlatāt tēT vātNchaMpsqV]. The politics found in magical verses and mutterings is only to come from books [gāTamNya:etmē intNchaMketāPcSaApT pōqBtKbFX].

He then returns to the earlier question of whether politics is dirty.

In truth, politics belongs to the realm of the mundane, and it is not the means to *nibbana*. Nevertheless, within the mundane the supramundane can have a presence. It can remain within *loki*. Only when the stomach is full, can morality be observed.⁴

¹ Letter from Aung San, 11 July 1946; Aung Thàn (1969:228–29).

² ‘Shades of Aung San’ (editorial). *The Nation*, 15 July 1961; Smith (1965:230).

³ *Dagon Magazine*, February and March 1940.

⁴ This stock phrase was used by Ne Win as his chief message for his version of socialism until 1971, when this was replaced with *byama-so tayà*. See also Maung Maung (1969a:432).

⁵ Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58: the story of the Ceylon race riots*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1958, pp. 27–28; Smith (1965:310–11).

central to the functioning of democracy'.¹

However, he used the Middle Way elsewhere in different contexts. In his speech 'Who are the authorities in Burma' [bmaipvAa%artByqUp published on 17 June 1946, Aung San explained the problem the left wing posed to the unity of the AFPFL party as 'We are looking for the Middle Way' [mzBnv:kiddnt y].²

When the Buddha expounded the Noble Eightfold Path in 'The turning of the wheel of the doctrine' (*Dhammacakkapavattana*), which represents the Buddha's very first teachings after his enlightenment, he concluded his sermon by referring to it as The Middle Way [*Majjhima Patipada* mzBnp!pdanv].

The two extremes, monks, are not to be followed. What are the two? To give yourself up to indulgence in sensual pleasure, which is base, common, vulgar, unholy and unprofitable. Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata has shown the Middle Path, which is to make for insight and knowledge, to lead to peace, discernment, enlightenment or Nibbana. What, monks, is that Middle Path? It is the very same Noble Eightfold Path.³

These two extremes are represented by the two kinds of life the Buddha rejected: on the one hand, his life as a prince in the world of indulgence, and on the other, his life immediately after renunciation from the palace, when he practised often painful ascetic exercises based on self-mortification. They lead into a broadly balanced Buddhist practice of mental culture, in which Right Concentration is supported by Right Effort, which prevents sinking into sensual pleasure, and Right Mindfulness safeguards against falling into extremes of asceticism. Right Concentration is furthermore supported by morality – Right Speech, Right View and Right Livelihood.

Of course, Aung San used this concept metaphorically. Nevertheless, this speech marked a turning point in Aung San's political path. It anticipated the eviction of the Communists from the AFPFL in October 1946, after which Aung San increasingly made use of Buddhist concepts and idioms to express political ideas. Furthermore, despite the Ne Win regime's avowed commitment not to place Buddhism centrally, this concept of The Middle Way became a central point in *The Burmese Way to Socialism*. In both respects, much as the Buddha rejected his two prior ways, the resultant politics is described as neither leftist nor rightist.

Problems for Burma's freedom

Of his published speeches, the one that most elaborated on religion is 'Problems for Burma's Freedom'. Given at the inauguration of the AFPFL Convention on 20 January 1946, it is an important speech for Burma's main democratic political party. In this speech, the first the AFPFL gave to the public, Aung San set the parameters of secular politics in a predominantly Buddhist country. He admitted the historical importance of Buddhism, but wished to see only certain kinds of Buddhism in politics, and sought to clean politics of certain old ideas. Maung Maung described the ambience of this speech as follows.

In January 1946, the AFPFL convened its first great assembly of peoples on the slopes of the Shwedagon Pagoda. People came from all over the country and from all walks of life. It was a great upsurge. The general mood was a peculiar and unique amalgam of war-weariness and the great relief that was felt at war's end, nationalism and the pride of having emerged from the war as an 'independent' nation which was much battered and bruised but still whole and functioning, and hero-worship for Aung San and the joy and relief felt in having found in him a man to whom the future could be entrusted. Aung San was the hero of the hour, the *Bogyoke* – the Supremo. People needed someone whom they could trust without reservation, and blindly follow, and Aung San was that someone. He had led the Burma Independence Army, he had led the resistance. He was without selfishness; he was as poor as the people themselves, having acquired nothing during the war – when people in his position were gathering fortunes – except a loving family, and a solid reputation with the people.

It was a situation of a kind that rises but rarely in a country's history, when a people who are looking for a hero and a man who is looking for his mission meet, and there is happy union and the two merge into one ...⁴

The English title is very different from the original Burmese title 'Speech on the Middle Shwedagon Platform' [Al ypsBmI aklmKae]. Though this would make little sense to an international readership, to the Burmese it conveys a rich historical and nationalist emotion. The fact that the speech was given at the Shwedagon was extremely important to the ambience. This is so for several reasons.

First, it was becoming apparent towards the end of the Japanese occupation that the allied bombing of Rangoon could become serious if the Japanese dug themselves in and refused to retreat. For this reason, from October 1944 delegations mostly led by U Tun Aung and U Thein Maung regularly visited Japanese headquarters requesting them to spare Rangoon, but in particular the Shwedagon Pagoda. The Japanese

¹ Smith (1965:310).

² bmaentSacqt csa, 17.06.1946; Sagaing Han Tin (1985:165).

³ S., V, 421.

⁴ Maung Maung (1959:73).

responded that nothing, not even the Shwedagon Pagoda, was ‘indispensable’ in the war effort. However, as the war progressed, Japan desperately needed positive statements from the front, and this presented *adipati* Ba Maw and U Tun Aung with the opportunity to go to Tokyo to make a case for saving Rangoon and the Shwedagon. This visit, together with subsequent visits to headquarters, finally elicited a response. The Japanese left Rangoon on 23 April 1945 and the Shwedagon was saved from war damage.¹

Second, to Aung San's intention the Shwedagon was at that point in time related to the quest for freedom. This is evident in the first part of his speech, in which he points out the significance of the Shwedagon for the Burmese nation. He stated that to gather in a meeting is the appropriate way for citizens of the world, and remarked on the significance that such a meeting should take place at the Shwedagon. The Shwedagon ‘was built by us with the noblest of desires’. The spires of the Shwedagon ‘point at the highest of achievements, namely unconditioned nibbana’ [ATāTāTāPāSāqā nānā\ AqKē qāwē tātāPāSāqā nānā\]. It was here that rebellions and revolutions [Aer:tāpā\] took place. And this pagoda, and its surrounding region, have entered the records of Burmese history. It is also where the ‘patriots’ [māKēshā\] congregated who fostered ‘martyr mentality’ [Aazanvāit\]. Here the history of Burma began. Sacred relics were interred no less than 2,500 years ago. National independence was imminent but not achieved as yet.

By changing the English title, this occasion has lost its Buddhist connotations and ambience, so that the essential unity Aung San understood to exist in Burmese history between Buddhism and politics is not conveyed. Aung San refers back to the struggle of the 1920s, the need for freedom, the long-term nature of the struggle, the role of heroes in history, the danger of false gods and false prophets, and the importance of collective action, so that after national independence [I āē phā\]. He emphasises that freedom in a real and absolute sense [I āē pā:Ass\] may finally be attained (i.e. *nibbana*), but also says that it is important to move with the spirit of the times in a changing world (i.e. don't just aim for Buddhist freedom which should also be accompanied with pragmatic decisions).

Aung San then asks

Some of us have been [d]oing still, consciously or unconsciously, the same old way of ‘dirty’ politics. But is politics really ‘dirty’? Certainly not. It is not politics which is dirty but, rather, the persons who choose to dirty it are dirty. And what is politics? Is it something too high above us to which we can just look up in respectful awe and from which we refrain, because we are just mortal clay in His hands and cannot do it? [KāNpāi qāwē tātāPāSāqā nānā\]. Is it something charlatans used in preying upon the credulous imagination of some of our people, the kind of thing capable of being set aright only by fanciful tales and legends? Is it a dangerous ground which we must be wary to tread and might as well avoid, if we possibly could? Is it a case of ‘race, religion and language’ [Amī-Baqā-qāqāna:] forever, as we were once wont to say? What is it, then, really?

With this question Aung San is preparing to locate politics in an ethical system which depends on personal comportment and spiritual attributes. It resembles the Dalai Lama's view of politics, who said:

Sometimes we look down on politics, criticizing it as dirty. However, if you look at it properly, politics in itself is not wrong. It is an instrument to serve human society. With good motivation – sincerity and honesty – politics becomes an instrument in the service of society. But when motivated by selfishness, with hatred, anger, or jealousy, it becomes dirty.²

The translation ‘mortal clay in His hands’ in this passage implies the concept of an absent creator. Furthermore, the reference ‘something too high above us’ is really a much too liberal translation of the concept of *pūṭṭhujjano*, which he here uses for ‘us’, and which means ‘an ordinary person who is not a noble one (*ariya*), i.e. a person unaccomplished in mental culture’. In other words, in this passage Aung San does not ask whether politics is too high for us, but rather repeats his earlier assertion that ‘the persons who choose to dirty it [politics] are dirty’, and that our own spiritual attainments in mental culture are lacking which causes otherwise noble political causes to be corrupted.

He then proceeds to point out that politics is neither low nor high, but concerns itself with the ‘mundane world (*loki*) of human beings’ [I āē ak\] (as opposed to the supramundane realm of *el ākōṭa*). For politics to be noble, however, this mundane world must exclude the lower forms of selfish mundane skills such as magic, alchemy and astrology.

What is it, then, really? The fact is that politics is neither high nor low [māKēshā\]. Nor is it simply a dangerous ground to tread upon. It is not a question of bigoted or parochial nationalism either. It must always approximate the truth of marching events. In short, after all is said and done, politics means your everyday life [KāNpāi qāwē tātāPāSāqā nānā\].

¹ Maung Maung (1959:58–69).

² The Dalai Lama. *Kindness, clarity and insight*. J. Hopkins and E. Napper (eds). Ithaca, N.Y: Snow Lion, 1984, p. 62.

et#MkreqakisPspqvX. It is You, in fact [NchMSqvmH UkisPspqvX], for you are a political animal as Aristotle long ago declared. It is how you eat, sleep, work and live, with which politics is concerned. You may not think about politics. But politics thinks about you. You may shun politics, but politics clings to you always in your home, in your office, in your factories. There, everyday you are doing politics, grappling with it, struggling with it ... You have to live and get certain things that are yours for your living, and this is your politics. This is your everyday life; and as your everyday life changes, so changes your politics.

Silverstein dismissed Aung San's views of politics as 'your everyday life' as 'neither systematic nor original'.¹ However, in his reading he misses the Burmese value system implied in the Burmese version of this passage, and with it, its inspiration to contemporary opposition politicians today. The translation of the speech changes certain things. In particular it adds 'you are a political animal as Aristotle long ago declared', which is not to be found in the Burmese.

More important from our point of view, however, is that it glosses over the fundamental distinction in Burmese thought between the plane of human existence and the other planes of existence, and on the other hand, between the entire mundane world, including all planes of existence and the transcendental world beyond the mundane. In translating both 'human world' [l ɔl ak] and 'human affairs' [l kispas 'your [everyday life]' it collapses such important distinctions clearly implied in the Burmese original. And yet, not to understand these distinctions makes it almost impossible to comprehend Aung San's other views about politics, such as the elements he dismisses from politics like alchemy, astrology and religion, as well as the elements he admires in politics such as *samadhi*, *metta*, and *byama-so tayà*. All of these ideas refer to and are dependent on these underlying ideas of politics as pertaining to the human plane of existence, and to the realm of the mundane world. His definition of politics as *samsara* must also be understood in relation to this.

Perhaps the most important point is that *vipassana*, the practice that gives the contemporary politicians the courage to face imprisonment, addresses the very realms which Aung San defines as 'politics'. Not only does its practice lead to a change in the habits of everyday life, but it also emancipates from the human plane and the mundane world of existence. This explains how even from Aung San's point of view, who was not prone to religious theorizing, the practice of *vipassana* contemplation can be construed, if not as a political act in itself, then at least as having extremely important political consequences.

He then says that politics is about improving life and about freedom [l ɔl pər:], and that it is not beyond understanding. This is followed by an important paragraph in which he proceeds to consider the view some have that 'politics is religion [Baqt ra:]'.

It is not above understanding. Alas! this is not to be, for some wiseacres have ordained. They say politics is dirty. They say politics is religion [Baqt ra:]. They say these all in contradiction with each other in one and the same breath.

Politics is religion [Baqt ra:]! Is it? Of course not. But this is the trump card of dirty politicians. In this way, they hope to confuse and begot the public mind, and they hope to slur over and cloud real issues. Theirs is the way of opportunism, not politics. Religion is a matter of individual conscience [kikgəvBaqt:ml Bqlqit if qknc'ymhst] while politics is a social science [l Bqlqit if epā:qc:SkSngpāt t]. Of course, as a social science, politics must see that the individual also has his rights, including the right to freedom of religious worship [BaqtakikgəvBaqt:ml]. Here we must draw the line definitely between politics and religion, because the two are not one and the same thing. If we mix religion with politics, this is against the spirit of religion itself, for religion takes care of our hereafter and usually has not to do with mundane affairs which are the sphere of politics [Baqt:ml NchMSkurasppmBaqt:f qeBatra:kiSnk'khaerakəpfX Aelkac:mla:x Baqt:qv'enac'tml aBwmh:kiqwa) el ak'orakiaRfHvRsaqaelkac'el akAer:NchMSaəqk'SchX NchMmmla: el ak'or:qa PspqvX]. Politics is frankly a secular science, that is it [NchMmmla: el ak'or:raqa PspqvX].

In the Burmese original there is no reference to 'individual conscience', but the 'faiths of various people'. This is important, for the concept of collective faith is an important element in the term chosen for religion (*batha yei*) here. Nevertheless, politics here is equated with the mundane world (*loki*), whereas religion 'usually' deals with that which transcends the world (*lokuttara*). This is where the two part company.

Then Aung San says that many progressive religious values, including 'love (*metta*), truth and righteous living' are social values beneficial to society and politics. But many backward religious values also hinder progress and interfere with political development. He refers in particular to the great progress that Burma made when Anawratha performed 'historical surgery' by eliminating the Ari. The Ari are concerned with priestcraft that corrupts religion, as opposed to the Sangha who are responsible for learning and educating.

Aung San's reference to religion as dealing with the 'hereafter' is incomplete, of course, if it is to include mental culture. For example, *vipassana* is very much about awareness of the present moment and a change in the here and now for the individual. More indirectly, it is conceived as having great implications for the

¹ Silverstein (1993:5).

collective. Either Aung San was carried away here in his attempt to distinguish religion as supramundane from secular politics, or he excluded this particular quest from his comparison.

It is my belief that to understand Aung San's politics we must appreciate that he actually handled two concepts of Buddhism, one which lay within the realm of ‘religion’, and the other, the highest form, which was ‘beyond religion’. This, I will now attempt to demonstrate.

Throughout the speech, he uses two different Burmese concepts for the English concept ‘religion’. He mostly uses *batha-yei* [Baqaer:], the generic concept for all religions irrespective of any judgment as to their truth or values. More rarely he uses *thathana-yei* [qaqnaer:], the concept for the Buddha's teachings, and its correct continuation (through ordination procedures), correct dissemination and its correct practice. Though these evoke fundamentally different meanings and are used in fundamentally different contexts, these have both been misleadingly translated into English as ‘religion’.

As I have pointed out elsewhere,¹ for Buddhism these two concepts have substantially different meanings. The first is related to cultural points of view and, when used to characterise Buddhism, corresponds roughly to what has been labeled ‘Buddhendom’ [būBaqa] that broad culturally shared system of beliefs which is often in conflict with the original pure form of Buddhism and which is comparable in truth value to other religions. The second is ‘Buddhism’ [būbaqna], the Buddha's teachings as correctly implemented practically in one's own personal life.

So Aung San does not, as Silverstein and other observers seem to think, ban all forms of religion from politics. Though he clearly argued against the involvement of Buddhendom in politics, this does not apply to the initial purificationary stages in Buddhism which, on the contrary, he refers to as ‘the highest politics’.

Indeed, Aung San proceeds to say that Buddhism should be cleansed of its more defiling Buddhendom elements, and only its higher values are valuable to politics.

Speaking of Buddhism [Buddhendom] [būBaqa] particularly, which is the religion professed by the greatest bulk of our people, I can say without prejudice to other religions [Aka:Baqa:tra:] that it is more than a religion itself and has several indications of its becoming possibly the greatest philosophy [light of Buddhendom-Buddhism] [būBaqa qaqnaerac:] in the world, if we can help to remove the trash and travesties which antiquity must have doubtless imposed on this great religion.

I wish therefore to address a special appeal to the Buddhist priesthood and say to them: Reverend Sanghas! You are the inheritors of a great religion [holy Buddhism būbaqnaeta:] in the world. Purify it and broadcast it [holy Buddhism qaqnaeta:] to all the world so that all mankind might be able to listen to its timeless message of Love and Brotherhood [qmsit tēvrc:Askūemackc:WinkpānNīkpal iniv:] till eternity. Reverend Sanghas! We will worship you forever as Promoters of Love and Brotherhood. We are prepared to listen to your exhortation for Love and Brotherhood [emtātra:qmsit qeBaTaeqa] not only amongst our own people, but also amongst the peoples of this wide world. And we will support you in this respect as best we could, for this is what the world and our country need very badly at this moment. Reverend Sanghas! You have a tremendous role to play in world history, and if you succeed, you will be revered by the entire mankind for ages to come. This is one of your high functions ordained by your religion; and this is the highest politics which you can do for your country and people [tpvātātīNīkMā tūAtēAimcōtSibqā NīkMāKiaSacvādal vērakpāqv]. Go amongst our people, preach the doctrine of unity [vīvār:tra:] and love [emtātra:]; carry the message of higher freedom [mōntāqal āpār:tra:] to every nook and corner of the country, freedom to religious worship [Baqa:tra:kikgān] freedom to preach and spread the Dharma anywhere and anytime, freedom from fear [ekakRānīphk:KīN ān] ignorance, superstition, etc., teach our people to rely upon themselves and re-construct themselves materially spiritually and otherwise. You have these and many more noble tasks before you [ArhōttāyōvqōMā:mtāBa:xiqwad ep:etāNkqvātāApāmednq mēd T memmel BīAs Tawr Aa:Tō\ ikBītpvātātīma tūl MīSBmētāmlpāBa:Xiēqāq mīkīkīnīqal tūAa:kīnōc:tpvātātīf l hūqvēl akō\ el akīNā tēqa AkīTūh:kīNāNīcAacSackēNīkēpl iniv]. Will you or will you not rise equal to your tasks? The answer lies doubtless with you.²

Unless we discriminate between ‘Buddhism’ and ‘Buddhendom’ this passage would not be comprehensible. He speaks of Buddhism by monks as ‘the highest politics’, whereas earlier he had said that ‘if we mix religion with politics, this is against the spirit of religion itself, for religion takes care of our hereafter and usually has not to do with mundane affairs which are the sphere of politics’. We can only understand Aung San if we comprehend that he has moved between two very different senses of religion, namely from Buddhist ‘religion’ (Buddhendom būBaqa) in the mundane world, a cultural kind of Buddhism full of accretions, such as professed by the Ari but thankfully purged by Anawratha, to the more pristine Buddhism (Buddhism būbaqna) that Anawratha ended up with which focuses on practice and learning according to teachings of the Buddha.

¹ Houtman (1990a).

² Aung San (1971:59).

O Bhikkhus, I say this now to you: All conditioned and compounded things (*sankhara*) have the nature of decay and disintegration. With mindfulness endeavour diligently (to complete the task).¹

It means ‘with diligence strive to work out your liberation’. Furthermore, this is immediately preceded by his expression of confidence that national independence will be attained, ‘let us believe that we will attain our independence shortly’ [ကဏ္ဍိယ ခုနစ်လအတွင်း အနိုင်ရမည်ဟု ယုံကြည်ကြရန်။] This relates the concept of working towards national independence with Buddhist practice on the way to the attainment of *nibbana*.

Buddhism and national independence

I have already developed the concept of national independence as *loki nibbana* above, as an example of how Aung San conjoined the political quest with a spiritual one. In his speech ‘General [Aung San] plans two monastic ordinations’ [ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်သမားနှစ်ဦးကို ဝိသုဒ္ဓိပြုစုမည်] (23 February 1947), Aung San argued that Buddhism and national independence develop together.² The occasion was the passing of the *pahtamabyan* monastic exams, attended by a number of famous monks. Aung San says that Buddhists must observe the five precepts, but those in the army cannot. People turn to Buddhism when they are in trouble, as do politicians when elections are near. He says he tried to become a monk twice, but as Burma was not yet independent from the British it is still a religion in slavery. With national independence the *sasana* will flourish. He wants Buddhism to be missionised all over the country. He wants monks to learn other languages so that they might translate Buddhist books and the world can become Buddhist.

Padesa tree

On 19 July 1947 Aung San gave his speech entitled ‘The Constitutional Assembly’ [တရားရုံးချုပ်ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံအခြေခံဥပဒေကြမ်းကော်မတီ၏ အစည်းအဝေး] This is possibly the first time in his speeches that he uses the concept of the *padesa tree*. This tree is sometimes referred to as the *cornucopia* of Buddhism. The *padesa* tree is the Pali *kapparukkha* [ပုဏ္ဏားပင်] a tree (*rukkha*) that lasts for a fixed period of time (*kappa*) on the northern continent in the Buddhist cosmology. Those who lived on this island observed the five precepts permanently, and according to their accumulated merit they could partake whatever they wanted from it at the centre of the continent. Its yield is related to the moral and mental state of the population at large.

In relation to the attainment of national independence he warns that ‘I want to explain to you why not at every National Independence does the *padesa* tree grow’ [အမျိုးသားတို့သည် အမြဲတမ်းပင်ပေါက်သည်မဟုတ်ဘဲ အချို့သောအခါများတွင်သာ ပေါက်သည်ကို ဖော်ပြချက်။] He accuses of many people expecting the *padesa* tree to grow suddenly overnight’ [အချို့သောလူများသည် အမြဲတမ်းပင်ကို ချက်ချင်းပေါက်လာစေလိုကြသည်ကို ဖော်ပြချက်။] ³

In this speech he refers to national planning issues, ‘and so, it is unlikely that the *padesa* tree will sprout from the earth’ [အမြဲတမ်းပင်သည် မြေထဲမှ ပေါက်လာနိုင်သည်မဟုတ်ဘဲ အမြဲတမ်းပင်ကို ပေါက်လာစေရန် အားထုတ်ဆောင်ရွက်ရမည်။] And ‘I want to make you understand, that if the *padesa* tree is to grow, this will only take place if we work at it’ [အမြဲတမ်းပင်ကို ပေါက်လာစေရန် အားထုတ်ဆောင်ရွက်ရမည်။] ⁴

This tree is of some significance to socialist ideology. Not only are the trees offered to monks during the *kathina* ceremony known as *padesa* trees, but the socialist government corporation shops were named as ‘*padesa* shops’ (ပုဏ္ဏားပင်ဆိုင်) and savings accounts in nationalised banks were also termed *padesa*. During the U Nu period politicians promised a welfare state that was to bring back the lost Padaytha Tree of Buddhist folklore.⁵ The fruits of this tree are yielded only as long as the inhabitants are moral, lack greed, and practise mental culture.

Metta

Metta is one of the four *byama-so tayà* practices. Aung San refers several times to *metta* in his speeches. For example, in his broadcast ‘Reminder of the elections’ of 13 March 1947, he reminds the Burmese of the forthcoming elections of 9 April, he says that with reference to the ethnic minorities, ‘We will not destroy our *metta* for the ethnic minorities. Whatever rights they should get, we will help them fight for

¹ Shwe Mra. ‘Comments on salient points in the Mahapainibbana Sutta’. In *Ten Suttas from Digha Nikaya*. Rangoon: Burma Pitaka Association, 1985, pp109–12. An alternative translation is from Nanamoli’s *The Life of the Buddha*, namely ‘Indeed, bhikkhus, I declare this to you: it is in the nature of all formations to dissolve. Attain perfection through diligence’ (D. 16; A. IV.76).

² *bma.eReSacqtc:sa* 24.02.1947, 4, 35, p. 2; Sagaing Han Tin (1985:253–56).

³ Aung San (1971:380).

⁴ Aung San (1971:384).

⁵ Sarkisyanz (1965:225).

the adjustment of one's views correctly to time and place.

The essence of true knowledge then is this mastering of change in the world over time through the objective view afforded by personal perfection of one-pointedness of mind (*samadhi*).

Today's views [အယူဝါဒ] may not resemble tomorrow's. In fact, in a person's life, when we find they continuously change their views, we should not conclude that thereby they are not steady in their *samadhi* [စိတ်ချရမှု]. If there is no steadiness in their *samadhi* it means that they are neglecting their personal moral practice [ကျင့်ကြံမှု]. A change in view is because of a change in one's intelligence, not because of unsteadiness in *samadhi*. It is progress in a way.

In truth, when we contemplate in depth [နက်နဲစဉ်းစားကြည့်ကြည့်] the *samadhi* concept, it is rare to find among the collectivity of people in *loka* [လောကီလူများ] those who have attained a handle on *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is to see with ultimate knowledge of good and bad, merit and demerit, every event in *loka*. However, the person involved does not feel happy for the gain, sorry for the loss, out of concern for the danger of what other people might think of them, of applause, or of distortion and insult, but remains steady [တည်ငြိမ်စေ့ငြိမ်]. *Samadhi* is the kind of steadfastness of mind possessed and enjoyed by noble ones such as the Buddha. However, people have in ordinary speech appropriated this to refer to the superficial steadiness of ordinary physical behaviour or gesture and way of speaking. In truth, however, people do not think about how much inner immorality or corruption is multiplying [ပေါက်ပွားနေသော] behind that apparent steadiness. I am known as one who has great composure in comportment and facial expression. My physical and mental behaviour do not show anxiety or perverted thoughts and my changing mind. However, do I really have *samadhi*? How much *samadhi* do I really have? I alone know best my own inner tremblings and this will be evident as you read on.

The turmoil that is within me, I know myself best, is a sign of not having yet mastered *samadhi* at all. Now, do I then master *samadhi*? I do not yet possess *samadhi* at all. So that is why, let us not use the designation *samadhi* for that which not everyone possesses. [Conversely,] the mental turmoil, change of mind and change of view of someone should not be denigrated by branding it as unsteadiness in *samadhi*. For example, some years ago the monk Ashin U Adisa wrote a book¹ to the effect that there should be a monastic order of female monks in the *sasana*. For this he was expelled and boycotted. In truth his change [of view] may have been wrong. However, in the way of the ‘ordinary worldling’ [ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်] there are none without error. Only knowing one's error can lead to seeing truth. If we make one error, then the second time we are likely not to repeat the mistake.²

Aung San concludes that Gotama, before attaining enlightenment [ချစ်စိတ်အောင်မြင်မှု] sought out and encountered for six years various erroneous views only to change his mind. These uses therefore suggest that the political terminology used by Aung San, insofar as it refers to its Burmese translated elements, has its roots firmly in Buddhist spiritual practices. Indeed, to think that the path to *nibbana* had nothing to do with Burma's politics would be to contradict the desire for royalty expressed in their prayers to attain *nibbana* after their great acts of merit, as recorded in the stone inscriptions.³

The Ne Win regime carefully selected passages of Aung San to proclaim that patriotism and socialism are not ideologies empty of spiritual ethics, but are rooted in a long-established practice of Buddhist mental culture to which military advocates of the Burmese Way of Socialism themselves approvingly subscribe [D8]. Indeed, preceding the army, it was also U Nu's view that *brahma-vihara* was socialism [E2]. *Byama-so tayà/brahma-vihara* then, sums up the ideology behind Burma's Way to Socialism and the public justification for the closed economy. Today, it is perfunctorily placed, as we have already seen in chapter 4, at the heart of the SLORC-SPDC military ideology for the country, but it is mainly for the democracy movement for whom it has real meaning. This is the subject of the chapter 19.

¹ *AREADISE MY BKO AER: et al.* [The rebellion of the female monks]. U Adeiksa was a revolutionary monk in several ways. He believed that though English was the language that politically conscious Burmese were avoiding as the language of the oppressors, as an instrument it was neutral and that it should be mastered by monks not to be left behind. He went to study in India and England. His pupils were the controversial U Ottama, later declared *adhamma*, and the missionary monks U Thittila. When he was disrobed he became known as U Aung Myat Htut Amata [‘leAacht TæAmt].

² Thein Hswei (1951:15–17); Aung Thàn (1969, I:75–77; II:47–49). See also Myá Han (1998:34–35).

³ Than Tun (1978:112–13).

Chapter 13

Mental culture and crisis government

Evidently mental culture is important to political discourse in general. Even Aung San, the man designated as the most secular of Burmese leaders, could not evade its implications on his politics. The question arises is in what way these practices have been actually employed in political crises by the leaders beyond the confines of the prison, and beyond the rhetoric of their speeches and writings.

Buddhist responses to political crises

Saw Maung

General Saw Maung was concerned with delineating Burmese from foreign cultural habits and technologies. Characterising himself as a Buddhist at heart, he sometimes responded in Buddhist fashion to questions posed by journalists. For example, to a question about students fearing violence upon return from the border he replied with one of the Buddha's sayings which is also a standard phrase used by meditation teachers to invite people to meditate and see the truth: 'we have a teaching from the Buddha – "Welcome to see for yourself and to see the truth"'.¹ The implication clearly is that he considered himself and the army good Buddhists who abhor violence. Indeed, when it came to distinguishing between '-isms,' Saw Maung proclaimed the army neutral to politics except for Buddhism, 'the original "-ism" which can never be overwhelmed by new "-isms"'.² The army, though subject to impermanence in the same way as the Buddha and the *arahats*, is fearless.³

We have already noted that Aung San's most important quality was his 'one-pointed mind' (*samadhi*); this mental quality permitted unification of the country. It is only natural that Saw Maung as the head of State facing disintegration of his country should emphasize this very same quality. Indeed, despite the evident interests the army has in politics, he expressed the view that the army was now politically neutral after the BSPP episode. He expressed their role as one of 'jury' [qmaDKMkI], literally 'great arbitrator' (person with *samadhi* who sits on the bench).

Only *samadhi* permits seeing truth objectively, and so *samadhi* is what Saw Maung felt he *should* have. As Aung Gyi put it, Saw Maung used to proclaim his attainment of a higher spiritual plane, including superior *samadhi*, and that to oppose him is to oppose the Buddha's laws of causation.

He said things like: 'You are disintegrating the Tatmadaw. This is the last warning given to you. The Chief of Staff is giving the last warning,' he wrote. 'U Aung Gyi, you have committed a Pyinsanandriya kan [sin against Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and parents]. As a Defense Chief of Staff I feel sorry for you. I really believe the law of correlation [referring to the Burma Socialist Programme Party's philosophical tract 'The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment'], really believe in Buddhism and have achieved *thamadi* [a level of concentration from meditation]. Whatever I say is always the truth. Don't ever plan to stir up the country by writing letters like the 41-page one. [Aung Gyi's first letter to Ne Win and former members of the Revolutionary Council written in 1988] We are not reluctant to take action against you and are giving you a last warning.'⁴

Saw Maung in one of his speeches contrasted the Burmese technique leading to *samadhi* as infinitely superior to foreign computers. Burmese techniques of meditation that arrive at 'control of mind' [sit YinKich] are much faster than computers that demand 'data processing'. So when you ask whether, for example, you have been to London, data processing kicks in with a computer, and you have to press a button to get the answer. However, the Burmese mind is so very swift and needs no button to work.

But our mind can give such a required answer in a split second. Our brain can give answers quicker than the computers. So, I have come to think thus. Control the mind. This is my idea. But I may be wrong. Our process of computing is that quick.

And to curb the very swift currents of mind [del akant pit YinKichn'ty], our people are urged to meditate ['do *samadhi*', qmaDI pha]. It is very difficult. They [the foreigners] cannot understand these things. They don't understand such things.⁵

He took this further and said that to enter on the path to *nibbana* one must have no self-view, and no 'Self means pride – the pride that I am I. Self must be removed, killed ... one must do as he [the Buddha]

¹ e.g. Saw Maung (1990b:36,49).

² Saw Maung (1990b:337).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:157).

⁴ 'Letter to General Ne Win from U Aung Gyi'. Rangoon, 01.05.1992. *Burma Debate*, July–Aug 1997.

⁵ Speech on conclusion of 40th training course of the Command and General Staff College, 10 November 1989. *State Law and Order Restoration Council Chairman Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services General Saw Maung's addresses*. Rangoon: Ministry of Information, 1990, p. 215 (Burmese), 265 (English).

teaches.’¹

Samadhi has, in this case, been translated into English somewhat inadequately as ‘meditation’.² This contrast between foreign computers and Burmese *samadhi* was made in the overall context of a difference he sought to sketch between foreign cultures and the culture of Burma [ယဉ်ကျေးမှု]. He said that ‘you all should do everything you can to preserve culture and tradition. The people of our country understand and appreciate well the concept of *metta*.’ He encouraged the army and its families to practise *metta*. If *metta* and *samadhi* are apparently uniquely Burmese values, then he nevertheless concludes his argument saying that this *metta* should be more than just bonding in social and family relationships, it should also be used to discipline these relationships, for those with *metta* should ‘admonish the family members of the Tatmadaw units so that they might become good persons, have love for their country, adhere to discipline including school discipline ...’. And why? Because otherwise Saw Maung himself would be blamed, for ‘If you act in an undisciplined way, I will get shame’. Saw Maung himself was ‘solely responsible’.

Saw Maung, like Mindon and Hpo Hlaing, thus emphasized meditation in the context of solving a national crisis and searching for a new centre of identity through which he wished to represent Burma. Indeed, in remarkable parallel to Hpo Hlaing, he emphasized the need to ‘kill the self’. However, rather than using it as Hpo Hlaing did, to extract himself from his political predicament, namely by working on the side of reform, he in fact chose to entrench existing army interests through his emphasis on *samadhi* rather than *vipassana*.

The 1991 monastic boycott of the military was a great setback for the SLORC regime. This was the first time in Burmese history that a collective monastic boycott was called against the government or the national army.³ This contributed to Saw Maung’s downfall. Here, I would like to note that this crisis situation motivated the monks appointed to preach by Saw Maung’s government that he should spend time in *vipassana* practice. As the famous Tipitakadhara Sayadaw, the Secretary of the State Sanghamahanayaka Committee, put it to General Saw Maung, Chairman of the SLORC, on 22 October 1990:

According to the Buddha’s teachings, meditate on whatever is arising in present situation, with *vipassana*-insight, that is meditating on every arising and passing away of materiality (*rupa*) and mentality (*nama*), as they really are ... *Paccuppañāna* yo *dharmam* – the one who meditates on whatever is arising and passing away of mental and material phenomena at the very present moment realizes it as *anicca*-impermanence, *dukkha*-suffering and *anatta*-no-soul. *Asamhira* *asamkuppam* – one should not follow up present dhamma with *tanha*-craving and *dosa*-hatred. *Tam vidvamanubruhaye* – the task of meditation should be developed.⁴

Coming from the state-appointed head of the Sangha Committee, this shows to what depth the regime had sunk in its dealings with the Sangha and the Burmese people as a whole. General Saw Maung was increasingly in mental turmoil and his *samadhi* gave way to a nervous breakdown.

Tin U

If we are to go by Tin U’s comments, what Saw Maung missed was that *vipassana* underlies the culture of reform. When asked if the SLORC might feel a sense of shame about its actions, Tin U, Deputy Chairman of the National League for Democracy, replied that SLORC generals should ‘lay down all their weapons just for ten days and undertake a period of *vipassana* meditation practice under a competent Sayadaw [senior monk]. If their meditation is developing nicely then I think they should extend this practice indefinitely. I think the whole country would applaud them for this noble behaviour.’ Their meditation practice will ‘automatically reveal to them, by themselves, without anyone’s help, their true inner state of being. All Burmese will understand this.’ Though there might see ‘some redeeming qualities in them’, Tin U thinks ‘they should meditate first’ as ‘People are suffering’ [C19]. Such emphasis has also been made by Aung San Suu Kyi who referred to austerity practice (*tapa*) as the traditional requirement of *mahasamata* [C32].

This view that the military regime will change and stop making the people suffer once they practise mental culture, and in particular ‘insight contemplation’ (*vipassana*), and once they have developed ‘loving-kindness’ (*metta*) and ‘compassion’ (*karuna*) [F1], is held by many Burmese Buddhists [C14].

The call for ‘loving-kindness’ (*metta*) above is particularly poignant when presented by an ex-

¹ Saw Maung (1990b:215,266).

² I will take up the relationship between *metta* and *samadhi* in the chapter on *byahma-so tayà*.

³ There was a monastic boycott against Kon-daw Maung Kya Ban under King Mindon, but this was not a full onastic boycott against the government.

⁴ Patriarch Maha Thera’s *Ovadakathas delivered to State Law and Order Restoration Council Senior General Saw Maung*. Rangoon: Department of Religious Affairs, U Aung Than, 1991, p. 19.

commander of the Burmese army and one-time heir-apparent to General Ne Win. Tin U was Minister of Defence and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (1974–76). He was arrested when he was accused of involvement in an aborted army officer's coup in July 1976 for which he was imprisoned. He was released in 1980 under a general amnesty. However, he was imprisoned again between 1989–95 for his work with the National League for Democracy. Though stripped of his army titles, today he is still affectionately known as 'The Great General' [bLkKpKl].

U Nu

U Nu, in the midst of the biggest political crisis in his career as Prime Minister, retreated into the same Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha *vipassana* centre in which Tin U later became a monk. Indeed, U Nu was the principal founding member of this centre. The Karens had captured Mandalay in March 1949, and were close to capturing Burma's capital Rangoon. This took place a prolonged period of great anxiety, starting in 1949 when elections had to be postponed, and involved him announcing in early June 1950 that he was taking a vow to attain a particular state in *vipassana* contemplation. In July, he said that he would go the next day to the meditation centre as he had 'a vow to keep to attain the thin-khar-ru-pek-kha nyan (Sankharupekkha nana ခါးပုကံဝံ့)'. He warned that 'Until then do not send for me, even if the whole country is enveloped in flames. If there are fires, you must put them out yourselves' [C20].

This was a particular kind of self purification, for as he wrote much later about this particular stage of *vipassana* (Sankharupekkha nana), 'I really consider this to be a wonderful *nana* [intelligence]'. He considered this stage particularly wonderful as it results in equanimity with major advantages. It permits one to be 'free from fear', to 'treat good as well as bad phenomena with equanimity' and to retain the state of mindfulness the longest.

Nu repeatedly went into meditation retreats at times of personal or national crisis, including the Laotian crisis. The practice of *vipassana* at critical times is also linked to the view that when practised in itself it contributes to the peace and stability of the whole nation and even the world. In respect of U Nu's government in particular, the practice, patronage and furtherance of insight in some respects usurped hands-on political action.¹ For U Nu, the abolition of 'I' – consciousness through insight resulted in the best government: the kind of government that does not need to govern. In a speech in America in 1959, he spoke about insight as a way of resolving more than just personal difficulties. A proper socialist state was in need of 'Streamwinner' (*sotapanna*)² who had permanently uprooted defilements through the practice of insight.

the Sotapanna-politician can serve his country with honesty and efficiency because he cannot be bribed or threatened ... People can trust the politicians in full confidence ... By seeing the example of Sotapanna-politicians, other bad politicians or worldlings will imitate them. So everybody will be reformed ... to combat Communism and Fascism in our country, to preserve our independence, and to establish a socialist state, I urge all of you to practice the way to become a Sotapanna.³

Here, then, through the practice of insight and the ruling of their own mind, government officers provided an example others would follow so that there would eventually be no need for rulers. Introspective rule of mind has become a perfect form of socialist state-rule.

King Mindon

The involvement of *vipassana* in government was first initiated during the reign of King Mindon (1853–78). Mindon himself brought mental culture into the duties of kingship at the very beginning of his reign when, upon accession to the throne, he requested his Thathanabaing to write a work on royal conduct entitled *Commentary on the way of the king* [Thúyazá mekga dipani kyàn]. Finished in 1853, Thathanabaing said that the King himself requested 'to have a work written on royal discipline and mental culture' as previous writers on the subject of discipline of royalty 'have tended to lack deference to and profundity in the Buddhist truths' and were 'materialist in orientation', so that following them is 'like eating curry without salt by which one can never feel contented' [C21].

King Mindon, who seized power immediately after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, was the first major king-patron to take a personal active interest in *vipassana*. He also patronised the earliest generation of *vipassana* teachers considered the founders of Burma's contemporary *vipassana* methods, such as the Thilon Sayadaw (1796–1860), Htuthkaung Sayadaw (1798–1880), Shwegyin Sayadaw (1822–1893), Hngetdwin

¹ See also King (1964:96).

² With at most seven more lives for whom entry onto the path of nibbana is assured.

³ A close confidant of U Nu as reported by King (1964:256).

Sayadaw (1831–1910) and the nun Me Kin. Furthermore, he had the latter teach *vipassana* to his queens in the palace. Interest within the palace is confirmed by Maheiti, the Right Hand Queen of King Mindon, who commissioned a work called *The mirror of vipassana*.¹

Significantly, it is to the Thilon Sayadaw, Mindon's favourite forest monk, to whom the Mahasi Sayadaw traces back his *vipassana* techniques (referred to as a 'practice lineage' as opposed to a 'scriptural learning' lineage based on ordination). Since Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin U and U Nu all practise *vipassana* in the Mahasi tradition, there is therefore much overlap between dynastic and spiritual succession from the time of Mindon. Mindon provided the impetus for the introduction of mental culture into government at a time of crisis and the crisis is here today.

Mental culture and the military

U Nu and the Ne Win coup

To understand the role of *vipassana* from the military perspective, it is necessary to take the example of U Nu one step further, for it bears on the current political situation. With government becoming untenable, on 26 September 1958 U Nu, then Prime Minister, invited by the military under Ne Win, by means of an eight point letter, to restore law and order until elections would be held in April 1959.

Point six referred to the army's role in attaining peace 'within the country' by the 'suppression of such crimes as rape, robbery, dacoity, kidnapping, and murder'. This is distinct from point seven below which, concerning itself with the attainment of 'internal peace', is undoubtedly a reference to the practice of mental culture.

As you yourself are well aware that all the citizens of the Union are yearning for internal peace, with as much ardent longing as human beings in the beginning of the world prayed for the sun and the moon. I need not enlarge on this point. Therefore I would particularly like to request the government formed by you to secure to the fullest extent this glorious prize of internal peace.²

Ne Win replied, in a letter drafted by U Nu himself:

I am firmly convinced that the stability, progress and prosperity of the Union is greatly dependent on the existence of internal peace. Therefore, I give my promise that I will put forth my utmost endeavour to secure internal peace.

U Nu's resignation took place 28 October 1958 when he divested himself of his personal possessions, later sold at an auction for charity, and ordained as a monk spending a week in a monastery.

It is important to appreciate that U Nu's request, and Ne Win's reply, on this point of 'internal peace' pertained to mental culture. For example, U Nu says that human beings 'at the beginning of the world ... prayed for the sun and the moon' because the first human beings were doing so in the origin myth (See App. I.2). In the chapter 'What is socialism?' in his *Conduct of government* [ပျော်တူမှု] (1960) U Nu identifies the goal of socialism as returning to this original pure (*jhana*, but in his view more specifically *vipassana*-induced) state, prior to the appearance of the defilement of craving and the corruption of man, where there are no differences in gender, beauty or possessions.

In popular perception, therefore, to practise mental culture is to purify the mind and thereby remedy and overcome dangers of lawlessness and greed. It bears a direct relationship to the reform of a hopelessly degraded society. Successful practice is supposed to lead people to change their minds to the extent that they will naturally become inclined to understand and observe law and order. 'To meditate' is 'to apply oneself to the *dhamma*' [တရားသမာဓိ] but *dhamma* can be used to refer to the 'attainment of *nibbana*', the 'Buddha's teachings' (*tipitaka*), 'justice' and 'law'.³ Mindon and U Nu's calls had similarities to those of Tin U, namely to bring mental culture into government as part of this common mental culture of politics, in which change in unsatisfactory political and legal institutions must be preceded by first accomplishing a significant change in the mental state of its incumbents.⁴ In other words, to make them see the laws of

¹ Thandíma (1883).

² Sein Win (1959:85–86).

³ For a detailed analysis of this concept see Than Tun (1978:77–90).

⁴ Further light is shed on the two passages by the last editorial included in *Dhammantaraya* (published by the military regime in psychological warfare with the Communists) from *Rangoon Post* (10 May 1959), which argues that in Buddhism the way to nirvana is to extinguish greed (*lawba*), anger (*dawtha*), and illusion (*mawha*) 'through self-discipline' [i.e. through morality, concentration and insight]. However, in communist countries it is government who legislates and disallows these. He considers to what extent 'words like greed, avarice, etc, should disappear from the Russian vocabulary' (p. 37). Mental culture, here, is the avenue to first internal peace, and second to country-wide peace, whereas in the communist system a country-wide single-class sense of peace would not

kamma [G1]. This emphasis on primacy of mind is what, as I hope to show, Aung San Suu Kyi has in common with the broader cultural thread running right through Burmese society.¹

The Ne Win regime declared it would not involve itself in mixing religion and government. Successive military regimes have clamped down on all forms of organization, including many Buddhist organizations. However, true to Ne Win's 1958 promise to Nu, these very same regimes have permitted the insight contemplation traditions, of which there are several dozen nationally, to proselytise relatively freely, though some *adhamma* cases have been brought against some *vipassana* teachers. The *Burmese Way to Socialism* that Ne Win propounded 'does not serve the narrow self-interest of a group, an organization, a class, or a party, but plans its economy with the sole aim of giving maximum satisfaction to material, spiritual and cultural needs of the whole nation'. This, as we shall see, later led to the incorporation of *byama-so tayà* in the formal ideology of Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party.

Even today these spiritual movements are still perceived as having the potential to lead to 'internal peace', for *vipassana* practice, with its emphasis on no-self and insubstantiality of identity, does not in itself encourage any form of militant opposition (though it often leads to more sophisticated intellectual forms of dissent). In that sense, the military sees it as 'the opium of the people', for those whose property was nationalised during the military regime took to its practice like ducks to water.

It was under Ne Win that the first, 'pilgrim's visas' were issued, permitting foreigners to come to Burma and stay there for many years, pending their good behaviour.² This began in 1979 in advance of the 1980 Sangha purification. At that time, only diplomatic staff and a handful of academics had entry into Burma.

Today, Ne Win himself is reported to have taken to meditation, though it would appear to be tinged with magic. Sanda Win, one of Ne Win's daughters who has the most privileged access to her father, characterised her father's activities in his retirement as follows.

[Ne Win] was in good health, spending most of his time in his vast library where he studies Buddhist sutras and meditates. To control his own destiny, his daughter explained, her father also indulges in a prevalent Burmese practice called *yedayache* [she means *yadayache*], for which he walks backward over a bridge at night, or has his pilot circle his plane nine times over his place of his birth while he is seated in the plane on a wooden horse.³

Military attitudes

Following in the footsteps of Ne Win, who has alleged taken up an interest in Buddhism and meditation, since 1992 the regime has increasingly taken to representing itself as pious and Buddhist. In an interview, General Than Shwe said the following:

As regards the Myanmar leader's feelings towards the United States, Senior General Than Shwe's reply reflected his devotion to and practice of the tenets of the Buddha's teachings. He said:

'Let me again reiterate that we have no ill feelings whatsoever toward the United States. As you know, I am a soldier, but at the same time, I am also a Buddhist. I faithfully try to follow the Buddhist teaching, which says one should not entertain antagonistic or hostile feelings toward other human beings. So, even though I am a soldier, and even though I have to do certain things for the maintenance of peace and stability and for the welfare and security of the country, I don't have hostile or antagonistic feelings toward others. Although the United States may have some ill feelings toward us, we have no ill feelings toward the United States.'

Finally, when asked by the interviewer how he could be so quiet and calm, the Senior General said:

'Actually, you know, I try to be calm and serene. Even now I am thinking that when I retire, I will devote myself to religion. I don't have any worldly desires; I just want to live a quiet and peaceful life. What I am doing now is because I love my country.'

His reply was indeed convincing in its very simplicity and showed the depth of his feelings for the country and his people.⁴

With these public expressions on the part of the generals, and largely forgotten since U Nu's heady days, mental culture has begun to creep back into the public limelight.

Today mental culture has once again come to be seen as an important and positive attribute for government. This is evident from the establishment in March 1992 of a new government title, namely 'Teacher of Mental Culture' [*knansriya*]. By March 1995, no less than eighty-five such titles had been

lead to personal fulfillment in terms of inner peace. This underlines the ambiguity in the original letter by Nu to the caretaker government, namely concerning 'inner peace'.

¹ Mya Maung (1992:ix) in seeking to find a model for the Burmese case of economic development which is capable of taking into account 'non-economic factors', quotes approvingly Lawrence E. Harrison's *Underdevelopment is a state of mind* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 1985.)

² Clements (1992:13).

³ Victor (1998:174).

⁴ Kyi Kyi Hla. 'Gives us a chance: an exclusive interview [with General Than Shwe]'. *MP*, May 1998.

issued accompanied by a financial reward, indicating that these teachers were now sanctioned by the government to teach mental culture. Also, the aforementioned International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University contains a Department of Vipassana along with a Department of Samatha, in the Faculty of Padipatti.¹

Members of the regime since the 1991 monastic strike seek to disarm their critics by presenting themselves as engaged in meditation. Victor describes how at an interview with General Maung Maung, 'the general spent almost an entire evening with me talking about the joys of meditation'.² However, when she mentioned the reports that women returning from Thailand with HIV had been executed by the regime, and that she herself had visited a mass grave, he responded that they were alive and cared for by monks and doctors along the border areas. He replied, 'you know, it is against the Buddhist religion to kill anyone.'

The regime admits on its official Internet site that mental culture provides the necessary solace for people during the years of slow economic development.

Through all the years of the country's slow economic development, Buddhism has provided strength and solace for its resilient people. No matter how busy they may be, devotees can be seen meditating or praying. Myanmar's meditation centres are, in fact, known world-wide and more centres have been opening all over the country. Foreigners are also enrolled at these centres.³

It is evident from the tourist map of Rangoon that foreigners are encouraged to seek out these experiences. The map conveniently shows at least two meditation centres for the tourist, namely the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha and the U Ba Khin International Meditation Centre. Tourist visas are routinely stepped up to 'Meditation visas' when they are stamped with the abbreviation 'Medi'.⁴ One goal of the regime in the field of tourism is thus to provide a Holy Land to foreigners who can come and meditate in this wonderfully Buddhist country [C15].

However, these centres are not just seen as beneficial for foreigners. The presence of *vipassana* centres in the minority states and abroad provides a useful stabilising influence in areas outside immediate government control, which in part explains the presence of the Minister for Border Areas at the inauguration ceremony of branches of forest monasteries in Rangoon.⁵ The regime has also opened 30 drug-treatment centres since 1975, where detoxification means undergoing agonizing withdrawal with a little opium and 'meditation lessons from Buddhist monks'.⁶

Military support for these movements is thus not a matter of personal devotion on its part. I have it on good authority from a highly placed informant that it was pragmatically perceived as a useful tool for keeping the Burmese people under control. The military regime today permits, to some extent, the practice of *vipassana* in prisons [C15].

In other words, to the regime *vipassana* provides a weapon of control aimed at those 'outside the legal fold'. Saw Maung's invitation to the students was similar to the Buddha's invitation to the people to meditate to find the truth – 'Welcome to see for yourself and to see the truth'.⁷ Nevertheless, it is not true to say that the military has used *vipassana* only as a tool and had absolutely no personal interest in its practice. For not only are the NLD leaders who emphasized the practice – directly or indirectly – of military background, but a number of military men have joined the fray in taking to its practice.

The Mahasi tradition

Sein Lwin, the most feared and brutal leader who took over the military regime immediately after Ne Win's resignation (26 July–12 August 1988), also known as the 'butcher of Rangoon', entered a Mahasi centre for *vipassana* practice upon his retirement. Also reported to have entered into meditation is Tin U, once Secretary General of the BSPP, who was removed from office in 1983 and was sentenced to life for

¹ IS, 07.01.1998; NLM, 19.06.1998.

² Victor (1998:210).

³ 'Tourist Information: religion and culture' at <http://www.myanmar.com/gov/tourist/rel.bak>.

⁴ In 1998 the visa regulations were altered so that extensions had to be paid for in foreign currency, resulting in a US\$90 expense for the first half year and the requirement for further foreign currency expenses every half year. This has made it difficult for longstay monks without private funds to find a place to meditate in Burma long-term.

⁵ Visiting SLORC official U Win Pe in London on 7 June 1993 said that when quizzed on the attitude of government to insight centres, 'meditation assists in eliminating self-centredness and moving outwards' (*Burma Affairs Bulletin* 3,2, Apr–Jun 1993, p. 12). The regime's view of this is a one-way outward move that represents the subduing of ethnic minorities, and the spreading abroad of Burmese Buddhism in the form of *vipassana* oriented monasteries strictly under supervision of the military.

⁶ C.S. Wren. 'Heroin puts Burma in crisis over AIDS'. *New York Times*, 03.05.1998.

⁷ Saw Maung (1990b:36,49).

corruption. He spent his retirement 'devoted to religion and meditation'.¹

A strong relationship between the Mahasi tradition and the military regime is evident, which has prompted some to accuse it of having become an instrument of the military.²

The regime has indeed established much control over the Mahasi organization. Sometime in the early 1990s, the regime weeded out of the Thathana Yeiktha all monks who were not prepared to support the regime.³ The monk U Pandita left the Thathana Yeiktha at that point and is therefore seen as independent from the regime. It is with this relatively independent side of the Mahasi tradition that Aung San Suu Kyi has been most associated. Tin U, on the other hand, is associated with the main Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha before the assertion of the regime's control. However, Mahasi centres have been established since 1938, well before the Burmese military even existed, and control has been established over most of the country's organizations, so that the wholesale identification of the Mahasi tradition with the army would be simplistic.

Indeed, in the course of Ne Win's attempt to 'purify' the Sangha in the 1980s, lack of co-operation by the Mahasi Sayadaw and the Tipitaka Mingun Sayadaw led to Ne Win initiating a defamation campaign against these two monks in a very similar manner to the campaign against Aung San Suu Kyi. The regime distributed leaflets accusing the Mahasi of talking with the 'nat' spirits, and it was claimed that the Tipitaka Mingun Sayadaw had been involved in some unsavoury incident two years after entering the monkhood. So 'the SLORC's crude use of disparaging propaganda against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is not something new or surprising'.⁴

Nevertheless, because of its formidable influence and its structure of centres, the Mahasi tradition is still much in favour with the regime. The military has allowed the Mahasi tradition to expand, take in foreigners and to establish itself abroad even while Burma's borders were officially closed. On examining the opening of Mahasi centres, it is notable that the biggest growth took place during the military period after 1962, not under U Nu's premiership as one would imagine.⁵

Lately, with the new emphasis on public military devotion to Buddhism, official regime sponsorship has been taken up once again. Activities initiated by the Mahasi centres are routinely reported in the national press.⁶ On 27 July 1998 General Khin Nyunt attended a cash donation ceremony for the construction of a three-storey Thiri Yadana building at the Thiri Mingala Mahasi Yeiktha in Dagon Myothit, together with all the major government ministers: including Industry, Cooperatives, Hotels and Tourism, Progress of Border Areas and National Races, Livestock and Fisheries, Health, Rangoon Mayor and various other ministers and officials.⁷ Since then, many more donations by high ranking officers have followed.⁸

¹ 'Brig. General Tin Oo dead at 71'. Associated Press, 30.12.1998.

² This argument has been put to me by the son of a senior NLD politician. Indeed, the Mahasi argument spilled over into the press of the Burmese opposition in Japan. Japan is seen by the Burmese regime as a hotbed of opposition. It is a place where much intelligence is gathered by both sides. When a Mahasi monk took many pictures of me in a way which appeared to be more than passing interest (including photographs with glasses on and off), I mentioned this to some Burmese acquaintances. My informal account was promptly published under the heading 'Government monk?'. When I wrote a letter in reply, saying that this header was inappropriate as I could not be sure about the status of this monk, I was vilified in the next issue as insensitive to the opposition cause (*Voice of Burma* 8.10.97, 19.10.1997). Evidently this permitted the editors to air a long-time grievance. This grievance is also largely stoked by ignorance of the editors and reporters to this newspaper, who were not only largely ignorant about *vipassana* traditions in Burma because of their long stay abroad, but were also one-sided in their political views, giving the *vipassana* traditions little credit for their revolutionary political history.

³ Arguably there is some support for the Khsatriya [military] tradition within Buddhism, for, as Goyal (1987:58–60, 201–2) argues, Buddhism plays an important role in questioning established hierarchies in emergent ruling classes.

⁴ 'Hitting below the belt'. BurmaNet, 06.01.1998.

⁵ A total of 293 Mahasi centres were opened over the 43 year period between 1938–80, which averages at 6.8 centres per annum, rising to 8.79 per annum for the 33 year period between 1947–1980. The pre-independence period (1938–48) saw a rise of 6 centres, or 1.5 average per annum. The early post-independence period (1948–62) saw a rise of 103 centres over 13 years, or an average of 7.8 centres per annum. The military period (1962–80) saw a rise of 185 centres over 19 years, or an average of 9.7 per annum. The last 11 years (1970–80) of this period was responsible for the biggest rise in centres at 142, or an average of 12.9 per annum. The rise in the number of new centres has diminished since the death of the Mahasi Sayadaw in 1983.

⁶ 'Nyaungkanaye Sayadaw leaves for Japan'. *NLM*, 15.05.1998; 'Pagodas, monasteries crowded with devotees on Fullmoon Day of Waso'. *NLM*, 09.07.1998; 'Respects paid to religious title recipient Sayadaw of Yay U'. *NLM*, 26.04.1998.

⁷ *NLM*, 27.07.1998.

⁸ 'Families of Ministry of Transport offer dry rations to Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha'. *NLM*, 21.08.1998.

Pa Auk Sayadaw

Senior members of the regime have taken a liking to the Pa Auk Tawya Sayadaw [PaeAakàtarSraetā]. On 28 June 1998, it announced a major cash donation ceremony for the opening of a branch in Thanlyin, Rangoon. Again, Khin Nyunt was present along with the Major government ministers. The leading members of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee were also present,¹ and Ne Win's grandson, the son of Sanda Win, apparently insisted on attending this event. He gave a copy of the Sayadaw's writings to Ne Win, who appreciates the Pa Auk Sayadaw's teachings.

The Pa Auk Sayadaw is unique among Burmese *vipassana* teachers in teaching *samatha* to *jhana* level along with *vipassana*. This monk's fame is underlined by Dr Mehm Tin Mon's *An introduction to Hpà-auk-tàwya*, first published in 1991.² Mehm Tin Mon, who also teaches at the Department of *Samatha* at the new Buddhist University, believes that hitherto Burmese methods have ignored the *jhana* practices and he strongly supports this tradition. Opinion within the Pa Auk tradition appears to be that he is more scripturally correct in his methodology than other Sayadaws. This is causing some major problems obstructing, as the Pa Auk supporters see it, the publication of the Sayadaw's writings in an environment where the Mahasi method predominates. Nevertheless, a number of publications have already appeared, in particular abroad.³

The current Pa Auk Sayadaw is U Seinna [Isīṇā] the third in line from the original Pa Auk Sayadaw who was known as the 'Fruit Sayadaw' [qsqīSraetā] because he lived on only fruit. The Second Pa Auk Sayadaw U Egga Pañña [Iagṇa] died on 21 July 1981. After Seinna practised *samatha* and *vipassana* for twenty years at a forest monastery, he began teaching at the Pa Auk monastery in 1983 [1345]. Though I do not find this in his biographical details, I have it on authority from a Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha teacher that he originally studied *vipassana* at this centre.

I have seen video reports on television which featured the numerous foreign monks, from many countries, including Sri Lanka, Italy and Germany, who gave testimony to the excellence of the Pa Auk method. When I visited the centre in September 1998, there were a total of 313 people meditating there, including 56 foreigners of sixteen nationalities. A large number of them were Taiwanese, with smaller numbers of Malaysians, Sinhalese and Germans. It has attracted a number of long-standing foreign monks whom I found to be intellectually curious. The centre occupies a vast stretch of land totalling 190 acres, including forested hills with isolated meditation huts planted far apart. It is ten hours by bus or train from Rangoon, though only an hour by plane, but malaria poses a serious risk.

Although the Pa Auk tradition has supporters high up in the regime, nevertheless, publication of Pa Auk Sayadaw's voluminous work proved to be a problem. Pa Auk Sayadaw's work concerns itself with knowledge not just of the present, as the other methods, but with knowledge of the past and the future. This turned out to be a major departure from previous methods, and fear has been expressed that it would imply criticism of the other *vipassana* methods, in particular of the Mahasi. Though a large volume of the writings had already been published in Taiwan, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, upon the recommendations of the Mahanayaka Council decided not to publish his works in Burma for fear of destabilising the situation by alienating followers of other methods.

Alodawpyay Sayadaw

The Alodawpyay Sayadaw [AlitāpvaSraetā] Bhaddanta Ariyavamsa⁴ is also known as 'Pakistan Sayadaw' because he originates from Arakan. Aungmyay Bodhi Dhamma Yeiktha, his principal monastery, is located opposite the famous Shwezigon Pagoda in Nyaung U near Pagan, but thanks to sponsorship by the military, he now has affiliations in Rangoon and elsewhere.

When General Khin Nyunt toured Pagan donating and inspecting the renovation of the pagodas, he met this Sayadaw. After General Khin Nyunt became his pupil, the Sayadaw seldom stayed in his monastery often accompanying General Khin Nyunt on his travels.

¹ 'Phaauk Tawya Yeiktha of International Buddha Sasana Yeiktha Branch opened in Thanlyin – Nine wellwisher families donate over K35m for meditation centre'. *NLM*, 29.06.1998, p. 1.

² edāk'tamc:t chāh [An introduction to Hpà-auk-tàwya] PaeAakàtarmit Skārṇkūl r'tnamc:saepx 1991X See also chapter 4 on the works of Pa Auk Sayadaw, in the same author's Aint Smit t'pnt t'k n'pā vol. 1, 2nd edition, mmaet nasaepx rnkūl 1995x m'k n'pā 50–81, 203–315X

³ *Light of wisdom: meditation in Pa Auk Forest Monastery*. Kuala Lumpur: Wisdom Audio Visual Exchange, 1997.

⁴ He received so many titles that now he is billed as Alodopyi Sayadaw Maha Gandavacaka Pandita Maha Saddhammajorikadhaja Bhaddanta Ariyabhivamsa.

He received his name after restoring the Alodaw Pyay or 'Wish-fulfilling' Pagoda. This pagoda is now visited by many Burmese pilgrims. He is said by some to have originally studied *vipassana* under the Mahasi Sayadaw. However, he is known in particular for his *samatha* and has become something of a wishfulfilling monk to his followers. He teaches *vipassana* and has established teaching monasteries (Pariyatti Sathintaiks) and meditation centres in various parts of the country.

This monk is now patronised by the regime's top echelons. General Maung Aye visited the Alodaw Pagoda on 11 February 1998, during which he gave a cash donation.¹ A visit to Pagan by the highest-ranking officers including Than Shwe took place on 18 April 1998. The visit included a clock-wise tour of the Shwezigon Pagoda (auspicious), they donated funds and then visited the Alodawpyi Pagoda where they also made donations.²

The most fervent supporter of the Sayadaw is General Khin Nyunt. As part of the campaign to develop influence in Arakan, he happily sponsored the opening of a meditation centre in Arakan by the monk on 17 March 1998.³

In March 1998 Khin Nyunt facilitated and visited the construction of the Aungmye Bodhi Dhamma Yeiktha, another three-storey building at Pinshwenyaung Street in Tarmway Township Rangoon, 'to enable the Sayadaw to carry out the missionary duties with peace of mind and conveniently'. At the opening ceremony, Khin Nyunt said that the Sayadaw had 'established Pariyatti Sathintaiks and meditation centres in various parts of the country', and 'at the same time ... the Sayadaw is discharging missionary duties in Bagan and border areas energetically.' Money for this particular building was provided by what would appear to be government agencies, including more than 5 million Kyat from the Yangon City Development Committee, and 2 million Kyat from the Ministry of Construction and the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development. Khin Nyunt made regular visits to monitor progress.⁴

On 9 August 1998, Khin Nyunt attended the laying of the foundation stone in the construction of the Htayrawatha Kyaungsaung, one of the buildings in the same Bodhi Dhamma Yeiktha compound in Rangoon. This coincided with the umbrella hoisting ceremony for the Bawdiyadana Theindawgyi. The procedure was that Khin Nyunt received 3 million Kyat from Brigadier General Tint Swe, a retired army officer and sole donor of the Bawdiyadana Theindawgyi, which he then presented to the Bawdiyadana Theindawgyi. It was Khin Nyunt who hoisted the umbrella, and together with the other ministers laid the foundation stone.⁵

At the same centre General Khin Nyunt regularly offers robes to 'Pakistan Sayadaw'.⁶ There are usually between seven and nine ministers and other high officials, present on a regular basis at these events. Khin Nyunt performed the water libation ceremony on 19 November 1998 for his donation to the ordination hall at the Aung Myay Bodhi Dhamma Yeiktha within the same centre. At the water libation ceremony, there were the highest monks of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, seven ministers and a number of other high government officials.⁷

¹ 'Vice-Chairman of State Peace and Development Council pays obeisance to pagodas and Sayadaw in Bagan-Nyaung U.' *NLM*, 12.02.1998.

² *NLM*, 17.11.1998.

³ 'Safeguarding of religious, cultural heritage in Rakhine State getting necessary inputs.' *NLM*, 19.03.1998.

⁴ 'Secretary-1 inspects construction of Aungmye Bodhi Dhamma Yeiktha Alodawpay Kyaungtaik in Tamway.' *NLM*, 22.03.1998; 'Senior General Than hwe and party pay obeisance to pagodas in Bagan.' *NLM*, 19.04.1998; 'Theravada Buddhism flourishes in Myanmar thanks to Venerable Sayadaws' abilities to carry out missionary duties'. *NLM*, 05.05.1998; 'Secretary-1 pays homage to Maha Zeya Atulamarazein Bonze Buddha.' *NLM*, 11.07.1998.

⁵ *NLM*, 10.08.1998.

⁶ In 1998 Khin Nyunt offered the wazo and the *kathina* robes. 'Secretary-1 and wife attend Waso robes offering ceremony of Aungmyaybawdi Yeiktha Alodawpyi Kyaungtaik (Yangon)'. *NLM*, 10.8.1998; 'Secretary-1 and wife attend Kathina robes offering ceremony of Aung Myaybawdi Dhamma Yektha Alodawpyi Kyaungtaik (Yangon)'. *NLM*, 20.10.1998.

⁷ 'Ordination hall of Aungmye Bodhi Dhamma Yeiktha, Alodawpyi Kyaungtaik (Yangon)'. *NLM*, 30.11.1998.

Part IV
Aung San Suu Kyi and Buddhism

Chapter 14

Sources on Aung San Suu Kyi

I will deal with Aung San Suu Kyi's own writings later, but here I wish to briefly draw attention to the source material available in book form, which has so far all been of journalistic provenance. An overall comment on her profile presented in these works is necessary here.

It is difficult to collect in-depth information about her as she has been isolated from the outside world except for the occasional interview with a journalist or politician. Her telephone has been cut off and visitors fear the unwelcome attention of military intelligence. More than that, however, it is difficult to come to terms objectively with personalities such as Aung San Suu Kyi because those who have written about her have also invested emotionally in her. It is difficult to be neutral.

This makes any attempt to write an objective account of her life very difficult. And yet it is important that an attempt is made to highlight her life in different ways, for there is no doubt that Aung San Suu Kyi plays a role internationally, as she has captured the imagination of people all over the world. Not only does she represent the hope for the future on the part of the majority of the Burmese people, but also most free-thinking persons in the international environment. Indeed, she is being held up as an icon of humanitarian and democratic values under threat.

It is uncommon for a political leader to have the first biography intended to inform children, but this is the case with Aung San Suu Kyi. The pedagogical value of her life seems inexhaustible in democratic countries. She has become an icon in particular for the women's movement. Her role as a mother deprived of access to her children has resulted in the earliest English-language biographies of Aung San Suu Kyi interestingly targeted as children's books. It is the women authors, namely Whitney and Victor who sketch these dimensions most effectively, thus exposing the threat that these military regimes pose to Burmese family life. In Japan, though her speeches and writings have been translated,¹ Aung San Suu Kyi was the focus of *manga* comic book-style young literature, before any other account of her life appeared.²

It is not surprising that this should be the case, for Aung San Suu Kyi's internationalist and humanitarian approach to democracy, transcends boundaries and appeals to internationalist sentiment, and it represents the major challenge to authoritarian governments particularly in Asia. Certainly, from the point of view of the Burmese regime she represents a serious threat. Its imagery, as represented by Hpe Kan Kaung, is that of a woman of loose morals who prefers foreigners to Burmese and is about to set fire to the nation. However, this literature came into existence, it should be noted, under severe conditions. The regime censored positive, and sponsored negative and destructive stories about her. For example, in October 1998 officials summoned local reporters, writers and publishers from state-owned and joint venture publications to print articles attacking her. Burmese newspapers and magazines typically receive articles written by regime officials that must be published on a daily or weekly basis.³

The resulting imagery of her is therefore polarised between these two, neither of which is without major flaws. The positive ideal of Aung San Suu Kyi is invariably the outcome of what brutal actions the regime perpetrates on the Burmese family, and the fact that Aung San Suu Kyi stands up to it by advocating a non-violent struggle while continually placed under house arrest and restrictions by the regime. Nevertheless, as Parenteau points out, 'biographers searching for facts on her early life have a difficult job', as she was not an activist, controversial ambitious, and 'even when she began appearing in public, she played down her own personality while emphasizing her ideas' (p 130). The lack of knowledge about her early life permits a selective view that is highly spiritual and spiritualised only more by the virulent attacks on her character by the regime's version of her life. Also, as I have pointed out in relation to Taylor's work, the NLD has often been academically side-lined, since it is still the military which retains control over government institutions. This has prevented an analysis of the cultural and Buddhist elements underlying its politics.

¹ Aung San Suu Kyi. *Jiyuu* [Freedom]. Translated by Yumiko Jansson. Tokyo: Shueisha, 1991; *Enzetsu huu* [Collected Speeches]. Translated by Ino Kenji. Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1996.

² Akazu Mizuha. *Aung San Suu Kyi: Tatataku Kujaku* [Aung San Suu Kyi: the fighting peacock]. 'Super Nobel Peace Prize Story.' No. 2. Tokyo: Ootoo Shobo, 1994.

³ Aung Zaw. 'Suppression of press freedom in Burma gets worse.' *The Nation*, 08.11.1998.

My aim, however, is to go beyond this polarisation. My aim is to elicit from among these conflicting views of her role and character some underlying continuities of her politics with that of her father, and with Burmese political values in general. My interest was to identify the cultural institutions and vernacular concepts that might just play a role in the conciliation process which I hope will eventually take place.

John Parenteau

The biography *Prisoner for peace: Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's struggle for democracy* (Greensboro: Morgan Reynolds, 1994) by John Parenteau was written for 'the young adult reader'. It uses no original interviews and is entirely based on previously published sources. It deals with her life until early 1994, while she was still under house arrest. In that sense it is out of date and, from our point of view, contributes relatively little.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that Parenteau, as part of his overall view of Aung San Suu Kyi as imprisoned, sketches Ne Win, whose house is in direct line of vision from Aung San Suu Kyi's house, as 'also imprisoned in his own home' (p 130). A reflection on this suggests that the idea of imprisonment works both ways, namely to punish and isolate, but also to protect from danger. This adds to the irony when in September 1998 the regime confined to guest houses NLD activists as 'guests' rather than prisoners on a large scale. The book also seeks to instil in the youth this value of the purity of Aung San Suu Kyi's resolution, for it concludes: 'regardless of what is to come, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has instilled that courage in her own sons, and in the sons and daughter of Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi has indeed lived the full life' (p 132).

Parenteau identifies Buddhism as a religion 'which overcomes worldly problems not by conquering them, but by understanding them and learning to make the best of them'. He also sees Buddhists as 'tending to be contemplative' and withdrawn from worldly problems (p 20). He does not, however, deal with either Aung San Suu Kyi's views on Buddhism, or with the role of Buddhism in her politics as a continuum with of past Burmese political values.

Whitney Stewart

Aung San Suu Kyi: fearless voice of Burma (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1997) by Whitney Stewart includes some fresh information gathered during a visit to Burma in 1995 and is presented in the form of interviews conducted with Aung San Suu Kyi and those surrounding her. Though aimed mainly at a young readership, it contains some useful information that I have not encountered elsewhere, including several photographs. As author of the previously published biography of the 14th Dalai Lama there is a little more detail in her treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi's relationship to Buddhism.

Like Parenteau, Stewart also begins with the threat posed by the regime to the family, in particular dealing with the mother-son and husband-wife relationships. Stewart's sketch is all the more commanding as the book begins with Aung San Suu Kyi's dilemma of impending arrest by the authorities while the children were with her and at risk. Also, she draws attention to the manipulation of Aung San Suu Kyi's husband by the SLORC for its own ends, which was to make him come and take his wife back to England, thus solving the problem of what to do with her.

She interprets Aung San Suu Kyi's mother as having taught her children that they should not demand revenge for their father's assassins, for the law of *karma* means that 'each person must control his or her own ignorance, hatred, and desire, or suffer the consequences in this life for the next' (p 25). Of particular interest is the reminiscence of a British journalist, namely that Aung San Suu Kyi was already deeply interested in conversing about politics when she was still living with her mother in India (p 40). She also drew attention to Aung San Suu Kyi spending two years University after high school studying political science at Delhi, which would have been between 1962–64, and that while Ne Win was taking over the country she 'kept an eye on Burma's problems'. And 'although some people believed that Suu Kyi had forgotten her country while she lived abroad, those who knew her well understood the depth of Suu Kyi's continued devotion to Burma' (p 43). Furthermore, she gives examples of Aung San Suu Kyi's maturity for a political role, such as her debate on the issue of her passport with the Burmese officials, and her response to the accusation that she was a spy while in India (p 64).

Interestingly, she sketches the Ne Win regime attempting to intimidate Aung San Suu Kyi as early as the early 1970s while she was on friendly terms with UN Secretary General, who was hated by Ne Win. Furthermore, at that time U Chit Myaing, Burma's former Ambassador to London, claimed that if he had attended her wedding to Michael Aris, a foreigner, 'I knew that ... I would be fired that day' (p 53).

She makes one error, in calling Aung San Suu Kyi's wedding a 'Buddhist ceremony' (p 55). In Burma, people are circumspect about bringing Buddhism into the wedding ceremony, which involves instead a *beik-theik saya*, an honourable Brahmin. Buddhism is involved only at the level of making a joint offering on a separate occasion to cement one's family relationship through joint merit, thus also securing the conjugal relationship for future lives.

Mikio Oishii

Aung San Suu Kyi's struggle: it's principles and strategy (Penang: Just World Trust) was published in 1997. The author, Mikio Oishii, studied at Bradford School of Peace Studies where he developed the interest 'in developing a spiritual and moral approach to conflict resolution' and where he completed a PhD on 'Conflict resolution and development: a case study of domestic development-related conflicts in Malaysia' in 1995. The book, the result of a Fellowship from the Just Trust, primarily attempts to advocate reconciliation within Burma within the ASEAN perspective.

It is divided into four chapters: Aung San Suu Kyi's struggle, the essence and principles underlying this struggle, the strategy to bring about democracy and human rights, and the issues and prospects for resolution.

One interesting theoretical idea the author applies is the way democracy movements threaten national boundaries through 'integrative power', as proposed by Boulding in *Three faces of power* (London: Sage Publications, 1989), that is different from 'threat' (capacity to coerce or destroy) and 'exchange power' (capacity to mobilise resources). Integrative power 'assumes that every human being has a capacity to respond to such values as truth, love and justice', and that the democracy movement mobilizes transnationally.¹

As the preface states, the book aims to show how an Asian leader 'could harness the traditions and spiritual beliefs found in the country's culture and history and employ them to their fullest potential in the struggle against tyranny'. The book, though of interest in other respects, is ill-informed in its understanding of the spiritual dimension to the democracy struggle, and links it to Hindu Karma Yoga.²

Hpe Kan Kaung

A book entitled *What is Aung San Suu Kyi? Whither does Aung San Suu Kyi go?* [eAacSn'sik vBal μ eAacSn'sik vByl μ(qt c:WkanyxcN pbn)] was published in 1997. It collects the articles published in *Myanma Alin* by Hpe Kan Kaung [ePKWacN], one of the regime's infamous journalists. The cover of this book has a princess, a puppet-on-a-string, carrying a flame. Throughout the book, he puts forward the regime's various theories. Sometimes the strings are pulled by ex-colonial forces, and if we are to go by earlier interpretations, by her English husband.

This person whom the Puppet Princess thinks is very good to her as a spouse is no ordinary person. He is a good acquaintance of people of high society and aristocracy of England and moves in and out of the Oxford circle of scholars and keeps company of famous reporters and is capable of influencing and is capable of influencing them to write whatever he would like them to. He is a great director and puppeteer who can pull the strings.³

In this particular volume, however, the strings are pulled by the Communists. It is often the case that the rationale for labelling the opposition is derived from an internal structure already present, and Victor makes the interesting reference to Ne Win as 'puppet master', not of Aung San Suu Kyi, but of the regime.⁴

In one particular Burmese dance, women used to carry an oil light [Shikba], which was later substituted by a candle attached to a ring on the finger. There is no other Burmese tradition of dance with fire, and the main interpretation has to be that the intention is to depict her as about to torch the country. With 368 pages, it is appended with seven photographs selected to depict her at her most foreign.

The photographs are worthy of analysis since they convey the intentionality behind the book and most clearly communicate the image the regime wishes to project. The first photograph is of her sitting youthfully on the floor in a room with Michael Aris, suggesting love affairs with foreigners in various countries. This is immediately juxtaposed on the same page with a second photograph in which she is surrounded by six young men about which is said that this is 'Aung San Suu Kyi, photographed with youngsters pretending to

¹ Oishii (1997:31–32).

² Oishii (1997:21).

³ Myo Chit. 'Let's tell the truth'. *NLM*, May–July 1996.

⁴ Victor (1998:175).

Chapter 15

Aung San Suu Kyi: a personality cult?

In his press conference General Khin Nyunt justified the employment of the authoritarian instruments of State against the NLD by saying that the Communists ‘decided to fully exploit the propensity of the Myanmar masses to be enthused with personality cults and the sudden rising popularity of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’.¹ The army, used to holding the reigns of power since 1962, know that their *ana* instruments have failed to create enduring structures of State, and they fear the invisible, fluid and unbounded trickling of *awza* personalities throughout the country who might just succeed in snatching away their privileges.

The regime's predicament

The regime's psychological warfare campaign has only a very limited repertoire. The generals hope to justify their power, and diminish Aung San Suu Kyi's, by pointing at ‘conspiracies’ and ‘personality cults’. The shape these accusations take are woolly and lack consistent logic, but they do involve certain features. First, since party politics is in their view personality politics, those involved in party politics are not looking at the interests of the country as a whole, but at their own clique. Since the army fought as a national army for Burma as a complete political entity, it proclaims a privileged position in the annals of history, and a superior vision for the country. This should be accepted by everyone without question or any form of discussion. Second, since party politics is invariably centred around a popular personality, the people who support this personality are open to exploitation. Hence, national politics becomes dependent on the personal characteristics of a few leaders with their greed and desire for power, thus ‘destablizing’ the country. Third, the subject of such a personality cult has no loyalty to the army. Since the army represents the country, this person is easily tempted to sell out to foreigners. Hence, with the nation thus narrowly defined, party politics becomes a front for ‘foreign’ interests. It is by this ‘hermit land’ logic through which the military ends up proclaiming the following kind of statement, of which there are all too many:

the Myanmar people place the interest of the country before that of an individual, whereas the NLD and its supporters place the interest of the individual before that of the country, resulting [in] a personality cult. One wonders whether a group of new masters-would-be [Britain] are trying to play the behind-the-scene role to install in power in Myanmar an individual who is married to a British citizen and is widely suspected to have vowed her allegiance to that foreign power.²

The regime's view of politics – both of its own and of the NLD – is fundamentally flawed. As I have shown in chapter 6, the regime bases itself entirely on ‘authority’ (*ana*), for ‘influence’ (*awza*) would endear certain army personalities with the public, and this would soon result in a coup and cause a split in the army and therefore ‘disunite’ the country. The army must be liked as an institution, but it is better if all its individual personnel are hated, so that there is no question about the loyalty of all of its individual members. In other words, the army does not generate personalities, let alone cults. In this respect, I fundamentally disagree with Taylor's view that Ne Win was a more pragmatic man than U Nu simply because he ‘decided’ not to pursue personality politics³ – Ne Win became a thoroughly unpopular man around whom no cult of any sorts could be generated even if he had wanted to. By contrast, around U Nu a cult arose spontaneously. This is all the more so with Aung San Suu Kyi.

In trying to encourage the popular view of the army as institutionally loved (‘the army is father, the army is mother’), but willingly disliked at the level of personnel, the army is in fact foreignizing people who under normal circumstances could be its ‘friends’. It is manufacturing its own enemies. The more it emphasises *ana*, the more *awza* figures will jump out of the woodwork. These *awza* figures appear like circles drawn by Bo Bo Aung that you can never – however hard you try – wipe out as they multiply endlessly. The Wunthanu movement and the Freedom Bloc tell us something about Burmese political culture and how they respond to dissatisfaction with an authoritarian government – they practise mental culture and they produce *azani* whose powers will ultimately prove unstoppable. To introduce a programme of ‘frameworks’,

¹ ‘Burma Communist Party's Conspiracy to take over State Power’. General Khin Nyunt Special Press Conference, 5 August 1989.

² ‘Allegations of forced labour in Myanmar categorically rejected. Conclusions in Commission report one-side, untrue and unfair. Mr Fatchett's statements fatally flawed, most deplorable. Most imprudent to interfere in Myanmar internal affairs’ [based on Burmese Embassy Press Release, 19.10.1998 in reaction to Minister Fatchett's Letter in the *Financial Times*, 15.10.1998.]. *NLM*, 18.10.1998.

³ Taylor (1987:367).

'structures' and 'traditions' to contain these personalities, only produces stronger *azani*, who will sooner or later present the generals with the consequences of the same law of *samsara* with which Ne Win judged U Nu's elected government. Tin U said that 'incarceration didn't impede our struggle, it enhanced it'.¹ In short, the paradox then is that, while the army complains about personality cults destroying Burmese politics, it is its own very authoritarian measures that produces the personality cult it feels threatens it, and that it so intensely dislike. Just as Aung San and Gandhi were products of British colonial politics, so Aung San Suu Kyi is a product of Burmese army politics. It is as simple as that.

Aung San Suu Kyi's predicament

Undoubtedly, the most influential personality in Burma today is Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the *azani* who, having great *awza*, was able to bring national independence to Burma as a civilian. Though people in Burma may feel uncertain about the future, in their hearts they support her fully and they hope that the generals will see that. Until they incorporate her *awza* into government, Bo Bo Aung's circles will continue to multiply – there will be no end to personality cults and conspiracies.

Her approach has been to emphasize the spiritual in the political. Indeed, she has said that there is no conflict between Buddhist and political pursuits [H1][H7], that 'politics is about people, and you can't separate people from their spiritual values' [E9]. The result is that her political aspirations become linked, in the public eye, to her spiritual aspirations.

Facing a corrupt and repressive military regime, that continuously endeavours to expose her as corrupted by personality characteristics and foreign money, Aung San Suu Kyi has consistently emphasized a more spiritual and ethical approach to political leadership. However, in proclaiming that liberation of the country can be found through personal mental culture, and in criticising the regime for not personally reforming in terms of personal Buddhist practice, she herself only further raises the spiritual capital invested in her by her supporters and her spectators. Her use of Buddhist concepts and practices – *byama-so tayà*, *metta*, *karuna*, *parami*, *samatha*, *sati*, *vipassana*, *nibbana*, *yahanda*, *bodhi* – in the fight for democracy inevitably lead to a personality cult from which she finds it difficult to extract herself. As the gap increasingly widens between the dirt and corruption represented by a repressive military regime and the purity and power of the heroic democracy fighters, so also the impersonal continuity of political organizations demanded by a truly democratic system is increasingly at risk.

Angel or female bodhisattva ?

The Thirty-Seven Nats in Burma are spirits associated with a particular region or with particular families, who were instituted by King Anawratha at the Shwezigon Pagoda in Pagan. These spirits were elevated to be paid respect by the public. They were either greatly loved or greatly pitied by the people, before they met their violent death, often at the hands of the authorities. One difference between a *nat* and an *azani* [martyr] such as Aung San is that the latter is worshipped as a hero by government itself also, and not just propitiated by a selected and factionalised public.

Some of Aung San Suu Kyi's followers refer to her as 'Angel [Nat] of University Avenue' [တက္ကသိုလ်မတီဒိုမ္မ] and 'female bodhisattva' [J2]. Some intellectuals have suggested to me that she is the 'Angel [Nat] of Democracy' [သမ္မတလမ်းမတီဒိုမ္မ]. Others have referred to her as 'a heroine like the mythical mother goddess of the earth who can free them from the enslavement of the evil military captors'.³ This supernatural attribution to Aung San Suu Kyi is affirmed when the SLORC refused to hand over power in August and September 1990, by the way many Burmese people interpreted the swelling of the left breast of Buddha statues and the bleeding of the eyes as indicating Aung San Suu Kyi's imminent rise to power soon – the swelling of the left breast indicating Aung San Suu Kyi's nurturing characteristic.⁴

¹ Tin U in ASSK (1997b:209).

² 'There seems to exist a big discrepancy between Burmese peoples' expectations of Suu Kyi and her own image of the future democratic Burma. The ordinary supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi tend to worship her as the goddess [Angel] (*Nat-thami* in Burmese) of ... suffering Burma. If Suu Kyi herself is content with this personality worship, there will be little unhappiness between them. But she is not.' (Nemoto 1996a:9 writing of a visit in 1990). ['Angel' is a more appropriate translation of မတီဒိုမ္မ].

'When I visited Rangoon later in February 1994, some of the people even used a Burmese expression "Tekkado yeyittha lan ga Nat-Thami" which meant "the goddess [Angel] of University Avenue" ... The University Avenue is the place where her house is located.' (Nemoto 1996b:27).

³ Mya Maung (1992:163).

⁴ '... people have been worshipping her [Aung San Suu Kyi] as a saviour. To give an example, when I visited Burma in August

These positive characterisations of Aung San Suu Kyi's supernatural power contrast with the negative characterisations by her self-made adversaries. They call her the spirit 'Mother of the West' (Anauk Medaw).

Your Mrs Michael Aris, called Anauk Medawgyi, is just following the course of Thakin Than Tun, her aunt's husband. As I have experiences, past and present, I can see her steps well. Both of them are of the same mentality. They are [the] same in having great aims and thinking highly of themselves in arrogance. They are same in marching along the path towards their wishful goal.¹

They also refer to her as the Head of the Byahma [ဝဏ္ဏီဗျာဏ္ဍာ] which is too hot to handle, supposedly after she supposedly contributed to ruining economic progress after her release in 1995:

Persons who are called the Byamma's Head always get angry as soon as they know their nickname ... I can't be certain whether Mrs Aris would be angry or take pride if she were called the Byamma's Head. But she has surely become the terribly hot Byamma's Head right after the restriction was revoked ... Even though you are being held by golden hands, your terrible heat will melt them down as you are the Byamma's Head. So, you'd better leave this nation. As citizens, we are demanding deportation of Mrs Aris. The only word we have to say to you is 'Get out'.²

If the Burmese supernaturalise her in these contrasting ways, some of the publications aimed at foreign audiences have been equally extreme. For example, in one publication she has been characterised as 'Burma's Saint Joan'.³ She is also referred to as 'Burma's Woman of Destiny'. Although he has asked many interesting questions, Alan Clements does sometimes excessively overemphasize her spiritual side, such as when he suggests Aung San was a 'spiritual seeker'⁴ or when he asks whether she turned her house arrest into a 'monastic-like life'.⁵

Victor has argued that some Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters are responsible for creating her supernatural image. Journalists sometimes complain that she does not distinguish her personal identity from her political image.

According to several, The Lady takes umbrage if she is challenged on any specific issue or position. She becomes haughty, they say, retreating behind an academic snobbism that tends to intimidate and discourage people from approaching her. A journalist from *Time* magazine recalls that when she asked a question that Daw Suu Kyi perceived to be challenging, her response was to rise and exit. 'One of her aids came in and just announced that The Lady had a previous appointment', the journalist says, 'and the interview was over'.⁶

Her followers are unwilling to permit the 'deconstruction' of Aung San Suu Kyi herself, and only permit engagement of the SLORC's criticism. Supporters argue that the SLORC makes use of the slightest criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi for its own ends.

Aung San Suu Kyi herself must take some responsibility, for these views are not just the creation of her situation or her commentators. To some extent they also have been stoked up by Aung San Suu Kyi's view of the human condition as 'trying to gain enlightenment and to use the wisdom gained to help others' [S1][Y15], and 'while we can't all be Buddhas, I feel a responsibility to do as much as I can to realize enlightenment to the degree that I can, and to use it to relieve the suffering of others' [Q2]. Her highest personal goal is 'purity' in a 'spiritual' sense [V1], which is related to the purity of an arahant [V2]. Though she has denied being a 'female *bodhisattva*', she greatly emphasizes the development of *metta*, one of the Ten Perfections (*parami*) practised by *bodhisattvas*, and admits to meditating [J2]. Aspiring to mental perfection, and believing that only incessant self-perfection permits a political leader to be worthy of respect, she has

1990, just two and a half months after the general election, people were talking about a strange phenomenon of growth in the left-hand side of the chests of many images of Buddha in the country. This story was believed even by the people living in big cities like Rangoon or Taunggyi. To make sure of the truth of the matter, I myself visited a house in a remote town where people alleged that such kind of Buddha image existed. It was "true" that the image's left chest was thicker than the right side. But most of the left chests of Burmese Buddha images are originally sculptured thicker than the right, because the Buddha's original style of wearing his robe has been thought of as the right shoulder bare and left shoulder covered. Therefore, I would not judge whether the thickness of the left chest had been originally sculptured this way, or whether it might have grown later by "supernatural" power. However, I was more interested in their interpretation of this as a good omen relating to Aung San Suu Kyi. They said that her power would grow in order to save Burma from all the sufferings. The people's interpretation of the phenomenon varied a little, but here I would like to show a typical interpretation made by my young Burmese friend, who was a graduate of the Mandalay University.

This phenomenon and its interpretations spread throughout the country up to September the same year. It is likely that the phenomenon gave an impetus to many Buddhist monks to take part in the protests with the NLD supporters between September and October against SLORC's neglect of the result of the 1990 election ...' (Nemoto 1996b:26–27).

¹ Thanlyet. 'Harm caused by one's own deed, being caught in one's own trap – all should beware!' *NLM*, 25.11.1996.

² Thant Ein Hmu. 'The Byahma's head'. *NLM*, 18–19.09.1998.

³ This reference occurred in *Vanity Fair* (ASSK 1997b:9).

⁴ ASSK (1997b:1).

⁵ ASSK (1997b:104).

⁶ Victor (1998:222).

used the concept of saint for herself, though in a metaphorical sense, as part of the never-ending struggle for perfection that musicians and artists strive for in an imperfect world [Y2].

Some journalists have been antagonised by this cocktail of holy imagery. For example, Lintner wrote: 'Suu Kyi's almost mystical streak makes her writings, and books about her, different from those about and by other democratic leaders who have spent time in prison, such as Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel or Mahatma Gandhi, who was but a saint and a shrewd politician ... These three books show that Suu Kyi is indeed a good saint but ...'. Moreover, Lintner goes on to criticise her lack of detailed economic planning for action in Burma and that this 'may fail to prevent more martyrs being made by the kangaroo courts of Burma'. In other words, playing her saintly role leads her to neglect the hands-on style leadership required for a good politician. This echoes the criticism U Nu received, who has been characterised by Brigadier Maung Maung as 'a Gandhi without Gandhi's predilection for politics'.¹

Such criticism has, of course, much truth from an outside observer's point of view. Indeed, it reiterates what one observer said about the relationship between Buddhism and the political order in U Nu's style of political campaigning in the 1960s as 'this tendency to over-value the personal and discount the systematic and technical, seems to be the Achilles heel of all present Buddhist social-political philosophy and methodology'.² Here, 'the controlling philosophy is that good men make good government' and there is the tendency 'to set personal character over against plan and technique, and to substitute it for the latter in actual procedures'. The result is that 'a "Buddhist" political campaign may be more like a religious preaching mission than a statement of political principles, and a party platform an exhortation to be pure rather than a statement of basic policy'.

Because there is no rigid legalistic system of standards and controls, a personal-relations way of carrying on government affairs may be in actuality only the best possible way to perpetuate a system of personal 'pull', influence, and corruption. And emphasis upon 'government by character' rather than government by principle, may well become only a camouflage for an indisposition or inability to plan and execute intelligently.

Aung San Suu Kyi evidently realises this because she has responded to the regime's personal attacks on her, which she finds 'less disconcerting than articles or speeches that attribute me with vaguely saintlike qualities', for such practice, she says, runs counter to democracy. Quoting one of the drafters of the Constitution of India, 'hero worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship', and these in her own words 'there is no room for hero-worship in a true political struggle made up of human beings grappling with human problems'.³ But in this very same article, in which she seeks to moderate the public image of her spirituality, she cannot avoid using the metaphor 'dark nights of the political soul', an evident play on Teresa Avila's contemplative experiences of the Night of the Soul.

When I am asked what sustains me in the dark nights of the political soul, I am inclined to answer: 'understanding, compassion, friendship.' This is perhaps not the kind of answer the questioners want. Perhaps they would rather hear about mysterious inner resources, some wonderful inspiration, some memorable experience that gives us the strength to withstand the hardships of the human lot. But our powers of endurance are slowly and painfully developed through repeated encounters with adversity.⁴

Evidently there is much tension between Aung San Suu Kyi's attempt at coping in adverse circumstances by perfecting herself in the battlefield – watching over and sharpening herself into an incorruptible leader for the cause of democracy, capable of sacrificing her own life for the cause – and make true her desire to advance democracy for the country as a whole.

Complexities in Aung San Suu Kyi's situation

We must, of course, appreciate the complexities of the situation pertaining to Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD for they operate in a very difficult political landscape. On the one hand, there is the total repression by the military, and on the other, there is the inherited culture of politics to contend with.

First and most importantly, to say that Aung San Suu Kyi is behaving like a saint without framing this against the Burmese cultural background leads to a skewed picture of what she is trying to do. It ignores the history of traditions of mental culture and political opposition in Burmese politics.

I have pointed out that political opposition is denied a secular legal space in Burma. Furthermore, it is unable to express itself in terms of material culture that might convey it the status of Buddhist legitimacy,

¹ Maung Maung (1963:65–66).

² King (1964:275–76).

³ Aung San Suu Kyi. 'The game rules in Burma: there are no rules'. *Asahi Evening News*, 25.08.1998.

⁴ *Ibid.*

such as building pagodas, for such is reserved for the military. What it can do, however, is to emphasise mental culture, which has a long historical tradition in Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi, along with the senior NLD leadership, are in that sense carrying on a local political tradition. They have in common with their reformist predecessors (U Nu, Mindon, U Hpo Hlaing) an emphasis on the practice of *vipassana* and the deployment of Buddhist terminology as a reformist technique of political leadership in which some discourse is unavoidable, in particular when choosing the non-violent route. This specifically Burmese element is readily understood by the Burmese, but not so easily by non-Burmese [C19][D6][D7][E19]. As suggested earlier, it internalizes evil as a fight with one's own mental impurities through the practice of mental culture.

Second, the regime has greatly neglected all fields of academic analysis, in particular analysis of the economy and political order. It is common for regime spokesmen to confidently field questions about Burma by foreign journalists and international organisations without any form of research or evidence. It obviously wants to prevent such an analysis. The few who are qualified to comment are harassed if they speak out. If they live abroad, and the regime cannot reach them directly, then their relatives are subject to harassment. This makes it difficult to reflect on policy matters at this stage.

Third, without even the most basic human rights, there is no possibility even for telephone calls or letters to be exchanged between interested parties, let alone collect data and publish extended analyses. The flow of communication is closely monitored and long prison sentences are routinely handed out for possessing a fax machine or a computer without a government licence.

Fourth, it should be noted that in the origin myth, the Mahathamada, the first king elected by the people, was characterised as a *bodhisattva*. Also, this claim has been commonly made for Burmese kings and also Prime Minister U Nu whose popularity was largely part based on his supportive work for the higher forms of Buddhist practice instead of charity alone. That Aung San Suu Kyi should be referred to by some as a 'female bodhisattva' is but a manifestation of such a long-standing tradition.

Furthermore, as for 'practicalities', in this particular environment of political culture, the concepts of 'practice' and 'practicality' are more closely linked with mental culture in Burmese than is at first sight apparent. In the English language, 'contemplation' is the original meaning of 'theory' (*theoria*) which in contemporary parlance is considered unable to engage reality. This is opposed to 'practice' which does engage reality. Meditation traditions in Burma, however, are firmly known as 'traditions of practice' [ပိပိတိ] which are based on 'hands-on experience' [လက်ထဲ] in opposition to scriptural learning or 'theory' [ပရိယတ္တိ]; this is very much related to discerning truth and reality. The Buddhist concept of practice, with its intrinsic relationship to mental culture, was subsequently used to translate political concepts such as the Marxist idea of practice.¹ Therefore, in this culture of perception, practicality is in fact, not that far removed from *vipassana* practice.

Sainthood and the political inheritance of Aung San

Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly sought to side-track her designation as a 'big leader' (*gaungzaunggyi*) or an 'extraordinary' person,² or a saint or female *bodhisattva*.³

Do not think that I will be able to give you democracy. I will tell you frankly, I am not a magician. I do not possess any special power that will allow me to bring you democracy. I can say frankly that democracy will be achieved only by you, by all of you ...⁴

Her party colleagues have also regularly denied that she is, or indeed pretends to be a saint [O4]. In interviews also, she has frequently and very strongly suggested that democratic change should involve the democracy movement as a whole, and not involve her as the personality representing it [Y3]. When described as representing Burma in interviews, Aung San Suu Kyi has clearly said that 'we must not

¹ Marxism was interpreted in terms of Buddhism in particular by Thakin Soe (1934:125,123,246). Sarkisyanz (1965:168), who took an interest in Marxism after his study of Buddhist philosophy. He used Buddhist terminology to explain Marxist concepts, so that Leninistic unity of revolutionary theory and practice was understood in terms of the distinction between scriptural learning (*pariyatti*), practice (*padipatti*) and penetration (*padiweida*). Political leaders must possess perfections (*parami*). Also, the Marxist notion of dialectical materialism and the flux of matter was to be interpreted in terms of Buddhist periodical destruction of worlds (*upathi bin*).

² ASSK (1997b:62).

³ Cf ASSK (1997b:9).

⁴ ASSK (1997b:212–13).

emphasize this personality business'.¹

SLORC blamed the Aung San Suu Kyi personality cult as responsible for stalling a meeting that it had called with NLD chair U Aung Shwe on 16 September 1997, who initially accepted but later declined because the General Secretary (Aung San Suu Kyi) was not included in the invitation. The following appeared in the state owned newspapers:

After a study and assessment of all the developments, conditions, stands and causes, it can be concluded that the one who disrupted the meeting is the National League for Democracy with dishonest attitudes and the personality cult, the serious disease, relying solely on a person instead of relying on organizational strength that has been pestering it since its formation.²

It was evident from the resolutions of the NLD conference held between 27–29 September 1997 how internally the NLD was positively working towards avoiding personality cults, in part as a response to such accusations.³ This is reminiscent of her father, Aung San. He wanted to discourage popular perception encouraged by writers such as Thahkin Kodawhmaing, which vested in him the role of the concentration meditation wizard, the mental cultivator *cum* universal ruler. He said in his first AFPFL conference speech that we must 'take proper care that we do not make a fetish of this cult of hero-worship'.⁴ And nine months later in his 1 September 1946 speech he said that

At this time I am a person who is very popular with the public. But I am neither a god [V ya], wizard [kwa ya] or magician [Vō zō ya]. Only a man. Not a heavenly being [Qmāw mī] can only have the powers [Asā] of a man [Z].⁵

Despite being satisfied about the working of political parties after AFPFL victory in the Constituent Assembly Election on 17 April 1947, he said that 'the masses have supported the AFPFL on an organizational basis and not on personalities basis' and that 'the standard of Burma politics has risen'.⁶ There is no doubt though that his personality was as crucial an element in the vote for the AFPFL as was Aung San Suu Kyi's in the vote for the NLD. Indeed, Aung San Suu Kyi, whose popularity rests on Aung San's political personality, inherited the personality problem her father encountered. This, as we have already noted, is a product of an unpopular authoritarian regime.

¹ ASSK (1995:255).

² Kaytu Nilar. 'Who disrupted the meeting'. *NLM*, 24.09.1997.

³ 'We recorded that a "spirit of cooperation without holding grudges and without any personality cults" is to be used as the NLD's guidelines in organizing. This was mentioned in part of the response by General Secretary Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to questions posed by delegates.' ('The resolution of the NLD Congress.' *soc.culture.burma*, 27/9/97).

⁴ 20 January 1946 in Aung San (1971:25).

⁵ Aung San (1971:140) cited in ASSK (1991=:28).

⁶ Silverstein (1993).

Chapter 16

Buddhicisation of Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi's views are understood through her own writings and the numerous interviews and biographies written on her. Her views on Burma differ depending on the audience addressed. It is difficult to determine exactly when she wrote some of her work, and sometimes it is not clear to what extent her statements, in particular when delivered and published in her absence, have perhaps been interfered with by others in translation or otherwise. Nevertheless, broadly speaking her communications on Burma may be divided into four main periods (1) the period up until the Shwedagon speech, (2) the campaign period from the Shwedagon speech until her house arrest, (3) the period of her house arrest, and (4) the period subsequent to her release.

Her output during the pre-Shwedagon period is dominated by academic and educational essays. Afterwards, the material is more varied in terms of campaign speeches, interviews, letters to newspapers and international bodies, party addresses and speeches at international gatherings abroad – usually delivered in her absence – on humanitarian and political issues confronting her, the NLD and the Burmese people as a whole in the context of a repressive regime. Naturally, the pre-Shwedagon speech literature has a more analytical and less engaging flavour when compared to the latter, which has an urgent and humanitarian quality.

There are many continuities between the two, such as the references to her father's thoughts as a benchmark, and the way her political engagement marks a shift in the way she portrays Burma in the English medium. For various reasons that I will set out below, what has taken place is what may be termed a 'Buddhicisation' of her discourse. By Buddhicisation, I mean a process that has existed in Burma since the advent of Buddhism. In one sense, it means attributing extra-Buddhist roles and characters such as Min Mahagiri (who became Sakka) to a Buddhist identity.¹ Here, however, I apply it more specifically to mean a particular circumstance in which a politician is pressed in the context of crisis politics into adopting a Buddhist stance. More specifically, this involves an adaptation to Burmese ideas about political life in terms of mental culture, the *summum bonum* of Buddhist practice. This occurred with all Burmese politicians to a greater or lesser extent.

Assessing the role of Buddhism

Some observers, in particular journalists such as Lintner² working to tight deadlines, with the political perspectives of the ethnic minorities, and no doubt recalling U Nu's call for Buddhism as the State religion, have dismissed this shift out of hand as necessarily detrimental to Burmese politics. Other observers, on the other hand, including long-term observers of the political scene from a Burman perspective such as Steinberg,³ have argued that Aung San Suu Kyi should involve Buddhism more in order to address the Burmese electorate. She 'must speak to her own people through the Burmese cultural medium or see her internal legitimacy erode'. Citing the example of 11th century Mon King Manuha who was permitted to build a pagoda from his Pagan prison in which he had been placed under the Burmese king, he suggests that 'King Manuha's actions remind us how to speak through culture to politics. Aung San Suu Kyi must speak to her own people, drawing upon the traditions and resources of her own society.'

This conflicting assessment of Aung San Suu Kyi's politics raises the perennial problem to what extent modern politicians are able to modernise Burmese politics without losing the support of the majority public. Furthermore, it also raises questions about the political analysts themselves. Evidently, in a predominantly Buddhist environment Buddhist concepts have to inform the country's politics at one level or another. To what extent are observers of the political scene able to detect the relevance of the Buddhist concepts and their implication for the country's politics when these do not enter into the English versions of their speeches?

¹ It is sometimes accompanied by 'Palicizing' and 'de-Sanskritizing' an identity or a text, as happened with the appointment of Sakka to replace Min Mahagiri and the reduction of the number of nats to the Buddhist number thirty-three, the increased involvement of the Buddha and his teachings in Manu law texts and in the Ramayana.

² Lintner, Bertil. 'Burma's voice of democracy.' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11.09.1997, pp. 52-53.

³ Steinberg, David I. 'What medium for the message?' *Bangkok Post*, 16.08.1997.

That there is much confusion on this matter is clear. For example, Mikio Oishi's *Aung San Suu Kyi's Struggle: its principles and strategy*, though drawing attention to Buddhism as the source, nevertheless mistakenly traces Aung San Suu Kyi's spiritual dimensions ultimately to *Bhagavad Gita*, to Karma Yoga and to Gandhi's concepts of *satyagraha* (grasping the truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence).¹ Though she admired Gandhi and Tagore, and was well-aware of Burma's history of Indianization and shared colonial history with India, this does not remotely touch the core of Burmese sensibilities about her spirituality.

Below I will present evidence that Aung San Suu Kyi has indeed addressed the Burmese in terms of 'the traditions and resources of her own society', as have other senior NLD leaders. However, contrary to Steinberg, I do not believe it necessitates building a pagoda to engage the Burmese people in this way. If this were all it entailed to achieve legitimacy, then Ne Win would have attained legitimacy long ago. Indeed, Manuha's imprisonment experience has elicited a response in terms of higher forms of Buddhist mental culture. Also, contrary to Lintner, I do not find evidence that the way Buddhism is appealed to by Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD poses significant problems for the country. Finally, contrary to Oishi, there is little space here for Gandhian concepts of yoga.

To the contrary, the NLD have formulated their political problems in terms of widely known and popular Buddhist practices, and these in turn, point towards attempts to open up narrow self-interests and soften ethnic identity. The practices they appeal to have the broadest support among Buddhists and are furthermore extendible to an inter-ethnic and inter-religious environment.

Before the Shwedagon speech

During this period, Aung San Suu Kyi wrote four main essays addressing the biography of her father, Burma as a country, Burmese literature and the development of nationalism. These four essays were all collected together as the first part of her *Freedom from fear* first published in 1991, and translated into Burmese with a different set of essays in 1993.

The ideas of her father and Mahatma Gandhi play a central role in the essays. Crucial is her realisation that 'actions without ideational content lose their potency as soon as the situation, which called for them, ceases to be valid'. In India, as her father pointed out, there were older leaders with strong ideologies such as Gandhi, a Nehru and a Tilak, but in Burma this was not the case, and he said 'let anybody appear who can be like such a leader, who *dares* to be like such a leader. We are waiting.' Her father's assassination and the lack of an enduring ideology that could capture the Burmese masses led to the military coup. She herself, when she lived in India with her mother and afterwards, read Gandhi's work.

This led Aung San Suu Kyi to later emphasize the 'spiritual revolution' in terms of Buddhist ideas, with the aim to conceptualize an enduring ideology on a political level that the Burmese were lacking.² Buddhism plays a role in these early writings insofar as Aung San Suu Kyi recognizes it as providing the spiritual side of the independence struggle.

Aung San Suu Kyi's campaigning period

The period during which Aung San Suu Kyi was able to campaign freely extended from her first speech to 20 July 1989, when she was placed under house arrest. At the end of August 1988 she still said that 'a life of politics holds no attraction for me. At the moment, I serve as a kind of unifying force because of my father's name and because I am not interested in jostling for any kind of position.' The military seized power on 18 September 1988 and Aung San Suu Kyi felt prompted to take a stance on a political platform. And so she co-founded the National League for Democracy (NLD) and became its General Secretary.

The speech at the Shwedagon Pagoda on 26 August 1988 marks a turning point for Aung San Suu Kyi. The Shwedagon Pagoda she herself had designated, quoting a *Times* journalist, as 'the soul of the nation'. Her first rally was held at the Western Moat Entrance of the Shwedagon Pagoda on 26 August 1988, where she appealed for silence for the students who had fallen in the struggle for democracy, so as to 'share the merit of their deeds among all of us'.³ Sharing merit is a fine Buddhist concept, and her use in this context is innovative, for it implies (but does not explicitly state) that the democracy struggle encompasses work for the good of the Buddhist realm of the *sasana*. Her first lines in the Shwedagon speech addressed the uncertainty she thought the Burmese would feel about her marriage to a foreigner, reassuring the Burmese

¹ Oishi (1997:19,21,27).

² I think Kraeger (1995:330) is right in his interpretation of the revolution of the spirit.

³ ASSK (1995:193)

The Shwedagon speech was a historic one, for her father gave his first AFPFL presidential address there and students sought refuge at the pagoda during the protests in the months prior to her speech. Estimates of her audience range from 500,000 to one million people.¹

13 March – Burma Human Rights Day (death of student leader Phone Maw, 1988)
 27 May – Celebration of the 1990 elections
 6 June – Workers Day
 21 June – Myenigone Anniversary Day
 7 July – Student Day (Ne Win dynamited the Student Union, 1962)
 19 July – Martyrs' Day (Aung San Suu Kyi's father was assassinated)
 8 August – The 1988 uprising
 26 August – Aung San Suu Kyi's Shwedagon speech and entry into Burmese political arena
 18 September – The SLORC was founded in 1989⁴

Such spontaneous speaking poses a risk, of course. For example, in a speech on 3 December 1988 she spoke about the possibility of humans becoming Buddhas as an encouragement for people to emulate in the attempt to perfect themselves as follows:

Ap(1)al t(1)ik ik(1)ba(1)pa(1)ty(1)mc(1)nc(1)k(1)p(1)il Amc(1)S(1)it(1)al(1) k(1)isa(1)rc(1)B(1)ra(1)P(1)sh(1)et(1)yl(1)ik(1)at(1)is(1)R(1)ip(1)al(1)a(1)x(1)Ba(1)l(1)in(1)k(1)N(1)ch(1)il(1)u(1)
k(1)isa(1)rc(1)h(1)ir(1)ic(1)am(1)n(1)l(1)l(1)1(1) on(1)ts(1)a(1)B(1)ra(1)S(1)it(1)al(1) v(1)ic(1)am(1)n(1)l(1)l(1)2(1) [3] on(1)ts(1)a(1)B(1)ra(1)et(1)ach(1)il(1)l(1) B(1)ra(1)P(1)sa(1)A(1)ack(1)ty(1)k(1)N(1)ch(1)il(1)u(1)ba(1)
mc(1)nc(1)k(1)N(1)ch(1)il(1)pa(1)ty(1)x(1)

⁴ The regime attributes appropriating a diary by the opposition on Gene Sharp's influence in Burma. (See Di Hlaing, 'Strategic political defiance,' *NLM*, 15.08.1996.)

The military regime attempted to attack Aung San Suu Kyi's reference. However, its members are not renowned for their sophistication in Buddhist ideas, and they distorted this into a supposedly sacrilegious statement that 'any human being can become a Buddha in this life' [J1].¹ Since women are not able to attain Buddhahood in their life as a woman, such a statement would run counter to received orthodoxy. This accusation was of course never rendered believable with the Burmese public, she was supported by Burmese monks.² But the accusations persisted, and Saw Maung claimed that on the 68th anniversary of National Day (3 December 1988) she had said that 'Human beings are not even as faithful as dogs'.³ By the time of his 1991 crisis with the Sangha military boycott, however, he presented this somewhat differently, claiming she had said that 'Buddha was an ordinary man. Dog is more loyal than man.'⁴ 'Dogs are more loyal than man'⁵ is a common Burmese saying, and there was no such direct relationship made in her speech between the status of dog and Buddhahood.

She responded to the SLORC's attacks on her reference to Buddhism at a later press conference on 26 June 1989 saying that intentional attacks on her were 'childish and mean' [Kel :SnSnAak'tn:Kk], and that she intended to say that human beings who were intent on becoming Buddhas could do so. She then challenged the SLORC, 'how about abiding by at least the two precepts, namely killing and lying'. She recommended keeping the five.

Another example of an awkward expression was at an international press conference on 26 June 1989, when she said that she would go and take care of Burmese soldiers at the front line fighting with the Karen, which conveys an ambiguous message to the ethnic minorities.

I am not satisfied merely with writing a letter. Really, I will go and take care of them. Invite me and I will go to Methawal and I will take care of them in person. In this way the government will know whether I am sincere in my attitude towards the army.

Aew:kenipletasaer:RbdtamekhpnpaBW tkykqhale taise:pamyA AletatkykqhahatphetabAmstnaRHa: mRHa: Sitawnt kqeskkk ktkkkipewa kqamitkAl kpa kqhapiyA

On another occasion, she said that she would place garlands around the necks of soldiers at the front. Such statements, though intended to demonstrate her own commitment to the army as an inheritance from her father, nevertheless can be used to legitimize the army's activities in exterminating Karen opposition rather than coming to terms with it democratically.

In response to criticisms of her affiliation with a foreign husband, in a speech in January 1989 in Thabaung Myo, Irawaddy Division, she said her husband agreed to release her from her family responsibilities so that she could dedicate her life to the struggle for democracy in her country [A1]. Before that, just after her mother's funeral, she said she permitted her husband to remarry. This emotionally affected her, and the Burmese who were present at the announcements viewed her situation with great empathy. This loneliness was, of course, to carry a particular significance for her practice of mental culture during the period of her house arrest.

Many of her speeches became available as videos and were translated into other ethnic languages, and many felt that she was able to reach out to the ethnic minority groups in the way that her father had done.

Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest

Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for six years between 20 July 1989 and 11 July 1995. Though there were times when she was able to arrange interviews and receive visitors, the period between July 1990 and May 1992 involved almost no contact with the outside world. During this two-year period, contact with her family and friends was cut, and her mail and telephone conversations were intercepted.

On a personal level, the pressure on her family life and this long period of house arrest spurred her to reflect on her ambivalent position. During this period, she completed the essay 'In quest for democracy', and finished writing the essays 'Freedom from fear' and 'The true meaning of Boh'.

Her essay 'Towards a true refuge', though not explicit, may be interpreted as an analysis of the causes and sufferings of refugee status in terms of the three 'refuges' in Buddhism. 'Refugee' in Burmese means 'one who has to bear suffering' (*dukkha-the*). Suffering is a central and extremely elaborate concept in Buddhism. In this essay, she is preoccupied not just with the particular problems faced by refugees but also,

¹ See also Hpe Kan Kaung (1997:121).

² Mya Maung (1991:248).

³ Saw Maung (1990a:60).

⁴ Saw Maung (1991:7).

⁵ I tkkkaqspityA

in the broadest of Buddhist relational terms, with the global conditions that give rise for refugees to leave their homes. She suggests that catastrophes ‘have small beginnings’ which are ‘barely discernible from the private ... Calamities that are not the result of purely natural phenomena usually have their origins in common human failings’. We guard against germs, but ‘more attention should be paid to correcting “common” attitudes and values which pose a far more lethal threat to humankind’.¹ These arguments so far are not dissimilar to the idea that disasters happen as the result of impure mental states (see App. I.2).

‘Material yardsticks’ alone are insufficient as a measure of human well-being. The concept ‘poverty’ (*hsinye*) in Burmese also means discomfort of mind. To be poor ‘is to suffer from a paucity of those mental and spiritual, as well as material, resources which make a human being feel fulfilled and give life a meaning beyond mere existence’. Conversely, ‘rich’ (*chantha*) in Burmese also means rich in mental and spiritual resources.

In this essay, Aung San Suu Kyi identifies a number of mental qualities and practices which she feels ‘could reconcile the diverse instincts and aspirations of mankind’ from a Buddhist point of view [B1]. According to Buddhism it is not lack of material wealth, but greed or lust, the first of the Ten Impurities (*kilesa*), which stand in the way of a wholesome state of mind. On the other hand, it is liberalism or generosity which head the various lists of the Ten Perfections of the Buddha (*parami*), the Ten Virtues, and the Ten Duties of Kings. This ‘is a recognition of the crucial importance of the liberal, generous spirit as an effective antidote to greed as well as a fount of virtues which engender happiness and harmony’ [C1]. Furthermore, in Buddhism loving-kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy are ‘divine’ states of mind which ‘help to alleviate suffering and to spread happiness among all beings,’ and the obstacle to the cultivation of these noble mental states is ‘narrow self-interest’ [D1].

In short, it is ‘a generous spirit’ which peoples and nations should cultivate, ‘which welcome the happiness of others as an enhancement of the happiness of the self’ which will make ‘many seemingly insoluble problems ... prove less tractable’ [C2].

Her belief in *karma* as the inevitable relationship between cause and effect permits the view that people who do evil or act as if they are above the law are punished for their own wrong-doings [G1].

Her personal views on the interrelationship between Buddhism and politics do not become evident until her statements and interviews in some of the later sections of *Freedom from fear* are examined. More Buddhist concepts are employed in ‘Quest for democracy’, where due to her newly found political role, she has tended to address a broader audience to include the Burmese electorate as a whole and the international public.² Nevertheless, though guided by Buddhist principles, she does not think of herself as a Buddhist politician: ‘I don’t think of myself as either a Gandhian or Buddhist politician. I am Buddhist of course, and I would be guided by all the Buddhist principles that I have absorbed throughout my life’.³

In the face of such difficult personal circumstances, she began to take a greater interest in the development of ‘inner spiritual strength’ [S5] and in the practice of Buddhist techniques of mental culture [D4–7].⁴

Post-house arrest

At an interview shortly after her release from house arrest on 11 July 1995, Aung San Suu Kyi said ‘I hope I’ve matured. I feel spiritually stronger; in a sense I’ve been tested and that has strengthened me. And I think that I have learned to put a much greater value on compassion. I think compassion is very important in this world.’⁵

Two major publications arose from the material she provided after her release on 11 July 1995, namely *The voice of hope* and *Letters from Burma* both published in 1997. A new edition of *Freedom from Fear* with five additional essays was also published in 1995. In addition, a number of speeches and other kinds of presentations were published in various newspapers and on the Internet.

It is interesting to gauge the regime’s reaction to *The letters of Burma*.

¹ ASSK (1995:240).

² It is possible that Buddhist concepts may be found in the original Burmese of some of the speeches, but it is difficult to make this out in the translation. There are some sections, such as her speech at Shwedagon Pagoda on 26.8.1988, ‘In the eye of the Burmese revolution’ (12.09.1988) which are not given over to references to Buddhism at all

³ ASSK (1997b:79).

⁴ Aee also Mallet (1994).

⁵ ‘Patience, pragmatism pays off for “the Lady”’. *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

Since November 1995, Daw Suu Kyi has been writing the column Letter From Burma series of articles in the Mainichi Shinbun. To date, she has written 42 such articles. She touched upon topics to make foreigners, who have not been to Myanmar, to have a low opinion of the Myanmar people and misunderstand the Government. In some articles, she exaggerated that Myanmar are too poor to have proper breakfast and had to drink congee water instead, that living standard is so low, that NLD members are being suppressed, that though Myanmar are famous for their hospitality, they do not wish to receive visitors now so on and so forth. In fact, Daw Suu Kyi only belongs to one political party in Myanmar. It should be considered whether it is proper for journalists to public the articles of a mere political activist. What is worse is that broadcasting and dissemination of roadside talks on Saturdays and Sundays by foreign radios amount to destabilization of Myanmar. Even if not intentional, it still constitute to aiding and abetting a lone political party in Myanmar.¹

This material combined – and in particular *The voice of hope* – and demonstrated an extremely strong commitment to make Buddhism relevant and central to her politics. One of the first things she did after her house arrest was to visit the Thamanya Sayadaw (see below).

She has explicitly argued for not separating ‘the secular from the [Buddhist] spiritual’ [H1]. She expressed her view that in Vietnam the Buddhist movement could not succeed as there were many non-Buddhists holding power and ‘the Buddhist movement could not activate those who were crucial to the situation’. Though in Burma this is not the case, however, she also recognizes that Buddhism, which has no parish, has features that hold back the political organization of people and permit greater control by the regime [H2].

Some awkward elements still enter her speeches. In a speech on 14 October 1995, she referred appreciatively to the status of Upper Burmans [Avaqa:], who were the majority present, who will ‘lead the country to prosperity’ [Aekac:sa:qv]. This may be appropriate in a particular context, but if the speech were to be reported country-wide then it is unlikely to endear the Lower Burmans. In the same speech, a monk interrupted and asked her opinion of the saying, ‘if you learn knowledge, it is for the country progress, but if you look for money, the country suffers’. Though her answer was cleverly phrased in terms of the contrast between mundane knowledge and transcendental wisdom, instead of answering by addressing the monk politely using the monastic sacred language such as ‘your holiness’ ‘pupil’ (*ta-byí daw*) and ‘lord’ (*a-shin-hpayà*), she answered the public directly going against the grain of Burmese custom which her father observed in his speeches, always showing politeness to the Sangha.

Factors influencing Aung San Suu Kyi's Buddhisation

I have already drawn attention to the value of Buddhism in political opposition, both through the Sangha and the concepts that accompany Buddhism in terms of salvation from *samsara*. Though Aung San Suu Kyi's choice for Buddhism may be thus interpreted, there were more specific factors that led to her emphasis on Buddhism.

First, in early September 1988 prior to the foundation of the NLD Aung San Suu Kyi was accused of being surrounded by Communists [N1]. Indeed, she has been accused of ‘going the same way as her uncle's [Than Tun's] Burma Communist Party’.² One observer put it that Buddhism ‘is an invaluable weapon in defending the political system against the attacks of the only hostile ideology capable of posing a serious threat, i.e. communism’.³ This drove Aung San Suu Kyi, in turn, to emphasize her Buddhist credentials from the start. The accusation of communism was continued by military intelligence in mid September 1988,⁴ and later similar accusations were made by Aung Gyi on 3 December of the same year and in 1989.⁵ Though Aung San Suu Kyi denied this, stating on two occasions in June 1989 that these members had long renounced their communist views and that the NLD was, in fact, anti-communist,⁶ this became a repeated criticism by the SLORC. The accusations were perpetuated in subsequent journalist reports,⁷ and have continued right up until today.⁸

In response she appealed to the Buddhist precepts, ‘denied she was a communist or sacrilegious, and reminded the country's military leaders of two Buddhist precepts, against lying and killing’. Aung San Suu Kyi could not have survived these attacks on her political aspirations without countering with Buddhist

¹ Yangon's Press Conference (3), Rangoon, 01.10.1996.

² ‘Very sorry – in the Tawgyi. *NLM*, 04.06.1996.

³ Smith (1965:311–312).

⁴ *Working People's Daily* (Rangoon), 18.09.1988; ASSK (1991:274).

⁵ *New Yorker*, 09.10.1989, p. 91; ASSK (1995:341); ASSK (1991:274–75).

⁶ Amnesty International (1989:40,55); ASSK (1995:343,344).

⁷ Hpe Kan Kaung (1997:114–20).

⁸ Thanlyet. ‘Harm caused by one's own deed, being caught in one's own trap – all should beware!’. *NLM*, 25.11.96.

ideas. Her critique in terms of Buddhism is made all the easier given the regime's lack of interest and understanding of Buddhism [H3], who are sometimes said to have five 'anti-Buddhist' moral precepts, namely jealousy, envy, anger, greed and childish stupidity.¹

Second, the course of events pointed to Buddhism as the last bastion of freedom and democracy. The Sangha played a supportive role in the democracy movement as 'their monasteries have offered a haven for poor students and Burmese dissidents'.² Once all the students and politicians opposing the regime had been silenced, the political arena shifted to the monkhood, the one element which the regime has never been able to establish full control over despite its attempts in the 1980s. Burmese people care intensely about their Buddhism, and the regime acted against the collective will of the Sangha, which itself for a moment became the most effective idiom of opposition [L1]. This completely delegitimised the regime in the eyes of the majority of Burmese Buddhists and inflicted irreparable damage.

Buddhism was therefore more than a way of countering the accusation of communism; it proved to be the last possible form of opposition against the ruthless military regime once all other forms of protest had been silenced. In countering with Buddhist ideas, and with the army's subsequent behaviour towards Buddhism, Aung San Suu Kyi evidently did much more than counter accusations of her as a communist – she gained the regime's high ground.³ Since the 1950s, the Burmese army has justified its prominence in the political arena in terms of its role in fighting communist insurgency and has periodically uncovered communist inspired conspiracies commonly presented as a major danger to Buddhism. With the regime now perceived as opposing Buddhism, however, it has left the defence of Buddhism to the NLD and has effectively delegitimised itself.

Third, the personal attack on her 'foreign' lifestyle, connexions and her supposed ignorance of Burmese and Buddhist ways [L2-L4] have pressed her to play up Buddhism, for Buddhism is the most highly valued aspect of Burman culture.

Fourth, as already suggested, her emotional state as the result of her confinement is linked to the adoption of Buddhist techniques of mental culture.

Fifth, democracy has been designated as incompatible and 'foreign' by the regime. The same is the case with human rights. Aung San Suu Kyi has argued that democracy and human rights resonate with the Burmese Buddhist value system. She argues that The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is 'wholesome and good' and is present in indigenous Buddhist values. Furthermore, without the geographical exchange of ideas Buddhism would never even have reached Burma. Taking the regime's argument to the extreme, Buddhist values, themselves the core of Burmese society, would have remained in India, so that 'Buddhism would be confined to north India, Christianity to a narrow tract in the Middle East and Islam to Arabia'.⁴ As she responded to the question whether 'you are ushering in a renaissance period in Burma, which is combining timeless Buddhist values with modern political principles?' she said: 'When people face troubles, they are forced to reassess their lives and their values, and that is what leads to renaissance.'

Sixth, after a few half-hearted attempts in 1989, the regime has been unwilling to involve themselves in dialogue with the elected NLD. Her commitment to pursue a politics of non-violence, which she has consistently advocated since,⁵ meant that she had to take up all possible instruments for peaceful opposition to the regime. This meant the involvement of those ideas most strongly advocating non-violence, which were bound to draw her back to Buddhism and to influential monks for inspiration.

Seventh, the regime has criticised the NLD for engaging in anti-Buddhist activities [H4], which the NLD responded to with Buddhist arguments.⁶ See Appendix 4 for an example of an article attacking Aung San Suu Kyi on two of the ten defilements, namely jealousy and envy.

Finally, her husband Michael Aris is a renowned scholar of Buddhism, and she has herself spent much time in Nepal; this has undoubtedly influenced her views, in particular *metta* and *karuna*, which are

¹ U Kyi Maung in ASSK (1997b:180).

² Mya Maung (1992:174).

³ 'This cultural taunting of bad rulers by the leading clergy of Upper Burma spread to other Buddhist monks across Burma and apparently caused some psychological trauma to the military rank and files. Indeed, being Burmese and Buddhist is synonymous and these cultural sanctions may well be the most potent weapon against the army.' (Mya Maung 1991:303).

⁴ ASSK (1995:175).

⁵ *Bangkok Post*, 26.03.1989; ASSK (1991:324).

⁶ The regime, in their 45th Press Conference, accused Aung San Suu Kyi as anti Buddhist, and of having said The Buddha also was an ordinary human (Hpe Kan Kaung 1997:121).

particularly strong in Mahayana Buddhism [H1].

The political arena in which she found herself increasingly brought Buddhism to the fore. Sensing that Buddhism was one of the last remaining platforms for NLD opposition, the regime proposed a purge of the monastic order towards the end of September 1996 in order, to prevent the ordination of NLD members [H5].

It is not until her 1997 publications that we find out how much this Buddhist discourse has advanced. This has surprised some observers. For example, Lintner (1997), in his review of her two 1997 books, says that 'her tendency to explain political phenomena in terms of Buddhist philosophy alienates her from the local and international business communities, as well as other potential supporters of the open, pluralistic society that she advocates'.

Aung San Suu Kyi's attitude towards Buddhism, already evident in her early writings before 1988, has been that historically it played an important role in Burmese concepts of identity and in politics.¹ In particular, she characterises education in Burma as 'connected with the teachings of the Buddha who had pointed out the way to *nirvana*', so that to be educated 'meant more than the mere acquisition of book learning; it meant the mastery of supreme knowledge that would lead to enlightenment', which was quite different from British colonial education.² She recognizes her father's preoccupation with Buddhism in his early youth. Though she sketches her father's actions against a Buddhist background,³ she also recognizes that he later expressed a firm dislike for integrating Buddhism into politics.⁴ Her own early education included visits to Shwedagon Pagoda, listening to her aunt's stories about the Buddha's lives and Buddhist values.⁵ In her letters, she demonstrates her commitment during her campaigns to listen to the advice of members of the monastic order from all over Burma, including a Sagaing monk who instructed her to bear in mind the example of Sumedha who took the vow to become a Buddha and postponed enlightenment for the good of the world [H6-H7].

Furthermore, I am not sure when this began, but by 1998 Aung San Suu Kyi was donating money every month to monks from the following monasteries: Shwetaungkon Monastery (U Pandita); Mun Pali Tekkatho (on the 19th to commemorate her father's death); Chanmyei Yeiktha; and Shwe Kyetyek Kyaung (on the 27th to commemorate her mother's death). The Shwetaungkon Monastery and Chanmye Yeiktha are *vipassana* training centres, and the Shwekyet Yek Kyaung is the monastery where her sons were novitiated.

However, she has also warned against the pitfalls of a 'bigoted and narrow-minded attitude' towards Buddhism.⁶ She not only expresses her tolerance for religion, but she considers religion a positive value. She says that 'religion is about increasing peace and harmony in the world', and 'Everyone should be given a chance to create peace and harmony in their own way' [ZN1]. Her maternal grandfather in particular, who was a Christian and to whom she read the Bible in Burmese, helped her appreciate this.⁷

So, though her politics are within the Buddhist idiom, this is largely because it provides the main practices and concepts with which she was brought up, which her father and prior politicians used, and which is the idiom with which the majority can be addressed. Aung San Suu Kyi has expressed the view that benefits would accrue to the country were the regime becoming more, rather than less, Buddhist [H8]. This is indeed, what the regime has done since her release in 1995, though mostly in perfunctory ways.

¹ ASSK (1991:113,141–42).

² ASSK (1991:124–25, 294).

³ e.g. ASSK (1991:187–88).

⁴ ASSK (1991:7,8).

⁵ Whitney (1997:25–27).

⁶ ASSK (1991:202).

⁷ Parenteau (1994:61), Whitney (1997:32).

Chapter 17

Freedom from fear

Freedom from fear is the title of the book first published in 1991. It refers to the title of Aung San Suu Kyi's speech delivered on the occasion of the 1990 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought published as the centrepiece of this book. This prize was presented in her absence at the award ceremony at Strasbourg on 10 July 1991.¹

Aung San Suu Kyi's concept of freedom from fear is influenced to some extent by the Anglo-American attempt to gain co-operation of the democratic forces in the fight against fascism and the subsequent Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, this influence is only indirect. Aung San Suu Kyi, instead begins her essay with the concept of fear within a Buddhist classification, and ends with the concept of perfection in a manner highly suggestive of emancipation from fear on the path to arahatship. Here I attempt to distinguish various layers that go into this expression.

Aung San Suu Kyi emphasises freedom from fear more than any other kind of freedom.² She underlines the close link to the Buddhist concept of mental training by means of both *metta* but in particular *vipassana* in the model of the Buddhist saint (*yahanda*) and the martyr (*azani*). What we can say is that freedom from oppression, fear and national independence are all related to mental culture. One irony that should be pointed out from the beginning is that the techniques of *vipassana*, that are so useful in the prison context, are rivalled by heroin addiction in prisons, which is also known in Burma as 'freedom from fear'.³ There is thus overlap between drugs and mental culture, both of which aspire to freedom from fear.

Freedom

In a recent article on Aung San Suu Kyi's concept of freedom, Silverstein argues that the struggle in Burma today 'turns on the idea of freedom'. This idea in Burma has, he argues, two sources, one of which is 'deeply embedded in Burma's religion and culture', while the other is represented by the 'ideas and values brought to Burma by the British rulers following their conquest'. At the beginning of the twentieth century 'the two streams merged', so that today, as during the time of U Nu, 'the idea of freedom in Burma is a mixture of the two traditions'.

According to him, Aung San Suu Kyi's idea is 'in the mainstream of Burmese thought' and therefore 'easily understood and widely accepted by the people'. Of the two streams of thought, the Burmese Buddhist idea of freedom is more powerful, for the Burmese concept 'has its roots in Buddhism, customs and traditions even though it was not claimed in its own right before the advent of colonial rule.'⁴ He argues that political freedom was experienced more by ethnic minorities and villages remote from the power centre. Religious freedom, on the other hand, was 'implicit in Buddhism and explicitly practised by Burmans and non-Burmans alike without ever being extracted and claimed as an independent good'.⁵

I think Silverstein is right in saying that Buddhism has an important influence on Burmese ideas of freedom. However, largely because he does not deal with the English and Burmese terminology itself in detail, he ends up oversimplifying Aung San Suu Kyi's vernacular expression of freedom. In Burma, concepts for freedom and self-determination have historically been linked to the Buddhist quest for liberation, though this is a rather complicated relationship based on several different concepts of freedom as I have already indicated in my argument about the hermit state vis-à-vis the hermit practice.

There is the attainment of *nibbana*, which is a total unconditioned kind of freedom, but there is also the more esoteric and millenarian style of freedom that proclaims sovereignty and control, as in *htwet yak pauk* (the Freedom Bloc). For Aung San and Aung San Suu Kyi the former kind of freedom has a function in purifying politics and raising the politician's mind to a higher level, though the latter kind is seen as a corrupt and undemocratic form of freedom based on charismatic leaders claiming to be universal kings at the heart of government. Furthermore, there are other concepts delineated by U Hpo Hlaing in *The taste of*

¹ It was published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Times*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the *Bangkok Post*, the *Times of India* and in other newspapers in Germany, Norway and Iceland.

² Though she has also referred to the other 'basic freedoms', namely of association, expression and unlawful restraint (Aung San Suu Kyi 'Honoring those of fought for freedom'. *Mainichi Daily News*, 12.01.1998).

³ Christ Beyrer. 'War in the blood: sex, politics and AIDS in South East Asia'. *Burma Debate*, V, 2, 1998, pp. 6–8.

⁴ Silverstein (1996:212).

⁵ Silverstein (1996:214).

freedom [vimutti rasa] which is productive of the various levels of *ariya*.

Depressed by fear

A distinction is often made between fear and anxiety. With fear, an idea exists as to the cause (fear of something in particular), whereas anxiety is less abrupt, more nagging psychological condition with a less identifiable source (one is anxious about a general situation). In Burma, fear is the predominant condition, the cause of which is well known. The opposite of fear is courage, and the repression and uprooting of fear is an attribute of heroes, martyrs and renouncers.

Though fear is cross-cultural, and psychologically a similar condition, there are different mechanisms for coping with fear. In Burma there are two different parties experiencing fear for different reasons, namely members of the regime who experience the fear of revenge by the people they repress, and the political opposition representing the common people who experience fear under repression. They cope with these fears differently, and while the regime initiates hard authoritarian behaviour, the NLD members respond non-violently with *metta*..

Aung San Suu Kyi has isolated 'fear' and 'intolerance of diversity' as the main characteristics of the regime [O1]. Similarly, U Kyi Maung characterised the regime as 'fear-based' and works like 'Big-Brother'.¹ So, too has Tin U, who furthermore says that 'this "fear" they live with is identical to the "fear" they have created among the people'.²

The people in particular fear forced labour [O2] and forced portering, which could lead to injury, disease or even death [O3]. However, like the feeling of imprisonment, fear is produced by the general state of the entire country in which human rights are denied.

Within a system that denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day. Fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of poverty, fear of isolation, fear of failure. A most insidious form of fear is that which masquerades as common sense or even wisdom, condemning as foolish, reckless, insignificant or futile the small, daily acts of courage which help to preserve man's self-respect and inherent human dignity. It is not easy for a people conditioned by the iron rule of the principle that might is right to free themselves from the enervating miasma of fear. Yet even under the most crushing state machinery courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilized man.³

Freedom from fear – democracy and human rights

Freedom and fear are closely related concepts in Aung San Suu Kyi's discourse. On a mundane level, they have everyday meanings. For example, to the question 'what does freedom mean to you?' Aung San Suu Kyi replied 'Freedom would mean that I would be able to do what I understand to be right, without the fear that by doing so I would be exposing myself and others to danger'.⁴ Thus freedom and fear are inversely related: true freedom can only arise in one who has overcome fear which, in turn, is related to an accurate perception of what is dangerous in a particular political environment. As I shall argue, there is here a complex relationship between fear and wisdom.

More concretely, Aung San Suu Kyi placed freedom from fear [*ei ka kha m hla kka: te*] alongside freedom from want [*kit pō cō a*] as the two basic human rights 'without which human beings cannot lead dignified, meaningful lives'. For 'As long as there are parts of the world where the two freedoms are not fostered there will be refugees' [K1]. The purpose of the democratic struggle then, is to liberate people from these two psychological conditions for, as she says, 'In working for democracy and human rights we are striving to establish political and social institutions and values that will free our people from want and fear.' [K3] She defines the democracy struggle as 'a change in our everyday lives' and 'we want freedom from fear and want' [Y23].⁵

Aung San Suu Kyi does not relate her particular use of the expression freedom from want to the Allied war effort. However, objectively speaking, that is where this discourse started. During World War II, the freedom from want and fear were originally enunciated in 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the third and fourth of the Four Freedoms.

¹ ASSK (1997b:194).

² ASSK (1997b:232).

³ ASSK (1991:184–85).

⁴ Interview with Aung San Suu Kyi by Ivan Suvanjiëff. *Shambala Sun*, January 1996.

⁵ By contrast, the regime steers clear of such mental view of rights and refers to striving towards 'practical human rights [internal to the country]' [*dim pō cō a*] as meaning the 'security of life and property, food requirements, and social advancement of the people'. *NLM* and *ek: m* 06.09.1998.

In the future days we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way. The third is freedom from want. The fourth is freedom from fear.¹

These were brought up in the Roosevelt meeting with Churchill in August 1941 off the coast of Newfoundland, when they established joint war aims under the Atlantic Charter as part of the democratic (as opposed to Fascist) ideology of the Alliance. It subsequently entered the discourse of human rights through the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by an eight-member UN committee chaired by the American humanitarian worker Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.²

Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly subscribed to the entire Declaration of Human Rights [Y30][ZD5], and so is well aware of its contents. She undoubtedly uses these expressions conscious of their international meaning in terms of human rights.

What is noticeable is that, of the four freedoms, only freedom of fear is actually prominent in her speeches; freedom from want is only referred to once, and freedom of speech and belief do not form cornerstones in Aung San Suu Kyi's political discourse. Freedom of speech is mentioned in particular by U Kyi Maung, who says that 'Suu's [Aung San Suu Kyi] compound is the only liberated area in Burma. From there we say all sorts of things' [K5]. Freedom of belief implies freedom from fear, for it is 'fear of persecution for their political beliefs that has made so many of our people feel that even in their own homes they cannot live in dignity and security' [K2]. Furthermore, freedom from want is a much underdeveloped concept, only referred to occasionally in relation to freedom from fear.

In contrast to the NLD perspective which psychologizes freedom, the regime steers clear of such mental view of rights and prefers to strive towards 'practical human rights [internal to the country]' [dipvtakt] ~~U Aung Mye Aung~~ as meaning the 'security of life and property, food requirements, and social advancement of the people'.³ The regime cannot control the psychology of freedom.

Freedom from fear – Aung San and Gandhi

What is clear from the above contexts is that, though freedom from fear as an English concept had a predominantly secular strategic meaning within the Atlantic Treaty, and later a humanitarian purpose within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Aung San Suu Kyi does not relate her own use of freedom from fear directly to these. Instead, she 'Asianizes' and 'indigenizes' the concept by focusing on two personalities – Aung San and Gandhi.

The war created a situation of fear world-wide. But to the Burmese and Indian population this very same war situation also brought onto the horizon the possibility of national independence after a long period of colonial domination. During this time, the state of fearlessness of the national political leaders became the nation's focus. Do they dare to oppose colonialism? Aung San Suu Kyi finds the words used by Jawaharlal Nehru to describe Mahatma Gandhi could therefore well be applied to Aung San: 'the essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view'. Aung San Suu Kyi has suggested that Aung San and Gandhi share 'an inevitable sameness about challenges of authoritarian rule anywhere at any time' which is reflected in 'a similarity in the intrinsic qualities of those who rise up to meet the challenge' [O19]. Both were, of course, the leading political figures during a period of intense locally aroused nationalist sentiment, so that fearlessness attained particular cultural interpretations for their own respective countries.

The allied forces asserted the same concept in their own way against the threat of ultra-right nationalists in Germany (and later Japan). Nationalists in both India and Burma hoped that Article 3 in President Eisenhower's Atlantic Treaty, which affirmed that peoples would have the right to choose their own government, would apply to their respective countries. Indeed, we know that on 8 September the British Prime Minister exempted all elements of the British Empire from the Atlantic Treaty. Premier U Saw visited Britain in October 1941, shortly before Japan entered war, specifically to look for a promise of freedom for the colonies under this Treaty. However, the British government suggested to U Saw that the Atlantic Treaty

¹ *New York Times*, 07.01.1941, pp. 4,7.

² Chorba, Timothy. 'The Charter is still relevant, says a diplomat.' *Asia Week*, 31.10.1997.

³ 'General Than Shwe speech on the occasion of the AGM of the USDA'. *NLM and eik.m* 06.09.1998.

did refer to freedom for the colonies, including Burma.¹

This is why Aung San emphasized the importance of freedom from fear regularly, for it had been mentioned the Atlantic Treaty and he hoped that the four freedoms would be extended to Burma also. The Declaration of Human Rights was not formulated before Aung San's death, and so we can only investigate Aung San's relationship to President Eisenhower's notion of freedom from fear.

It is through the image of Aung San that she came to appreciate the need to resist fear. Resisting fear was a feature of her upbringing by her mother, who taught her to respect Aung San's values of fearlessness [O11]. As Aung San Suu Kyi explained, in his speeches Aung San, once he attained political power, was able to become a civilian and 'lay aside his sword without fear' because of his faith in *metta* and truth [E26]. Aung San, in his inaugural address to the AFPFL delivered on 20 January 1946, encouraged the Sangha to foster 'freedom from fear' with the people. The role of the Sangha, in their propagation of Buddhism, should 'go amongst our people, preach the doctrine of unity and love; carry the message of higher freedom to every nook and corner of the country, freedom to religious worship, freedom to preach and spread the Dharma anywhere and anytime, *freedom from fear* [ဓမ္မစိတိပဿနာ] from ignorance, superstition, etc., teach our people to rely upon themselves and re-construct themselves materially, spiritually and otherwise'.²

Aung San Suu Kyi quoted a resolution which was proposed by Aung San on 16 June 1947 in the Constituent assembly, as the basis of drawing up the new constitution which she said 'encapsulated the hope of the people of the Burma for a state sustained by democratic values that would enable them to live in freedom and dignity'. The fourth point is that the constitution shall 'guarantee and secure to all the peoples of union, justice, social, economic and political; equality of status, of opportunity, and before the law *freedom of thought, expression, belief, worship*, subject to law and public morality ...'.

Aung San, as co-founder of the Anti-Fascist Party League, thus skilfully blended this anti-Fascist and pro-democratic idea of the concept of 'freedom from fear' with its Buddhist ramifications as advocated by the Sangha, while providing for the other two freedoms (expression and belief) in the constitution. Aung San died young, and is generally seen as a modern pragmatic man of action who advocated a secular politics. Aung San relied much on intermediaries such as Thahkin Kodawhmaing to translate his political views into the more religious-minded ideas of the common people. To develop a coherent political philosophy meant that Aung San Suu Kyi had to look elsewhere for inspiration. She looked initially in the direction of Gandhi. Gandhi's greatest achievement she quotes Nehru as saying was the 'instillation of courage to the people of India'. He used the ancient political philosophy of ancient India and found that 'the greatest gift for an individual or a nation ... was *abhaya*, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but absence of fear from the mind'.³ She also looked at Mandela, whose *Long walk to freedom* she had read.⁴

Buddhist freedom from fear

One explanation for Aung San Suu Kyi's emphasis on freedom from fear is that this is readily interpreted in Buddhist tradition in terms of psychological comportment rather than substantive political realities. When properly translated, this is less controversial in the mental culture of Burmese politics, as it appeals to the Burmese aptitude to interpret politics in terms of Buddhist psychological concepts.

One reason for the neglect of the other three freedoms is to be found in Burmese Buddhism. Freedom of belief does not translate well into Burmese, for it is too readily associated with ideology and with monotheistic religion, which translates into Burmese as 'wrong-viewed' [*micca*] and 'selfness' (*atta*), and runs directly opposite to the Buddhist teachings about non-self (*anatta*). Also, freedom of speech is not so important in Burmese discourse, for in Burmese opinion the spiritual and conciliatory nature of speech is seen as more important than the freedom to say what one wants [R2].

Though used, 'Freedom from want' may also be controversial. 'Want' is too readily linked to the mental defilements related to sense-gratification. In Pali, there are no less than sixteen different terms for 'desire', many of which overlap with 'want' in a negative sense, of which the most important in Burmese are 'craving' [*tanhā*] and 'desire' [*SNāhanda*]. Though sometimes positive, as in the desire to do good or to attain *nibbana*, for the most part these concepts are seen to go against the grain of even minimal Buddhist behaviour because they are based on attachment, which prevents the practice of Buddhist charity (*dāna* *dana*)

¹ Cady (1958:429–31).

² Silverstein (1993:93–142), Aung San (1971:28).

³ ASSK (1995:184).

⁴ Victor (1998:103).

and renunciation of offerings ‘without regret’.

Indeed, the regime has sometimes justified its socialist path by means of the idea underlying Schumacher's ‘Small is beautiful’, i.e. what matters is the reduction of want rather than the increase of consumption. It is by these means that the regime has justified its ‘hermit’ status of closed borders and egalitarian socialist development. It is possible, therefore, to see in this cynical manipulation of Buddhist ideas of ‘want’ a history of human rights violation. Freedom from want takes a peripheral role in Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches and writings compared to the central role designated to freedom from fear. As she said, ‘among the basic freedoms to which men aspire that their lives might be full and uncramped, freedom from fear stands out as both a means and an end’ [K6].

In ‘Freedom from fear’ Aung San Suu Kyi categorises ‘fear’ (*bhaya-gati*) as the worst of the Four Corruptions (*agati*) in the monastic code of conduct, for not only does *bhaya*, fear, stifle and slowly destroy all sense of right and wrong, it so often lies at the root of the other three kinds of corruption’ [O6].¹ She holds that fear creates a corrupt society, saying that ‘in any society where fear is rife corruption in all forms becomes deeply entrenched’ [O6]. The political situation becomes confrontational because hate and fear are ‘the opposite sides of the same coin. It's the same thing. You don't hate unless you fear, basically’ [O7].

I have already noted that Aung San Suu Kyi tied this concept to Aung San's fearlessness of Aung San [R12][U1], her father, who spoke truth ‘fearlessly’, and Gandhi, who said: ‘the greatest gift for an individual or a nation ... was *abhaya*, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but absence of fear from the mind’.² Aung San Suu Kyi, however, moved away from this in favour of indigenising and Buddhicising her concepts – the concepts of Law as *dhamma*, human rights as ‘the shade of the Buddha's teachings’ [E32], and freedom from fear as the development of *metta* and *karuna*. Indeed, she says that enjoyment of these basic freedoms will come when the country is ‘peaceful like the *dhamma*’ [K4]. Thus the broader concept of freedom and human rights, from which all four particular freedoms follow, are closely linked to Buddhist practice.

Of all freedoms, freedom from fear is therefore Aung San Suu Kyi's focus. Fear sums up not only the regime and the conditions in the country [Y1-Y16], but emancipation from fear very much at the heart of the Buddhist concept of martyr (*azani*) and saint (*yahanda*).

Overcoming fear

The political niche of Gandhi and Aung San, of course, parallels that of Aung San Suu Kyi today, which is why theyse men are an inspiration to her. The main difference is that she is facing not a colonial but an indigenous military Burmese regime. Nevertheless, the situation of fear generated by repression by police and military is as pertinent today as it was then. To overcome fear is a major preoccupation on the part of Aung San Suu Kyi. She draws attention to several techniques in which she herself and her colleagues coped with her fear, and through which she also expects the regime to cope with its fear.

The regime ‘fear change’ [O4]. If fear is ‘not the natural state of civilized man’, then civilisation consists of drawing on that ‘wellspring of courage and endurance in the face of unbridled power’ by reasserting ‘the sanctity of ethical principles’ and see to it that ‘spiritual and material advancement’ takes place through ‘self-improvement’, and in particular ‘perfection’. By these means, ultimately, it is ‘man's vision of a world fit for rational, civilized humanity which leads him to dare and to suffer to build societies free from want and fear’. Aung San Suu Kyi views international support as ameliorating the fear of the people (though not of the regime) such as the support by the former European Economic Community for the Burmese cause [O5].

First, she claims that in her youth she conquered fear from the dark by facing it for two weeks [O8]. After she was subsequently brought up outside Burma she had not further developed fear as a habit [O9].

Second, *brahma-vihara* proves to be a major element in overcoming fear. As we shall see below, Tin U also emphasizes that *brahma-vihara* and a monastic education allowed him to turn away from ‘a shallow and fearful life’ associated with his life under the military [E1]. Also, Aung San Suu Kyi views the regime's fear as the product of its lack of compassion for others, and developing compassion would dissipate its fears [F2]. This is a view she shares with Tin U, who holds that ‘fear compromises the feelings of compassion’ and ‘when SLORC eases their fear a bit they will have a dialogue with us’.³

Third, a more basic way of overcoming fear is by taking refuge in the Three Jewels – the Buddha,

¹ General Saw Maung in his first statement appealed to the military ‘should not indulge in the four *agati* (biases) in the general election.’ (Saw Maung 1990b:8,15).

² ASSK (1995:183–84).

³ ASSK (1997b:234).

Dhamma, and the Sangha. Also known as the Three Refuges (*sarana tiratana*), 'those who seek its protection overcome their fear, alarm, physical and mental suffering and various miseries'. Wholesome consciousness (*mahakusala-citta*) inclines one to the Three Jewels, and through devotion and veneration mental defilements are 'moved' resulting in 'refuge consciousness' (*sarana-gamana*). Though these benefits are often seen as taking place 'in the lower worlds after death', the Three Refuges are commonly recited at funeral services with the aim of benefiting the dead in the process of being dispatched to their new abodes.¹

Fourth, we have already noted that *vipassana* practice leads to states of mind that permit one to be 'free from fear'. Indeed, as we will note later on, the issue of uprooting fear (rather than temporarily suspending it) through *vipassana* was addressed by U Pandita in *In this very life* in which Mara's Sixth Army is known as 'Fear' itself, and only 'a person who reaches *nibbana* is completely protected and can therefore be called "The Fearless", the one without danger'. This is attained 'even before arriving at the perfect safety of *nibbana*', for 'one is protected from fearful things while walking the Noble Eightfold Path' so that 'this path itself is the haven'. It is 'attachment' that makes for 'a very shallow fearful life' [E1].

However, 'freedom from fear' is not unambiguous, both in the context of the Burmese language and in Buddhism. Though in some contexts it works well in Burmese, its use is contextual and sometimes it does not translate well. For one thing, in Rangoon and Mandalay the drug heroin is now known locally as 'freedom from fear', an alternative form of courage needed to face dictatorship which is allegedly fostered by the military to defuse opposition.²

The reason why it does not translate well is because in Buddhism fear is not necessarily always negative. Indeed, it is often seen as positive. For example, 'fear' [*iq t pē tra*; P. *ottappa*] in the sense of 'not doing, saying or planning out of fear of doing bad deeds' (i.e. moral dread, scrupulousness) together with 'shame' [*hrit tra*], are seen as the 'two guardians of the world' [*el akpāl tra: 2pā*], which are 'cultural rules guarding the world from destruction'.³ Additionally, *samvega* [*qəw*] represents the fear of the consequences of action for a future state, and as a result, the experience of remorse.

Just in case it be thought that these are merely Buddhist theories, it should be noted that they are also of some political significance. This is evident when we look at the political speeches of Burma's leaders. *Ottappa* was quoted as a protest against the regime's actions. Aung Shwe in his letter on the subject of the National Convention to the Chairman of the SLORC, wrote about the National Convention that 'no resolutions based on the development of a genuine multi-party democracy and *law ka pa la taya* have been reached in the Convention', so that the National Convention has not addressed matters vital to the country's problems.⁴ It was also used by Aung San in appreciation of Burmese modesty as opposed to the Japanese tendency to jump collectively naked into their public baths.⁵

The concept of *samvega* features in Maung Maung's explanation for Ne Win's rule.⁶ In Buddhism 'fearlessness' (*Aenat pē*. *anotappa*) in the sense of 'lack of fear of bad action' [*mekac mshl n kca qe Ba*],⁷ the tenth of the Ten Mental Defilements, is a negative attribute when it contributes, along with other mental processes, to lust (*tanha*), conceit (*mana*) and wrong belief (*ditthi*), all of which prolong *samsaric* existence.⁸

After some time, Aung San Suu Kyi contextualised her ideas about fear more carefully. While foreign journalists continued to trumpet the attractive idea of fearlessness, she herself increasingly came to link 'freedom from fear' to the positive practice of *metta* and *brahma-so tayà*, so conducive to national unity. Later she also revised her views and admitted she had fears, but not for herself or her own safety, only 'fear of letting down people who have faith in me' [O18]. Freedom from fear, therefore, in a good sense is only experienced by the martyr (*azana*) without self (*atta*), who has permanently uprooted fear and no longer returns to this world. True fearlessness, therefore, does not have a particularly long lifespan in politics.

¹ Mingun (1990–96, 4:483).

² Institute for Asian Democracy. 'The heroin trade'. In *Towards democracy in Burma*, 1992.

³ Awbatha (1995:538).

⁴ Aung Shwe (1992:39). The meaning is inserted as a note by the ABSDF editors of the volume as follows: 'the Buddhist principles of shame and fear which guard the world from falling into chaos.' However, exiled Burmese are often unaware of the Buddhist message underlying the terminology of politicians back home. In this case, it may well have meant the four guardians of the world, namely *byama-so tayà*, which has come to be associated with democracy.

⁵ Sagaing Han Tin (1985:48).

⁶ Maung Maung (1969b).

⁷ Awbatha (1975).

⁸ Mahasi Sayadaw. 'Tuvataka Sutta.' Translator Daw Kay Mya Yee. Rangoon: Nyo Maung, 1982, p. 8.

Chapter 18

Revolution of the spirit

Closely related to freedom from fear, Aung San Suu Kyi refers to a 'revolution of the spirit' [စိတ်သန့်ရှင်းရေး] in her speeches and writing. The earliest and central reference to this concept is to be found in the speech 'Freedom from Fear' (Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought). Nevertheless, it is a much broader concept than freedom from fear, for it advocates striving more broadly for spiritual perfection. I have already introduced the concept of political revolution, constituted in terms of a revolution that involves uprooting mental defilements such as greed, and here I wish to elicit more specifically what these senior NLD leaders make of it.

Aung San Suu Kyi's revolution of the spirit

In the essay *Freedom from Fear* she argued that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not have the reach that it should have, as it can not be guaranteed by the international community while there are governments 'whose authority is founded on coercion rather than the mandate of the people' and while there are interest groups which 'place short-term profits above long-term peace and prosperity'. As long as this persists, 'there will continue to be arenas of struggle where victims of oppression have to draw on their own inner resources to defend their inalienable rights as members of the human family'. Here Aung San Suu Kyi made a close association between the 'revolution of the spirit' and the struggle for democracy, for she says that 'a people who would build a nation in which strong *democratic institutions* are firmly established as a guarantee against state-induced power must first learn to liberate their own minds from apathy and fear' [S8]. In other words, the struggle for democracy is a struggle to cleanse one's own mind, it is a revolution of the spirit.

However, the revolution of the spirit is more than just this, for it also means 'perfection'. Spiritual values must accompany material advancement: 'at the root of human responsibility is the concept of perfection,¹ the urge to achieve it, the intelligence to find a path towards it, and the will to follow that path if not to the end at least the distance needed to rise above individual limitations and environmental impediments'. To cultivate truth, justice and compassion, they cannot therefore 'be dismissed as trite when these are often the only bulwarks which stand against ruthless power'.

In her 1991 Nobel Peace Prize speech, presented by her son Alexander Aris on 10 December 1991, this concept of 'revolution of the spirit' is reiterated. However, by this time the Gandhi and Aung San element of 'fearlessness' is absent, and it more specifically uses the Buddhist discourse drawn from 'In the quest for democracy'. Her son reminds the audience that his mother is not just a 'political dissident' who 'strives by peaceful means for democratic change', but 'we should remember that her quest is basically spiritual' [S1].

The speech, after asserting that in the military regime 'there are those to whom the present policies of fear and repression are abhorrent, violating as they do the most sacred principles of Burma's Buddhist heritage', it much more clearly delineates the spiritual revolution as a Buddhist quest for enlightenment.

... Buddhism, the foundation of traditional Burmese culture, places the greatest value on man, who alone of all beings can achieve the supreme state of Buddhahood. Each man has in him the potential to realize the truth through his own will and endeavour and to help others to realize it²

Between the 1990 Freedom of Thought and the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize speeches, which were delivered only five months apart, this spiritual revolution concept has undergone a noticeable shift from a 'universalist' cross-cultural concept (Gandhi and Aung San), towards more specifically universalising those practices and perfections (*parami*) permitting attainment of Buddhahood, in which enlightenment is combined with compassion for the world. Though both may be characterised as ways of overcoming fear,

¹ This concept of perfection is, in turn, closely tied to her view of Aung San (see previous note). However, it is also related to the concept of perfection for attainment of Buddhahood.

² ASSK (1991:174, 238). Francis Sejersted, Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, though mentioning Gandhi as a role model for Aung San Suu Kyi, also quoted more extensively from the Buddhist 'In the Quest for Democracy' in his speech on the same date. Distorting her views, newspaper articles in Burma have heavily criticised Aung San Suu Kyi for suggesting that ordinary people can become Buddhas 'in this life'.

the methods by which these are achieved are inherently quite different.

This shift may be understood in several ways. First, it may be understood in terms of the chronology of events. In May 1991, just prior to the Freedom of Thought speech, the regime forced the NLD to drop all leaders from the party, allowing only three ex-military commanders as leaders. This was a low point in NLD politics, and firm and final evidence of the regime's total disregard for election results. Her attitude was more confrontational then, than after five months of reflection, when she had to rethink her political strategy in terms of a longer-term ideology.

Second, 'fearlessness' fits differently in the context of the different prizes. The Sakharov Prize was given for freedom of thought in which fearlessness is a positive attribute. However, in the context of a Peace Prize 'fearlessness' is not necessarily a positive attribute, for the same quality can give rise to war. The metaphor Aung San Suu Kyi used for fearless resistance is that of the 'glass splinter', which 'with its sharp glinting power to defend itself against hands that try to crush' is a comparatively violent metaphor. Buddhist enlightenment, on the other hand, is attractive for its emphasis on non-violent means of changing attitudes and making conquests.

However, a third explanation may be found in her assertion that the revolution of the spirit involves a change of mental processes by means of specific homegrown solutions. In this respect, the Gandhi concept of fearlessness, since it uses a 'Hindu' technique, is not adequate as a primary role model for Burma. Nor is, for that matter, Aung San's, which was not always a non-violent fearlessness in his military career.

Some support the idea that Aung San Suu Kyi revised her views in order to develop an ideology that may persist in the long-term. Philip Kraeger in his essay 'Peaceful Struggle for Human Rights in Burma', attempts to relate this concept to Aung San Suu Kyi's awareness that 'continuity of vision' and 'ideational content' is an important component of a revolution. He suggests she may have feared that similar discontinuities would take place, as they did between the older generation of revolutionaries. Saya San depended on charisma, and harked back to kingship in 'mundane knowledge' style, and the newer student-type leaders, such as Aung San, looked forward and attempted to give leadership a more modern intellectual framework (though translated by Kodawhmaing and Ba Maw). Unlike India, where 'political and intellectual leadership often coincided' and where 'there had been an uninterrupted stream of able leaders from the last years of the nineteenth century until independence', in Burma the development was 'more fractured'. In this context, she writes in her analysis of intellectual life in Burma and India: 'actions without ideational content lose their potency as soon as the situation, which called for them, ceases to be valid. A series of pragmatic moves unconnected by a continuity of vision cannot be expected to sustain a long-term movement.'¹

Kraeger's argument, though interesting and relevant, does not incorporate the perspectives added by the revolution of the spirit as an internal cultural debate. In *Voice of hope*, Aung San Suu Kyi describes a 'true revolution' as going beyond a change in the material world, and as a change 'of the spirit'. Thus, the 'struggle for democracy' is based on 'spiritual values', 'values that are different to those you have lived by before', which inevitably change peoples' mentality [S2]. This notion also exists in her essay 'In quest for democracy', where the quest for democracy is 'part of the unceasing human endeavour to prove that the spirit of man can transcend the flaws of his own nature' [S1] [Y18].

Furthermore, the call for a 'revolution of the spirit' is necessitated by a lack of room to manoeuvre in the political and social sphere.

AC: What shift in consciousness has been required in order to make the struggle a 'spiritual revolution' from a socio-political one?

Aung San Suu Kyi: Because of the tremendous repression to which we have been subjected it's almost impossible for it to be either a political or a social revolution. We're so hemmed in by all kinds of unjust regulations that we can hardly move as a political or a social movement. So it has had to be a movement very much of the spirit.²

This idea is given more substance in her essay 'Towards a true refuge', which she presented at Elizabeth House, Oxford, where the Refugee Studie Programme is located. Here, she identifies with the many Burmese and other refugees against the hunger of repressive regimes for power and wealth, which can only be countered by developing their inner spiritual resources, for 'there only remain to sustain them the values of their cultural and spiritual inheritance' and 'the great majority of the world's refugees are seeking

¹ ASSK (1995:128).

² ASSK (1997a:50–51). See also [S3].

sanctuary from situations rendered untenable by a dearth of humanity and wisdom'.¹

She proceeds to write of a 'dream of a society ruled by loving-kindness, reason and justice'. The 'revolution of the spirit', though in many contexts conceived of as Buddhist, has loving-kindness in common with every religion [E23].

In a more general sense, however, the concept of a 'spiritual revolution' may be understood as making an opening for free spiritual practice in a state regulating every aspect of peoples' lives. As she says, 'the authorities accuse us of using religion for political purposes, perhaps because this is what they themselves are doing, or perhaps because they cannot recognize the multi-dimensional nature of man as a social being. Our right to freedom of worship has become threatened by the desire of the authorities to curtail the activities of our party'.²

Thus, given the lack of fronts on which she can fight the regime with any success, the spiritual sphere is a very good beginning for it elicits the broadest support with the Burmese people and of all battles, it is a battle that can be won. Whether this can translate into a pragmatic government capable of handling the complex political and economic problems is a different matter that I cannot address at this juncture.

The concept of 'spiritual revolution' is extended by the idea of 'spiritual and intellectual reconciliation' that she sought with the SLORC, which is the 'reconciliation between different ideas' [Y3]. Tin U put it that democracy can be attained under the SLORC if they demonstrate 'kindness' and 'compassion'. In his view, this is why 'Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has called our movement for democracy a "revolution of the spirit."' [S4]

To evoke this spiritual revolution we must again draw attention to Pandita's preaching about reconciliation with the regime through right speech supported by *vipassana* practice [R2]. This revolution does not start with one's adversary, but with the development in oneself of 'inner spiritual strength' and 'spiritual steadiness' which helps 'to shore up ... spiritual powers' of pro-democracy activists [S5][S6].

Tin U's spiritual revolution

Tambiah once wrote that the 'passage from violence to righteousness is problematic for all actual rulers'. The Buddha had admitted to violent rule during his lives prior to his spiritual conquest while carrying out his role as a universal ruler (*cakravatti*), for 'the wheel of righteousness conquers more effectively than the scepter of *danda* [punishment]'.³ Asoka and Anawratha had a history of violence before they turned to Buddhism. Ultimately, the people appeal to the military regime to become part of the 'spiritual revolution' by practising *vipassana* and developing *metta*. To repeat Tin U's words:

... In all honesty, I think the SLORC generals should lay down all their weapons just for ten days and undertake a period of *vipassana* meditation practice under a competent Sayadaw [Senior monk]. If their meditation is developing nicely then I think they should extend this practice indefinitely. I think the whole country would applaud them for this noble behaviour. In this way, the meditation practice will automatically reveal to them, by themselves, without anyone's help, their true inner state of being. All Burmese will understand this. They can foster *metta* in this way ...

... it is possible they might change, and then we might be able to see some redeeming qualities in them. But I still think they should meditate first. That may hasten the process. People are suffering [C19].

Tin U began his practice of *vipassana* during his first prison term.⁴ When he was released from prison in 1980, he became a monk for two years⁵ at the Thathana Yeiktha in Rangoon, the chief centre in the *vipassana* tradition of the Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82). I first met Tin U when he was a monk, while I was engaged in my fieldwork in the centre between 1981–82. Why does Tin U so firmly hope for this change? Is it because he himself has been part of this 'spiritual revolution'? Once he was on the side of the military regime, but the change brought about by *vipassana* brought him into the fold of the democrats. In response to the question how he, who was once in charge of Ne Win's military and participated in the repression of the Burmese people, could now join hands with the democratic movements, he says

When you live for nine years in solitary confinement under the most severe forms of repression, a man has a lot of time to reflect. Since I know the worst in human nature it gives me more confidence to seek the best in people. I've seen both sides. The dark and the light. I've seen it in myself. From observing my mind through the practice of *vipassana* meditation. I have come to realize that loving-kindness and compassion can be developed. If I can do it, it gives me great hope that others can do

¹ ASSK (1991:247).

² ASSK (1997a:199).

³ Tambiah (1976:45–46).

⁴ For Tin U's own account of his prison experiences see ASSK (1997b:228–29) as cited below.

⁵ See ASSK (1997b:229).

it too. Since I was blinded by a deeply unrecognized level of ignorance, I feel more sympathy when I see others that are so deluded. But it was all those long years in prison and my years as a monk that really made me appreciate *metta*.

It is worth recounting in some detail the moment at which the revolution of the spirit took place within him – his conversion from soldier to monk to democrat as the result of his experiences in prison. This began with his inability to cope with the humiliation of confinement that ultimately expressed itself in physical illness.

AC: What prompted you to be ordained as a Buddhist monk and enter at the age of fifty-four?

UTU: During my first period of incarceration from 1976 to 1981, my conditions in prison were harsh – extremely harsh. Sometimes, when I thought over my affairs, I felt full of resentment and outrage.

I was in a terrible state of mind, alone in solitary, and without anyone to discuss things with. I was at times seething, really mad. And I had no ability to control my mind. I knew very little about meditation at that time, nor was my conviction in the *dhamma* very strong. You know, I was trained to be a soldier, I was a combatant.

In solitary confinement I felt like a caged, enraged animal. Furthermore, after my sacking from the army as Chief of Staff, I received a few months' pay and that was it. My pension stopped and my name was struck from the annals of history of the Burma Army. My photographs and speeches during the tenure of my service were all destroyed.

In addition, they issued an order stating that nobody was to address me as 'General', only as U Tin U. In fact, if someone were to address me by rank they would be punished. Then the BSPP party published a scathing book portraying me as a notorious criminal. At the same time, I thought about my wife and how difficult it would be to live without an income. The situation as I felt it in prison was like a pressure cooker. I was ready to explode. Suddenly I came down with severe dysentery. My stomach-pains doubled me over. And my anger made the pains in my stomach worse. The combination of the two forms of suffering, and without any release, was terrible. I sat down on the floor of my cell and felt like I was going to weep.

The suffering then prompted him to find a way out, which was suggested by the *satipatthana* method of the Mahasi Sayadaw.

Well, it just so happened that I had brought a small booklet with me by the Mahasi Sayadaw on *vipassana* meditation. I picked up the booklet and started reading his instructions on mindfulness or bare attention. He suggested that one should simply be aware of all experiences as they arise. If it's pain, be aware of pain. If it's joy, well, just be aware of joy, so on and so forth. So I sat cross-legged on the floor and just started to be aware of the pain and the anger. Well, it was like a miracle. After the first ten minutes or so the anger and pain increased. I said, 'This is only creating more pain.' But I stayed with it and after an hour or so, the pain and anger simply disappeared. So you can imagine how I felt. I now had a friend in prison, myself, my mindfulness. So when I came out of solitary in 1981 I was ordained at the Mahasi monastery and learnt meditation under the guidance of a teacher. Of course, this is when we [i.e. with Alan Clements] met. So many good things can come from critical moments, if you're mindful.

Subsequently, he practised in tranquillity, until he joined the democratic movement.

During the pro-democracy upheavals of 1988 my colleagues urged me to address the public. At first I declined. I wanted to continue living quietly practising *vipassana* [insight] meditation. I think I was a bit attached to the tranquillity and peace of the practice. But my colleagues would not give up, and after many discussion we all agreed to form a league which we named the All-Burma Patriotic Old Comrades' League. Nearly all the retired officers from all over the country came to our headquarters, which was my house, to offer their services.¹

One of the principal elements of the 'revolution of the spirit' is the overcoming of the habit of fear and apathy, and as already argued above, this may be done by cultivating *metta* and attaining the habit of mindfulness through mental culture [S7]. Ultimately, however, one of the most effective ways of accomplishing this revolution of the spirit, is by uprooting the defilements in the way the revolution concept was originally conceived (see chapter 11).

In the Indian prisons, it was the authorities who experienced the first change as a result of the revolution of the spirit, before the prisoners.

Mrs. Bedi [Inspector-General of Prisons] made inquiries and contacted Ram Singh in Jaipur. He advised her that the first step for introducing *Vipassana* into Tihar would be for some of the jail officials to take a course. Mrs. Bedi made a deliberate decision to send some of the angriest members of her jail staff to attend a *Vipassana* course. These officials were authoritarian and short-tempered, feeling themselves to be above correction. Yet when they returned from their ten-day *Vipassana* course, their interactions were markedly more congenial and cooperative, as confirmed by their colleagues and the inmates alike. This gave Mrs. Bedi and the other jail coordinators growing confidence that *Vipassana* was indeed an effective method of reform.

This puts a very different light on the characterisation of men such as Hpo Hlaing and Ledi Sayadaw, who were interested in practising and teaching *vipassana* as 'revolutionary' in spirit. Ba Maw's revolution merely rode on the back of this ultimate idea of revolution.

¹ ASSK (1997b:209).

Part V
Mental Culture in Democracy Politics

Chapter 19

Byama-so tayà: social meditation and the politics of influence

Aung San Suu Kyi in response to a question a journalist posed about the sudden piety of the regime, responded that ‘I would not like to judge other people's religious activities or attitudes and all I would say is that if there is real respect for the teachings of Buddhism on the part of the authorities, it is all to the good of the nation.’ However, to the regime's intolerance towards other religions she responded that ‘if that is so then it's a great pity because Buddhism after all teaches tolerance and loving kindness *myitta* so it would be against the essence of Buddhism to persecute anyone, whether on religious, political or any other grounds.’¹ The question arises whether Aung San Suu Kyi's view of Buddhism is substantively different from that practised by the regime, and, if so, in what ways.

As I have already noted, senior NLD members stress a number of Buddhist practices. The most important is *vipassana*, which operates at the level of coping psychologically with imprisonment and repression. This is so, particularly with the older generation steeped in the teachings of Burmese Buddhism. Among the younger leaders, in particular those who fled from Burma to Thailand, no such emphasis can be discerned. A long absence from Burma has cut them off from these techniques for coping with personal suffering which are openly available in most parts of Burma.

Nevertheless, for Aung San Suu Kyi as a Buddhist, change in and purification of her own mind and attitudes is as important as, if not more important than, calling for a change in the attitudes of others, including one's enemies [O10].² She has admitted, during various interviews, to her own addressing of these failings through mental culture [C17]. Nevertheless, though she practices herself, she also has reservations that mental culture necessarily always leads to change in the person, for there are many people who practise ‘not just for days but for months’ without changing their attitudes [C18].

Samatha and vipassana

Vipassana

Many NLD members were sustained through their prison term by practising mental culture, in particular *vipassana* or ‘insight contemplation’. The practices, which Spiro – in his emphasis on Kammatic Buddhism over Nibbanic Buddhism – relegated to footnotes,³ here take centre stage. The three most senior leaders of the National League for Democracy – Aung San Suu Kyi (General Secretary), Tin U (Deputy Chairman) and U Kyi Maung (Deputy Chairman) – practise *vipassana*.

Aung San Suu Kyi and Tin U practise in the tradition of the Mahasi Sayadaw, whereas U Kyi Maung and

¹ ‘Patience, pragmatism pays off for “the lady”.’ *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

² ASSK (1997b:91).

³ ‘Although most Burmese who conceive of *nirvana* as extinction reject it as a goal, this is not uniformly the case. If did encounter some few Burmese – almost all of them monks – who aspired to the attainment of *nirvana* precisely because they conceive of it as extinction. Unhappy and world-weary, their one wish is to bring an end to their suffering. Thus, for example, one monk (who lived in a meditation monastery) said he devoted most of his time to meditation so that he might attain *nirvana*, which he defined as “extinction”. When I asked him why he desired extinction, he said: “Everything is *doukkha*; hence, extinction is much preferable to continued rebirth.” Or, to take another example, a layman (who subsequently entered the Order) said he wanted *nirvana* (defined as “extinction”) because “only in *neikhan* will there be no suffering.” When I asked him if he found none of his bodily activities pleasurable, he said: “No, there is no pleasure, neither in eating, in sex, in sleeping . . .” What, then, I asked him, about other forms of pleasure? Didn't he obtain pleasure from his children (to whom, I knew, he was strongly attached)? to this he said that no doubt he was happy with them, but “ultimately, they too give me *doukkha*.”

What was striking about both of these men – and about the few others for whom extinction was a desirable goal – was their seemingly acute state of depression. Unlike the typical Burman, who at least externally seems outgoing and gay, these men appeared to be markedly withdrawn and, clinically speaking, depressed. That they should have desired extinction over persistence, if persistence meant – as it did for them – the pain associated with deep depression, is hardly surprising.

Theoretically, the world-weary need not be the only type for whom extinction is a welcome or, at least, an acceptable end. There are also those who, having led lives of complete fulfilment, are ready to die (with no expectation of a future life) because, as the Bible says of the patriarch, they are “full of years.” (*Genesis* 25:8) Typically, however, this theoretically possible type is empirically empty, whether in Burmans or elsewhere’ (Spiro 1970:77n4).

U Aung Gyi (formerly in the NLD) practise in the tradition of U Ba Khin. These two *vipassana* traditions were institutionalized by members of government concerned to reform government and society. The Mahasi Sayadaw was brought to Rangoon by former Prime Minister U Nu. U Ba Khin, in turn, was appointed by U Nu as Accountant General of Burma, who then went on to set up his own International Meditation Centre. Both *vipassana* traditions have a long history in anti-corruption campaigns and in the reform of bureaucracy.

Samatha

In all Burmese *vipassana* methods, *samatha* must be included, but not all *samatha* traditions need include *vipassana*. In particular some *samatha* practices, such as mindfulness of breath (*anapana*)¹ and the *byama-so tayà* or *brahma-vihara* practices of loving-kindness, have been incorporated into *vipassana* as part of a focus on the body and to create conditions favourable for the ‘crossing over’ into *vipassana*.

Nevertheless, *samatha* is what the Buddha practised prior to his enlightenment while he had not yet found the *vipassana* path, both in previous lives and in his life as Gautama before the age of forty. As a Buddha, competent in all forms of mental culture, he also practised *samatha* after his enlightenment.

The Buddha is supposed to have rejected most extreme forms of *samatha* practices of his time, particularly when practised for their own sake without follow-up with *vipassana*. *Samatha* is therefore ambiguous: at the level of technique, it is regarded as both preliminary to and supportive of *vipassana*, but at the level of its many pre- or extra-Buddhist hermetic practices, and in its identification with instrumental control over *loki*, it is regarded as non-Buddhist.

Samatha practice is readily characterised as leading to ‘mundane knowledge’ (*loki pañña*) and as concerned with ‘power’ in an instrumental sense to serve goals in this world. Unlike *vipassana*, which seeks to attain direct perception and transparency of all processes that actually take place in mind, *samatha* produces a mind-created state at will. In short, *samatha* creates worlds [*loki*], whereas *vipassana* breaks them down and sees them for what they are. The *vipassana* traditions most worried about the *loki* implications of *samatha* are the ‘dry’-visioned *vipassana* methods, including the method of the Mahasi Sayadaw. On the other hand, *vipassana* methodologies arising from the *anapana* tradition of the Ledi Sayadaw tend to involve more clearly identifiable *samatha* practice. The Hpa Auk Sayadaw, a new phenomenon in Burma, aims to scale the heights of both practices.

Samatha and political ideology

I have shown that the military (and those in search of *ana*) prefer the *samatha* traditions, since it permits control over *loka*, whereas the democracy movement (and those in search of *awza*) tend to stress *samatha* mainly as an avenue for emancipation from *loka*. At the level of formulating a clearly identifiable political philosophy, *vipassana* is not the most important practice, even among the senior leaders. By far the most important are those practices that bridge the mundane and the supra-mundane practices, and bridge collective and personal aspirations. These in particular refer to *samatha*. Thus, *byama-so tayà*, and in particular *metta* and *karuna*, are the formative practices for creating social and political bonds. *Samatha* is also important for finding legitimacy and support with monks famous for its practice, such as the Thamanya Sayadaw. Furthermore, the term *sati*, which produces the necessary one-pointed mind (concentration) in preparation for *vipassana*, also is of some political significance when it is interpreted as giving rise to political awareness in a multi-party system.

In sum, the political significance of Buddhist terminology revolves almost entirely around the *samatha* or ‘mundane’ (*loki*) element of Buddhist practice. *Vipassana* operates in the background as the purificatory element of last resort, as the final, highest and most noble goal of Buddhist practice, namely final release from *samsara*.

¹ ‘[A]t the time the Bodhisatta reflected on the correct path for realization of Omniscience, for attainment of Buddhahood, after discarding the practice of dukkaracariya, he correctly considered that the eight mundane attainments of Jhana that he achieved after meeting the Sect-leaders Alara and Udaka were just the basis of the round of suffering (vattapadaka); he also considered that the Anapana Concentration which was developed in the shade of the rose apple tree while his father King Suddhodana was performing the auspicious Ploughing Ceremony was the correct path for the realization of Omniscience, for the attainment of Buddhahood since the Anapana Concentration was part of A Mindfulness Meditation of the body, (*Kaya-gatasati*), and the basis of Insight Meditation, (*Vipassana*) for all Bodhisattas, (*Mulapañña-sa Tika* vol I).’ (Mingun 1990–96, 2, 1:200–201)

Byama-so tayà

Socialism

It has often been remarked that Burmese style socialism was ‘less influenced by the international socialist movement than by indigenous factors’.¹ Indeed, the indigenous factors ensured that communists from Russia and Vietnam simply could not recognize the content of Burmese socialism as socialist at all. The question, however, is what these ‘indigenous factors’ are, and whether these have actually been understood.

Though he had his reservations, Smith nevertheless argued that, compared to U Nu's religious democracy, Ne Win's socialism was evidence of a more secular and more pragmatic ‘ideology’, supplementing or even replacing ‘tradition’ as the ‘prime factor’ in the legitimation of the Burmese political system.² However, such an idea that Burma was on the move from Buddhist ‘tradition’ to secular ‘ideology’ after 1962 is deceptive for two reasons. First, as Smith also realised, it is a minority in Burma who view socialism as a secular ideology – most interpret it as a system based on traditional Buddhist values. Second, and this is more important, socialism has mostly *not* been conceived of as an ideology at all, but as a typically Burmese Buddhist *practice*, namely as *byama-so tayà*, a kind of social meditation.

Legal matters

Maung Maung, biographer of Ne Win, who in 1989 briefly became Burma's president, was appointed Chief Judge after the 1962 coup. He was responsible for revising the Burmese legal system. In January 1965, as part of his effort to ‘decolonise’ Burmese law, he made a judgment about whether an engagement between youngsters fitted into the *Indian Contract*, or the customary *dhammathat* law. In one case, the latter required no minimum age, but according to the former one of the parties was deemed too young to be engaged. Maung Maung decided that the *dhammathat* law applied and the fiancée could sue for breach of promise of marriage. The significant point is that in this judgment, Maung Maung invented a ‘new Burmese legal identity’, namely he appealed to *lokapala tayà* [el akpāl t̃ra:] or ‘the principles upholding the universe upon which the *dhammathat* rested’. Maung Maung himself characterised it as ‘non-oppression between man and man, and non-exploitation of man by man’.³ Huxley identifies this with the Four Kings, representing the Guardians of the Universe and the four compass points. However, there are three other kinds of *lokapala* besides this, namely the Two (shame and fear), the Four (the *byama-so tayà*) and the Five (the five moral precepts). Though I do not have this source at hand, I am inclined to think that Maung Maung intended his revised legal system to appeal to the ultimate Burmese values in line with the adoption of the four *byama-so tayà*, a synonym of *lokapala* as set out below.

The Buddhicisation of socialism

Ne Win had become acutely aware that socialist ideology could not, in Burma at least, operate entirely as a secular ideology. The Sangha was outraged by the nationalisation of industry and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the government because it was depriving the Sangha of independent support, and if the State was not to support them, who would?⁴ Ne Win Buddhicised his rendering of socialism more and more as time passed.

In 1965, the same year as Maung Maung's shift in legal interpretation, Ne Win repealed U Nu's acts in support of Buddhism.⁵ Also in that same year, the Mahasi Sayadaw, who was the central person in U Nu's Buddhist reform, was invited to speak on Burmese radio for four successive rainy seasons between 1965–68, addressing the general public in Burmese on each of the four individual *Byama-so tayà*.⁶ These were published in 1985 as *The Teachings on Byama-so Tayà* [b̃h̃s̃t̃ r̃a:t̃ a:k̃l̃]. In the first broadcast, he explained how he usually preached about *vipassana*, but since it is difficult and not everyone could practise this, he wanted to benefit the general population by preaching on *byama-so tayà*. This could be practised by all, irrespective of ethnicity or religion.

By 1971, barely three years after the Mahasi finished his broadcasts, the BSPP prefaced the Burmese

¹ Steinberg (1981b:30).

² Smith (1965:311,313).

³ See Andrew Huxley. 1998. ‘The last fifty years of Burmese law: E Maung and Maung Maung.’ *LawAsia*, 17, p. 18-19.

⁴ Smith (1965:300–301).

⁵ Ecclesiastical Courts Act, the Pali University and Dhammacariya Act of 1950, and the Pali Education Board Acts (Smith 1965:305).

⁶ Broadcast on 12 August 1965, 1 August 1966, 18 September 1967 and 22 August 1968.

version of every party document with *byama-so tayà* in a single page entitled 'Our Belief', characterising this practice as the foundation of socialism.

We seriously believe that people cannot be emancipated from their suffering because of the prevalence of the evil economic systems [wqmslpaer:snsSi] controlled by unjust and avaricious [wqmel aB] people, who rule the roost and have disheartened the peoples of the world by overturning noble qualities such as considerate behaviour, and foist this upon people they do not understand. We believe that it is a serious matter that people cannot free themselves from suffering. That is why this Union of Socialist Burma wants to silence such avaricious system which seeks unjust prosperity, and which unjustly oppresses people. We seriously believe that we can build a socialist economy which has justice at its basis, and which permits citizens to collectively, through human effort, achieve a new society in which people enjoy themselves, and in which the *Byama-so ta-yà* can flourish, permitting people to liberate themselves from suffering [m tra:slpa:ha:ca wqmsnsa:kUpin:espl tra:mHmgiu AekKaeqa Sijh s:paer:snskit vāSakNchejal HpvqUWaeap:qvN de yageikac:epI epākheqal uškAepāc:maamakikI kVhōst tra:mā: Tākā:Nchvqayawepaeqa I BAcqskiqarākNthvhu Ael :AnkyuVqvN]. We vow that, according to these beliefs, even if we do not attain the final socialist goals, we will uplift our lives.

Until 1971 the Ne Win regime had fondly summed up Burmese socialism in 'Our belief' [kāt if yuVkvk] as 'No full stomach, no morality'. This had been incorporated in the first socialist document produced, namely in the nine-page document *The Burmese Way to Socialism* of 30 April 1962.

The Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma does not believe that man will be set free from social evils as long as pernicious economic systems exist in which man exploits man and lives on the fat of such appropriation. The Council believes it to be possible only when exploitation of man by man is brought to an end and a socialist economy based on justice is established; only then can all people, irrespective of race or religion, be emancipated from all social evils and set free from anxieties over food, clothing and shelter, and from inability to resist evil, for an empty stomach is not conducive to wholesome morality, as the Burmese saying goes: only then can an affluent stage of social development be reached and all people be happy and healthy in mind and body.

This original statement was evidently a reaction to U Nu's emphasis on meditation. Borrowed from one of Aung San's speeches, some have translated it as 'no full stomach, no morality', and as 'one can meditate only if the stomach is full' (morality precedes meditation) or, in English terms, as 'man does not live by bread alone'.¹

By 1971 Ne Win realised that, in making this ideology so earthly and low-down, it had become associated with, and was an excuse for, corruption. With corruption cases pending, it was decided to follow his earlier statement of intention and to notch socialist ideology a little higher than the stomach, by incorporating another of Aung San's references, namely to *byama-so tayà*. This seems to have been discovered in the BSPP Internal Party Discussion Document, which also attributes it to one of Aung San's speeches.² From 1971 onwards, all Burmese BSPP documents dropped the reference to 'Full stomach first, morality second' and had substituted it with this paragraph added on the first page as 'Our belief'.³

I have already noted above how Aung San referred to a 'Socialism underpinned by *byama-so tayà*' [vōhōst tra:kiaekKaeqa "Sijh s:ca"],⁴ and I have now shown how this became the core of socialist ideology as expressed by the Ne Win regime. Saw Maung said about these practices that they are 'not very difficult to practise',⁵ and through the Thirty-Eight Mangala this has been incorporated into official policy of the contemporary military regime, though not into their similarly named, but much less imaginative slogan today, namely of the People's Desire [pvvōdeBaTa:X] [ZM3b]. What, we may ask, is the nature of this social and socialist form of meditation, this spiritualisation of politics?

Byama-so tayà and the moral precepts

In Pali the expression *brahma-cariya* is most readily identified with 'good conduct' [qsrk], such as taking the vows of abstinence, as included in the Eight, in the Nine and in the Ten Moral Precepts. Thus a distinction is made between the Four Kinds of *Brahma-cariya*, namely (1) abstinence practised by ordinary laity according to the moral precepts, (2) by monks according to the Vinaya, (3) by those who took the Buddhas teachings according to the Buddha's teachings, and (4) the practices of the *ariya* who were able to

¹ Mya Maung (1998:2).

² *Party Discussion Document*, Vol. 2 [1968 pāt it ca SaNpāthSuk:AmV], page 19. I believe this reference was taken from Aung San (1971:62) as discussed above.

³ 'Our Beliefs' was edited three times. At the First Party Congress in 1971, at the 1974 party meeting, and at the Fourth Party Congress in 1981.

⁴ Aung San (1971:62).

⁵ Saw Maung (1990b:337).

cut off their attachments.¹

The third of the Eight, of the Nine and of the Ten Precepts are all known as the injunction to ‘avoid ignoble practices’ or *abrahma-cariya sila* [Aḥṣṛiyā].² Furthermore, in a special group of Precepts observed at the time of the Kassapa Buddha in the conduct of Vajjian country, there were Five Precepts known as *brahmacariya-pancama sila* in which the third applied to temporary abstinence of sexual intercourse. When to these five is added the precept to take only one meal a day, then this is known as *brahmacariya-pancama ekabhaddika sila*.³ There is also a category of Five Precepts known as Kumara *byama-cariya* precepts [ekamarḥṣṛiyā mñ], in which the fifth is celibacy.⁴

Byama-so tayà and the Thirty-Eight Mangala

The philosophical and political importance of *byama-so tayà*, however, is much broader than signifying abstinence and good conduct. This becomes particularly evident in its use as number 32, namely ‘pure life’, in the context of the Thirty-Eight Mangala in the *Mahamangala Sutta* (Discourse of the Supreme Blessings).

F. Renunciation of the Worldly Life (31–34).

[31] Tapo ca	[31] To practise austerity,
[32] brahma cariyaca	[32] and the practice of pure life,
[33] Ariya sacana dassanam	[33] to have perception of Ariya [noble] truths
[34] Nibbana sacchi kiriya	[34] to realize Nibbana (through Arhatta-phala)
Etam mangal muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

This has been defined in the new 1994 syllabus on training in Buddhist culture as ‘abstinence and the practice of noble practices’ [emTəAmSṛiyā pī kākacimṭəqəAkēkēkē].⁵ As Kyaw Htut points out, ‘many people think that *brahmacariya* practice only means abstinence from sex’, and there is a tendency to translate this as ‘celibacy’. However, he proceeds to argue that, since it is the previous [31] *tapa mangala* that involves the practice of renunciation of ‘the worldly life’ and taking up the life of ‘a bhikkhu or an ascetic or a hermit’, abstinence in the case of *byama-so tayà* is already assumed, so that this refers to something more. He says that *Brahmacariya Mangala* or the practice of the life of Purity in this context ‘should be taken to mean such practices which are based on tranquillity practice’.⁶

As in the case of *tapa*, he distinguishes a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist through this practice:

we find two categories; the *Brahmacariya Mangala* as practised by the ascetics outside the Buddha's teaching and the *Brahmacariya Mangala* as taught by the Buddha. The practice of the ascetics is the tranquillity practice (*samatha*), and it is by means of this practice that many ascetics attained *jhanas* (mental absorption) and *abhinnas* or supernormal powers. As a matter of fact, outside the Buddha's teaching, any form of practice that strives for the development of supernormal powers is *Brahmacariya Mangala* ... the practice within the Sasana and outside the Sasana are quite different. The *Brahmacariya* practice under the Buddha's Teaching voids the two extremes of self-mortification and indulgence in sense pleasures, and is carried out steadily and steadfastly. Besides, the goal here is not tranquillity but the attainment of insight-knowledge (*vipassana-ñāna*).⁷

He then says that ‘it is not easy to explain *Brahmacariya* practice as it can be interpreted according to context’, and contrasts *tapa mangala* as making for ‘moral purity’ (*sila visuddhi*), while *brahmacariya mangala* makes for purity of mind (*citta visuddhi*).

The significance of this pure life is that it lies exactly at the threshold between the mundane and the supra-mundane life. Indeed, it is the first thirty-two *mangala*, right up to *byama-so tayà* that ‘pertain to mundane (*lokiya*) matters’, and the six that follow are *lokuttara*, of which the first two are practices, and the last four are results.⁸ The implication is that, as the last of the mundane practices leading up to the supramundane and as the beginning of the final path, it empowers towards the final release, it permits vision of the unconditioned emptiness of *nibbana* upon which can be projected ultimate ideals of freedom and fulfilment.

¹ Known as the Four Kinds of *Brahma-cariya* Abstinence [ḥṣṛiyā emTəAx 4-pa kēkē] Awbatha (1975:402).

² In the *brahmacariya pancama sila* the third of the Ten Precepts becomes *abrahmacariya veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami* Aḥṣṛiya, ewrm%qkēpdlmadiyamñ. This means to avoid ignoble practice and is often linked to the clean mind of a child [ekamarḥṣṛiyā].

³ Mingun (1990–96, 1, 1:162–64).

⁴ Awbatha (1975:401, 626).

⁵ *The class book for the exam in Buddhist culture* [bdBaqa y’ak’emSaem:ppqCkn’sa]. Rangoon: DPPS, 1994.

⁶ Kyaw Htut (1994:91).

⁷ Kyaw Htut (1994:90–91).

⁸ Kyaw Htut (1994:92–93).

Brahma-vihara is a collection of four *samatha* meditation objects out of forty, namely ‘loving-kindness’ (*metta*), ‘compassion’ (*karuna*), ‘sympathetic joy’ (*mudita*) and ‘equanimity’ (*upekkha*). Commonly translated as ‘the Four Divine Abodes’ or ‘the Four Sublime States’, these are identified as Brahma practices and as leading to the Brahma heavens, the top heavens in Buddhist cosmology (which has thirty-one planes of existence). Their cosmological reach and positive influence on the world, from a Buddhist and a socio-political point of view, means that they are sometimes designated as ‘the Four Guardians of the World’ [el akpāl tra:4pā].¹

They are also known in Buddhist philosophy as ‘Illimitables’ (*apamañña*), as these are ‘the mental qualities to be developed and extended [limitlessly] towards all beings’.² By this is meant that ‘in their perfection and their true nature, they should not be narrowed by any limitation as to the range of beings towards whom they are extended. They should be non-exclusive and impartial, not bound by selective preferences or prejudices. A mind that has attained to that boundlessness of the Brahma-viharas will not harbor any national, racial, religious or class hatred.’³

These practices are based on moral conduct and concern conduct towards living beings (*sattesu samma patipatti*). Nyanatiloka has argued that they provide, in fact, ‘the answer to all situations arising from social contact. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism.’⁴

These practices are considered the foundation of Burmese collective life at the very early beginnings of Burmese history. Indeed, SPDC journalists portray artists from the Pagan period as expressing these *brahma-vihara* practices in their painting, which they interpret as uniquely Burmese.

The Bagan artist did not believe in naturalistic art. His art was something akin to the art of the moderns. He knew that a painting needed to exaggerate certain contrasts or to eliminate an enormous amount of detail. He knew that a painting needed to simplify to achieve art. Accordingly he was ready to exaggerate, eliminate or simplify. He was ready to pull his subject to pieces and to reassemble it in accordance with his vision. Because of the success of his effort he was able to give the impression of telling the truth about life around him. He brought out the force and quality of the original. Because of his skill he was able to express in art such concepts as compassion, joy and equanimity.⁵

The scriptural passage on brahma-vihara

I. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with loving-kindness, likewise the second, the third, and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with loving-kindness, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

II. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with compassion, likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with compassion, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

III. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with sympathetic joy, likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with sympathetic joy, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

IV. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with equanimity, likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with equanimity, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.⁶

Samatha and cosmological attainment

In Burma by far the greatest emphasis is placed on the first two, and in particular on the first practice. Thus the four practices were collectively characterised by the Mahasi in *Brahmavihara Dhamma* in particular in terms of the very first practice, namely as ‘the systematic method of developing *metta*’.⁷

Aung San Suu Kyi’s main emphasis throughout has been very much on the first two qualities, *metta* and

¹ Awbatha (1975:538).

² Mingun (1990–96, 1:324); Vibangha Chapter XIII.

³ Nyanaponika Thera (1958).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *MP*, October 1997.

⁶ *Digha Nikaya*, 13.

⁷ In the *Patisambhida Magga Pali* 528 kinds of *metta* are developed classed by the manner of attainment.

karuna. People should 'concentrate on cultivating loving kindness and compassion'. From these two practices the third practice, sympathetic joy, 'would naturally follow.' However, *upekkha*, the fourth practice, is 'well-nigh impossible for most ordinary beings', as it stands for a 'perfectly balanced state of the mind and emotions, a balance between faith and intelligence, between energy and concentration, between wisdom and compassion' and is 'non-preferential without inclination towards excess in any direction'.¹

The social and political relevance of these practices correlates with the cosmological height to which these practices lead, permitting access to the top twenty heavens. The animal realm and the hells are the lowest five realms (nos 1–5), the human realm is number 5, the deities are 6–11, and the Brahma realms are nos 12–31. The first three practices – *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita* – enable the practitioner to reach up into the third *rupa jhana* leading up until realm no. 20.

However, the fourth practice – *upekkha* – enables achievement of the fourth *rupa jhana* up until realm no. 27. As Ko Lei puts it, equanimity is necessary to attain to these higher realms:

This is the reason: Metta, Karuna, Mudita Jhanas are associated with Sukha Vedana [feeling of pleasure]. The fourth Jhana is associated with Upekkha Vedana [feeling of indifference]. If, therefore, the yogi wants to go up to the fourth Jhana, he must change his object, after he has acquired the third Jhana, by means of one of these three Brahmavihara bhavanas. For example, the yogi is practising Metta bhavana. The object on which he concentrates is the mental image of the person, whom he loves and respects. Up to the same time of achieving the third Jhana, the yogi uses the same object. If, however, he wants to achieve the fourth Jhana, he must give up his original object of the mental image of the person, whom he loves and respects. He must concentrate on the mental image of a person, to whom he is indifferent. And while he has the third jhana, the jhanangas (parts of the Jhana) are Sukkha Ekaggata. However, from the very moment when the yogi achieved the fourth Jhana, the Jhanangas will be Upekkha Ekaggata.²

Though the highest realm that can be attained through these practices, this practice is also the least socially relevant. It is of some interest that in the book about Aung San Suu Kyi, the regime responded by saying that she writes well with literary talent, but that she does not practise what she writes herself. On the other hand, I have already noted that Saw Maung dismissed these practices as 'easy' and Burmese people criticise the military for having no *metta*.

Supernatural protection

The main agency responsible for protection, even in lower forms of Burmese magic, are the powers unleashed by recitation of the *paritta*, the words of the Buddha. The power of incantations (*paritta*) to overcome or dissipate danger is also ultimately based on the quality of *metta* of the reciter. The Four Accomplishments of a Reciter are: (1) The reciter must be capable of reciting passages, phrases and syllables of the Pali text with the correct mode of articulation, enunciation and accent; (2) He must have full and exact understanding of the Pali text he is reciting; (3) The reciter should chant *paritta* without expectation of gifts or presents.; (4) *Paritta* should be recited with a pure heart, full of loving-kindness and compassion. So 'it is necessary to administer *paritta* according to the conditions laid down, with a heart full of loving-kindness, and compassion and resolute inclination towards release from the Samsara and curbing one's desire to receive offerings.'³

The SPDC takes *paritta* seriously, for on Burmese New Year, 17 April 1998, it organized a reciting of *paritta*, and poured the sacred water into the four lakes that supply Rangoon's water supply 'for all the people of Yangon to be safe and free from harm and danger'.⁴ After this 'they also dispensed *metta*'.

Development

Aung San Suu Kyi's most explicit statements on this particular practice are to be found in her 11th Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture, entitled 'Heavenly abodes and human development' presented on 3 November 1997.

In this, she argues that today we recognize that development can no longer be 'measured purely in economic terms', since it 'includes socio-political factors', and she suggests that 'true development should also comprise spiritual cultivation'. She quotes Sulak Sivaraksa on 'the spirit of Buddhist development', who argued that 'the inner strength must be cultivated, along with compassion and loving kindness' and on the goals of Buddhist development as 'equality, love, freedom and liberation':

... the means for achieving these lie within the grasp of any community from a village to a nation – once its members begin

¹ 'Heavenly abodes and human development'. Lecture presented on 3 November 1997. (ASSK 04.01.1998).

² Ko Lei (1985:11–12).

³ Mingun (1990–96,3:199–207).

⁴ 'Paritta water New Year's gift for Yangonnites'. *NLM*, 18.04.1998.

the process of reducing selfishness. To do so, two realisations are necessary: an inner realisation concerning greed, hatred and delusion, and an outer realisation concerning the impact these tendencies have on society and the planet ...

She concludes that

Paradise on earth is a concept which is outmoded and few people believe in it any more. But we can certainly seek to make our planet a better, happier home for all of us by constructing the heavenly abodes of love and compassion in our hearts.

Beginning with this inner development we can go on to the development of the external world with courage and wisdom.

This echoes Rewatta Dhamma, who briefly acted as mediator between Aung San Suu Kyi and the SLORC, who said in his 1996 address to Asian leaders that ‘if the central human values of compassion and loving kindness were actually practised in our countries, we would soon find a solution to our problems, and our people would not be sacrificed on the altars of “security” or economic “development”’.¹

U Nu expounded something akin to this view in 1960, when Thakin Tin, his finance minister, told the press that profiteering and black-marketing would be stopped by appealing to all business men ‘to observe the Buddha’s teachings concerning *metta*’. However, the next year this policy was recognized to have failed and was abandoned, to be substituted by stern measures to control prices of essential commodities. Smith says about this that ‘whether the teaching of *metta* was seriously believed to be adequate, or was simply a rationalisation for inaction, in either case its use was rather pathetic’.² Though Smith’s warning that *metta* should not substitute for sound economic policy remains valid, he did not seem to appreciate the intra-cultural significance of this concept (he also mistranslated *metta* as ‘all-embracing compassion’).

Politics

Byama-so tayà plays an important role in Burmese politics, as underlined by its frequent use in the speeches of kings and politicians.

The role of *byama-so tayà* in political crisis was already evident in Kyanzitha’s time, for after he reconquered Pagan from a rebel, he promised to remedy the crisis by his superior loving-kindness and compassion so that the refugees could safely return to their homeland. Adapting a prophecy by Gavampati on behalf of the Buddha, the inscription (c 1102 A.D.) says: ‘of those torn from their dear ones, of those who were sick at heart, by a course of benefits, with water of compassion, with loving-kindness which is even as a hand, he shall wipe their tears, he shall wash away their snot ... Like children resting in their mother’s bosom, so shall the king keep watch over them and help them’ [D3].

Its value as a political instrument was repeatedly emphasised by the monk Wisara in his quest for national independence and the restoration of Buddhism.³ It was also emphasized by U Nu during his position as Prime Minister of Burma between 1948–62 [E2], during the 1988 disturbances, and while engaged in setting up his political party at the end of 1989 [D2].

U Nu’s emphasis on *brahma-vihara* was particularly pronounced from 1958, when the caretaker government took over. On 28 August 1988 U Nu was the first to declare a new political party, The League for Democracy and Peace [သမ္မတတော်လှန်ရေးပါတီ] followed by his declaration of a provisional government on 9 September. It is of interest that his main philosophy for democracy was known as the *Byama-so Way* [ဝိပဿနာလမ်း] and that his newsletter was known as the *Brahmacariya Bulletin* or in Burmese as the *Byama-so Bulletin* [ဝိပဿနာတန်း]. He was ‘disqualified’ by the military in December 1989 after he refused to call off his declaration that his party legally constituted the Government. He declared himself prepared to be killed and urged his followers ‘to strive for liberation through the *Brahmacariyavada*’.

We have already noted *byama-so tayà* as a major criticism of the SLORC regime by Tin U who proclaimed that by practising *vipassana* the generals will be able to ‘foster *metta* that way’ [C19]. Tin U also emphasizes that he himself learnt this in the course of his monastic education [D3], and sees what he learnt in the monastery as a turning away from ‘a shallow and fearful life’ associated with his life under the military [E1]. Nevertheless, U Kyi Maung points out that there are limitations to the non-violence strategy of *metta* and meditation in a situation of conflict [E4].

Aung San Suu Kyi, through her emphasis on *brahma-vihara*, aims to bring the military ‘into the fold’ of peaceful and harmonious government. However, at the same time, as Kyanzitha did with the refugees in his time, she addresses the numerous Burmese refugees in the jungle and in Thailand. She appeals for *metta* and *karuna* on the part of the Thai government [D5].

¹ ‘Dhamma ethics and human rights.’ (Delivered at the Asian Leaders Conference, Seoul, 1996).

² ‘Action against profiteers’. *The Guardian*, 06.10.1961; Smith (1965:145–46).

³ Lwin (1971:146, 148).

Aung San Suu Kyi isolates the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, 'surely one of the leading authorities on, and practitioners of, loving kindness in our world today' [D17]. Chinese repression of Tibet since 1959 means that the Dalai Lama faced a longer struggle than Aung San Suu Kyi, but both share a similar fate in their non-violent struggle against a totalitarian regime, for which both have been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. It is interesting that both should find in *brahma-vihara* the main centrepiece of their politics.

As I will show, the first three *brahma-vihara* practices primarily serve as a way of forming bonds between individuals so as to make possible a sense of groupness. However, this works two ways, for different political factions have emphasized different ideas of the group, with military discourse sometimes one-sidedly using it to either claim ethnic exclusiveness or common Asian values.

Reconciliation with opposites and enemies

Vipassana teacher Rewatta Dhamma, who lives in a monastery and meditation centre in Birmingham, England, is the only person to have briefly secured the co-operation of both sides in an attempt to mediate between the SLORC and Aung San Suu Kyi. Though unsuccessful, these were the only hopeful signs of negotiation taking place.

It is significant that Rewatta Dhamma, who has known Aung San Suu Kyi from youth, has identified the *brahma-vihara* as a typically Burmese Buddhist instrument able to achieve reconciliation between the SLORC and NLD. He encouraged both the SLORC and NLD to develop these mental attributes saying that he sincerely hopes that 'she [Aung San Suu Kyi] walks on well with loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, principles taught by the Buddha, which the majority of the people of Myanmar appreciate ... and have been principles the people of Myanmar have followed for centuries.' He expects that 'If Suu Kyi and the members of the SLORC abide by the principle of the Buddha's teachings and solve their problems, then they will succeed in building a democracy fit for Myanmar, and peace and stability will be restored to the land' [D4].

In preparation for the attainment of 'transcendental wisdom' (*lokuttara pañña*) this practice affords engagement of this world (*loki*) in the broadest of frameworks, transcendent of its oppositional and confrontational differences. Indeed, the practise of *metta* teases out human relationships from the particular narrow, confrontational, political context as framed by the attitudes of the military regime. This mental quality permits compromise and negotiation. If the regime were to respond and develop *metta*, than this situation, Burmese feel, will contribute to a situation where negotiation may take place, and eventually a compromise may be reached [E5].¹ Senior NLD members suspect that regime members, too 'yearn to have *metta* directed towards them rather than it being forced or coerced from people' [E6]. Indeed, even other governments, such as in Thailand, should be appealed to for *metta* towards the plight of Burmese refugees and economic migrants who are threatened with deportation in 'the Asian crisis' of 1997–98 [D5]. However, Aung San Suu Kyi does not consider herself spiritually advanced enough to extend *metta* to the regime in an unqualified way [E7].

Also, *metta* is a mental process Burmese recognize as shared with other peoples and other religions, which makes it transcendent of the particular Burmese ethnic elements, and forges it into a suitable inter-cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious instrument [E19][E23][H8].² For example, Aung Ko, the chief actor in the film *Beyond Rangoon*, explains how the two very different characters in the film 'meet and have a compassionate relationship ... a love based on *metta*-, or loving kindness', so that these two 'slowly erase [their] differences in race, religion, color and culture when they journey together through turmoil ... because of their regard for the five hundred and twenty-eight strands of *metta* (the basis for a pure compassionate love and affection)'.³

With *metta*, and the *brahma-vihara* as a whole, Aung San Suu Kyi believes that 'all peoples and creeds can co-exist in peace, that whatever our race and religion, we can all learn to agree on certain basic values

¹ 'It is only in *metta* that we come upon the idea of the relation between man and man which is independent of all social and worldly relations. *Metta* appears with the distinctive qualification of freedom of mind or purpose. In *metta* the man, the self, meets the man, the self, divested of other relations. Monastic life will serve as a stimulus to that amity which is solely and absolutely disinterested...' (Law 1987:79).

² It should be noted, for example, that both *metta* and *karuna* are core concepts in the translation of the Bible into Burmese, whereas *mudita* and *upekkha* are to my knowledge not used.

³ 'U Aung Ko: in his own words'. *Burma Debate*, June-July 1995.

essential for the development of human society'.¹ Such use of the concept of *metta* as reconciliative between diverse interest groups was also evident with U Nu, who argued in July, after his forty-five day meditation retreat, that the Shan's demands for a looser, more federalized type of constitution should be treated 'with love'. At the time, as Trager understands it, 'no one, least of all his Constitution Revision Committee concerned with the proposed amendments for the State religion and for the new states, knew how to interpret Nu's reference to the Buddhist doctrine of Metta.'² However, seen in the light of Aung San Suu Kyi's concern to reconcile opposites, the importance of *metta* becomes readily apparent.

It can play a cross-cultural, cross-ethnic and cross-factional role because, unlike the concept of Buddhahood or *nibbana*, it does not appeal to an exclusive central Buddhist teaching, but to a state of mind shared across peoples from different backgrounds.

Social bonding

It is significant that among these four *brahma-vihara* practices, the first two have the greater social and political implications, and it is these also that are most prominent in Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches and writings. *Metta* as a concept comes first, for it 'forms the foundation of compassion'.³

As Rewatta Dhamma put it at the Asian Leaders conference, *brahma-vihara* is what all Buddhists practise and this provides Buddhist societies with the necessary social bonding mechanism:

The Mahayana specifically emphasises the enlightenment of all beings, and even we of the little tug-boat praise the triple gem of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, where Sangha means community – in a specific way the community of monks and nuns, but in a broader sense, of all beings. Every Buddhist tradition gives a central place to the Brahma-Viharas: Upekha (equanimity), Metta (loving-kindness), Karuna (compassion), and Mudita (joy in the joy of others), the last three of which are directly social.

It is, on the other hand, the last mental state – 'equanimity' – that has been selectively emphasized by King and Spiro as characteristic of 'nibbanic Buddhism'.⁴ In adapting Weber's position by arguing that nibbanic Buddhism is about 'detachment' and the 'destruction of emotion', King and Spiro conclude that Buddhism does not concern itself with this world.⁵ However, this denies that 'equanimity' is not practised on its own, but in conjunction with the other three qualities of mind, in particular *metta* and *karuna*, which do engage the world and which are far more commonly used in everyday life and in political ideas.⁶

To understand why *brahma-vihara*, and in particular *metta*, plays such a central role in Burmese society we have to understand certain features of its socio-political organization. In Theravada Buddhist countries such as Burma, social organization lacks the concept of congregation or parish, in which large numbers of people are integrated by a regular weekly church meeting [H2]. The absence of the strong social and political bonds such congregations provide, one can say, is made up for by the concept of *metta*. The political significance of *metta* is captured in the way it is sometimes compared to 'adhesion': 'the *loka* [world] is prevented from breaking up as if it is held together by [the glue of] *metta*', and its practice will 'prevent the *loka* from being disorderly'.⁷ This underlies Aung San Suu Kyi's aspiration for society to be ruled by *metta*, along with reason and justice; these are the true refuges of society [E8]. Such society unifies in a way quite opposite to what the military regime stands for, which does not unify by *metta* and which is, judging by its actions, devoid of *metta* [D1][D9]. The NLD feel that the regime perceives *metta* as a weakness, and feel it has to make it a more active *metta* [E9].

Aung San Suu Kyi, whose Buddhism has been characterised as 'engaged Buddhism' by the editors of a

¹ ASSK (04.01.1998). That in particular *metta* fulfils this inter-religious and inter-ethnic reassurance was also proposed in the 1961 State Religion Bill, which suggested that 'Buddhism is not a religion which strengthens itself by persecuting others' as 'it has Metta as its basis, it can establish in strength the principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality and ensure peace and prosperity to all beings for all times'. 'State Religion in Burma' (Rangoon, October 1961) as cited in King (1960:261).

² Trager (1966:197).

³ Mingun (1990–96,4:49).

⁴ Spiro was quite aware of his selective emphasis of Buddhist concepts, for he stated at the very beginning of his section on Nibbanic Buddhism that 'it should be added that if certain doctrines have been unduly emphasizes and other unduly slighted, it is usually because our theoretical interest in the contrapuntal relationship between textual and Burmese Buddhism demands this kind of shading' (Spiro 1970:31). However, the intricacies of Burmese Buddhism should not be made subsidiary to the aesthetics of intellectual models. Spiro relied mostly on King (1964:161) who saw equanimity as 'the transcendent ethic of Nibbana'.

⁵ Aronson (1980:78–96) criticises the positions King and Spiro have on this particular mental state.

⁶ See also Paul Mus in his introduction to Sarkisyanz (1965=ix).

⁷ 'To bring about the reign of peace in *loka*, beings should cultivate loving-kindness [*metta*] towards one another. The more *metta* is cultivated, the more the *loka* will be peaceful. The more beings love one another, the more the *loka* will be pleasant. The more the *loka* is pleasant, the more benefits one will gain by being born as a human being, which according to dullabha dhamma is a very rare and difficult thing to attain'. (Shwe Aung 1995:273).

volume on this subject,¹ herself characterises 'engaged Buddhism' as 'active compassion² or active *metta*'. Such mental disposition stops the fighting and provides crucial support for overcoming fear and caring for the imprisoned and their relatives [D6]. These are a positive force 'for the happiness of oneself, not just for others', and, though it is extremely difficult for non-Burmese to understand, these are sufficiently popular concepts to be understood very well by the Burmese themselves [E9]. In addition, it is the form which the people's support takes for Aung San Suu Kyi, as the daughter of Aung San, who gave his life for the country [E10]. It is also the way in which NLD members work together [E11]. Aung San Suu Kyi herself copes by the social implications of it, for 'the *metta* between us keeps us going' [E12].

These three *brahma-vihara* practices, as pursued by the Sangha, represent 'the social dimensions of Dhamma' which provides 'the guiding and softening influence which the ordained Sangha has traditionally exercised over rulers'. Its practice is part of its responsibility of both the sangha and government towards the common people [E13].

The regime's uses of *byama-so*

The military has consistently attempted to appropriate these mental qualities into their discourse. 'Compassion' and 'kindness' were already incorporated into *The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment* [D8], 1963. Indeed, its value was clearly emphasized even by Maung Maung, the civilian lawyer and writer who briefly headed the pre-SLORC regime, who addressed a television audience on the proposed multi-party elections in the wake of Sein Lwin's resignation saying that 'the fire of anger can be extinguished with the cool waters of love and compassion'.³ Furthermore, attempts have been made in the mass media to portray the army patronisingly as an adjunct to the *metta* of parents [E16] and even as a substitute for the *metta* of parents [E31]. The Karuna [Compassion] Foundation has recently come into existence which opens remote rural health clinics run by the Ministry of Trade, of which Tun Kyi was a life-time patron, and to which all big business, winning major government contracts, including foreign companies, were asked to make large donation.⁴ In addition, the Army is portrayed in the national press as having treated Aung San Suu Kyi with unreciprocated *metta* [E17], and Tin U's release from prison was also based on the army observing 'the Buddhist tradition of keeping loving kindness in the fore of every deed'.⁵

Asian values and ethnic exclusiveness

Yet, in spite of the inter-ethnic and inter-religious dimension to *brahma-vihara*, the military use these practices, like everything else, as instruments for 'consolidation', unification and assertion of a common Burman or Asian ethnic identity.

The common Asian identity was emphasized by Chief Justice U Aung Toe in the context of one of the ASEAN meetings, in which he said that 'although there may be some diversity between countries of ASEAN, we share the common sentiments of loving kindness, compassion and desire to help one another in times of need. They represent the noble spirit of the peoples of Southeast Asia'.⁶

Thahkin Kodawhmaing, the grandfather of Burmese political party organization, has emphasized the derivation of 'Burman' from 'Byahma'. In doing so, he has forged *samatha* and *brahma-vihara* into possible nationalist instruments, as these reach into the Brahma heavens and are associated with the Brahma way of life. *Metta*, *karuna* and *piti* lead to ascent into the first three *jhana*, and *upekkha* leads to the fourth.

The sentiment is also conveyed by Thawng Lwin, who says that Burmese people believe that to practise *brahma-vihara* is to become a superior Burman (See Appendix I.9). There has been much emphasis on *jhana*

¹ '...Aung San Suu Kyi ..., though not represented in this volume, is another exemplar of a politically/socially engaged Buddhism. She protests throughout her speeches that she is involved in national affairs because of the crisis facing her country, because, as the daughter of a popular national leader she can serve as a unifying focus for the people's yearning for democracy – but that she herself has no interest in political parties and power politics. Yet the political power she held was a sufficient threat to the Burmese government that she was placed under house arrest for five years following her party's decisive victory at the polls.' (Queen & King 1996:421).

² See (ASSK 1997b:232) for NLD Tin U on the need for SLORC to develop compassion.

³ RHS, 19.08.1988 (BBC, SWB 23.08.1988); Smith (1991:5).

⁴ Reuters, 16.11.1997. See also summary of 'TV Myanmar', 18.10.1996 (BurmaNet News, 20.10.1996).

⁵ Maung Kya Ban. 'Don't break more laws to commit more offences'. *NLM*, 14.09.1998, p. 5.

⁶ At the 19th Working Committee and General Assembly of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO), Kuala Lumpur, 24–28 August 1998. 'Myanmar committed to the creation of peaceful, stable and developed region for posterity'. *NLM*, 01.09.1998, p. 4.

attainment through *samatha* in the nationalist movements of the 1930s, through which Thakhin Kodawhmaing and Saya San proposed to unite the opposition against colonialism. It is therefore no surprise that Aung San Suu Kyi's *metta* and *karuna* also has strong political overtones.

In *The New Light of Burma*, an article was published that indicates that the SLORC views Aung San Suu Kyi as operating outside the group, and as associating with foreigners. They agree that *byama-so tayà* is a typically Burmese practice:

WE Myanmar have Byamaso Taya the four cardinal virtues or sublime states of mind. These, namely *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upekkha* are so deep profound that they can not be defined by such little words as love or kindness.

However, this same article then proceeds to attack Aung San Suu Kyi for associating with foreigners and hence forgetting about the third *brahma-vihara*, namely sympathetic joy (*mudita*) for her own Burman racial lineage in the process:

However deep and profound they [*brahma-vihara* practices] are to us, they may not be so for those who have forsaken their own lineage and origin, having a high opinion only of foreigners and taking them as their spouses.

Aliens may perhaps be able to understand and practise the essence of *metta* and *karuna* but they have no terminology to exactly define *mudita*. So we gradually came to realize that those who speak the Western tongue only with relish would not understand the meaning of *mudita*. As people without *mudita* are surrounding Daw Suu Kyi who had wrested back the party leadership position on the grounds that party backing was needed in politics, it must be said it is, in a way, natural to gradually become devoid of the four Byamaso Tayas.¹

The above typically seeks to place Aung San Suu Kyi, and the opposition as a whole, within the 'foreign' and non-Burman camp by their inability to practice *mudita*. Or, as Nemoto would put it, the regime places them, the 'Them-Burmans' [တီမာဘမ္မာ] as opposed to their own designation of themselves, as within 'Us-Burmans' [တီမာ] camp.² Such perverted use of *byama-so tayà*, which is intended as an open system tolerant of diversity, demonstrates that the regime *ana* style of interpreting this practice is unlikely to ever yield it the electoral *awza* they crave for.³

This debate about numerical lists of qualities is extended also to the issue of the Ten Mental Defilements. Aung San Suu Kyi had argued that primary emphasis on material development without of raising the quality of mental life, would merely feed an emphasis on greed, the first and most important *kilesa* that needs uprooting. However, a journalist of the regime responded that the pious meditators of Burma must realise that it is the last of the ten, namely 'jealousy and envy', that are most abominable, for 'envy (*issa*) is common mostly among those who do not know the law.' The author proceeded to identify Aung San Suu Kyi indirectly, saying that the fact that the SLORC had reunited all ethnic groups and had accomplished great infrastructural developments was a matter for rejoicing, but 'that person [Aung San Suu Kyi] offers no help: indeed the person even tried to obstruct and impede ... a deed so vile and so abominable.'⁴

If Aung San Suu Kyi is portrayed here as the envious person, then it is Aung San Suu Kyi who has the better institutional memory. It was indeed the socialist motto 'Morality (*sila*) can only be upheld when the stomach is full'⁵ that became identified with such serious corruption that in 1974 it had to be changed to the ideology and practice of *byahma-so-tayà*. There was nothing to be jealous of, for a country run by army personnel who think primarily of their own stomachs causes great divisions within the country as a whole.

Detachment from power

Another example highlighting the use of *byama-so tayà* is Saw Maung's view that those who lost power, such as U Nu in 1962, should be prepared to detach themselves from it through practise of *upekkha*, the fourth meditation. His view is that U Nu should practise what is wrongly translated as 'indifference' (in SLORC-SPDC English this means 'equanimity'), namely 'indifference meditation' (*upekkha bhavana*):

One says about the matter of 1962 and about 'Give me back power'. Where is *Upekkha bhavana*? 'Upekkha' means the ability to remain indifferent. I am telling these for ordinary people to think about.⁶

It is through the example of *byahma-so tayà* that Saw Maung proceeds to contrast Burmese against

¹ Sithu Nyein Aye. 'Going too far'. *NLM*, 01.06.1996.

² Nemoto (1995).

³ Other examples of this kind of use of *byama-so tayà* are to be found in Hpe Kan Kaung's *razwàr H bñ l a Tà t ak Kpel x* published in *AmhAmhpaik-pasi (1) x Rnk n k t c. Wè sany z c. N pñ n* 1996, pp. 26–27, who refers to these practices under Shin Arahán and Anwratha, suggesting that with this already practiced under royalty in early Burma there is no need for democracy.

⁴ 'Let there be no jealousy or envy'. *NLM*, 1.08.1995.

⁵ ASSK (1995=241).

⁶ Saw Maung (1990b=337).

western ways of democracy and development.

Metta and karuna¹

I have already dealt with some aspects of *metta* and *karuna* under the previous section. However, here I would like to draw attention to particular features of *metta* and, to some extent, *karuna*. *Metta* or 'loving-kindness' is the most important mental state in Aung San Suu Kyi's thought, as she has used it persistently throughout her writing since her house arrest,² and *karuna* or 'compassion' comes close second in frequency.³ It is also the most important quality of Burmese culture that Aung San Suu Kyi wishes to see preserved in the future [D7], and in that respect she is not alone, for in the book *The history of Burmese culture* it is indeed argued that this is the foundation of Burmese culture as influenced by Buddhism.⁴

Aung San Suu Kyi's first use of *metta* was about three paragraphs into her very first speech at Shwedagon, in which she made explicit some of the objections the Burmese had for her arrival on the Burmese political scene, namely, that having lived abroad and having married a foreigner she was not familiar enough with Burmese politics. To this she responded that 'these facts have never interfered and will never interfere with or lessen my love (*metta*) and devotion for my country by any measure or degree [ကံတိုက်ပျော့မိမိတို့အားပေးသော အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။]'.⁵

However, her first major documented use of the term *metta* is in her speech at Insein on 25 June 1989, and it coincides with her criticism of Ne Win for dividing the army. She talks of countering the fear [စိုးရိမ်] associated with life as a human being under the repressive regime:

We will have to strike back with *metta*. Let us cultivate and direct *metta* to our country. Let us direct *metta* to our people. We must cultivate courage to bear whatever suffering befalls us with *metta* and to face our problems by basing it on *metta*. To direct *metta* in this way is much-needed. Cultivate the courage that solves problems by the incessant development of *metta*. Only when courage is developed in this way, will we attain democracy within the year.

ကံတိုက်ပျော့မိမိတို့အားပေးသော အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။
 သို့သော်လည်းကောင်း၊ အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။
 အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။
 အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။

Here it evidently represents a response to the military regime, and Winston King was right when he described *metta* as 'the most emphasized of the positive Buddhist moral attitudes today', which he related to a Buddhism 'confronted increasingly by the activist and socially conscious culture of the West'.⁶ This has been echoed by a student of Burmese political history who sees *metta* and non-violence as 'the ethical well-springs for Buddhists on domestic polity as well as on problems of war and peace and international relations'.⁷

When we look back at the U Nu period we realise that *metta* served primarily as a way of introducing a sense of ethics into politics. During his 1959–60 campaign U Nu made statements about political principles involving sixteen rules for the practice of *metta* on the part of the public servant. Also, because of political leaders' inability to obtain the status of *sotapana*, he advocated that they should at least practise *metta*. U Nu advocated *metta* rather than sanctions by price-control committees. Also, he advocated *metta* in the Sino-Burmese border commission. However, it would be wrong to delineate *metta* as a modern political concept, for it was already greatly elaborated in the royal inscriptions.⁸

Metta has been described as 'more powerful than the other three sublime mental states',⁹ and U Thittila goes so far as to sketch *metta* as the most important ingredient in the transformation of the Hindu ritual of sacrifice towards Buddhism, 'a religion of understanding' which liberates from slavery, stops wars, stops conquest and revenge, encourages the setting up of life-preserving and life-enhancing institutions such as hospitals, and asserts the equality of man.¹⁰

¹ Later I will show how *metta* and *karuna* may be related to her vegetarian diet and to *samatha* practice (see next section).

² For *metta* see ASSK (1997a: ix, 3, 11, 17, 133; 1997b: 3, 4–5, 17–21, 32, 56, 66, 90, 118, 122, 133, 134, 143).

³ For *karuna* see ASSK (1997b: 3, 17, 18, 56, 238–39).

⁴ စာတတ်ပညာတို့၏ အကျိုးအမြတ်ကို အသုံးပြုရန် အားပေးရန် အတွက် အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။
 သို့သော်လည်းကောင်း၊ အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။
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 အချစ်အားကိုးမရှိပါ။

⁵ See Burmese (p. 193) and English editions of *Freedom from fear* (ASSK 1995:193; ASSK 1993:174).

⁶ King (1964:150).

⁷ Trager (1966:126).

⁸ Pe Maung Tin (1920:67); Than Tun (1978:11).

⁹ Mingun (1990–96, 1:167).

¹⁰ Thittila (1996:171–74).

Metta Sutta (Hymn of Universal Love)

Who seeks to promote his welfare,
Having glimpsed the state of perfect peace,
Should be able, honest and upright,
Gentle in speech, meek and not proud.
Contented, he ought to be easy to support,
Not over-busy, and simple in living.
Tranquil his senses, let him be prudent,
And not brazen, nor fawning on families.

Also, he must refrain from any action
That gives the wise reason to reprove him.
(Then let him cultivate the thought:)
May all be well and secure,
May all beings be happy!

Whatever living creatures there be,
Without exception, weak or strong,
Long, huge or middle-sized,
Or short, minute or bulky,

Whether visible or invisible,
And those living far or near,
The born and those seeking birth,
May all beings be happy!

Let none deceive or decry
His fellow anywhere;
Let none wish others harm
In resentment or in hate.

Just as with her own life
A mother shields from hurt
Her own son, her only child,
Let all-embracing thoughts
For all beings be yours.

Cultivate an all-embracing mind of love
For all throughout the universe,
In all its height, depth and breadth –
Love that is untroubled
And beyond hatred or enmity.

As you stand, walk, sit or lie,
So long as you are awake,
Pursue this awareness with your might:
It is deemed the Divine State here.

Holding no more to wrong beliefs,
With virtue and vision of the ultimate,
And having overcome all sensual desire,
Never in a womb is one born again.

Myit-ta [em̥t̪a], P. *metta* [em̥t̪a], ‘loving-kindness’,¹ like meditation, is ‘increased’ or ‘cultivated’ [em̥t̪a p̥i t̪i y] by one’s own mental application.² It is, however, also possible to ‘send *metta*’ [em̥t̪a p̥i t̪i y] which turns it into a social and political instrument with which one can benefit, but also overcome, the animosity of others. If these are technical terms, the concept is in more general use in the homily (lit. ‘letter of *metta*’ [em̥t̪a sa]), ‘wishing well’ [em̥t̪a ta: qv̥], ‘selflessness’ [em̥t̪a ri em̥t̪a p̥i t̪i y] and a ‘complementary gift’ [em̥t̪a k̥a sa]. Negative qualities are associated with those who have no *metta*. In short, *metta* is a religious, but also a social and political instrument.

Metta has three important functions in Burmese society. First, at the mundane instrumental level, *metta* is a very powerful mental process which Buddhists believe removes all kinds of dangers and thus copes with fear. Whenever the Buddha or his disciples faced dangers he sent *metta*, and this was invariably successful in dissipating the dangers faced. This is how we must understand the Thai amulet cult in which the amulets, representing the fetishization of the inexhaustible *metta* of the saint, can be used to ward off danger.³ However, in the Burmese context the commercialisation of charisma has not yet developed to the extent of Thailand where amulets are bought and sold, though it is applied to the selling of photographs of holy monks, wizards and the like. For the most part the Burmese still rely on a direct personal relationship with their monks (see also the section on ‘supernatural protection’ and *paritta* in this chapter).

Second, *metta* creates the right conditions for, and anticipates success in, mental culture. Immediately prior to his enlightenment Gautama spent many days practising *metta-bhavana*.⁴ *Metta* relates to mental culture in two important ways. On the one hand, the practice of *metta* leads to *samadhi*. It is this combination of attributes – namely of loving-kindness and concentration (plus morality) – that are at the heart of the roles of the exorcist, the future king and the *weik-za*, for this practice permits access to, and permits one to benefit from the protection and knowledge of, the highest deities and Brahmas.⁵ On the other hand, *metta* is conceived of as an important departure point for the practice of *vipassana*, for in its practice, ‘a primary task ... is to watch that no deed, word of thought offends against the spirit of

¹ Also variously rendered as ‘amity’, ‘love’, ‘sympathy’, ‘friendliness’, ‘benevolence’ and ‘goodwill’ (Law 1987:78). However, it is ‘physical love’ in the sense of sexual attraction is opposed to this as ‘desire’ (*raga*).

² *Pwà thi* here means to increase in the sense of multiplication.

³ Tambiah (1984:342).

⁴ Just after he left the ascetic Udaka, under whom he learnt the Eight Jhanas, he ‘spent a large number of days practising meditation for the development of loving-kindness (*metta-bhavana*)’ at the market town of Sena while collecting alms to sustain himself prior prior to his practice of severe austerities (Mingun 1990–96, 2, 1:180).

⁵ See, for example, the discourse of the exorcist and the aspirant universal kings (Spiro 1967:189; 1970:164–80).

unbounded loving-kindness (*metta*)'.¹

Third, *metta* stresses the social elements of Buddhism and it permits the emergence of feelings of solidarity and the formation of a society. The Buddha-to-be was conceived by his mother while he himself was in a state of *metta jhana*.² *Metta* is presupposed to have important implications for other people than oneself, for this state of mind permits a transfer of benefits to others. As the Mingun Sayadaw put it, 'those who receive *metta* not only love him who directs *metta* to them, but they show goodwill to one another under the influence of his *metta*'.³

Metta is therefore a crucial ingredient in the politics of crisis, namely in the context of electioneering and in the context of fierce opposition when one is left at great risk without instruments or authority to fight back by more powerful means. As Winston King once put it, it is part of Buddhist politics of persuasion (i.e. influence) rather than control (i.e. authority).

A set of eleven advantages of *metta* is often expounded, including: 1. Sound sleep with undisturbed mind; 2. Happily aroused from sleep; 3. No evil dreams;⁴ 4. Having noble attributes, one will be subject to adoration and affection;⁵ 5. One will be loved by devas; 6. One will be protected by devas⁶; 7. Invulnerability;⁷ 8. Mind becomes quickly stabilised and calm; 9. Complexion of the face can become clear; 10. Death takes place without bewilderment or perplexity.

Metta and charity

The Buddhist concept of charity cannot be understood without understanding *metta* as practised by both the donor and the donee. It is said that offerings to a neutral person or an enemy should be done 'in the same way' as 'to a dear person', namely 'with compassion and preceded by loving-kindness'.⁸ Conversely, those who receive material support should attempt to give *metta* in return. For example, monks, only by developing *metta* on accepting offerings towards the donors, 'shall be deemed to have accepted the gifts in the role of a real owner'. Not to send *metta* in this context, 'will amount to taking things on loan for which he will have to account for'.⁹

This is why *metta sutta* is routinely recited at offerings, and why a crucial component of the water libation ceremony concluding the offerings includes the sending of loving-kindness to all sentient beings. It is to be practised by both the donor and the donee.

Furthermore, *metta* underlies the '(equally) sharing of merit' [အမျှမျှသော] derived from the donation with all sentient beings, which should always follow the donation, and neither the donor nor the donee should attempt to concentrate the benefits of *metta* solely for themselves or for their families.

Metta and the nine moral precepts

The significance of *metta* is further underlined as an extension of the regular Eight Precepts taken during duty days. The Nine Precepts [နိဗ္ဗာန်] ¹⁰ have not so far been discussed in the anthropological literature on

¹ The Buddha is supposed to have connected loving-kindness and Satipatthana as follows:

'I shall protect myself' with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. 'I shall protect others' with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. By protecting oneself one protects others; by protecting others one protects oneself.

'And how does one, by protecting oneself, protect others? By repeated practice (of mindfulness), by its meditative development, and by frequent occupation with it.

'And how does one, by protecting others, protect oneself? By patience, by a non-violent life, by lovingkindness and compassion.' *Samyutta-Nikaya* 47, 19 (Nyanaponika 1962:77).

² Mingun Sayadaw (1990–96, 2, 1:13).

³ Mingun Sayadaw (1990–96, 1, 1:335–6).

⁴ 'A person developing *metta* will not have ... weird or frightful dreams, but will have pleasant and sweet dreams, as if he is worshipping the Buddha or is flying through the air with jhana, or listening to the sermon and the like which give him delight.'

⁵ 'Developing *metta* from the bottom of his heart is the best attribute which invokes or causes to invite affection and respect from others.' (Mahasi 1985:30).

⁶ 'The manner of giving protection or guard is stated to be similar to the kind of protection given by the parents to their only son through love. If the Nats are going to render help and protection, one will definitely be free from dangers and will also gain happiness' (Mahasi 1985:34).

⁷ '...no danger, such as, fire, poison, and lethal weapons like dahs, spears, arrows, etc, can cause bodily injury to an individual who is developing loving-kindness.' (Mahasi 1985:34–35).

⁸ Mingun (1, 2:31).

⁹ Mahasi (1985:24).

¹⁰ These are the eight precepts but with additionally: 9. sending of loving-kindness to all sentient beings. Scriptural reference to

Burma. It has two special features. First, these precepts prepare for interaction with the supernatural (including those in the Brahma heavens), and are particularly popular with those who practise concentration meditation and wish to attain the *jhanas*. These precepts are commonly taken by those with a special spiritual goal such as seeking supernatural power, practising alchemy, attracting supernatural beings, or becoming a *weik-za*.¹

It is worthy of interest to note that members of the regime have been taking the Nine Precepts at some special events. For example, it is a mark of their emphasis on *metta* as an avenue to power that on 22 April 1998 the SPDC, including General Than Shwe and many of his ministers, took the Nine Precepts at the enshrining of objects in the Nanda Loka Pagoda.² This coincided with the increasing interest on the part of high officials in the regime for the meditation methods of the Pa Auk Sayadaw, who encourages the taking of the Nine Precepts. These precepts have also occasionally been reported to have been taken by Buddhists more generally at festive days in the regime-controlled press.³

Metta, freedom from fear and success in mental culture

There is a strong association between the practise of *metta* and mental culture in the forest. Thus, bodhisattvas characteristically develop *metta* towards all the animals in the forest. As the Buddha said in *Cariya Pitaka*: ‘when I was Suvannasama, living in the residence made ready by Sakka, I directed loving-kindness towards lions and tigers in the forest. I lived there being surrounded by lions and tigers, by leopards, wolves, buffaloes, spotted deer and bears. None of these animals was frightened by me: nor am I frightened [by] any of them. I was happy living in the forest as I was fortified with the powers of *metta*.’⁴

The strong power of *metta* is inherent in the *metta sutta* preached by the Buddha to five-hundred monks who were experiencing trouble practising their mental culture. The reason for the monks’ trouble was that the deities who lived in the trees where they practiced were deprived of their homes, having to stay outside with their children, as they could not reside higher than the noble monks. Wanting back their abodes, they then began to create frightening appearances and emitted awful smells to deter the monks from their habitat.

The monks were unable to practise their mental culture and, intent on leaving, they consulted the Buddha who said that if they recited the *metta sutta* this ‘serves as a deterrent to the perils caused by those deities’, and would also ‘help towards better realisation of the Dhamma in the practice of Kammatthana [mental culture]’. The deities, because of their implementation of *metta sutta*, ‘were so pleased and happy’ that they went further than not troubling the monks, they assisted them in anyway possible. Consequently, all five-hundred monks gained enlightenment. This *sutta* is recited in Burma at every major donation, and on taking the moral precepts.⁵

The *Metta Sutta* has three parts representing distinct aspects of *metta* (see *sutta*).⁶ The first part (lines 3–10) covers that aspect ‘which requires a thorough and systematic application of loving-kindness in one’s day-to-day conduct’. The second part (lines 11–20) ‘expresses loving-kindness as a distinct technique of meditation or culture of mind leading to *samadhi* – higher consciousness induced by absorption’. The third part (lines 21–40) underlines ‘a total commitment to the philosophy of universal love and its personal, social and empirical extensions – loving-kindness through all bodily, verbal and mental activities.’⁷

the nine precepts is to be found in *Navaka Nipata Pali* (AN 9) as follows: (1) abstention from killing; (2) from stealing; (3) from intercourse; (4) from lying; (5) from intoxicants; (6) one meal and abstention from food at wrong times; (7) abstain from looking on at shows and fairs, where there is dancing, singing and music; from wearing, decorating or ornamenting themselves with garlands, scents and salves; (8) give up large and lofty beds and lie on low beds, couches or strewn grass; (9) send loving-kindness to all living beings in all four quarters (the state of the first *brahmavihara*), above, below, around, and everywhere, pervading with thoughts of amity, far-reaching, abounding, measureless, free from hatred and ill-will.

¹ e.g. see Gyi (1968:17) on how he took the Nine Precepts for life.

² The Nine Precepts have been reported at the following events: ‘Religious objects enshrined in middle reliquary of Lawka Nanda pagoda in Sittway’. *NLM*, 23.04.1998; ‘Relics enshrined, Shwehtidaw of Tilawka Wizaya Hsutaungpyay Pagoda hoisted in Lashio’. *NLM*, 10.05.1998; ‘Ananda Theindawgyi, ShweKyaungdawgyi consecrated, foundation laid for pilgrims hostel in Lumbini Park’. *NLM*, 03.05.1998.

³ ‘Pagodas, monasteries crowded with devotees on fullmoon day of Waso’. *NLM*, 09.07.1998.

⁴ Mingun (1990–96, 1:1334)

⁵ Mahasi (1985:81–82).

⁶ *Khuddaka Gatha*, 9. Cited in Acharya Buddharakkhita. *Metta: the philosophy and practice of universal love*. The Wheel Publication No. 365/366. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1989.

⁷ Acharya Buddharakkhita. *Metta: the philosophy and practice of universal love*. The Wheel Publication No. 365/366. Kandy: Buddhist

The importance of using *metta* to placate the innumerable seen and unseen creatures is itself a justification for the institutionalization of practices that placate and please the spirits. Some Burmese, who frown on nat worship, have argued that nat shrines are '*metta* offerings', i.e. they are an expression of *metta* rather than worship, and are therefore excusable.¹ Such view helps transcend Spiro's 'psychological' conflict between spirit-cults and Buddhism.

Metta and samatha

This *metta* 'glue-effect' that permits living beings to incline towards one-another positively is reinforced by its relationship to concentration meditation. *Metta* is one of the most important qualities in the development of the *jhanas*, 'even if the feeling of *metta*, loving-kindness, is fostered for the very brief duration of a split-second, he who exercises this goodwill or benevolent feeling towards others may be said to be a person who is not devoid of *jhana*-contemplation'.² This is, of course, linked to mastery over the cosmology:

Herein [is wealth] that a brother abides letting his mind fraught with love pervade one quarter of the world, and so too the second quarter, and so the third quarter, and so the fourth quarter. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere and altogether does he continue to pervade with love-burdened thought, abounding, sublime, beyond measure, free from hatred and ill-will.³

Practise of *metta* leads to a high as high as the Brahma heavens. 'Loving-kindness is for the purpose of staying in the company of Brahmas as a companion, nay, it is a path leading one to become a Brahma', so that 'radiating the feeling of *metta*, loving-kindness, to all beings in the ten regions is the way or the path of practice to ascend to the Brahma world'.⁴ Conversely, the Brahmas themselves have *metta* as their most suitable object of meditation.⁵ As noted before, in the Brahma heavens life is long, relatively pleasurable and a temporary shelter from calamities.

In its relationship to the Brahma heavens, *metta* has the ability to overcome difference (as it knows no gender). The ability of *metta* to transcend difference motivated Aung San Suu Kyi to advocate its practice as a way of overcoming the gender-gap [E14], and of overcoming diversity of self-interest, which underlies 'hardness, selfishness and narrowness' associated with 'greed' [D1].⁶ Indeed, one of its most important characteristics is its ability to integrate diverse peoples and to prevent discrimination of non-Buddhists [E15].⁷

This ability to overcome difference means that it is not only a useful instrument in strategies of warfare, but also in non-violent instruments such as law, medicine and 'good' political traditions in society, such as the higher ideals of monarchy, socialism, democracy. It reaches across boundaries and builds confidence in people, freeing them from fear where major changes are taking place.

However, when the regime emphasizes *metta* it has no particular universal applicability, but is almost exclusively in the self-serving context of the army. For example, the large number of soldiers fighting on the front-line has resulted in a large number of veterans who have lost limbs in the wars, and the army is 'consoling' them with the pretence that the people have *metta* for them:

As the Tatmadaw is providing every assistance for these disabled soldiers, the public is also taking part in the task with immense generosity, indicating the perpetual unity, goodwill and love between the Tatmadaw and the people toward building the nation's modern armed forces, he pointed out, urging military personnel to value the *cetana* and *metta* of the people.⁸

Publication Society, 1989.

¹ Trager (1966:127).

² Mahasi (1985:23).

³ *Digha-Nikaya (Dialogues of the Buddha)*, Sutta 28, PTS Edition, IV, 76; King (1964:151).

⁴ Mahima Pañña quoted in Mahasi (1985:27). As Vajiranana (1975:264) put it, though re-birth in the Brahma-world is the result of higher consciousness, 'that is the moral consciousness of the form-world, called Mahaggata-Citta and induced by Rupa-Jhana', it is 'the four principles of Metta, Karuna, Mudita and Upekkha' which 'form the essential virtue of the life of a Brahma' due to their 'intrinsic value in the attainment of that state' so that 'meditation upon them is specified as the direct path to the Brahma-world'.

⁵ The *Kassapasihanada Sutta* gives *metta* as the suitable subject of meditation for 'the true Samana or Brahmin', who 'cultivates universal and boundless benevolence (Metta), diffusing it to all beings, and thereby obtaining full knowledge and final release of heart' (D.I. 167–71). Paraphrased in Vajiranana (1975:13).

⁶ Nu's idea of socialism as a place analogous to Byahma heavens, with no differences in class or property works along the same lines.

⁷ This cross-cultural effect of *metta* is pointed out by Law (1987:78) who argues that the practice of *metta* is based on an attitude of 'good will towards fellow men without restriction of colour or habitat'.

⁸ 'Thanmyanthu presents cash assistance to in-service Tatmadawmen who sacrificed limbs for national cause'. *NLM*, 19.03.1998.

Metta and enlightenment

As the ninth of the Ten Perfections for Buddhahood (*parami*), *metta* is a crucial precondition for the attainment of enlightenment as a Buddha. Gautama Buddha-to-be practised *metta bhavana* upon conception in Queen Maya. It is also a crucial quality for his message being carried into the world and for saving the people, for ‘only by fostering infinite loving-kindness for them [all beings] can a Bodhisattva establish all beings in Nibbana’.¹

Metta and Arimettaya

Arimettaya, the coming Buddha, is extremely important to millenarian politics of purity in Burmese crisis situations. This Buddha will appear after his counterpart, the universal king, restores order. This is the only Bodhisattva, capable of attaining Buddhahood in a single rebirth, that Theravada Buddhism shares with Mahayana Buddhism, and, as Jaini points out, ‘the name Metteyya itself, which expressed mastery over the *metta-bhavana*, a favourite form of meditation among the Theravadins, might have also contributed to the popularity of this bodhisattva ...’.² The emphasis on loving-kindness among the millenarian cults coincides with their aim to time their rebirth at the time of Arimettaya’s manifestation and with the cult of the universal king. Therefore, through the production of influence by means of *metta*, this reinforces the association between *metta* and authority. The Arimettaya cult is more evident, for example, in the pupils of the Ledi *anapana* than in the Mingun *satipatthana* tradition, and this is built into a complex attitude that also pertains to the greater proportional emphasis on *metta* and vegetarianism in the former.

Metta and authority

Nemoto’s assertion that *metta* is the distinguishing feature of Aung San Suu Kyi’s *awza* as opposed to that of the SLORC’s is correct.³ This permits us to understand the need, in Burmese politics, to incorporate reference to strife for Buddhahood, for that is to emphasize the *metta* that is a prerequisite to *awza*.

Since kings are commonly conceived of as *bodhisattva*, *metta* is a vital qualification for kingship. Hence, *metta* becomes an attribute of ‘good’ power. In this way, *metta* was part of Mindon’s coronation ceremony, when it was directed ‘O King, ... love compassionately everyone ... treasure their lives as though your own ... Look after everyone as though after yourself. Guard their welfare as though your own ... Deign to watch over the country’s inhabitants’ welfare ...’.⁴

In her essay ‘The true meaning of *Boh*’, aimed at the military regime, Aung San Suu Kyi portrays Aung San, once he attained political power, as able to ‘lay aside his sword without fear’ and ‘could say with absolute sincerity and a complete lack of self-consciousness that he would govern “on the basis of loving kindness and truth”’.⁵

Also, as Ko Lay put it, the Nine Precepts (including *metta*) are characterised as appropriate to universal monarchs.⁶ This relationship between *metta* (as an intensification and extension of morality) and kingship is reinforced when we look at the Ten Royal Duties in which nos (5) kindness [*Eksā N*] and (7) non-anger [*AwēraD*] are equivalent to *metta*. In addition, merit derived from the practice of *metta* may itself be considered a substitute for the great ‘royal’ *dana*, the first of the royal duties.⁷

¹ Mingun (1990–96,4:48)

² Padmanabh S. Jaini. ‘Bodhisattva career of the Thathagata Maitreya’. In *Maitreya: the future Buddha*. Alan Sonberg and Helen Hardacre (eds), Cambridge UP, 1988, p. 77.

³ ‘As for her *myitta* (‘mercy’), the people must have felt it through her understandable speeches on democracy and human rights, encouraging them to push non-violent mass movements against SLORC. I think they have found a “prophet” figure through her activities... I mean a person with a special sense, who can understand the people’s sufferings which they can not put in words, and a person with the ability to phrase those feelings clearly for them. This kind of prophet is full of “mercifulness” even to the extent that she or he is able to share the people’s sufferings. It is my supposition that the Burmese people have recognised this sort of “mercifulness” in Aung San Suu Kyi.

... Do [SLORC] have *oza* (‘power’)? Yes, they certainly do, indeed. But the meaning of it with reference to SLORC is quite different... Their “power” which is mainly secured by their exclusive possession of arms has been directed to the people who feel they have been deprived of freedom. Therefore, the people’s interest goes naturally to the other side to seek another person who seems to possess “power” to abolish the hateful regime for them. This is deeply connected with SLORC’s lack of *myitta* (‘mercy’), because *oza* without *myitta* (or “power” without “mercy”) means nothing, or just vice for the people.’ Nemoto (1996a:28–29).

⁴ Yi Yi (1961:133); Sarkisyanz (1965:67).

⁵ ASSK (1995:191).

⁶ In Nu (1985:147).

⁷ ‘Developing your mind with *metta* for a brief period of time involved in milking a cow once in the morning, once in daytime and once at night time, or smelling a fragrance for once only, is far more advantageous than the offering of meals by cooking a hundred

We find this as an attribute of Kyanzittha (1084–1113), known as ‘the uniter of Burma’, who would receive living creatures by the thousand from his subjects and would, after pouring holy water, release them so that ‘by the power of loving-kindness ... all the birds on the high roads, in the lanes, and at the palace, would not flee. They would lodge in cages. They would come and perch on the roofs, ... and the king would stroke them with his hand ... and call them “Birds of the Dhamma”’.¹

Metta and imprisonment – the Jatakas

I have already noted above that *metta* permits the release of creatures from prison into a life of freedom. Two *Jataka* deal with effecting the release from imprisonment by means of the practise of *metta*.

In *Seyya Jataka*, King Brahmadatta of Baranasi was a righteous king who faithfully practised the ten kingly duties, gave alms and kept the moral precepts. One of his ministers, whom he had expelled for a crime, went to a neighbouring country and advised King Kosala to attack Baranasi. The attack took place and King Brahmadatta was imprisoned:

In the prison, Brahmadatta directed his metta towards Kosala, who had robbed him of his kingdom, and in due course attained *mettajhana*. Because of the power of that *metta* the robber King Kosala felt burning sensations throughout his whole body as if it were burnt with torches. Suffering from particularly severe pain, he asked his ministers: ‘Why has this happened to me?’ They replied ‘O King, you suffer thus because you have imprisoned King Brahmadatta who is endowed with morality.’²

Kosala released him and gave him back his kingdom. The *Ekaraja Jataka* is similar to *Seyya Jataka*, except that Brahmadatta is hung upside down from a doorstep in the palace.

Metta and anger

From Aung San Suu Kyi's point of view, one of the important psychological values of *metta* is its effectiveness in countering anger, both which she experienced herself, and of which she was the object. Considering what has been done to her and to the senior leaders of the NLD in terms of imprisonment and scandalising their person, their emphasis on *metta* even towards the most despicable actions of the regime, is a sacrifice performed by one who has realised the right view in the Buddhist sense.³ That *metta* appeases anger was already extensively drawn attention to by U Nu.⁴

In *Visudhimagga* it is said that ‘extinction of anger means fulfilment of *metta*, but arising of passion means destruction of *metta*.’⁵ The concept ‘angerlessness’ (*adosa*) encompasses *metta*, though angerlessness is broader in the sense that it can be exercised with reference to inanimate beings, while *metta* only has animate beings as its reference.⁶

Metta, evil, fear and invulnerability

Metta ‘casts out fear’ in the hearts of people under the regime [D9]. Aung San Suu Kyi's discovery of its importance motivated her to change some of her ideas. In her early work she spoke of ‘freedom from fear’. However, freedom from fear is divisive if it is not directly fostered by *metta* [E18]. She discovered the practice of *metta* during her period of incarceration [E19], and in her later work ‘freedom from fear’ became translated mostly in terms of this concept, which is more relevant to the Burmese context. In particular, she relates it to the spirit of friendship with her colleagues and friends in the face of adversity and hardship.

Fear is caused by perception of evil. In Buddhism ‘evil’, in turn, is seen as brought about by incorrect perception due to one’s own mental defilements (*kilesa*). Thus, Mara the Evil One is conventionally represented as a deity with an army from which anyone would flee in fear except experienced meditators who have accomplished purification of their mental defilements. Loving-kindness enters the picture as an expression of sympathy with which one regards ill will, animosity and anger towards one’s person as

big pots of rice, once in the morning, once in the daytime and once at night time, which would, of course, tantamount to feeding about (3000) people in all.

It is therefore quite evident that developing metta only for a moment and deriving much benefit thereof, is really precious and invaluable without incurring expense, and without involving time and labour’ (Mahasi 1985:28).

¹ Luce (1969, 1:64).

² Mingun (1990–96, 1, 1:337–38).

³ ‘If a sacrifice is performed by one whose mind has dispelled the darkness of delusion and realised the right view, having placed amity [*metta*] in the forefront (*metta pubbangamena*), that sacrifice will help him to get rid of anger, delusion and hatred.’ Law (1986:79) citing *Suttanipata Commentary*, p. 417.

⁴ Nu (1960:164–65).

⁵ (Mingun 1990–96, 1, 1:336).

⁶ (Mingun 1990–96, 1, 1:324).

defilements in the minds of the originators of this emotion. The Buddha is shown to confront anger and ill will, such as that of Angulimala [E20] who plans to kill him and cut his fingers, with *metta*. The result is invariably that the perpetrator has no grip on the Buddha, that the anger of the perpetrator subsides, and is usually converted to Buddhism because of the kindness with which he is met.¹

The ‘enemy’ subsequently is often represented as himself attaining the state of *yahanda* which frees him also from fear. Thus Angulimala, once converted to Buddhism, was not frightened of an attacking bull elephant. The Buddha said in relation to Angulimala's lack of fear, that *yahanda* (i.e. Angulimala) no longer experience fear as they are the ‘ultimate Brahmana’ who have ‘washed away’ their ‘mental dirt with the clear water of the Path’:

(Monks!) The Arahāt with his *asavas* destroyed, who is courageous as he knows no trembling like a bull-king,² who possesses noble energy, who has sought and acquired the aggregate of virtues, who has triumphed over the three evils, namely Mara as deity, Mara as moral defilement, and Mara as conditioning factors, who has quenched all craving for existences, who has washed away his mental dirt with the clear water of the Path and who has realized the Four Truths, him I declare an ultimate Brahmana as he really is.³

By dissolving the *loka* constraints operating upon one's own person, mental culture culminates in its transcendence. Mara, when personalised (i.e. when not represented as impurities or the laws of conditional relations), is said to be particularly afraid of losing the Bodhisattva from his domain⁴ because he thinks he will also lose his control over the population, who will follow the path to *nibbana* mapped out by the Buddha and thereby overcome the three kinds of existence in *samsara*.⁵ The Buddha's sermons turn out to be ‘beneficial and effective like the *vajira* weapon hurled by Sakka’, and ‘men and Devas who are established in his teaching became invisible in *samsara*.’

Conceptions of Evil in the *vipassana* traditions, however, go a step further. Instead of starting with threats to self-identity by means of the deity-view of Mara, here we have only mental defilements, as self is no longer visible in high Buddhist practice.⁶ Here Mara is commonly interpreted, not even as an external embodied enemy, but solely as the force leading to one's own personal embodiment, namely Mara conceived as one's own mental defilements, and Mara conceived of as the laws of conditional relations.⁷ In other words, the deity-view of Mara is substituted by the impersonal non-self view. As Aung San Suu Kyi put it, absolute purity of thought, word and deed means that ‘no one can hurt you but yourself’,¹ so that evil is merely one's own stupidity and ignorance rooted in one's own mental defilements which must be uprooted through mental culture [C25]. The Three Battalions of Mara's Ninth Army are nothing but the dangers in

¹ This emphasis on *metta* as part of *vipassana* practice is why the association introducing *vipassana* into British prisons is known as the Angulimala Trust.

² ‘Bull-king’ is a reference to martyr (*azani*).

³ *Brahmana-vagga* cited in Mingun Sayadaw (1990–96,4:295).

⁴ Just as the Bodhisattva was about to leave the palace Mara appeared ‘who did not like and had always opposed and obstructed the emancipation of sentient beings from the round of rebirths’ with the purpose to ‘deter the Bodhisattva from renouncing the world by tricking him into believing that the deterrence was for his own good’. He predicted that ‘On the seventh day from today, the celestial Wheel Treasure for you will certainly make its appearance’. The Buddha replied ‘I already know even before you that the divine Wheel Treasure will certainly arise for me. As for myself, I do not have the least desire to become a Universal Monarch ruling over the four Continents’ and told him to go away. (Mingun 1990–96,2,1:146–47).

⁵ ‘Then Mara reflected and came to know in anger thus: “While I am moving about, the Monk Gotama has taught ten thousand Brahmas and set them free from my dominion.” So furious was he that he once again possessed a young attendant Brahma.’ The Buddha responds saying “‘Evil, Mara, I know you. Do not think that I do not know you. you are Mara... you have spoken thus because ... You fear that those who follow my preaching will overcome the three kinds of existence that lie within your domain.’ (Mingun 1990–96,4:344)

⁶ ‘The fact that we use the word “I” constantly to refer to ourselves seems to imply the existence of an ontological subject corresponding to the grammatical subject “I” of the sentences we use. In many of the Upanisads where the identity between the individual soul and the ultimate world-ground was being taught there was little doubt that “aham” in sentences like, *eso aham asmi* (this I am) (Ch 8.11.1) meant the personal ego conceived as a substantial entity and generally considered to reside within the body... Against this the Materialists argued that the personal pronoun “I” (also “My”) in “I”-sentences referred to the body and not to a mental substance... The Buddhists appeared to have opposed both these schools of substantialists by contending that there was no permanent substantial entity that could be observed to correspond to the term or concept “I” or “soul”...’ (Jayatilake 1963:320).

⁷ ‘(Monks!) The Arahāt with his *asavas* destroyed, who is courageous as he knows no trembling like a bull-king, who possesses noble energy, who has sought and acquired the aggregate of virtues, who has triumphed over the three evils, namely, Mara as deity, Mara as moral defilements, and Mara as conditioning factors, who has quenched all craving for existences, who has washed away his mental dirt with the clear water of the Path and who has realized the Four Truths, him I declare an ultimate Brahmana as he really is’ (Mingun 1990–96,4:295).

one's own life of 'material gain in the form of donations from followers, the reverence of devotees, and fame or renown',¹ and the Ten Armies of Mara are negative personal mental habits.² Conversely, 'greatness' or 'goodness' is not represented by conquest over your enemy but 'the taming of one's own passions' [C23]. As NLD Tin U put it, repressed people must face their fears, for 'fear is against the teaching of the Buddha' who 'taught us to confront our fear' and 'fearlessness must become a habit' [O12].

This internalizes the enemy and consequently, much of the political battlefield is thereby internalized too. The 'core' of the democratic movement is thus not a physical strength oriented outwards, but an 'inner strength', 'a spiritual steadiness' which helps 'shore up your spiritual powers' [S6] and which is intrinsically related to *metta* directed initially at and within oneself, yet which is capable of benefiting everyone. Fear is no longer faced by annihilating the enemy, but rather by seeing fear itself as a 'habit' on the part of the mind which can be 'broken in meditation' [C22], much 'like mindfulness in meditation' can be turned into 'an effortless habit' [S7]. To confront the enemy directly is to tackle one's own mental impurities in mental culture, with a clear mind in a non-confrontational and unaggressive manner, without fear.

In the story of the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment both 'material' (deity-view) and 'mental' interpretations (mental defilements) of fear overlap. It is recounted how the Buddha faced his own mental defilements in mental culture while physically in an 'invincible' bodily position, 'the posture for conquering the enemies, not for conceding defeat'.³

This helps us understand the emphasis in NLD political discourse on developing personal mental purity, and in removing the mental defilements of its leaders and followers. This represents more than an engaging a *representation* of the battlefield – the battlefield within the mind *is* the primary arena of conflict in and of itself, which has the greatest of implications for the 'material' battlefields; did not the Buddha conquer Mara by conquering his mental defilements first, not the deity itself? He committed himself to a war not with Mara, nor Mara's representation, but his mental defilements. Indeed, this helps us understand how mental culture permits escape from the constraints of the powers that are attempting to imprison you [K4]. Because of this approach to politics, Burmese politicians see little conflict between politics and mental culture, and between their political and their spiritual quest [E9]. This explains how U Nu was able to practise *vipassana* in the midst of a national crisis. This is why Burmese crisis politics is suitably referred to as 'the mental culture of Burmese politics'.

This very same logic moved Aung San Suu Kyi when confronted by two trucks of soldiers barring her way in Rangoon to tell her followers 'please don't be perturbed. Only if we can control ourselves can we win over our enemies'.⁴

The famous Danubyu incident, in which Aung San Suu Kyi, by walking alone in the middle of the road, faces up to a captain aiming to shoot at her caused dissent amongst the commanding officers. On this occasion she would have been shot, but for the last-minute intervention of a major who frightened of the potential consequences of her death would casue, overrode a colonel's instructions. This would have produced a 'second martyr' and 'would hardly be to its [the government's] advantage'.⁵ She herself interprets her actions at that time as being due to her 'lack of fear as a habit'.⁶ But from a popular point of view, it is also readily interpreted as one of the three most importantly perceived advantages of *metta* practice which is highly strategic in the political arena, namely 'invulnerability' from attack, 'to be guarded by deities' and to be 'subject to adoration'. These are conveyed, almost as a matter of right, on the practitioner of *byama-so tayà*. Their protection, therefore, is to be found in the act of mental culture itself.

Therefore it should be emphasized that, however much *metta* may be directed to entities outside oneself, or what Rhys Davids called 'televolution', it primarily begins with oneself:

Metta – Universal Love – is generally taken to exist in connection with other people but in reality love for self comes first. It is not a selfish love, but love for self ... By having pure love, Metta ... for self, selfish tendencies, hatred, anger will be diminished. therefore unless we ourselves possess Metta within, we cannot share, we cannot radiate ... Metta to others.

To love the self means not be free from selfishness, hatred, anger, etc. Therefore, to clear ourselves from these undesirable

¹ Pandita (1992:274).

² Ten Armies of Mara – sensual pleasures; discontent; hunger and thirst; craving; sloth and torpor; fear; doubt; conceit and ingratitude; gain, renown, honor and whatever fame is falsely received; self-exaltation and disparaging others (Pandita 1992:278).

³ Mingun (1990–96,2,1:215)

⁴ Taperecorded response in Kanbawza Win. *Daw Aung San Suu Kyi*, p. 82.

⁵ ASSK (1995:286).

⁶ ASSK (1997b:27–28).

In true meditation first you fill yourselves with love mentally 'May I be well and happy.' After a while you extend it to all others saying, 'May all beings in the Universe be well and happy.' Mean and feel it.¹

As the following anecdote recounts, nothing, not even *metta*, is supposedly more powerful than the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP):

When asked how he managed this feat, Ne Win said: 'I whispered into the ogre's ear, "Would you mind joining the BSPP?"'.

This contrasts with the *metta* that U Nu attempted within the democratic context, who was, despite his faults, a popularly elected politician. On the whole, Tinker assessed the democratic period over which U Nu presided as Prime Minister in terms of the balance sheet of successes and failures, 'but only if weight is given to the traditional Burmese values of tolerance, compassion, and meritorious acts, and these are rated higher than concrete achievement'.²

Of course, no politician could be elected or develop a following with an ogre and a lack of *metta* as a political platform. The qualities of *metta* are supportive of democracy to the extent that these qualities are conceived of as winning over the people by responding to their needs and wishes, rather than by means of extortion through fear.⁴

When we came to this town there was much support and a lot of flowers were offered and it was too much, though I have to thank them. The NLD is also very poor, so that it is desirable that money spent on flowers be redirected to our NLD fund.

The emphasis placed on *metta* by Aung San Suu Kyi, and indeed the NLD as a whole, is not some liberal ideal, but a part of mental culture, and it is a strong political concept with rich, local cultural connotations and historical precedents that the ordinary Burmese find easy to understand. As Aung San Suu Kyi put it, ‘Some people might think it is either idealistic or naïve to talk about *metta* in terms of politics, but to me it makes a lot of practical good sense’ [E9].

In Aung San Suu Kyi's statement at the closing ceremony of the 9th NLD Congress on 15 October

⁴ The opposite is also true, namely that *metta* upholds the ideal of a superhuman being and of hierarchical organisation.

1997, a rare event as the regime had not hitherto permitted a congress to take place, she encapsulates the significance of the NLD, the democracy movement, and the hope that the regime may change their disposition, all in terms of this concept of *metta*. While she was under house arrest she told her captors that what they identified as ‘wrongs’ on the part of the powerless people should be responded to with *metta* [E24]. Furthermore, since they renounced violence, *metta* that remains for the democracy movement and the NLD to hold itself together:

Our League may be a democratic one but we are not an organization that is unjust or repressive to others. If there are any grudges that stem from the past between our party members and the people, we will resolve them. At this time, as I have said, our party is thriving on Metta. We have no power, we have no weapons. We also don't have much money. There is also the matter of that eighty thousand dollars ... (laughter). What are our foundations? It is Metta. Rest assured that if we should lose this Metta, the whole democratic party would disintegrate. Metta is not only to be applied to those that are connected with you. It should also be applied [to] those who are against you. Metta means sympathy for others. Not doing unto others what one does not want done to oneself. It means not obstructing the responsibilities of those whom one has Metta. It not only means not wanting harm to befall one's own family, but also not wanting harm to befall the families of others. So our League does [not] wish to harm anyone. Let me be frank. We don't even want to harm SLORC. But SLORC also doesn't want to harm us. Our Congress has come this far because we have managed to reach a degree of understanding with the authorities. I would like to say from here that I thank the authorities for making things possible since this morning. We do not find it a burden to give thanks where thanks are due. Not is it a burden to give credit where credit is due. So it is not true that we do not give thanks or credit where it is due. There will be thanks where thanks is due, credit where credit is due ... so be good. One is never overcautious. This is a Buddhist philosophy.

We are not working solely for the benefit of our party. We are not working to gain power. It is true, we are working for the development of democracy. Because we believe that it is only a democratic government that could benefit the country. Let me make it clear that it is not because we want to be the government. And also because we believe that it is only the people that have the right to elect a government. That is why we asked that the government be made up of people that were elected by the people. Not because we want power. Power only gives stress. Power comes with responsibility and I believe that anyone who understands that cannot be power-crazy. I know how much responsibility goes with a democracy. That is why we are not power-crazy people. We are only an organization that wants to do its utmost for the people and the country. We are an organization that is free from grudge and puts Metta to the fore [E25].

Aung San Suu Kyi gives the regime a choice of fulfilling two kinds of roles. They can be a Devadatta, the ever-scheming Buddha's detractor who does not respond to or generate *metta*, who is unwilling to listen to advise, and who is incapable of attaining enlightenment until the time of death. Or they can be an Angulimala, the fearsome killer and mutilator who, while attempting to kill the Buddha, is transformed by *metta* only to achieve enlightenment at that very moment, and who ends up making a constructive contribution to the monastic community of which he became part [T1]. This is an important element in the ‘revolution of the spirit’.

Karuna

If evil is the mental disposition of ‘fear’ which must be uprooted by *metta* and mental culture, Aung San Suu Kyi expresses the converse idea of ‘goodness’ as another mental disposition, namely to be ‘serene’, ‘sensible’ and, in particular, to be ‘compassionate’.¹

Aung San Suu Kyi would like to see a greater measure of compassion in Burma, a quality she admires in Mahayana Buddhism [I1]. Her view is that the regime's fear is the product of their lack of compassion for others, and developing compassion would dissipate their fears [D10]. This view she shares with Tin U, who holds that ‘fear compromises the feelings of compassion’ and ‘when SLORC eases their fear a bit they will have a dialogue with us’.² Whether a human-rights activist or a despotic leader, ‘we can always find ways to be more compassionate’ for ‘through our compassion the world will be a much better place’, it makes for a ‘world without fear’ [F3]. The regime has a choice between following the model of Eastern Europe, South Africa and Latin America, where eventually authoritarian governments came to accept change because ‘they realized it was inevitable and it was best for them to go along with it’, or to adopt ‘the real change that comes from inside through learning the value of compassion, justice and love’ [D11]. Aung San Suu Kyi's emphasis on compassion in the face of adversity has inspired Buddhist leaders in other countries.³

¹ ASSK (1997b:62–63).

² ASSK (1997b:234).

³ For example, Sulak Sivaraksa in a lecture in the United States in spring 1992 was motivated to refer to Aung San Suu Kyi as: ‘She maintains a compassionate feeling for those who put her in jail, who killed her people, and for those who destroy her political party... If you take up arms against oppressors, you will end up destroying each other.’ (Swearer, D. ‘Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist vision.’ In Queen & King (1997:220).

Chapter 20

Samatha meditation and the politics of power and control

I have already shown that the practice of *byama-so tayà* leads to the Brahma heavens. Its role in politics and in formulating Burman ethnic identity suggests that *samatha* is, in combination with these practices, an instrument for forging Burman ethnic identity. In particular, *metta bhavana* is the most popular form of *samatha* practice.¹ This contributes to the NLD's view that in practising these, the NLD will influence the country's fate.

At the basis of all human life, Aung San Suu Kyi argues, are the five moral precepts.² As her teacher, Pandita, points out, these moral precepts represent the first phase – morality – of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, incorporating ‘right speech’, ‘right action’ and ‘right livelihood’. On the basis of this, it is possible to develop the concentration group, the second phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely ‘right effort’, ‘right mindfulness’ and ‘right concentration’.

Samatha, power and revolution

Concentration, the second phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, has two aspects to it. On the one hand, it is a form of mental culture which individual practitioners undertake for their own benefit to empower themselves in order to attain the spiritual heights of mental culture on the Buddhist path. On the other hand, by virtue of gaining control over *loka*, it is a political instrument to effect some transformation in this world. In the latter sense, it plays a role in the effort to build a nation and, more generally, of rebellion, revolution and conquest.

Aung San Suu Kyi is aware of the role *samatha* played in the anti-colonial politics in 1930s Burma, in particular in the ideas of Saya San³ and Thakkin Kodawhmaing.⁴ She is possibly also aware of its importance in Ba Maw's concept of ‘revolution’ against British colonialism.⁵ That she is aware of this quality is suggested by her praise for some of her student followers who ‘had tremendous powers of concentration’, as she says ‘such are obviously the qualities necessary for those who wish to pursue between the new national elite and the old ideals as these lived in the countryside.’⁶ It was certainly widely regarded as an attribute of her father's [M2].

Thakkin Kodawhmaing (1875–1964), whose picture often appeared alongside Aung San's during the demonstration, was renowned for his practice of alchemy and his meditation retreats in the mountain resort of Sagaing. He played a significant role in supporting the entry of Aung San into the Dobama Party and, as editor of *The Sun* and as national poet. In 1940 he published the *Sub-commentary on the red dragon (or serpent) (na-gà ti-ka)*, in which he encouraged early U Nu's (at that time still in his concentration meditation phase, and as yet not crossed over to *vipassana*) founding of the Red Dragon Club by contributing a little poem which clearly associated the fate of Burma with concentration:

ဝေဠာန် နှစ် နှစ် မှာ မြေ နှစ် နှစ်
ခေတ် - နှစ် နှစ် မှာ !

as muddy – the puddle becomes,
the ‘Red Dragon’ – when it comes out to reveal itself

¹ Spiro's encounter with two Mandalay ‘Future Kings’ implicated meditation (concentration) and loving-kindness. Ba Pwa, a ‘Universal King’ (Setkya Min) was ordered by his guide *weik-za* Bo Min Gaung ‘to live with love and concentration’, as did Bodaw Setkya dispensed his students advise to ‘practice meditation... practice both love and tolerance’ (Spiro 1970:176,179).

² ASSK (1997a:24,124).

³ Saya San who was a healer wrote two books on *loki pañña* before he got involved in the rebellion.

⁴ After I gave a talk in Oxford in 1983, Aung San Suu Kyi asked about the meaning of ‘yogi’. Only just returning from fieldwork, at the time the significance of this question was not clear to me. However, I was later to discover that Thakkin Kodawhmaing, who was a great supporter of the entry of her father into the Do-Bama Party, adopted the title of ‘yogi-hermit’ (*yogi yathet*). The significance of his meditation to the Burmese national independence politics dawned on me only much later.

⁵ Ba Maw (1968:74), in a conversation with Aung San, indicated that the appeal of the *Burmese Freedom Bloc*, which had been phrased in terms of concentration meditation symbolism, allowed a binding between political leadership and the Burmese masses necessary as the characteristic of a ‘true revolution’, as distinct from a ‘conspiracy’ (leadership only) or an ‘insurrection’ (the masses only). The significance of this concentration symbolism for the success of a true ‘revolution’ which gave the masses a joint purpose with their leaders, should not be underestimated

⁶ ASSK (1997a:33).

but she was scheming to set fire to the nation.’¹

According to this perception, she is pretending not to be harmful (a cat retreating its claws) whilst yet ‘scheming to set fire to the nation’. He thus refers to her doing the worst possible harm with her meditation. The ‘setting fire’ is also related to the practice of *metta* and the *jhanas* for, as we have seen in *Seyya Jataka* above, those who have *jhana* are able to heat up the seat of those in authority (the king), causing them to act in their favour. This also confirms depiction of Aung San Suu Kyi on the front cover of Hpe Kan Kaung’s collection of articles on her with candles, about to set fire to the nation.

Furthermore, this idea that her *samadhi*, the power also attributed to her father (chapter 1) and to revolution and national planning (chapter 11) can set fire to the nation is perhaps best of all confirmed by the comparison a journalist made between her and the head of King Brahma. The story goes that King Brahma lost a bet and was beheaded. Because the head, due to the king’s *jhana* powers, was purportedly very hot, it threatened to scorch the earth or dry up the oceans. The King who won the bet ordered four female celestial beings to hold it and keep it from reaching earth, each for a period of one year. The passing of the head from one celestial being to another marks the beginning of a new year. Supposedly in Burmese tradition, a ‘Byamma’s head’ is the name given to a trouble-maker. ‘Hoodlums, hecklers, bullies, and persons who borrow money are ... always referred as the Byamma’s Head.’ The article then names Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as a Byamma’s head, and outlines various ‘trouble’ she has stirred up. The article concludes with an echo from the mass rallies:

Even though you are being held by golden hands, your terrible heat will melt them down as you are the Byamma’s Head. So, you’d better leave this nation. As citizens, we are demanding deportation of Mrs. Aris. The only word we have to say to you is ‘Get out.’²

The beads are instruments for *samatha* practice, for getting what one wants and for receiving supernatural protection from danger.³ The heat is the natural consequence of attaining *jhana*. Because leadership is associated with the ability to generate powers through *samadhi*, as already demonstrated in relation to Aung San and Bo Bo Aung, rebellion is normally associated with fire (*teiza*).

When ex-Prime Minister U Nu was still a student, not only did he make a vow to become a *bodhisattva*, but ‘he did spend many hours in meditation, and proclaimed that he would aid the attainment of independence by saying rosaries’.⁴ Furthermore, one interpretation of Nu’s escape from the Aung San assassination says something about the belief in the power of the rosary in Burma: ‘devout Buddhist Nu was found by his would-be executioner to be counting a Buddhist rosary at the time, a sight which melted the ferocity of his assailant and reduced it to harmless impotence.’⁵

In referring to ‘beads’ and a ‘vegetarian diet’, which are the hallmarks of the concentration meditator, Byatti has therefore revealed the regime’s deep-seated fears of Aung San Suu Kyi, namely as a high profile *samatha* meditator with all the long-feared destabilizing influence which motivated the regime to arrest practitioners outside its own realm of influence.⁶

Furthermore, there are also allegations of her involvement in *loki pañña* or ‘magic’. As Byatti says elsewhere, ‘the democracy sayagvis and sayamagvis who tell fortunes with cowries and are descendants of

¹ (#11095 soc.culture.burma). In an email reply, Myint Oo Maung finds this accusation ‘is a very insulting remark on ... Buddhists’ daily practice... what DAung San Suu Kyi does is simply a daily process of the Buddha’s way. What is wrong with this? Byatti (the SLORC mouthpiece) says as if this process is a criminal act.’ See also ‘Foreign dependent skinny person.’ *NLM*, 08.08.1996. Saw Maung had already intimated this criticism when in his 27 March 1989 Resistance Day address he criticised ‘internal and external destructive elements’ taking advantage of disorder, that ‘as the saying goes, the cats dance in glee while the forest is on fire’ (Saw Maung 1990b:77).

² ‘Byamma’s Head’. *NLM*, 09.1998. Interpreted on Radio Free Asia (RFA) by Aung Zaw, 29.09.1998.

³ For example, this has also been used to explain why U Nu was not killed at the same time as Aung San for when they came for him he was counting the beads which protected him.

⁴ Butwell (1969:18).

⁵ Brohm (1957:394).

⁶ Certainly, monks renowned for their practice of concentration meditation such as the Bodhi-ta-htaung Sayadaw, who currently has a fleet of forty cars and a large area of land populated with cheaply built religious structures funded mostly by soldiers and their wives, receive requests for helping protect soldiers going into battle. However, some of the most potent monks, such as the Thamanya Sayadaw, whose photograph is in almost every taxi in Burmese towns, are beyond government reach. Once the protective power of meditating monks slips from government control, and becomes focused on monks within NLDs domain, there is little doubt that the regime will not survive. How can its soldiers keep up their morale and go into battle with the blessings of ineffective monks? There is some evidence of Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army {DKBA} army members have been instructed to meditate in order to gain victory over their enemy. They have also been instructed to be on a vegetarian diet (article 1674, soc.culture.burma)

Devadat [who argued for vegetarianism in Buddhism] are afraid to tell the truth so much so that they even criticize the Lord of Nats, who had assumed the form of a buffalo that its horns are spread out.¹

There is, however, substance to the allegation that Aung San Suu Kyi is involved with *samatha*. I do not believe she uses the rosary, but the vegetarianism² she practised from the time she visited the Thamanya Sayadaw until the car arrest episode when she stopped as she was so seriously weakened, invariably accompanies the practice of *samatha*. This is not just simply for the fact that *metta* and compassion (*karuna*) are indispensable to peaceful practice of all forms of mental culture. It is because the practice of *samatha*, since it emphasizes mind-created states and does not see all phenomena in terms of their transitory nature, is more readily disturbed by fear. In ascending to the higher abodes, it is therefore more crucially dependent on the 'liking' that the Brahma residents of the highest heavens supposedly have for people who do not eat meat (they cannot stand the smell of meat).

However, though included as part of *vipassana* traditions which place relative emphasis on *samatha* as a separate activity (as in the Ledi *anapana* tradition), vegetarianism is not a prominent attribute of the 'dry' approach *vipassana* practice of the Mahasi tradition, as U Pandita, Aung San Suu Kyi's *vipassana* teacher, himself emphasizes.³ Here vegetarian diet is adopted by some people, but is not a feature of the tradition as a whole.

Samatha, metta and Thamanya Sayadaw

The most successful role model of *metta* held up by Aung San Suu Kyi is described in the first four chapters of *Letters from Burma*. These deal with Aung San Suu Kyi's 4 October 1995 visit to the U Winaya, better known as the Thamanya Sayadaw, who used to live on Thamanya mountain in Pa-an, but today lives at the foot of this mountain.⁴ This was Aung San Suu Kyi's first visit outside her home immediately after her release from house arrest. The Thamanya Sayadaw is of some significance to the 'spiritual warfare' that is happening between the SLORC and the NLD. Having almost four thousand Karen refugees living around him, and living in an area which has not been under full government control since 1948, he has openly criticised the SLORC and has openly expressed support for Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Thamanya Sayadaw is a Pa-o monk held in great regard by the Burmese, described in U Sandima's *Events in the life of Thamanya Mountain Sayadaw* [ဓမ္မဒါနဗျူဟာ] (Rangoon: *erpepla*, 1993, pp 52). The history of the mountain resort where he lives is described in *Serene pinnacle of Thamanya Mountain* [အေးမြစိမ်းမြေ့သောဓမ္မဒါနဗျူဟာ] (Rangoon: *m%èzatsaep*, 1993, pp 172).

I myself visited the Thamanya in early July 1998, taking the bus from Rangoon in the early evening and

¹ Byatti. 'Not satisfied dear love, let's begin from the start'. *NLM*, 07.06.1996.

² *Thet-thak-lut*, 'life-killing-free from' is the Burmese term for vegetarianism. There are important differences in the way this term operates in the Burmese language as compared to its English equivalent. First, rather than a dedication to a diet of vegetables, as the English 'vegetarianism' (one who prefers vegetables) implies, the Burmese term is clearly an extension of the first and the last of the Nine Moral Precepts (*thilá kò bà*). The first precept is not to kill, and the ninth precept is to send loving-kindness to all sentient beings (including 'enemies'). In Burmese vegetarianism means to take the moral precepts to an extreme degree of difficulty, namely by eating in a way which avoids killing in action, intention, and desire. Though Pythagorean ideas held vegetarianism as important, in the Christian heritage, on the other hand, killing of animals for food is morally quite acceptable, which leaves vegetarianism thereby as having a very different status in Burma as compared to, for example, England, the country with the largest number of vegetarians in Europe.

³ '... I would like to talk about vegetarianism. Some hold the view that it is moral to eat only vegetables. In Theravada Buddhism there is no notion that this practice leads to an exceptional perception of the truth.

The Buddha did not totally prohibit the eating of meat. He only lay down certain conditions for it. For example, an animal must not be killed expressly for one's personal consumption. The monk Devadatta asked him to lay down a rule expressly forbidding the eating of meat, but the Buddha, after thorough consideration, refused to do so.

In those days as now, the majority of people at a mixture of animal and vegetable food. Only Brahmins, the upper caste, were vegetarian. When monks went begging for their livelihood, they had to take whatever was offered by donors of any caste. To distinguish between vegetarian and carnivorous donors would have affected the spirit of this activity. Furthermore, both Brahmins and members of other castes were able to join the order of monks and nuns. The Buddha took this fact into consideration as well, with all of its implications.

Thus, one needn't restrict oneself to vegetarianism to practice the Dhamma. Of course, it is healthy to eat a balanced vegetarian diet, and if your motivation for not eating meat is compassion, this impulse is certainly wholesome. If, on the other hand, your metabolism is adjusted to eating meat, or if for some other reason of health it is necessary for you to eat meat, this should not be considered sinful or in any way detrimental to the practice. A law that cannot be obeyed by the majority is ineffective.' (Pandita 1992:40–41).

⁴ 'Burma's Suu Kyi leaves Rangoon for first time'. *Nando Times*, World Briefs, 04.10.1995.

arriving at Pa-an early the next morning, from which the Thamanya mountain resort was an hour's bus ride. I stayed one night at the monastery. During my visit some of the attendants of Thamanya took me around the projects, including two schools, the many monasteries and retreats on top of the mountain and the monasteries below. The grounds owned by the Sayadaw cover a three mile radius around the mountain where about 7000 families live. The Sayadaw owns 22 vehicles, including heavy duty trucks, that are used for various construction projects, including the building and maintenance of roads and various public utilities.

Thamanya's most distinctive emphasis is on *metta*. It is said that people used to come mainly to receive Sayadaw's *metta*. People mostly have come to the Sayadaw because of poverty in this financial crisis. Increasingly, some wealthy business people – both women and men – have come over the last year. This suggests that *metta* is becoming more commercialised as the free market takes hold of Burma. When I asked him about this, the Sayadaw did not emphasize the donors, but said that it was a single monk for whom this entire empire was built up.

The Thamanya Sayadaw, however, is clearly a product of the political and economic situation. He is viewed as a monk who contributes to the well-being of all those who visit him, and, increasingly to their businesses. In this sense he is seen by the pilgrims as a 'productive' monk. This explains why he collects such enormous wealth, which he redistributes to the destitute. For example, I met several young children there, some of whom had run away from home and others whose parents had abandoned them. Apart from receiving *metta*, they get as much free food as they like for which the finance comes from the wealthy – this is clearly a mechanism for redistribution at difficult times.

The military regime has always relied on twenty or so monks whom they will cultivate for their powers and occasionally invite to Rangoon. However, the greater the geographical distance between the monks and Rangoon, the more difficult it is to keep these monks tied to their patronage; on the other hand, also, the further away these monks are, the more useful they are to gain control over far-flung regions. The military was very keen on fostering a close relationship with the Thamanya Sayadaw, but this monk responded to their overtures by daring to criticise them quite openly.

The stories about his powers are legion. Some have alleged him to be a *yahanda* which would put him in the same bracket as Shin Arahant, the monk who assisted Anawratha in his reform (See App I, 7). During my visit, some of his attendants placed him as 'more than a *weikza* and more than a *yahanda*', suggesting that he is a kind of small Buddha. Like many monks who practise *samatha* he is vegetarian. His power is readily conveyed¹ through pictures distributed to pilgrims visiting him. For example, in Rangoon and Mandalay, the majority of taxi drivers have a picture of this (or some other) renowned *samatha* monk fixed against their windscreen for safety.

The Sayadaw's *metta* was extended to his environment and shaped the community around Thamanya mountain, for today within a radius of about three miles the people who live there eat only vegetarian food and only vegetarian food is sold in the food stalls. Visiting pilgrims eat vegetarian food for several days prior to departure. I was accompanied by five people, all of whom were vegetarian for the duration of the trip. One had already spent one year eating vegetarian food according to the instructions of this same Sayadaw. They do so in sympathy with the monk's emphasis on *metta* (of which vegetarianism is part since it is about avoiding the killing of sentient beings). His *metta* is so great that he feeds all who come to see him, without fail.

As Aung San Suu Kyi once said, the people at Thamanya live in 'a sanctuary ruled by the *metta* of the Hsayadaw' and in 'a domain of loving-kindness and peace'. In criticising the SLORC, Aung San Suu Kyi remarks how bad the roads become when one leaves Rangoon, yet how good they are in the Thamanya Sayadaw's hands, 'far superior to many a highway to be found in Rangoon'. She describes the situation where the SLORC forces people to contribute labour to build roads, whereas the Sayadaw achieves his works by voluntary contributions from the people. At Thamanya, 'whenever the Hsayadaw goes through his domain people sink down on their knees in obeisance, their faces bright with joy'.²

At the two schools surrounding Thamanya Sayadaw's monastery, 375 children are taught by thirteen teachers with a lack of resources such as books. She concludes that the monk's works 'are upheld by the donations of devotees who know beyond the shadow of a doubt that everything that is given to him will be

¹ The actual taking of a picture of someone with power permits it's transfer to the photograph, known in Burmese as 'conveying energy' [Dāt klt y].

² ASSK (1997a:13).

used for the good of others. How fine it would be if such a spirit of service were to spread across the land'. Her conclusion to this piece sums up her interest in *metta*:

Some have questioned the appropriateness of talking about such matters as *metta* (loving-kindness) and *thissa* (truth) in the political context. But politics is about people and what we had seen in Thamanya proved that love and truth can move people more strongly than any form of coercion.

This suggests an important criticism of the regime, which can only pretend to have *metta* in their slogans [E16][E17][E31]. It also suggests that only in *metta* do the destitute find refuge, thus producing more powerful monks than the regime can handle. Once again, it is the regime that produces its own enemies.

Aung San Suu Kyi's intention initially appeared to have been to visit a monk greatly respected by both the people and members of the regime alike, with the aim of working towards reconciliation. Some even speculated that she met with some high-ranking military officials at the Thamanya in preparation for future dialogue. A senior advisor close to her father supposedly even suggested she pay her respects to Ne Win. The idea being that, while they may not be able to formally reconcile, they may be able to arrange a Buddhist ceremony where they could meet informally. Soon after returning from her visit, Aung San Suu Kyi held a ceremony to mark Buddhist Lent day, and included among the invited guests was General Ne Win, though he did not attend.¹

The many informal stories of the meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and the Thamanya Sayadaw turned her into something of a heroine in opposition to the regime, and these stories are still popularly recounted by Burmese people today, even years later. Though many are obviously mythical, they invariably demonstrate Aung San Suu Kyi's spiritual upperhand over the SLORC's General Khin Nyunt:²

1. The Sayadaw manages through his superior jhanas to enter her compound despite all the guards and is able to talk freely to Aung San Suu Kyi; yet Khin Nyunt repeatedly invited the Sayadaw to Rangoon but he would not come
2. Khin Nyunt visited U Thamanya after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did. U Thamanya came down the mountain to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and later invited her to come back and visit again. Khin Nyunt had to walk up the mountain by himself, and he was not invited back. Khin Nyunt tried to give U Thamanya a van, but U Thamanya said monks don't need vans, take it back.
3. The Sayadaw openly spoke out in support of Aung San Suu Kyi's efforts when they met; he openly told Khin Nyunt off
4. The Sayadaw only permitted his picture to be taken with Aung San Suu Kyi; Khin Nyunt was not permitted
5. Khin Nyunt was only given a brief audience; Aung San Suu Kyi was given over an hour.
6. When Khin Nyunt tried to start his car as he was leaving, he couldn't. He had to go back up to U Thamanya and ask for help. U Thamanya told him that when he stopped being angry, his car would start. Finally after a period, he was able to start the car. Such incident did not happen to Aung San Suu Kyi during her visit.

Aung San Suu Kyi's emphasis on *metta* and her involvement with *samatha* practice is clearly significant in her image as a powerful politician with the Burmese people.

¹ Aung Zaw. 'Suu Kyi extends olive branch as convention delayed once again' *Nation*, 13.10.1995.

² I am grateful for example 2 and 5 to Christina Fink.

Chapter 21

Vipassana contemplation, democracy and the politics of wisdom and purity

In his book *Buddhism, legitimation and conflict*, Peter Jackson comes to the conclusion that in Thailand the practice of *vipassana* 'has come to be associated with the denial of the traditional Buddhist cosmology and Thai supernaturalism', and that *vipassana* teachers regard *nibbana* 'as a state of wisdom or insight into imminent reality in this world here and now'.¹ He also says that direct access to, and the universal relevance of *nibbana* 'parallels the desire for a democratic political system in which individuals, in particular individual members of the middle class, have more direct access to the manipulation of political power.'²

In Burma, *nibbana* was democratised under the Ne Win government, i.e. brought within reach of every person through the *vipassana* centres. Thereby the concept of knowledge and wisdom has been redistributed also. The current regime may not have human rights, but it does not mind pre-occupation with *nibbana* on the part of the individual person. What it does mind is that the wisdom realised could possibly be in disagreement with theirs. King Mindon, U Hpo Hlaing, U Nu and the General Secretary of the United Nations U Thant were all reformers, and were all what we might call 'internationalists' – they had a broad view of identity and never conceived of Burma as an enclosed hermit land. They were also practitioners of *vipassana*. Aung San Suu Kyi and many other NLD members are working hard to prise open hermit-land, but it is a difficult task for which *vipassana* is one of the only instruments available under the political conditions that still pertain in Burma today.

Wisdom

During July 1998, Aung San Suu Kyi made repeated attempts to meet members of her party in different parts of the country, but was obstructed by the regime. While Aung San Suu Kyi was in her car, the regime wrote that it alone had the necessary wisdom to guard life within its realm.

There is an expression in Myanmar as 'one's own life can be safeguarded only by one's own wisdom' [Aqkku%&ac:] upon which in this scenario the government's wisdom is becoming purer and clearer in conscience in saving a life of a human being since the other party seems to find it difficult in producing or coming up with the nearest sense of any solution. The authorities hope that anyone who considers him or herself to be a political leader to act more accordingly and that action taken should be more befitting one's own projected status.³

The regime's proclamation that it alone had the wisdom to safeguard Aung San Suu Kyi's life, is a parody of what they know a government needs, namely 'wisdom' [pva]. The irony is that this is self-evidently what the regime does not possess for wisdom is not bounded by the boundaries of race or culture. Nevertheless, this statement shows that wisdom, having long been a requirement of government (see App. I.2), is a particularly desirable quality. In short, the regime greatly hankers to be seen to be wise.

Why is it that members of the regime cannot convince that they have attained 'wisdom'? It is because, so Tin U argues, its active members do not practice *vipassana*, and so can have little wisdom. Indeed, the regime does have military intelligence, but could not even predict its own failure in the elections. Furthermore, its attempts to delineate racial, linguistic and cultural mappings of the people is evidence that it is doing the opposite – it is creating an environment of compartments and frameworks, a confrontational environment that is not consonant with vernacular, or indeed cross-culturally operative ideas of wisdom. In this respect, the regime is out of touch with the core Burmese value system that links wisdom to mental culture.

Vipassana is characterised as a practice which leads to 'wisdom' [pañña, pva], and in particular 'transcendental wisdom' [lokuttara pañña], which means 'intuitive knowledge of ultimate truth',⁴ the highest wisdom possible leading to *nibbana*. The *Visuddhimagga* defines wisdom as 'insight knowledge (*vipassana-nyana*) associated with wholesome states of consciousness' [kqu sit Nty Hqa pvakqal BSKoAM kqu sit Nty Hqa wpcenaFa%qv pvamvFX]. Mastered to perfection by the Buddha (as part of the Ten

¹ Jackson (1989:203).

² Jackson (1989:52).

³ IS, 30.07.1998.

⁴ Pandita (1992:287).

Perfections (*parami*) of all Buddhas) who taught *vipassana* as its principal path to enlightenment, the *vipassana* traditions are therefore often characterised as ‘wisdom traditions’. Technically speaking, ‘wisdom’ is the third and final stage in the Noble Eightfold Path, after morality and concentration, namely the attainment of ‘Right Aim’ and ‘Right View’.

Wisdom is an important element in Aung San Suu Kyi's ideas. Monks provide her with ‘words of wisdom’ [H6], human beings must ‘strive to attain enlightenment’ and ‘use their wisdom to teach others’ [Q2], lack of wisdom on the part of government leads to refugee crises [Q1], and Burma's deterioration since WWII is attributable to the country being ‘ruled by men without integrity or wisdom’ [Y13]. Furthermore, if the Burmese can ‘persevere with wisdom’, this will ‘overcome complacency’ of the people will help to ‘achieve success’ in the fight for democracy [Q3]. It is also closely related also to the concept of understanding, about which Aung San Suu Kyi has said ‘if there was understanding, in fact, there would be few problems’ [Q4].

I will come back to the concept of wisdom later, as it is a crucial element in Burmese politics, as indeed in politics everywhere. Suffice to note here two points. First, that Aung San is generally portrayed as having acted out of wisdom, and to have avoided physical force. Thus Kyaw Zaw attributed to scholars the view that ‘Bogyoke, in building the country used only wisdom and never used power (or) force’.¹ Second, the wisdom Aung San Suu Kyi describes is of a particular kind. It is the outcome of *vipassana* practice, that it must be based on ‘morality’ (*sila*) and ‘concentration’ (*samadhi*), and for it to be effective it must be balanced with and accompanied by other mental qualities, in particular the mental quality of ‘awareness’ (*sati*).

It is extremely important to appreciate this idea that *vipassana* practise, and the wisdom derived from it, are not some escape from or denial of the world, as the Weberian and some Buddhological models of Buddhism hold.² The practise of *vipassana* is firmly constructed over and above what are mundane (*loki*) Buddhist preliminary practices, namely charity, morality and concentration; this turns the practice into more than ‘escape’ from the world, for their preliminary practice helps to attain final release from the constraints of the world, and permits reform, refinement and ethicising one's own position in society without fear of the consequences of doing so. In this way, wisdom is necessary for remedying world-wide problems, including the refugee crisis [Q1]. Through *vipassana* is produced ‘greatness’ [C23].

NLD practice, mediation and purity of mind

Vipassana is by far the most important and most highly regarded spiritual practice that Aung San Suu Kyi is involved in. As already noted, this practice is closely followed also by her personal advisor U Win Htein, and by her principal colleagues U Tin U and U Kyi Maung [R1]. The special role of *vipassana* in the democracy movement is furthermore evident in the intercession by *vipassana* teacher Rewadatta Dhamma in the only mediated peace talks attempted since 1989, until the UN representative began its peace talks in January 1998. *Vipassana* is also evident, as already noted, in the frequenting of the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha by military leaders. This practice is of great importance, paradoxically at one and the same time, to comprehend the ideology of purity and reform of the democracy movement, and yet also the mechanism of control which the regime exercises within the country and to control Burmese elements outside the country.

I have already noted that the ultimate reward of *samatha* and *byama-so tayà* is attainment of ultimate power belonging to rebirth in the Brahma heavens as part of the ‘wheel of transmigration’ or ‘wheel of *loki*’. However, the ultimate goal of *vipassana* traditions is a radical exit from the ‘wheel of transmigration’ itself. Because of the control the regime feels they have attained over mundane affairs (*loki*) they are not worried that people should seek ‘transcendental wisdom’ – it does not lead to control or power, and does not lead to militant nationalism. Though it would not appear to greatly upset the order as they have imposed it, nevertheless, historically we know that the greatest exponents of government reform have at the same time been practitioners of this method. There is no doubt that Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD are challenging the regime's attempt to monopolise *loki*, and that the Burmese people have started to apply the techniques of transcendental wisdom to effect change in their mundane existence under a restrictive polity.

¹ Kyaw Zaw (n.d.:85).

² In this sense, Parenteau (1994:20) is wrong, namely in considering Buddhists as ‘tending to be contemplative’, and therefore as withdrawn from worldly problems. It merely dissolves the immediacy of these problems in terms of problems of a higher order called wisdom.

The role of a human being, according to Aung San Suu Kyi, is to strive ‘to achieve enlightenment’ and ‘to use the wisdom that is gained to serve others, so that they too might be free from suffering’ [Q2]. For Aung San Suu Kyi herself, the highest aspiration is ‘very much a spiritual one’, namely ‘purity of mind’ [V1]. In expressing this aspiration she puts the state of arahant at the pinnacle of human achievement: ‘I doubt that anybody who is not an *arahant* [enlightened one] could actually say, “There’s no impurity in me.” But ... for people brought up in Buddhism, I don’t think it’s so difficult, because we have our concepts of greed, hatred and ignorance which create impurity ... anything you can trace to ill-will and greed, that is impure ...’ [V2].

Aung San Suu Kyi’s idea about ‘purity of mind’ – i.e. freedom from mental defilements – as the highest goal of human beings, and, indeed, of herself, is entirely related to the practice of mental culture, for in the Burmese context this is perceived as the *only* way to suspend, and in the case of *vipassana* practice, permanently uproot mental ‘impurities’ or ‘defilements’ (*kilesas*) and to attain the state of *arahant*.¹ This in turn, transcends *loki*, for *vipassana* punctures the *loki* as defined by the regime through their tight control over *loki pañña*. The result is that the military are left, like Mara (as representing *loki*) attacking the Buddha (as representing *lokuttara*) in order to keep the people from leaving *loki*. So Aung San Suu Kyi realises that purification of herself can only guarantee her an ever-stronger political following.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s encounter with vipassana

When asked how she learnt meditation, Aung San Suu Kyi recounts how she began with the Mahasi Sayadaw in her twenties, which would be some time between 1966–76, at the same centre which U Nu set up in the 1940s, and where Tin U also practised later.

She is known to have visited the Chanmye Yeiktha Sayadaw² prior to her house arrest, who is a renowned *vipassana* teacher and pupil of the Mahasi Sayadaw.³ She then proceeded more seriously with another Mahasi pupil, namely U Pandita, during the period of house arrest:

Aung San Suu Kyi: I did go to the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha meditation centre but that was long ago, when I was in Burma on one of my visits. I was in my twenties. But I never really meditated very much. My real meditation took off only during my years of house arrest. And for that I had to depend a lot on books. U Pandita’s book, *In this very life*, was a great help.⁴

It is interesting that Aung San Suu Kyi, like many Burmese intellectuals steeped in reading foreign literature, should come to familiarise herself with Burmese *vipassana* traditions through the English medium whilst there is such vast literature on the subject in Burmese.⁵ This is indicative of the role of *vipassana* at the interface with other countries, and it affirms the role of *vipassana* centres as the only Burmese establishments to represent Burma abroad alongside the Burmese embassy. This is a legacy we have already noted in the case of U Hpo Hlaing, who did the opposite, namely he sought to bring foreign political ideas into Burmese government while engaged in practising and writing about *vipassana*.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal statement of her interest in *vipassana* is further elaborated in ‘Teachers’, one of her ‘Letters from Burma’, from which it becomes clear that she first met U Pandita immediately

¹ She also relates ‘perfection’ to ‘purity’ – in this sense she relates it to the way her ‘father once talked about purity in thought, word and deed’. Here, ‘the greatest protection in life is absolute purity’ where ‘nobody can hurt you but yourself’ (ASSK 1997a:52).

² One example of the concern of overseas Burmese communities for Aung San Suu Kyi is the offering of donations and the making of merit for the well-being and victory of Aung San Suu Kyi. These usually involve *vipassana* monks. For example, for her 52nd birthday a donation was held in South Africa: ‘Burmese compatriot done “Ah-hlu-dar-na Ku-tho” to the most venerable Chanmyay Sayadaw (Ashin Janakabhivamsa) aiming for Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at Burmese Buddhist Phone-Gyi-Kyaung, No 30, Mckay Road, Ashburton, Pietermeritzburg in South Africa on 52nd birthday of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. While offering this donation to Chanmyay Sayadaw, Burmese Community from Durban and Pietermeritzburg, were attending and pay respect to Sayadaw. The aim of donation is, to away Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from 5-enemies, and also for healthy longer life and peacefully to her and her colleagues. Burmese Community donated “Burmese Buddhist Phone-Gyi-Kyaung” to Chanmyay Sayadaw on 14th June 1997 in South Africa. Chanmyay Sayadaw arrived to SA on 30 May 1997.’ (‘Donation to Chanmyay Sayadaw, aiming for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 52nd Birthday, in South Africa’).

³ The Chanmye Sayadaw Ashin Janakabhivamsa was ordained in 1947, in 1954 he performed editorial duties for the Sangayana, and in 1957 he lived at the Mahavisuddharam monastery in Colombo for six years. He taught at the Mahasi centre in 1967, and was donated his own monastery in 1977, since when he became known as the Chanmye Sayadaw. He accompanied the Mahasi abroad in 1979–80 and is now internationally renowned for his teachings which he has disseminated through lecture tours and various media.

⁴ ASSK (1997b:65–66).

⁵ e.g. the author of U Ba Khin’s biography, who was vice-chancellor of Mandalay University, knew *vipassana* teacher U Ba Khin but paid no attention to him until a foreigner waxed liberally about the benefits of his teachers by a black American while on a trip in America.

prior to her house arrest:¹

Not long before my house arrest in 1989, I was granted an audience with the Venerable U Pandita, an exceptional teacher in the best tradition of great spiritual mentors whose words act constantly as an aid to a better existence. *Hsayadaw* (holy teacher) U Pandita spoke of the importance of *samma-vaca* or right speech. Not only should one speak only the truth, one's speech should lead to harmony among beings [O13]; it should be kind and pleasant, and it should be beneficial. One should follow the example of the Lord Buddha who only spoke words that were truthful and beneficial, even if at times such speech was not always pleasing to the listener [R2].

Apart from 'right speech' her letter describes how U Pandita, whom she paid several visits at his monastery,² urged her to pay particular attention to *sati*, which unlike other spiritual qualities such as faith, energy, concentration and wisdom, 'can never be in excess' [R3].

Stewart put is as follows

Alone in her Rangoon home, Suu Kyi set up a daily routine for herself to keep her mind and body strong. She only varied her routine on Saturday and Sunday, when she let herself enjoy leisurely activity. At four-thirty each morning, she rose and tidied herself up. Then she sat in a half-lotus position – legs crossed with one foot up on the opposite thigh – at the foot of her bed. There she meditated by concentrating on her breathing and being aware of everything around her.

This practice, called insight meditation, helped her to become focused and calm and to understand her mental habits. As a Buddhist, Suu Kyi had learned to observe herself 'from outside' and to recognize her own imperfections of character. Daily meditation during house arrest helped her understand herself even better.³

U Pandita, Aung San Suu Kyi's *vipassana* teacher, received in 1996 the NLD offering of *kathina* robes at his new Panditarama monastery, permitting enjoyment by the opposition of 'a small, precious spiritual respite' while under the thumb of an authoritarian regime.⁴

Awareness (*sati*)

The practice of 'awareness', known as *sati* (**qti** Pali *sati*), and sometimes also translated as 'mindfulness' or 'attention',⁵ is at the heart of all *vipassana* traditions in Burma, and this concept is much used by NLD leaders.

Sati is the first of the Seven Enlightenment Factors (the others are investigation, effort, rapture, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity). It logically precedes the others since the direct perception of reality to which *sati* gives rise, makes it indispensable to all the other factors. It stops negative emotional states, characterised as mental defilements, from developing from the point of contact with the senses.

Sati, as the seventh element in the Noble Eightfold Path, also belongs to the second phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Concentration (together with Right Effort and Right Concentration).

Supposedly, the last exhortation before the Buddha passed away was on mindfulness, and it is generally accepted that Emperor Asoka of India was motivated to become Buddhist because of the following passage on mindfulness:

Mindfulness is the way to the Deathless (*Nibbana*),
unmindfulness is the way to Death.
Those who are mindful do not die;
those who are not mindful are as if already dead.⁶

The Mahasi technique that Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi practise is often referred to as the *satipatthana* or 'awareness' technique which is 'the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception ... either through the five physical senses or through the mind which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense':

When attending to that sixfold sense impression, attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by deed, speech or by mental comment which may be one of self-reference (like, dislike, etc), judgement or reflection. If during the time, short or long, given to the practice of Bare Attention, any such comments arise in one's mind, they themselves are made objects of Bare Attention, and are neither repudiated nor pursued, but are dismissed,

¹ First published in *The Nation* (10.09.1996) and in the Japanese-English *Mainichi Daily News*, and later republished in Sulak Sivaraksa's *Seeds of Peace* (Jan–Apr 1997, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 7–8).

² ASSK (1997b:9).

³ Whitney (1997:93–94).

⁴ ASSK (1997b:200–1).

⁵ In the Ba Khin tradition which U Kyi Maung practices, the concept of *sati* is often translated as 'awareness', whereas in the Mahasi tradition it tends to be translated as 'mindfulness'. It may be that Aung San Suu Kyi is influenced by U Kyi Maung's ideas here.

⁶ *The Dhammapadam* Translated by Daw Mya Tin. Rangoon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana, 1993, pp. v, 9 (verse 21).

after a brief mental note has been made of them.¹

Sati accomplishes, in combination with *metta* and *karuna*, protection of oneself and others:

‘I shall protect myself’ with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. I shall protect others’ with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. By protecting oneself one protects others; by protecting others one protects oneself.

And how does one, by protecting oneself, protect others? By repeated practice (of mindfulness), by its meditative development, and by frequent occupation with it.

And how does one, by protecting others, protect oneself? By patience, by a non-violent life, by lovingkindness and compassion.²

Mindfulness is often described as a way of ‘self-reliance’ and ‘self-help’, as it does not require ‘initiation’, ‘esoteric knowledge’, or ‘any elaborate technique or external devices’, having ‘the daily life ... as its working material’. It is also described as a form of ‘self-liberation’, which needs no ‘saving divine grace’ or ‘mediation by priests’. These contribute to the view of mindfulness as ‘an island’, as the Buddha said to Ananda just prior to his death:

Therefore, Ananda, be ye islands unto yourselves! Be ye a refuge unto yourselves! Betake yourselves to no external refuge! The Truth (Dhamma) be your island, the truth be your refuge! Take no other refuge! And how is this done?

Therefore, Ananda, A monk dwells contemplating the body, in the body – contemplating the feelings, in the feelings – contemplating consciousness, in consciousness – contemplating mind objects in mind objects, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in the world, hankering and dejection.

And whosoever, Ananda, either now or after I am dead, shall be an island unto themselves, a refuge unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the truth as their island and refuge, taking refuge in nothing else – it is they, Ananda, among my Bhikkhus, who shall reach the very topmost height – but they must be anxious to learn.³

Through the awareness of impermanence (*anicca*), *vipassana* prepares people for arrest and for prison. In particular Tin U would practise, not just in prison, but also in preparation for his rearrest [C11]. It was the development of ‘awareness’ (*sati*) whilst in prison that made him stop his ‘blind obedience’ and which accomplished his transformation to a democrat; he believes it would work similarly for regime members were they to practise it [R4].

However, beyond a technical term, the concept of ‘awareness’ is also extended to mean the idea of ‘good friends’ who work to increase one’s awareness by pointing out one’s faults with an attitude of sympathetic joy (*mudita*) and loving-kindness (*metta*).⁴ Just like the enemy is internalized, so is the friend. This is how NLD Tin U can characterise, while incarcerated in solitary confinement, how he ‘had a friend in prison, myself, my mindfulness’.⁵ As he also put it, ‘as a Buddhist, I firmly believe that oneself is one’s enemy or one’s friend. This is very Buddhist, that from one’s mind the world originates’.⁶ This of course, has been asserted by *vipassana* teachers such as U Pandita who says that ‘practising the Dhamma, you truly care for yourself, protect yourself, and act as your own best friend’.¹² If friends bring awareness, the idea of ‘friend’ is also closely related to the meditation teacher, who is known as a *kalyana metta* [E22].

This concept of ‘awareness’ has, furthermore, also been extended to the idea of political opposition, for ‘the opposition in a democracy plays the role of Devadatta for any legal government. It stops the ruling party from going astray by constantly pointing out its every mistake’ [Y1]. Political opposition therefore means increased awareness; conversely, not practising mindfulness, not having ‘good friends’, and not allowing an opposition, means not having the necessary ‘awareness’ to rule (i.e. ignorance). And ignorance is at the root of misgovernance.

Aung San Suu Kyi has argued that the struggle for democracy is a struggle ‘for a change in our everyday life’ [Y23]. The awareness advocated in the Mahasi techniques, is a superior awareness of everyday life.

While under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi felt her progress was limited until she had access to the book *In this very life* written by U Pandita (first published in English in 1992), from which she recalled the preaching of this monk which emphasized ‘mindfulness’ [C24]. She eventually integrated meditation eventually into her daily schedule, meditating first thing in the morning for one hour after arising at 4:30 a.m.

Aung San Suu Kyi responds to the suggestions some have made of her as a ‘female *bodhisattva*’ by saying

¹ Nyanaponika (1962:32).

² Samyutta-Nikaya 47, 19; Nyanaponika (1962:77).

³ Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta; Nyanaponika (1962:77–84).

⁴ ASSK (1997b:31–32).

⁵ ASSK (1997b:229).

⁶ ASSK (1997b:231).

that she is 'nowhere near such a state'. She has a temper, but *vipassana* practice (like *metta*) has proved beneficial to control her anger through improved 'awareness' [C25].

In relation to the concept of evil, her views are that it is not an embodied essence, but the problem of embodiment itself. Evil represents ignorance ('stupidity') combined with 'greed' and 'anger'.¹ This can only be cut through by means of meditation and by fostering 'awareness', which she has discovered in relation to dealing with her own anger [C25]. Awareness is also important for leaders to keep on their toes and to avoid self-deception [R5].

The issue of uprooting fear (rather than temporarily suspending it) was addressed by U Pandita in *In this very life*. He views it as a result *vipassana* practice, a view Aung San Suu Kyi had not quite understood at the time her book *Freedom from fear* came out. According to U Pandita, Mara's Sixth Army is known as 'fear' itself,² and only *vipassana* leads to the final solution to fear as it leads to a 'safe haven', namely *nibbana*, where 'not a single danger, nothing fearful, remains', for 'old age and death are conquered', 'the burden of suffering falls', and 'a person who reaches nibbana is completely protected and can therefore be called "The Fearless", the one without danger'. This is attained 'even before arriving at the perfect safety of nibbana', for 'one is protected from fearful things while walking the Noble Eightfold Path', so that 'this path itself is the haven'.³

In response to the question 'What does Buddhist meditation mean to you?' she once again emphasizes that it is 'a form of spiritual cultivation' and that the 'awareness' it generates also helps avoid 'impurities' [R6]. *Vipassana* is furthermore implicated in her concept of 'soldiering on' in true conquest of herself [C23], aided by awareness [R7]. This is the only way to reach perfection, to become a truly great person.

In particular, she also used meditation to cope with the 'anger' and 'fear' of the people around her. It should be noted of course, that fear is considered related to anger.² When asked what 'truth' means to her, she again says that this mental state of awareness (*sati*), both of oneself and of others, contributes to objectivity of mind [R8, R9].

In answer to the question whether meditation has been 'a process of self-discovery', she denies that it helped her discover things about herself. Nevertheless, the development of awareness in everyday life permits conscious and careful living [R10]. Aung San Suu Kyi also indicated that she is after a particular kind of 'awareness', namely 'impermanence' (*anicca*).

During her house arrest, there were periods when she practised longer because she was improving and enjoying it [C26]. As for the actual changes in her mental states, she points at the stages described in U Pandita's book [C27].

Vipassana and kamma

Many students of Burmese society attribute the resigned attitude to life and the acceptance of inequality to Buddhism. In particular this is attributed to the quality of *kamma* which is inherent in people and over which they have no control. In this sense, Buddhism is often seen as pessimistic.

In Pali, *kamma* [kṃ] literally means 'action'. In Burmese, *kan* [kṃ] has two main meanings. First, it means one's deed, word or thought which predetermines one's future, and secondly, the meaning of luck, fortune or lot. To suffer the consequences of these actions is 'to be hit by the great *karmas*' [kṃtṃtṃ] meaning 'to be punished for having committed any of the five cardinal sins'.⁴ On the other hand, to do good

¹ Meditators commonly represent Evil as the impurities (*kilesa*) in one's own embodiment, which can only temporarily be suspended by concentration meditation, but permanently be uprooted through *vipassana*. There are many examples in the Buddhist teachings which how evil is inefficacious to those who have managed to do this successfully.

² Sixth Army: Fear. The Sixth Army of Mara is fear and cowardliness. It easily attacks yogis who practice in a remote place, especially if the level of ardent effort is low after an attack of sloth and torpor. Courageous effort drives out fear. So does a clear perception of the Dhamma which comes as a result of effort, mindfulness and concentration. The Dhamma is the greatest protection available on earth: faith in, and practice of the Dhamma are therefore the greatest medicines for fear. Practising morality ensures that one's future circumstances will be wholesome and pleasant; practising concentration means that one suffers less from mental distress; and practising wisdom leads toward nibbana, where all fear and danger have been surpassed. Practising the Dhamma, you truly care for yourself, protect yourself, and act as your own best friend. Ordinary fear is the sinking form of anger. You cannot face the problem, so you show no reaction outwardly and wait for the opportunity to run away. But if you can face your problems directly, with an open and relaxed mind, fear will not arise. (Pandita 1992:71).

³ Pandita (1993:225–26).

⁴ The Five Cardinal Sins: 1 matricide, 2 patricide, 3 killing an *Arhat*, 4 shedding blood of the Buddha, 5 creating Sangha division among the *Sangha*.

things, like charity morality or mental culture, improve one's good fortune in life. Thus, 'to be lucky' or 'to be fortunate' is to 'have good *kamma*' [ကံကောင်းမှု] [kāmācārya]

It is said of kings that '*karma* is exhausted' [ကံကုန်] which meant that they had died. Furthermore, the serious and detailed preoccupation with the *kamma* of monks means that 'great *kamma* and small *kamma*' [ကံကြီးကံငယ်] is an expression for the preoccupation with the *Vinaya* for the greater rites, such as ordination into monkhood, that take place in a *sima* accompanied by ritual recitation of sacred Pali texts, and the lesser rites such as absolving oneself of minor infractions of the *Vinayas* which require no ritual.

All Buddhist practice will affect *kamma*. However, one of the most important features of *vipassana* perspective on life is that this is the only practice that can truly 'burn' *kamma*. In other words, it can erase misfortune and status differences arising from past action. There is no other technique or knowledge that supposedly is able to level inequality and difference at the speed that *vipassana* is able to. This ability permits it a role in the reform of all sorts of inherited assumptions, ranging from ritual and culture, to government and economics. That is how it can work at the forefront of government reform in Burma. This is what makes *vipassana* truly 'revolutionary'.

Vipassana and ethicising the polity

Vipassana would appear to be an instrument for politicians to generate constructive awareness of their own sufferings, their own anger and their own fears in the face of repression and imprisonment. It permits them to see their misfortune as transitory, and their condition as impermanent. However, we have already seen, with the battle against evil in the political battlefield having been internalized, that *vipassana* is the weapon of choice to attain true freedom from the constraints of *loki*. This turns it into a potent political weapon.

As already noted, when the Buddha attained enlightenment it brought out the worst in Mara who, fearing his control over the world would be lessened by the outflow of people from his *loki* realm, attacked the Buddha with an enormous army throwing into the battle all possible weapons. These weapons were rendered harmless by his *metta* and *karuna*. The repeated attacks on these courageous politicians, who espouse non-violence, is a sign that the regime is unable to confine the implications of Buddhist practice for the liberation of Burma as a whole. The NLD, by all popular accounts, has mastered the high ground and has come to be seen as a guardian of the *lokuttara* realm; by implication the regime has become the equivalent of Mara's army. Wiser regimes would have avoided this development by timely transfer and sharing of power, leaving the opposition jointly responsible for any mistakes. However, by not seizing that opportunity, the regime now lives in the shadow of, what is from their point of view, a most formidable adversary. An adversary which has built up an unprecedented world-wide reputation for purity.

Seen in this light, *vipassana* has important social and political implications. This link is rarely made explicitly, because Burmese people see *vipassana* as an instrument which should not consciously be made to serve 'mundane' [*loki*] ends. However, in response to the question about what motivates her to meditate as a daily practice, Aung San Suu Kyi describes this less as a personal preference or indulgence than a personal duty to be performed compassionately for the benefit of others 'in the name of justice' and 'love' [C28]. In addition, she believes that awareness of impermanence prevents corruption [R11]. Meditation is not about the values that lie outside her family environment. It is about the qualities of honesty that she was taught during her youth, and helps protect against corruptibility [C29]. Were 'awareness' of greed to be cultivated more widely, a better society would result, for emphasis on material progress as the primary aim of society maintains the culture of greed and selfishness that causes the refugee crises in the world [C2].

Appendix 1

Mental culture and politics in myth

Buddhist mental culture did not come to play the role it did in Burmese government without prior foundation in concepts of royal discipline and myth. These practices and their resultant mental processes run through the very core of the Burmese value system and underpin its vital legal and political institutions.

1. Vipassana – a late historical transformation of the institution of sacrifice

Buddhism and its teachings on *vipassana* did not arise until after the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment some time in the fifth century BC. The Buddhist texts share with the earlier Upanishads strong scepticism of the emphasis in the early Vedas on ritual and sacrifice. In the older Vedic teachings, rituals of sacrifice (*yajman*) are seen as efficacious in stabilising cosmological imbalances in the relationship between humans and gods. Such sacrificial rituals have proved essential ingredients in conceptions of authority and government and in the restoration of order. Buddhism, on the other hand, favours the view that 'moral endeavour, contemplation and meditation are more exalted than Vedic ritualism'.¹ In Buddhism the older concepts of sacrifice have been reinterpreted to become activities of mental culture, as well as merit-making,² without, in my view, necessarily foregoing some of the social and political impact of the sacrificial ritual itself. A major difference in this shift, however, is the interiorisation of the cosmology within the person.

Shwe Aung, a Sanskrit scholar and former Director of the Department of Religious Affairs, argued that the Buddha introduced *vipassana* as the final and most efficacious replacement for Vedic sacrifice and austerities.³

First, they put their trust in sacrificial offerings (*yajati* [sacrifice]) (to devas) so as to enable them to build their lives as they wanted. When they became dissatisfied with 'yajati', they turned to 'tapa' [austerities] practices. Again, when they became dissatisfied with 'tapa' too, they took up 'bhavana' (meditation [mental culture]). As the 'bhavana' they practised was not 'vipassana bhavana' ... they could not achieve the object they wanted.⁴

Shwe Aung's front cover encouraging the practice of *vipassana* as a form of self-sacrifice, saying 'daring to sacrifice little by little will ensure good future existences.'

The first phase, namely the transformation from the sacrifice of live animals to the practice of austerities has been described by Heesterman in his *Broken world of sacrifice*. In this, instead of physically killing to sustain the gods with food so that they may provide the cosmology with continuity, sacrifice is instead internalized into a mental construct which transforms the physical killing into a ritual performed by vegetarian Brahmins. These Brahmins are devoted to ascetic practices and turn the fire of sacrifice inwards while engaged in the questions of life and death. This development has been characterised as the 'internalizing and psychologising of Brahmanical sacrifice'.⁵

¹ Goyal (1987:96).

² See Amore, Roy Clayton *The concept of practice and doing merit in early Theravada Buddhism*. (Columbia University Press, 1970).

³ Several Buddhist texts reinterpret these older sacrificial rituals as 'understanding' (*pañña*) in various ways:

Atthaka-nipata (AN), Ch 1, par. i, (1). This suggests that loving-kindness substitutes for Brahmanic sacrifice.

Ambattha Sutta (DN): the Brahmin Ambattha challenges the Buddha by claiming the superiority of Brahmins. The Buddha here forbids activities such as sacrifice of human blood to the gods, fire-oblation, auguries and so forth, which are the 'low' activities practised by Brahmins with no benefit. See also *Brahma-jala Sutta*, (Burma 1978:4,55).

Kutadanta Sutta. The Brahmin Kutadanta ('Sharp-toothed') went to see the Buddha for advice on how best to conduct the sacrifice: the Buddha recounted the story of King Mahavijita who conducted his ceremony with no loss of life of sacrificial animals and no hardship on anyone, where everyone cooperated willingly. When Kutadanta asks him if there was any sacrifice which could be made with little trouble, but with fruitful results, the Buddha suggested in order of ranking: first, offering requisites to monks of high morality; second, donating a monastery to the order; third, going to refuge in the three jewels; fourth, observe the five precepts; and finally, sixth and most noble, is to go forth from homelife leading to concentration and the highest knowledge – this sacrifice excels all other sacrifices. Here, wisdom is 'less difficult and less troublesome, but bearing greater fruit and more advantages than the sacrifices conducted by Brahmins.' (Vajirañña 1975:12).

Amagandha-Sutta, Sutta-Nipata (KN). The ascetic Tissa demands Buddha Kassapa (Brahmin by birth) answers to the uncleanness of diet, to which Kassapa says: 'Abstaining from fish or flesh, nakedness, shaving of the head, wearing the hair matted, smearing with ashes, wearing rough deer skins, attending the sacrificial fire, all the various penances performed for immortality, neither incantations, oblations, sacrifices nor observing seasonal feasts, will cleanse a man who has not overcome his doubt.' *Five Nikayas* 1977:195).

Brahmana-dhammika Sutta, Sutta-nipata. Here the Buddha condemns sacrificial cults at the heart of Vedic ritual and the taking of life. Ko Lei (1991:99).

⁴ Shwe Aung (1995:39).

⁵ Collins (1982:213).

The second phase, namely the transformation from *tapa* to *bhavana* has been described by Steven Collins as representing yet a further development in the internalization of sacrifice.

The social function of the irrationality of final *nibbana* is, I would suggest, the preservation of the Buddhist tradition as an Indian religious system separate from, and in certain crucial respects opposed to, the Brahmanical one. Just as socially the Buddhist tradition has provided an alternative to the Brahmanical religion of the sacrifice, with its supposed cosmic significance, so, too, psychologically Buddhism has refused to recognize the microcosmic correlated of the sacrifice in Brahmanical thought, the 'self' or 'person' within. The absolute indescribability of *nirvana*, along with its classification as *anatta*, 'not-self', has helped to keep the separation intact, precisely because of the impossibility of mutual discourse.¹

Collins proceeds to argue that the reversal in Buddhism of the sacrificial fire-imagery is linked to the Brahmanic concept of non-self.

The opposition between Buddhist and Brahmanical ideas is expressed clearly and symbolically by the reversal of fire-imagery. For Brahmanical thought, the fire of the cosmos-sacrifice-self is the focus of all value; virtuoso practice to gain 'release' involves burning off the distracting bodily and mental accretions to this inner self by the heat of asceticism (*tapas*). For Buddhism it is the cooling of the fire of craving by the detached practice of the Middle Way between sensual indulgence and asceticism which is the task of the virtuoso search. Thus, both the fire of desire, and the fire of life-in-*samsara*, go out. Throughout Buddhist thought, we must recognize this reaction of opposition to Brahmanical ideas and practices; the denial of self (*atman*) is the most fundamental example, and symbol, of this attitude.²

Because of different ideas about *loka* and sacrifice, there is no longer a need, as in Brahmanism, to undergo the 'three births ritual' of a man symbolic to the sacrifice in order to attain to the sacred *loka*. Here, 'the sacred reality of [Brahmanic] ritual [as gaining entry into ritually sacred *loka*] is replaced by states of consciousness attained temporarily in [mental culture]'.³ Also, the states of consciousness developed temporarily during one's life, are identified with the same states that are attained at the end of one's life. In other words, it is through mental culture, and not sacrifice, that one attains the powers of cosmic travel, and even the attainment of *nibbana* in this very life. The efficacy of ritual generally (including sacrifice) in making the cosmos work is entirely attained in the act of mental culture itself. *Vipassana* extinguishes the fire of craving within in a way that permits a transcending of the entire cosmological system in the attainment of *nibbana*.

What I argue in this book, however, is that we are dealing with a real world and a real political context – we are not just dealing with philosophical texts. Though the mental culture of politics begins with an inward turn, once it becomes externalized through a new political philosophy, the insight contemplative act continues, like the sacrificial act prescribed in the Vedas, to fulfil its original political function as a fire sacrifice responsible for restoring order to the universe.⁴ Furthermore, the continued *samadhic* basis upon which *vipassana* attainments rest have, in themselves, continued political significance since these permit identities to persist in the conventional sense.

The prevailing meaning of the Brahmanic idea of sacrifice in the *Sutta-Pitaka*, the sayings of the Buddha, has been in terms of 'the Great Charity' [*Maha-Dana*], i.e. the gift or oblation to the monastic order. This represents charity from the lay person's point of view as an act difficult to perform. It is difficult to successfully offer 'without regret', 'without attachment' and 'with the right aims'. Often, when Burmese monks preach they will emphasize not so much the social benefits of the gift to the monastic order (how monks will enjoy it, and so on), but more the great mental struggle that a donor must go through if the donation is to be performed with any sense of perfection. In the ritual of the gift, this struggle will include the loving-kindness meditation (*metta-bhavana*) at the water libation ceremony marking the formal relinquishment of the gift, and the subsequent distribution of merit to all planes of existence. This is where Spiro's view of Burmese society, as based on Kammatic Buddhism, fails. Today, in Burma, with the economic circumstances as they are, the donor is aware more than ever before of the difficulties surrounding the successful accomplishment of a donation, and is encouraged to practise mental culture and to reflect on the impermanence of their existence.

Masefield has argued that it is not just the donors who perform a sacrifice, but that his readings of the Buddhist texts support the view that the recipients of charity, namely the Buddha and the Buddhist saints, may themselves also be regarded as representing the sacrifice.⁵ They were for all intents and purposes a particular class of Brahmin who managed to be more responsive to the needs of the people than caste Brahmins.⁶ They perpetuated many Brahmin

¹ Collins (1982:41–84).

² Collins (1982:84).

³ Collins (1982:48).

⁴ *Adittapariyaya-sutta, Samyutta Sutta*. The Fire Sermon was delivered to one thousand ex-fire-worshipping ascetics who had come to be ordained as monks under the Buddha. Here the Buddha explains how all six senses burn with the fire of lust, hate, and ignorance; with the fires of birth, ageing and death; with the fires of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair; that one's consciousness that arises in relation to one's senses also burn. The Buddha then proceeded to say that, 'when a bhikkhu who has practised the dhamma develops Vipassana Insight and perceives that each of the bases is burning, he becomes disenchanted with it ... craving fades away ... with the fading of craving, he is liberated ... when liberated there is knowledge that he is liberated' (Ko Lei 1991:99).

⁵ Masefield (1986:156).

⁶ There is considerable emphasis on elevation to Brahmanic status in the rituals of novitiation of boys into the monastic order,

practices, though with different meanings. He argues that, ‘the *savakasangha* [the congregation of the eight aryas] – and particularly the Buddha – were looked upon as Agni in both his aspects as fire and the sun’; and that the significance of the spontaneous combustibility of food offerings and the bodies of the holy ones, continue to perpetuate this ideal of sacrifice.¹ It should also be noted that the requisite tools for sacrifice (*pa-reik-hka-ra* [prkḥ], P. *parikkhara* [prkḥ]), have in Buddhism been reinterpreted as the monks’ Eight Requisites.

Traditions of mental culture appear to maintain the institutional relevance, or fit into the ritual niche, of sacrificial offerings in the old political traditions, but are now adapted to a new context. Until the last century, Burmese monarchy worked by means of advice from the Brahmanic community specially kept at the court for that purpose. They were specialists in Brahmanic sacrifice that underpinned the continuation and manipulation of the mundane world (*loka*). Mindon attempted to turn his new capital Mandalay into a city state supreme in the Buddhist practice of the forest tradition, which also signalled a change in balance: it represents a relatively greater emphasis on ‘high Buddhism’, in particular *vipassana*, over Brahmanism.² The view that a *vipassana* understanding would contribute to the prosperity of the country was reasserted in the U Nu period. Now once again, it resurfaces in the culture of post-military politics.

That ‘mental culture’ is perceived as aiding the restoration of cosmological and political imbalance may be comprehended if we understand it as a ritual of sacrifice. As Nyanaponika put it:

A man with a meditative mind lives at peace with himself, and with the world. No harm or violence will issue from him. The peace and purity he radiates, will have conquering power and be a blessing to the world. He will be a positive factor in society even if he lives in seclusion and silence.³

It is this politically charged conquering power and intense heat of contemplative silence that Weber misapprehended in his analysis of Buddhism as an essentially world-denying religion.

2. The role of mental culture in the world-origin myth

In Burmese origin myths there is a direct correlation between the deterioration of mental processes and the decline of worlds. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that Buddha history is the history of the cosmology, for cosmologies come into being and end within the period of manifestation of new Buddhas.

The best-known myth, with which most legal and historical works start, concerns that of the origin of our current world, humankind, society and government.⁴ Entry into the Brahma planes of existence, which are the twenty uppermost cosmological planes, is attained by means of *jhana* as the result of concentration meditation (*samatha*), a technique that includes *brahma-vihara* or *byahma-so tayà*. The Byahmanas who live there are presumed to be there exactly because they were successful in their concentration meditation, for ‘without *Jhana* there is no rebirth in the Brahma-world’.⁵

The top realms (nos 21–31), corresponding to the attainment of the fourth *jhana* up to the fourth formless *jhana*, are not subject to destruction when the world-system is destroyed. The other planes are destroyed by wind (nos 18–20, third *jhana*), by water (nos 14–17, second *jhana*), and by fire (nos 12–13, first *jhana*) respectively. The lower eleven planes, including the realms of the devas and the human realm, are destroyed more readily.

With the longest life-spans in the Byahma realms, within the cosmology *jhanas* provide refuge from disaster. They provide an extension of life to bridge certain events deemed undesirable (e.g. disasters deemed to happen in some realms). They also permit control over rebirth into realms that are desirable (e.g. the appearance of a Buddha). Therefore, these heavens provide a depository for future worlds, with continuity of life and the longest memory. They are a reservoir of occult knowledge. This is why concentration meditators often attempt to tap into these realms for ancient knowledge hoping to gain unusual powers.

According to myth, the world is destroyed by natural disasters. However, these disasters are brought on directly by a-meritorious and immoral behaviour brought about by the mental defilements of greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), and craving (*tanha*), which arise when the three ‘Buddha periods’ [būēkt] (of his birth, authority and his sphere) diminish in influence in the world. In Burmese, Buddhas, like kings ‘rule [worlds]’, i.e. it is possible to speak of ‘Buddha rule’ [būē kt] just as it is possible to speak of ‘king’s rule’ [Bāē kt]. At this time, human beings begin to live shorter and shorter lives. Fire destroys all that has material manifestation. This link between natural

including the use of the Brahmanic cord (Houtman 1984).

¹ Furthermore, the burying of Buddha and saintly relics under the pagodas are a new claim to a more universal domain than that afforded by ordinary human sacrifice employed in the founding of towns and cities, and pagoda building is a major element in Burmese strategies of warfare and consolidation of power even today.

² On Mindon’s attitudes to Brahmanic notions of auspiciousness see *Mangala Sutta* in part I of this book.

³ Nyanaponika. ‘Right protection’. *Light of the Dhamma*, II, No 1, November 1953. Cited in King (1964:154).

⁴ See *Manugye* 5–8, *Manu Wunana* 4–6, *Hman-nan* 1:29–34; *Mahayazawin* 1:5–14. This account originally occurs in canonical Buddhist texts such as *Aggañña Suttanta* (DN) and, without the social contract, in some of the jatakas. It is also found in Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (Pe Maung Tin 1921–25:480–88).

⁵ *Visuddhimagga* XIII, Pe Maung Tin (pp 481–82)

disaster and mental defilements on the part of the inhabitants of the world is evident in the classification of the Three Disasters [**kəp̃ p̃a**], two of which, namely drought and war, are attributed to greed and anger respectively, and lead to low forms of rebirth as a ghost and in hell respectively.¹

Once the earth recovered from the ravages of natural disasters, Byahmanas descended from the higher heavens (in particular no. 17) upon expiry of their *kamma*. They licked a tasty earth which had grown, developed craving [**t̃%h**], and as a result they lost their self-illumination. Having lost their radiance, they became frightened of the dark. The sun and moon rose, as did stars, constellations and time.

Because their spiritual power could no longer sustain them (unlike Byahmanas), they were in need of more than spiritual food [**nt̃qza**],² i.e. mere nutritive essence suitable for spirits without material manifestation, and so they began to partake of solid food (the thought itself was no longer sufficient), growing of food (food no longer grew spontaneously), preparation of food (food became too coarse and could no longer be eaten raw), the need to work arose (food had to be cultivated and cooked), gender differentiation occurred (crudeness of food led to openings in the body to evacuate bodily waste), sexual desire arose (brought about by prolonged viewing of the material difference between the sexes), and finally, differences in commitment to work (laziness of some leads to hoarding), property (the need to hide in houses while having sex), boundaries (to protect property), and the emotion of greed arose to accumulate property and satisfy the senses.

Hence, crime evolved through property and greed. Thus, there evolved the need to elect government and officers of the law who could mediate in disputes and guide the people to good behaviour, and who would punish those who ought to be punished. In return, the people would provide one-tenth of their rice. It is often commented that, among the Indian religions of that time, only in Buddhism evolved this concept of social contract between a people and their rulers.

This king was known as Mahasamata, or Elected One, who was also the future Buddha.³ He had attainment in moral virtue [**q̃l**], a one-pointed mind [**q̃mad̃**] and understanding [**pva**]. Though at the time true understanding was supposedly not available to the first human beings as there were no Buddhist teachings,⁴ and we are referring here mainly to the practice of *tapas* [C32], today the latter two qualities, which are crucially dependent on the first, are commonly interpreted as the result of successful ‘concentration meditation’ (*samatha*) and ‘insight contemplation’ (*vipassana*) respectively. King Thibaw, the last king of Burma, was held to be 334,571st in line of succession from Mahasamata.⁵ King Mindon, the penultimate king, was exhorted at his coronation (*abhiseka*) ceremony to ‘please act always as the good and righteous kings from Mahasammata at the beginning of the world onwards’.⁶ The Burmese royal line of descent, thus primarily serves to cope with the mental defilements that arose as the result of the appearance of the human body and the desire and greed that is associated with bodily existence.

However, parallel to the institutionalization of government there was another development, namely the attempt, rather than attempting to restore order by electing a king, simply to totally renounce from the wrongs perpetrated in society of man into the state of homelessness.⁷ ‘Good’ and ‘virtuous’ people spontaneously renounced this immoral and degenerate human society to retreat into the forest. They attempted to return to the original pre-human *jhana* state of Byahmana, which was the best state attainable at a time when the Buddha period had expired.

At that time some men were thieves, some liars, some revilers, some punishers. Unseemly practices had become common. Men who were replete with virtue [**q̃l**], concentration [**q̃mad̃**] and wisdom [**SF a**],⁸ that they might expel⁹ these ameritorious practices [̃ : **ḡ ḡ MyakMangTa ñp̃h**] made small huts of leaves and branches in the jungle, and lived there, supporting themselves by begging in towns and villages which were under a king.

¹ The Three Disasters: (1) greed tends to cause draught and lead to rebirth in the realm of ghosts, (2) anger tends to results from a lack of loving-kindness (*metta*), which in turn results in killing through warfare and rebirth in the hells, and (3) illness (not caused by a mental defilement) tends to lead to the more pleasant abodes of the nats. (Awbatha 1975:119–20).

² See *Manugye* p 6, where the transition from deity to material human being is marked by the need to go beyond partaking of mere *awza* essence.

³ In the English *Visudhimagga* he is indicated as ‘the future Buddha’. However, this is not the case in the Mahasi (1979, Vol III: 140) Burmese rendering, and *Manugye* where he is referred to as a less definite Buddha-to-be. Nevertheless, Gautama Buddha is considered to be born in the lineage of Mahasamata (Mingun 1990–96, 2, 1:7, 296; 4:131). Contemporary reference to ‘President’ in Burmese is this same term, *tha-ma-dá* [**q̃m̃t̃**].

⁴ Goyal (1987:323) notes that through this myth explained are ‘the institutions of civilization (including caste, the Vedic religion, and especially the practice of retiring from the world to escape its evils) ...’.

⁵ Ni Ni Myint (1983:41).

⁶ Yi Yi (1961:41).

⁷ Wandering homelessly is *niketa-sayana* and one who is homelessness is *niketa-vāsin*. My Burmese friends, upon reading this passage, suggest that at this time also the search for refuge into spirits and the like arose. Indeed, *Ba-lí nat-sa pu-zaw-ni* mentions that *Shwei-bon Neik-dan* and *Meg-ká-dei-wá linka* attribute the origin of spirit propitiation to the time of the Mahathamada at the beginning of the world. The nat had caves placed at the four corners of the town where the guardians of the city lived.

⁸ Richardson translates this as ‘full of good sentiments and wisdom’ but it is necessary to be more specific here.

⁹ ‘Expel’ is a more appropriate translation for the active verb **kTa** **m̃an** Richardson’s ‘be rid of’.

Men who so put away evil practices, were called Byamana or Brahmins.¹

It is at the low-point of moral behaviour and the pending threat of natural disaster that the practices leading to the attainment of *jhana* are called for most, for as we have already noted, they provide a refuge even outside the Buddha period.² The state of *jhana* arrests the disturbance of the mental defilements so that a clarity of perception may be attained without inhibition. This is what inheres in the Burmese ironic expression, when faced with a person's impossibly bad behaviour, 'this is good for meditation' [ကမ္ပာနကဗြာဏကဗျာ].

Jhana attainments are closely associated with the most important concepts of (supernatural) power in the Burmese language, including: *tan-gò*,³ *theik-dí*,⁴ *it-dí*,⁵ and *a-beik-nyan*.⁶ Political leaders, doctors and legal minds who cannot command these powers themselves need a hermit, monk or Brahmin who has attained them.

Buddhas are conceived as 'reigning' over world-systems by virtue of their superior mental processes; as their minds are undefiled, they modify nature for the good of all creatures, and accomplish good things in this world by having a good influence with little or no need for authority. As long as their teachings and practices prevail, derived from their intensive mental culture, then the world system will not be destroyed. Their teachings encourage and help perpetuate the correct mental processes which permit an orderly universe. The degree of disappearance of the Buddha's teachings is often associated with a decreased age at which people marry, human lifespan generally and also with calamities, for without Buddhist teachings which instruct people to practically uproot their mental defilements, there can be no order in this world. Furthermore, worship of those with advanced attainment in the Buddha's teachings, and in particular arahats, is often associated with the manipulation of weather-related phenomena (as in the worship of the arahat Shin Upagupta) and misfortune (as in the Nine Hpaya Ritual [ဗုဒ္ဓရှင်တော်စာပေ] which focus on the Buddha and the nine arahats).

3. Mental culture in Manu's legal tradition

The *Manu-gye* describes how the law is discovered by the earliest judge known as Manu. As the result of his mistaken judgment in a legal question concerning the ownership of a cucumber that straddled two gardens, he renounces this life as a judge to become a hermit in recognition of his own inadequate knowledge of the law. Practising

¹ *Manu-gye*, vol. 1 in Richardson (1847:8-9).

² It is of interest that in the *Visudhimagga* the origin of the world is recounted in the context of the last chapter on higher knowledge through *samatha*, namely on clairaudience (*dibba-sota-dhatu*). Sentient beings are warned by the devas of impending natural disaster who come out and shout:

'Masters! develop love, develop pity, develop sympathy, develop equanimity. Support your mother, support your father. give respect to the seniors of the family.' Hearing their exhortation, men and fairies generally, moved by anxiety, become gentle in heart towards one another, do meritorious deeds of love, and so on, and are reborn in the deva-world. There, hearing heavenly ambrosia, they do the preliminary work in the air-device and attain to *Jhana*. Others are reborn in the deva-world owing to karma of successive experience, without which, indeed, no being passes to and fro in the round of existence. There in the deva-world they also attain to *Jhana*. Thus all are reborn in the Brahma-world by means of *Jhana* attained in the deva-world (Pe Maung Tin 1921–25:482).

³ *Ta-gò* [တဂွံ], 'power' or 'potency' (as in medicine [ကပဉ်]). The ten *t.* are often referred to as the ten *iddhi*. In *Visudhimagga* it is said about *tan-gò* as the last of the 10 impediments [တဂွံတရား]:

'Psychic powers' [တဂွံ] are those of an average man. Like a child lying on its back and like tender corn it is difficult to manage. It is broken by the slightest thing. Its is an impediment to insight [ဓိတိ], but not to concentration [သမာဓိ], because it ought to be obtained when concentration is obtained. Therefore one who desires insight should cut off the impediment of psychic powers, but another man only the remaining impediments.' (Mahasi 1979, 1:305–5; Pe Maung Tin 1921–25:113).

⁴ *Theik-dí* [တီကီ], P and Vedic *siddhi*, has two distinct meanings; 1. 'accomplishing fully (one's desires)' [တီကီအောင်မြင်စွာ], 2. 'the splendid and glorious powers which permit accomplishment of one's goals' [တီကီအောင်မြင်စွာအောင်မြင်စွာ], i.e. magical power. Of the latter usually ten types are given.

⁵ *It-dí* [အီတီ], translated into Burmese as 'power' [တဂွံ], P. *iddhi* 'psychic power'; Vedic *ṛddhi*, from *ardh*, 'to prosper'. B: 'the power to create' [တဂွံအောင်မြင်စွာ]. Rhys Davids & Stede (1921–25:120) write that 'there is no single word in English for *Iddhi*, as the idea is unknown in Europe', and suggest that 'its main sense seems to be "potency"'. Sometimes this concept is used interchangeably with *siddhi* or *abhiñña*.

⁶ *A-beik-nyan* [အပေဉ်ယံ], from P *abhiñña* [အပေဉ်ယံ] 'superknowledge' or 'full understanding'. Though primarily glossed as meaning 'knowledge' (ii below), Burmese use in everyday language follows, for the most part, its meaning of knowledge (in the sense of supernormal power) derived from the attainment of *jhanas* in *samatha* meditation. Though rarely used in the older Buddhist texts, in the canonical commentaries (in the Canon), in later 5th century AD commentaries, and in medieval and modern Pali it means nine times out of ten type i).

(i) *abhiñña* of six types (a list only given in D. III.281), all of which are the powers which attempt to overcome the limitations in the dimension of time, but more particularly space, of one's existence in this world.

(ii) a special knowledge produced by a particular state of mind which includes other benefits such as serenity, special wisdom and the attainment of nibbana. It is dependent on preconditions, namely: the path (S. v.421, Vin. 1.10, S. v.179), the path with best knowledge and full emancipation (A. v.238), the four applications of mindfulness (S. v.179), and the four steps to *iddhi* (S. v.255). (Wrong-doing, priestly superstitions, vain speculations, are presented as detracting from development of *abhiñña*, D. III.131, A. III.325 sq. and V.216).

concentration meditation [q̄mT] he travels the world system in a state of *jhana* bliss, which permits him to fly freely from place to place. While travelling like this, he discovers the true laws written on the walls of the universe which he takes back to the people. From these, supposedly, the Burmese laws were derived.

After his renunciation he becomes known in the fullest sense as ‘Lord hermit who is named Manu and who is true son of the king of Byahmas’ [b̄h̄m̄c̄f̄ q̄a:rc̄P̄s̄q̄ax̄m̄N̄ūv̄āq̄aR̄t̄k̄eq̄]. His superior knowledge of the law and his status as ‘son of the king of Byahmas’ is directly related to his attainment of the *jhana*.

Thus, there is a strong correlation between *samatha*, the Byahma realm, memory of the past and legal judgment. This underpins concepts of territorial rights and state authority.

4. Mindlessly spilt honey drop causes destruction of Benaris

If the attainment of a one-pointed mind is the attribute of a Byahmana (both as a heavenly being and as a renouncer), a good king and a good judge, absence of this attribute causes the downfall of entire kingdoms.

In the concluding part of *Manugye*, there is an account of how the kingdom of Benaris fell in an apparently innocent dispute over ‘a single drop of honey’.¹ King Brahmadat, its ruler, had carelessly let a honey drop fall onto a white cloth from his table while in conversation with a Brahmin. Neither the Brahmin nor the king cleaned it up. Starting with a fly eating the honey, it ends up with the dog attacking the cat that ate the rat that ate the lizard that ate the spider that ate the fly. Neither the king nor the Brahmin interceded. Eventually, the owners of the dog and cat came into dispute, causing dissension in the royal family and bringing down the kingdom.

The concept for ‘mindlessly’ here is [^]eNāp̄q̄v̄ which is often used jointly with ‘one-pointed mind’ (*samadhi*),² a characteristic of concentration meditation. Mindlessness is also the opposite of the state of mind of ‘awareness’ and ‘mindfulness’ [q̄t̄] stressed in the *vipassana* traditions practised by the NLD leadership. In short, a king lacking in the state of mind brought forth by meditative practice can bring down a kingdom.

5. Royal discipline requires mental culture

There is a significant overlap between royal discipline and mental culture. Out of the Ten Royal Duties [V̄ch̄oM̄Yad̄oSal̄V̄t̄k̄ āv̄v̄v̄M̄ḡ: ōp̄m̄noSal̄] there is one in particular that pertains to attainment in mental culture, namely no. 6, ‘austerity’ or *tapas* [t̄p̄m̄C32].³ This practice, observed in particular by the teachers Alara and Udaka of Siddharta as a *bodhisattva* until he found the *vipassana* method to become a Buddha,⁴ is extremely close to the practice of *samatha*, which is similarly defined as suspending the impurities in one's being. Today, these are still practised by hermits who are mythically represented in opposition, or in support of, royal authority.⁵

In Burmese history, kings were commonly conceived of as *bodhisattva* who strive for enlightenment through the attainment of the Ten Perfections (*parami*). In linking kingship with imminent Buddhahood, mental culture has significant political and social implications.

6. The mandala – enlightenment and political structures

Mental culture is conceived of as affecting the course of nature and the political order. The Buddha's attainment of enlightenment had a profound effect on the entire universe, ‘causing all the ten thousand world systems to vibrate and resound’, and as a result of which ‘the whole of the ten thousand world systems reached the height of beauty’, with flowers and fruits growing out of season.⁶

With such great effects on nature, it is no surprise that his enlightenment should also have significant effects on the political order of the kingdom he was in at the time and that of neighbouring kingdoms. As Sarkisyanz has argued, both Buddha and king orient themselves and their powers towards the same ideal cosmological centre.⁷

The great influence of enlightenment on political order is evident from the way enlightenment is brought into Burmese history. After referring to the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment (by means of *vipassana*) the Burmese chronicle *Glass Palace Chronicle* (§35:50, §41:62)⁸ refers to demarcated regions which arose surrounding the place of

¹ Sal̄MA: k̄m̄ āb̄s̄f̄ b̄ō m̄F̄m̄ ‘drop of honey ruins the whole country’ (*JBR* 1915, V, 1:23). Htin Aung (1962:70) ‘A kingdom lost for a drop of honey’.

² The concept q̄maDi [^]eNāp̄q̄v̄ which brings the two terms together, really means ‘the ability to control oneself in comportment’ or, as Rhys Davids put it in the Pali dictionary, ‘the faculty of concentration’.

³ The practice of *tapa* [t̄p̄t̄p̄m̄] usually translated as ‘austerity’ [k̄īk̄k̄q̄āk̄t̄]. One who practises it is known as Pali *tapassin* [t̄p̄ōē], ‘a practitioner who exercises the torment of the impurities’ [k̄ēl̄ q̄ak̄īp̄h̄ās̄eq̄āk̄t̄k̄k̄t̄q̄] or a ‘hermit’ [r̄eq̄] (Htūn Myīn 1968:87).

⁴ Shwe Aung (1995:39).

⁵ The hermit is a common theme in Burmese plays in their role opposite the king, but it is also occurs in Ne Win's biography and episodes of U Nu's life as a validation of their rule. Their presence seems to function as an independent and objective confirmation of their mandate to rule.

⁶ Mingun (1990–96, 2, 1:275).

⁷ Sarkisyanz (1965:82–86).

⁸ For a similar account, see also *Mahayazawin* 46, p 36.

[Ngũgĩ 1981: 163] Various lists are subsequently given of regions which thus arose, including the sixteen provinces, the twenty-one provinces, the twenty countries, as well as various royal lineages.

Mara is conceived of as intent on preventing enlightenment and invading the Bodhi-mandala, but due to the exceptional qualities of the Buddha, he was 'unable to enter the immediate vicinity of the Maha Bodhi Tree (Maha Bodhi *mandala*).'² Once his enlightenment was attained, as he himself responded to Mara, '... when I have attained the all-knowing truths, I shall be triumphant over the regions of the world.'³ In this context the enlightened and the right-viewed hold the cosmological centre ground, as opposed to the wrong-viewed adherents of Mara-style intrigues who are forced to occupy the margins in the distribution of power.

7. Vipassana and the founding of the Burmese State

The meeting is described as follows:

Shin Arahan arrived in the vicinity of Pagan and was discovered in his forest dwelling by a hunter. The hunter who had never before seen such a strange creature with a shaven head and a yellow robe thought he was some kind of spirit and took him to the king, Anawratha. Shin Arahan naturally sat down on the throne, as it was the highest seat, and the king thought: 'This man is peaceful, in this man there is the essential thing. He is sitting down on the best seat, surely he must be the best being.' The king asked the visitor to tell him where he came from and was told that he came from the place where the Order lived and that the Buddha was his teacher. Then Shin Arahan gave the king the teaching on mindfulness (*appamada*), teaching him the same doctrine Nigrodha had given Emperor Asoka when he was converted. Shin Arahan then told the monarch that the Buddha had passed into Parinibbana, but that his teaching, the Dhamma, enshrined in the Tipitaka, and the two-fold Sangha consisting of those who possessed absolute knowledge and those who possessed conventional knowledge, remained.⁶

Shin Arahan is alleged to have been a *yahanda*, and so his *vipassana* attainment was supposedly complete. He preached to the citizens of Pagan, and Anawratha left behind clay tablets with images of the Buddha, the king's name and Pali and Sanskrit verses in which he expressed his aspiration, 'through this may I obtain the path to Nibbana when Metteva is awakened'.

It should not be thought that this is just an ancient myth with no contemporary relevance, for Shwe Aung concludes his book with a long section on the renovation of Htee-ta-hsaung Pagoda at Taung-pya village, near Pagan, where Shin Araham is thought to have gained *pari-nibbana* as a full *yahanda*. The Pakkoku Sayadaw had made a search for it lasting more than 60 years beginning in 1929, and today Shin Araham's relics are enshrined in this renovated shrine. Furthermore, there is mention that 'the great ... nationalism and patriotism [that] had developed in the people of Bagan' was 'the result of the teachings and the leadership of Shin Araham and the samgha'. It was only through Shin Araham's 'great insight' that Anawratha and he met. Hence Shin Araham and the Ariva that followed him were 'the

¹ Bāw-dī man-daing [kU^hPəVl̥ ɕam means four distinct things: (i) the clear ground under the bodhi tree, the best place for enlightenment (B-B translates this into Pali as kU^hPəVl̥ ḥ); (ii) ‘to have arrived at a clear place by means of the power of enlightened intelligence’ [kU^hPə ɲ] (iii) ‘centre of a cosmological and political order’ (Htūn Myin 1968:257); (iv) in later canonical and post-canonical literature, ‘the spot (or “throne”’, on which the Buddha attained enlightenment’ (Rhys Davids & Stede 1921–25:491).

² Mingun (1990–96,2,1:218)

³ *Mahavastu*, II, 324: transl. Jones, Vol. II, pp 301f; Sarkisvanz (1965:64).

⁴ I. April 1921, p. 6.

⁵ "Inuskayiklupka:er:™anx 1952x pp 5, 25.

⁶ *Buddhism in Myanmar, a short history*. Roger Bischoff. Wheel Publication No. 399/401. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

8. The powers of the universal monarch

The physical and outward qualities of universal kings are virtually indistinguishable from those of universal Buddhas. In this concept, the cultivation of the ten ethical qualities of the king involved 'a long and strict regimen of deep meditation and intense and constant introspection'. The symbols of the Cakkavartin were acquired 'through a mystic contemplation and communion and the source of all his charismatic power is Dhamma itself'.³ His chief emblem, the wheel, is a mystical symbol likened to the disc of the sun.

The notion exists that restoration of political order must precede the advent of the next Buddha. During the life before Gautama attained Buddhahood, he was a universal king.⁶ Many Burmese historical personalities have been proclaimed as, or expressed the desire to be, *kakkavatti* in the past.⁷ It suffices to note here that in the Burmese classification five kinds of *kakkavatti* are recognized. The fifth type concerns those who have attained superior knowledge through *samatha* meditation and 'worldly knowledge' (*loki panna*).

a) the skills of transforming [; o ʒəpəŋk a-m] elements such as lead [; ʃ, iron [ʃ n mercury [ʃpəŋ and copper [k: ʃ] into precious silver and gold alchemic stones by means of the mind [kʷə-ʷkəʷX pəŋ ʒəpəŋk a-m] or

b) the ability to enter the earth [kʷə ʃ] and fly in the sky [ʷə ʃ] or

c) the ability to enter the earth [kʷə ʃ] and fly in the sky [ʷə ʃ] by means of the powers [Məŋ] derived from mundane medicine [kʷə ʃə], such as the wonderful *gahta*, *mandan*, *mantarà*, *in*, *aing*, *hkàhlè*, *lethpwé*. It refers to the collection of mundane *weikza* [kʷə ʃə] and *maw-hsaya* [kʷə ʃə], who can thus make happen what they want, and who thereby become *gandari* universal kings ‘known as *thama payàwqá itdí wádúná sekkayaza*’ [ʷə ʃə x ʃə] A: ʷə ʃə; c: ʷə ʃə; d: ʷə ʃə; e: ʷə ʃə; f: ʷə ʃə; g: ʷə ʃə; h: ʷə ʃə; i: ʷə ʃə; j: ʷə ʃə; k: ʷə ʃə; l: ʷə ʃə; m: ʷə ʃə; n: ʷə ʃə; o: ʷə ʃə; p: ʷə ʃə; q: ʷə ʃə; r: ʷə ʃə; s: ʷə ʃə; t: ʷə ʃə; u: ʷə ʃə; v: ʷə ʃə; w: ʷə ʃə; x: ʷə ʃə; y: ʷə ʃə; z: ʷə ʃə.

There is a confluence between ideas about Burman ethnic identity and appropriate mental culture for Burmese people. For example, dictionary compilers such as Hok Sein put the derivation for both Myanmar [mɪnma] and Burma [bma] as Brahma [baha].⁸ This Brahma should be taken to mean the brahma of the Brahma realms, the highest realms

⁸ Hok Sein (1978).

of the cosmology.¹

Myanmar [mɪnˈma] and *Bama* [bma], the words for Burma, are popularly interpreted as having derived from Brahma [bɒhɪ]. This has, for example, been entered in the Burmese Encyclopaedia.² It is accepted in numerous books and in particular in ideological and nationalist treatises, for example, on warfare.³ Thahkin Kodawhmaing (Saya Lun) wrote a series of articles entitled ‘A chapter in royal chronicle history’ [razwɛˈAknɔ̃<].⁴ In this he argued that prior to literary history, the Burmese were known in Arakanese history as ‘those who derive from the lineage of the first Brahma nats’.⁵

Brahma has at least three meanings in Burmese Buddhism. First, it is used to designate the realms from which heavenly beings migrated at the beginning of this world-system to become human beings. Second, it designates beings who renounced society into the forest prior to the election of the *thamada*. Third, in Buddhism Brahma is associated with a particular kind of ethics (see the citation from *Dhammapada* below).

In other words, it is a term closely related to the beginnings of human society prior to material differentiation between individuals and groups, and prior to politics. This term in turn, as has already been noted, is closely associated with the attainment of *jhana* through *samatha* meditation and the practice of *byama-so tayà*. These in turn, are associated with the political concept of national unity through harmony [vɪˈvɛr], prior to political differentiation because of greed.

In *Thahkin Tika*, Kodawhmaing furthermore traces the meaning and nature of the Dobama movement in terms of its ultimate referent of Burmese (Bama) as derived from Brahma.⁶ He analyses a whole range of meanings to do with Dobama: the meaning of the Dobama concept, the Dobama song, the meaning of ‘us’ (dó tɔ̃ what we call Brahma, ways of reading (pronouncing) Brahma, a question posed by Manle Sayadaw, the reply by (Zedawun?) Mingun Sayadaw, evidence from the Pagan Chronicle on Myanma, the concept of Myanma as referred to by Shin Okkan, the concept Myanmar from the Handbook of Words [ewahart ɛ̃kaŋkɪnɪ], Salin Sayadaw's use of Brahma, the transposition between Bama and Byahma, and about *Bama* as used in *Padasodhana ganthi* [pɛdɛqɔ̃ŋg< kɪnɪ]. He also mentions the Taungphila Sayadaw as having drawn attention to the relationship between Brahma and Bama.

Though modern linguists might deride such popular derivations, we must not forget that this is not a consideration held only by the Burmese, for the languages which had early contact with Burma, such as the Indian and the European romance languages, Burma was commonly referred to as Brahma. Indeed, even today in Hindi, Burma is known as *Brahma-desa*. Though further research is needed to substantiate this, it is likely that, since Portuguese contact with India predates contact with Burma, the Portuguese name for Burma, Brahma, may have been derived from early European contact through the languages of India.⁷

Furthermore, in a letter of 1759 in Dalrymple's *Oriental Repertory* (published 1791–97), the English briefly referred to Bûraghmahs and in the same source in 1767 to the country as Buraghmagh. It is not until Sangermano's time that ‘Burmese’ had come into common usage, which Sangermano nevertheless recognized as a bastardization of its Portuguese equivalent: ‘In fact in their own language their name is not Burmese, which we have borrowed from the Portuguese, but Biamma’.⁸

Hobson & Jobson identify ‘Mran-ma’ and ‘Burma’ as ‘identical with that (*Bram-ma*) by which the first and holy inhabitants of the world are styled in the (Pali) Buddhist scriptures’, and ‘*Brahma-desa* was the term applied to the country by a Singhalese monk’ familiar to the authors of the [Hobson & Jobson] Dictionary who returned to Ceylon.

There is, therefore, no doubt that this etymology was popular, and it permitted a particular conception of Burmese ethnicity. Some have played on this to work on the origins of Burmans.⁹ Thaung Lwìn looks at popular

¹ Though many are inconsistent in spelling and it is not always easy to distinguish between the different uses, a broad distinction must be made between: Brahma [bɒhɪ], the deity from whom life originated; the Brahmin officiant, renouncer or monk [bɒhɪ%], and the higher deities living in the Brahma realms [bɒhɪ]. In the popular derivation of Burma, we are referring more specifically to the latter use of the term.

² See *MSK* 10:338.

³ e.g. snɔ̃q̃mɪnɪmɪnhaɛq̃aɪmɪnhaɔ̃xɔ̃mɪnhaɪsɪvɔ̃x rɪnkõkɪnɪkɪnɪ17.

⁴ In ɔ̃tɪ ɔ̃lɪŋgɔ̃ (from January 1927 onwards).

⁵ Thus those who live in Sunaparanta Country, in Tampadipa Country, were known as ‘Brahma-kind-of-people’ because they worshiped the Brahma spirits who derived from the lineage of the Brahma nats living at the beginning of the world. In this former era they were also called ‘Byu’, ‘Pyu’ or ‘Myam-ma – Myan-ma’. That is why in old Arakanese chronicles Burma is referred to as ‘The country of the Eastern Brahmas’ (Myin Hswei 1977:363).

⁶ Kodawhmaing (1938:56–80).

⁷ For over a century between the early 16th and 17th centuries the Burmese were known in Portuguese as ‘Bramas’ or ‘Brahmans’. They were referred to as Bramas in 1538 and 1543 by the Portuguese Gaspar Lendas Correa, who chronicled the history of Portuguese India between 1512 and 1561, and by Diogo de Couto in 1606 in his *Decadas da Asia* (published in instalments between 1602–1645). They were known as Brahmas by Fernam Mendez Pinto in 1639 in his *Peregrinação de – por elle escrita* (published in 1653).

⁸ Sangermano (1893: 36); Yule & Burnel (1903:132).

⁹ See in particular Guha (1960:11), who in his poem on Tagaung, the foundation of Burma,

The first time the term Myanmar [Vɔ̃mɔ̃] is used is in 552 (1190 AD) in the Pagan inscriptions [SgkMə̃nɔ̃/ɣək: a Aa though the term had been used 90 years prior spelt in a different way [mr above ma] in Kyanzitha's 𑜋𑜢𑜤𑜰𑜫 𑜇𑜡𑜤𑜃𑜫 𑜇𑜡 In Pali this is rendered as Maranmā [Vɔ̃mɔ̃] or Myanmā [Vɔ̃mɔ̃]. Abots in former times, dating from the Taung Hpila [kMə̃nɔ̃ a 1578-1651], refer to Burma also as Bvahma [ʊb a].

Up Va a 4 d u b m r 4 d u b m s k s y a k m o m b y l e o k y a m o m m p y k : a A F M b
: a M e k m b m T e b m u a d i l u p r i V o m o n a C a e V a n e e

When we inquire into the meaning of *Bama*, we find it has changed from the Pali *brahma* [𑖀𑖢𑖦𑖫𑖜𑖞𑖪𑖱] and Sanskrit [𑖀𑖢𑖦𑖫𑖜𑖞𑖪𑖱]. As is often said, among the three creatures – humans, deities and *Byahma* [𑖀𑖢𑖦𑖫𑖜𑖞𑖪𑖱] – the word *Byahma* [𑖀𑖢𑖦𑖫𑖜𑖞𑖪𑖱] means living creatures known as *Byahma* [𑖀𑖢𑖦𑖫𑖜𑖞𑖪𑖱] up there in the sky.

In this book, I have presented the notion that practising *byama-so tayà* and dwelling in *brahma* abodes is seen as doing the right thing for the country, and as performing the highest politics irrespective of political ideology – monarchists, socialists, democrats and dictators have all sang its praises. The discourse of Burman as Byahma therefore lends credibility, at least, to the repeated assertion by politicians that to practise this makes for better Burmanness. The practice of *samatha* and the attainment of the *jhana* thereby play an important role in assertion of ethnic identity. It has historically played a major role in warfare, in the revolutionary tendencies of the 1930 Saya San rebellion (who was regarded and proclaimed *cakkavattin* by means of the above classifications of universal kings (v.c) and in Thakkin Kodawhmaing's political writings.

The third meaning of Brahmana, alluded to above, is a particular ethics. In the *Dhammapada* published by the Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana in 1993, there is an interesting chapter that would appear to provide the ultimate values of such Brahmana, namely chapter XXVI, in which Brahmana is identified with those who take mental culture to its ultimate destination and become arahat.

384. When the brahmana is well established in the two dhammas (i.e. the practice of Tranquillity and Insight Meditation), ten, in that knowing one, all fetters are destroyed.

386. Him I call a brahmana who dwells in seclusion practising Tranquillity and Insight meditation and is free from taints (of moral defilements), who has performed his duties and is free from moral intoxicants (asavas) and has reached the highest goal (arahatship). . . .

388. Because he has discarded evil he is called a 'brahmana'; because he lives calmly he is called a 'samana' and because he gets

¹ I am grateful to San San Hnin Tun for help in translating this passage.

² Thaùng Lwìn (1972:23–24).

rid of his impurities he is called a 'pabbajita'.

389. One should not strike a brahmana; a brahmana should not get angry with his assailant; it is shameful to get angry with one's assailant.

390. For a brahmana there is not benefit at all, if he does not restrain from anger to which his mind is prone. Inasmuch as the intention to harm is desisted, to that extent dukha ceases.

391. Him I call a brahmana who does no evil in deed or word or thought, who is restrained in these three respects.

392. If from somebody one should learn the Teaching of the Buddha, he should respectfully pay homage to that teacher, as a brahmin worships the sacrificial fire.

393. Not by wearing matted hair, nor by lineage, nor by caste, does one become a brahmana; only he who realises the Truth and the Dhamma is pure; he is a brahmana.

394. O foolish one! What is the use of your wearing matted hair? What is the use of your wearing a garment made of antelope skin? In you, there is a forest (of moral defilements); you can clean yourself only externally.

395. Him I call a brahmana, who wears robes made from rags (picked them up from a dust heap), who is lean with veins standing out, who meditates alone in the forest.

396. I do not call him a brahmana just because he is born from the womb of a brahmana mother. He is just a bhovadi brahmin if he is not free from moral defilements. Him I call a brahmana, who is free from moral defilements and attachments. ...

398. Him I call a brahman, who has cut the strap (of ill will), the thong (of craving) and the cord (of wrong views together with latent defilements), who has lifted the bar that fastens the door (of ignorance), and who knows the Truth.

399. Him I call a brahmana, who, without anger endures abuse, beating and being bound to whom the strength of patience is like the strength of an army.

400. Him I call a brahmana, who is free from anger, who practises austerity, who is virtuous and free from craving, who is controlled in his senses and for whom this body (i.e. existence) is the very last.

401. Him I call a brahmana, who does not cling to sensual pleasures just as water does not cling to a lotus leaf, or the mustard seed to the tip of an awl ...

403. Him I call a brahmana, who is wise and is profound in his knowledge, who knows the right way from the wrong way, and who has attained the highest goal (i.e. arahatship). ...

405. Him I call a brahmana, who has laid aside the use of force towards all beings, the perturbed as well as the unperturbed (i.e. the arahats), and who does not kill or cause others to kill.

406. Him I call a brahmana, who is not hostile to those who are hostile, who is peaceful (i.e., has laid aside the use of force) to those with weapons, and who is without attachment to objects of attachment. ...

408. Him I call a brahmana, who speaks gentle, instructive and true words, and who does not offend anyone by speech.

409. Him I call a brahmana, who, in this world, takes nothing that is not given him, be it long or short, big or small, good or bad ...

414. Him I call a brahmana, who, having traversed this dangerous swamp (of passion), this difficult road (of moral defilements), the ocean of life (samsara), and the darkness of ignorance.

Appendix 2

NLD activists: quotations and criticisms

A. Burmese/Burma

- [A1] I was born Burmese, and I am still Burmese. I have no intention to surrender my citizenship. My husband is of course a foreigner, but because of my situation he is in a pitiful situation. He accepted it now and says it is a noble thing to do for one's own country. Therefore he accepts it that I have to put aside my family responsibilities. (Interview with ASSK, pp 72-75)

See also [C19], [D6], [D7], [E10], [E19], [E32], [G2], [J3], [S1],[Y11], [Y13], [Y1], [ZC1]

B. Practice

- [B1] The greatest threats to global security today come not from the economic deficiencies of the poorest nations but from religious, racial (or tribal) and political dissensions raging in those regions where principles and practices which could reconcile the diverse instincts and aspirations of mankind have been ignored, repressed or distorted. Man-made disasters are made by dominant individuals and cliques which refuse to move beyond the autistic confines of partisan interest. (ASSK 1995:245)

C. Bhavana (mental culture, meditation, contemplation, brahma-vihara, byama-so tayà, samadhi, kammathana, samatha, sati, vipassana)

- [C1] The teachings of Buddhism which delve into the various causes of suffering and greed or lust – the passion for indulging an intemperate appetite – as the first of the Ten Impurities which stand in the way of a tranquil, wholesome state of mind. On the other hand, much value is attached to liberality or generosity, which heads such lists as the Ten Perfections of the Buddha, the Ten Virtues which should be practised and the Ten Duties of Kings. This emphasis on liberality should not be regarded as a facile endorsement of alms-giving based on canny calculation of possible benefits in the way of worldly prestige or other-worldly rewards. It is a recognition of the crucial importance of the liberal, generous spirit as an effective antidote to greed as well as a fount of virtues which engender happiness and harmony. The late Sayadaw Ashin Janaka Bivamsa of the famous Mahagandharun monastery at Amarapura taught that liberality without morality cannot really be pure. An act of charity committed for the sake of earning praise or prestige or a place in a heavenly abode, he held to be tantamount to an act of greed. (ASSK 1995:242)

- [C2] Clearly there is no inherent link between greater prosperity and greater security and peace – or even the expectation of greater peace. Both prosperity and peace are necessary for the happiness of mankind, the one to alleviate suffering, the other to promote tranquillity. Only policies that place equal importance on both will make a truly richer world, one in which men can enjoy *chantha* of the body and of the

mind. The drive for economic progress needs to be tempered with an awareness of the dangers of greed and selfishness which so easily lead to narrowness and inhumanity. If peoples and nations cultivate a generous spirit which welcomes the happiness of others as an enhancement of the happiness of the self, many seemingly insoluble problems would prove less intractable. (ASSK 1995:246-47)

- [C4] 'I set my alarm clock for 4:15,' she said, describing for me a typical day under house arrest. 'But eventually I was used to getting up at that hour, and I woke up on my own. I tidied myself up: you want to feel clean and tidy when you meditate. I sat at the foot of my bed, on the mattress, in the usual position of the half-lotus. I can't manage a full lotus. I practised what we call insight meditation. I concentrated on my breathing.' (Edward Klein in *Vanity Fair*, Oct 1995, pp 44-53 in relation to her own account of the period of house arrest.)

- [C5] The Burmese are early to rise and her day dawned at 4.30 am local time with an hour of meditation, 'part of my spiritual strengthening process. I am very grateful to the Slorc that I was allowed this period in which to practise my meditation,' she says, laughing. (Interview with Steve Weinman, BBC World Services in 'Patience pragmatism pays off for "The Lady".' *Nation*, 01.11.1995).

- [C6] She laughs at the possibility of being re-arrested. 'Well, I can always go back to the meditation I have been practising all these years, and let's hope this time at a higher level' (S. Satyanarayan. 'Suu Kyi rejects idea there are different types of democracy.' *Bangkok Post*, 12.09.1995)

- [C7] Later by the time I got used to it I would get up at 4.30 am, meditated for an hour and listened to the radio for a couple of hours. There were different stations I listened to, like the BBC World Service, The VOA and the DVB. So I started the day with a full grasp of what going on in the world outside. Then I divided up the rest of the day between reading and doing house work. (ASSK interview. 'Democratic movement seem to be stronger'. *The Nation*, 02.08.1995)

- [C8] K: What about the people who were in cells around yours?

WH: As my solitary confinement went on, I witnessed three out of ten people suffer severe mental disorders. They were broken. One tried to kill himself by cutting his wrists, but he was not successful. Another man suffered attacks of paranoia. Whenever I spoke to him, he assumed that I was insulting him or injuring him in some way. Often, we had to maintain total silence so as not to disturb him. If I sang a song, he thought it was intended to harm his life, whether I sang a sad song or joyous song. He didn't have any belief in religion; he didn't have any knowledge or experience [of] solitary confinement. So gradually he went crazy. I could withstand solitary confinement due to reason, plus *meditation*. I always tried to occupy my mind with something sometimes reciting the sutras, sometimes *meditating*, sometimes keeping my consciousness on whatever I

was doing. I had to change the methods frequently to keep my mind sane. Sometimes when I went to sleep, I tried to remember vocabulary from the English language from 'A to Z,' assigning words to the letters in alphabetical order, keeping my mind as a dictionary. Gradually, I could fall asleep.

LK: Otherwise, if your mind wasn't focused on something, there was the danger that ...

WH: The danger of angry feelings about the fate I was suffering, the injustice. I was basically successful in curbing my bad feelings with my *meditations*. Since 1982, I had visited a Buddhist monastery annually during the last two weeks of December. That helped me greatly in dealing with the solitary confinement ...

LK: Can you describe the first thing you did after you were released?

WH: Right after I was released, I had to go for a medical check up. After the third year in the prison, I had suffered high blood pressure, migraines, and a numbness in my legs because of all my *sitting meditation*. When I got up, the blood didn't flow to the left leg; when I exercised, the right side of my body would sweat, but not the left. Since these were such strange symptoms, I consulted a neuro-physician. He said I also had spondylosis of the neck, which means the freezing of vital nerves that control the function of the brain. The stiffness of these nerves caused the migraines. Even when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released I was not feeling well. If I sit on the couch for a half an hour, my leg still acts up. When I stand up my knees don't always work correctly. I have to make a great effort to stretch them and walk properly ([my emphasis] Interview by Leslie Kean with U Win Htein on 9 January 1996, Rangoon. *Burma Debate*, June-July 1996).

- [C9] Just yesterday I was informed that my close friend U Win Htein, ASSK's personal assistant (imprisoned for the second time in May 1996), has been moved from Insein Prison in Rangoon, the Hilton in comparison to the freezing hell realm he is now in 500 miles north of Mandalay. He lives in leg irons 24 hours a day, pounds rock 14 of those hours, has one meal daily of uncooked roots in lukewarm water, with no medicines, blankets or clothing. His wife was allowed one visit and was unable to recognize him. He's severely sick, extremely weak and probably dying, while most likely being tortured beyond the daily horrors. U Win Htein is a beautiful man. Fifty-five years old. Father of five. A devout Buddhist and vipassana meditator with a dharma heart of gold. (Alan Clements. 'Independent essay: appeal to western Buddhists'. BurmaNet News, 30.08.1997).

- [C10] The truth and value of this Buddhist concept that Hsayadaw U Pandita took such pains to impress on me became evident during my years of house arrest. Like many of my Buddhist colleagues, I decided to put my time under detention to good use by practising meditation. It was not an easy process. I did not have a teacher and my early attempts were more than a little frustrating. There were days when I found my failure to discipline my mind in accordance with prescribed meditation practices so infuriating I felt I was doing myself more harm than good I think I would have given up for the advice of a famous Buddhist teacher, that whether or not one wanted to practise meditation, one should do so for one's own good (ASSK 1997b:9).

- [C11] In the early morning on the day of my house arrest, a hundred or so armed military personnel surrounded my house. Why they didn't immediately enter the compound I don't know, but those extra hours gave my wife and other family members the time to tear up and flush down the toilet every NLD document, letter, and address that was in my office. I prepared

myself mentally and emotionally for my arrest by sitting in meditation ... (Tin U in ASSK 1997b:215-16)

- [C12] Well, it doesn't come easily but remember that I had already spent five years in solitary prior to my imprisonment by the SLORC.

I can't say that you ever get used to prison but it is something that one does adjust to. It depends on the individual. Some break, while others use the isolation and cruel living standards to their favour. As for me, I never felt the slightest bit bored throughout the time I languished in prison. Even though I was very restricted, I had ways to keep my spirit alive. My hut within the prison compound was completely encircled with barbed wire. I was indoors all the time. And the wire was a constant reminder of how precious freedom was. Like in the Buddha's teachings, obstacles can be seen as advantages; the loss of one's freedom can inspire reflection on the preciousness of freedom. This filled me with joy.

Also, I knew from my years as a practising monk the benefits of *sati* – mindfulness meditation. As you know too, with mindfulness everything you see, hear, taste, think, and smell becomes simply an experience, without anything extra placed upon it. Just phenomena.

So in that way too, the thought of imprisonment, is seen as just a thought. It comes and goes. And without attachment to it there's no problem. It's just a thought. That's all.

... I ... observed the eight Buddhist precepts by not taking any food after midday (ASSK 1997b:217-18).

- [C13] Just do everything you do with mindfulness and there is no room in one's mind for negative thoughts. I approached every day in prison as I did as a monk in the monastery, mindfully. I tried to notice everything that occurred in my mind and body. In this way I could keep my mind free of unobstructive emotions that might otherwise upset me. This is basic dhamma. (Tin U in ASSK 1997b:223)

- [C14] It is ironic to hear the SLORC renovating and promoting Pagan as a tourist destination. The well known behaviour of the generals in renovating and visiting their 'Wish fulfilling Pagodas' in a superstitious attempt to consolidate their power bears a striking resemblance to the behaviour of the kings who originally built much of Pagan. SLORC would like to see itself as emulating the harsh 'golden times' of those ancient kings. The irony is that just as Pagan is now ruined memorial of long dead kings and forgotten empires, so will the SLORC's 'empire' crumble and be forgotten. They would be better off practising vipassana than building up monuments to their ignorance and impermanence for the world to see. (Myint Nain Oo. Sydney, Australia. Guest book on the government Internet home page <http://www.myanmar.com/guest/guest.html>)

- [C15] If they have some disease, they should be careful of what they eat. They must observe do's and don'ts. They should exercise daily. If they mope around, feeling anxious about the wife, missing the sister-in-law or mother-in-law or wanting democracy or hoping for amnesty, they can go crazy and face release warrant or order read to them.

An example: When we were in prison, we did not have as much freedom as the bad-hat. We were kept in separate brick cells. Inmates are kept there for security or as a punishment or for their notoriety. There were inmates who had been in there for over decades. They got up early. They took exercise in the morning and evening. *They practised meditation*. They had regular meals. They managed to go to sleep at bed time.

They were so healthy that they could be said to thrive well with prison. The bad-hat must have died because of destiny, as a retribution. He knew he had a disease. He took medicines brought in or given at prison. Yet, he was reckless with food and

lazy and sought luxury so it was not strange that he met his fate thus. There was mumbling to other inmates that he could not sleep well at night. (Byatti. 'Will merits be shared only when democracy is obtained?' *The Light of Burma*, 15.07.1996)

- [C16] Although Buddhism is the principal religion, religious worship is free. Myanmar is one of the few countries remaining that practise Theravada Buddhism in its purest form; and is presently the centre for the propagation of this Buddhist sect. Many devotees, converts, religious scholars from around the globe converge on Myanmar to study, to meditate to don the robes and worship at the world renowned meditation and teaching establishments. Many ancient sacred pagodas and shrines exist all over the country, each with its unique history and legend. Every sacred pagoda has its day of commemoration, when worship is intermingled with festivities and trade; this attracts many pilgrims from all walks of life, thus pilgrimage tours are the main form of local tourism ...

In recognition of its rich heritage in history, culture, traditions and natural beauty, Myanmar was awarded the 'Gulliver de la Revelation de L'Annee' award at the 'Salon Mondial du Tourisme' an international tourism fair held in Paris in April, 1996. Likewise, due recognition was accorded to Myanmar at the I.T.B. World Tourism Fair held in March 1996. ('Myanmar – the land and its people'. *IS*, 19.08.1997.)

- [C17] ANNCR: And what about Buddhism. How important is Buddhism to you ?

ASSK: It is very important. As I mentioned just now, meditation means a great deal to me during my years under house arrest. Buddhist meditation, I think is very important, because it teaches you some awareness and the self discipline. (Live interview with ASSK on ABC Radio National Australia, AM-729, 06.06.1996, 10:15 p.m.)

- [C18] AC: How did this repressive ban of generals – SLORC – emerge from the mystical parenting of an ancient Buddhist culture?

ASSK: Well, one might as well ask how the Khmer Rouge emerged out of Cambodia. It does not mean that just because you have a good, caring religion, everybody practises it. A lot of people give lip-service to their religion. They can recite the prayers, attend the ceremonies, perform all the rites, but they may not really absorb anything into their hearts. You must have known people who meditated not just for days, but for months, even for years, but whose attitudes towards the world did not substantially change, or whose attitudes never changed ... (ASSK 1997b:163).

- [C19] ... In all honesty, I think the SLORC generals should lay down all their weapons just for ten days and undertake a period of *vipassana* meditation practice under a competent Sayadaw [Senior monk]. If their meditation is developing nicely then I think they should extend this practice indefinitely. I think the whole country would applaud them for this noble behaviour. In this way, the meditation practice will automatically reveal to them, by themselves, without anyone's help, their true inner state of being. All Burmese will understand this. They can foster *metta* in this way ...

... it is possible they might change, and then we might be able to see some redeeming qualities in them. But I still think they should meditate first. That may hasten the process. People are suffering. (U Tin U in ASSK 1997b:224).

- [C20] The situation eased sufficiently to enable the government to breathe freely. Cabinet members meeting in early June heard the prime minister announce: 'My friends, I go to the Meditation Centre tomorrow. I have a vow to keep to attain the thin-khar-ru-pek-kha nyan [နိဗ္ဗာန်ရတနာ]. Until then do not send for me, even if the whole country is enveloped in

flames. If there are fires, you must put them out yourselves.'

Fortunately, however, during the period of Thakin Nu's meditation no situation that could be called alarming arose in any part of the country. Thakin Nu fulfilled his vow on 20 July (Nu about himself in Nu 1965:195,198-199).

- [C21] It is at the request of the King himself, who wished to have a work written on royal discipline and mental culture (B. Bawna, P. *bhavana*). The good king noted that, though previous writers wrote on discipline of royalty, as they have tended to lack deference to and profundity in the Buddhist truths (B. Dm̃ P. *dhamma*), these tended to be materialist in orientation, so that following them is like eating curry without salt by which one can never feel contented. (Nyei-yá 1917:9-10).

- [C22] UTU: Totalitarianism is a system based on fear, terror and violence. If one lives under such a system long enough one becomes a part of it, often unknowingly. Fear is insidious. And from fear one easily and most often unconsciously adapts oneself to fear as a way of life, as a way of being. As Daw ASSK has said, 'Fear is a habit'. Of course, as a practitioner of meditation, I have seen that habits can be broken in any number of ways. Perhaps the most important way to break the habit of insincerity is to be in association with sincere people ... (ASSK 1997b:228).

- [C23] ASSK: ... I suppose one seeks greatness through taming one's passions. And isn't there a saying that 'it is far more difficult to conquer yourself than to conquer the rest of the world'? So, I think the taming of one's own passions, in the Buddhist way of thinking, is the chief way to greatness, no matter what the circumstances may be. For example, a lot of our people [political prisoners] meditate when they're in prison, partly because they have the time, and partly because it's a very sensible thing to do. That is to say that if you have no contact with the outside world, and you can't do anything for it, then you do what you can with the world inside you in order to bring it under proper control. (ASSK 1997b:162) (see also [R7])

- [C24] So I gritted my teeth and kept at it, often rather glumly. Then my husband gave me a copy of Hsayadaw U Pandita's book, *In this very life: the liberation teachings of the Buddha*.

By studying this book carefully, I learned how to overcome difficulties of meditation and realise its benefits. I learned how practising meditation led to increased mindfulness in everyday life, and again and again. I recalled the Hsayadaw's words on the importance of *sati* with appreciation and gratitude. (ibid)

- [C25] ASSK: ... I always quote something that Karl Popper said when he was asked, 'Do you believe in evil?' He said, 'No ... but I believe in stupidity.' And I think this is very near to the Buddhist position. I don't think there is a word for 'evil' as such, in Buddhism, is there?

I have not come across [the concept 'evil' in Buddhism the way it exists in Christianity] either. But of course, we talk of greed, anger and ignorance. That's stupidity, isn't it? Ignorance is stupidity. There's also something very stupid about greed. Greed is very short-sighted. Anger also. And short-sightedness is stupidity. I've always said that one of my greatest weaknesses is having a short temper. I tend to get angry quite quickly. This is a lack of ability to raise yourself above the immediate situation. This is where I have found that meditation helps – it gives you a sense of awareness that helps you to observe and control your feelings. This feeling which is so destructive is all tied up with ignorance. (ASSK 1997b:37)

- [C26] AC: Was there any period during your detention that you went into a more intensive period of meditation practice? Say for a few weeks or months, perhaps longer.

ASSK: No. But there were times when I did more meditation

because I was getting better at it. I think this is the same with all those who meditate. Once you have discovered the joys of meditation as it were, you do tend to spend longer periods at it. (ASSK 1997b:106)

- [C27] AC: May I ask what were the joys you discovered?

ASSK: The states I went through are the ones that Sayadaw U Pandita described in his book, *In This Very Life*. I'm just like any other meditator – nothing out of the ordinary. (ASSK 1997b:106; Pandita 1992:269-73).

- [C28] ASSK: The main reason why I meditate is the satisfaction that I derive from the knowledge that I am doing what I think I should do, that is, to try to develop awareness as a step towards understanding *anicca* as an experience. I have very ordinary attitudes towards life. If I think there is something I should do in the name of justice or in the name of love, then I'll do it. The motivation is its own reward. (ASSK 1997b:60)

- [C29] ASSK: It has been a help. But I have to go back to my parents and the way I was brought up and taught. My mother always emphasised honesty and integrity. It wasn't just that she herself was honest and incorruptible but she was also upholding my father's values. So it does go back a lot to nurture. It's not that I didn't know these things before I started meditating. Meditation has helped me to uphold the values that I've always been taught since I was a child. (ASSK 1997b:65)

- [C30] AC: Did they even bother with a trial? [in relation to U Kyi Maung's trial]

UKM: Oh, of course. That's just where the party begins. Everyone was brought to court, charged and sentenced. Mind you, they don't just go through the motions. They take their non-judicial system quite seriously. They paraded me before some brass with seventeen others; all were chained together except me, with handcuffs no less. In the party were engineers, lawyers, artists – democracy folds. Then a SLORC superstar witness stood up and said, 'We raided the NLD headquarters some time ago and seized this document.' Ironically, it was an excerpt from a small booklet outlining the negotiating principles of how to achieve mutual agreement between opponents. They bungled through a stream of witnesses – policemen and other MI goons – trustworthy types. By this time I was getting a bit bored so I asked the judge, 'Would you allow me to cross-question them?' The judge was not the least bit amused. He snarled at me like I had spit on him. So I sat down and smiled. He asked me, 'Are you guilty or not guilty?' 'Not guilty,' I replied. One by one we pleaded 'Not guilty'. One by one each of us was told to stand up to be sentenced. One by one the SLORC judge gave us ten years for those lined up in front and seven years for those behind. Then I was whisked away to my solitary abode to continue the struggle from within. (ASSK 1997b:178)

- [C31] Q: What kind of meditation are you practising?

A: I'm using vipassana, or awareness meditation. It has taught me a sense of awareness. That's very important. It's what keeps you in check. It keeps you from going astray. Or when you do, you don't do it again ...

Q: What do you do to relax?

A: I exercise regularly, about 20 minutes a day, on an exercise machine my husband gave me. It's for my back actually. During house arrest, I sat sewing and reading too much and developed back injuries. Now, they no longer trouble me. I also meditate an hour every day.

Q: Meditation is extremely difficult.

A: Keep practising. It's difficult at first. I was so frustrated that I wanted to cry. I didn't want to go on. But I read the advice of a meditation master, that meditation is what you must do whether you like it or not. So I gritted my teeth and did it.

Q: It gets easier now?

A: It's never what you call easy. It's never like sitting there doing nothing. It's never like that. Well, it's not meant to be easy. (Interview with ASSK by Sanitsuda Ekachai. 'The Lady of Burma'. *The Bangkok Post*, 19.06.1998).

- [C32] The duty of austerity (*tapa*) enjoins the king to adopt simple habits, to develop self-control and to practise spiritual discipline. The self-indulgent ruler who enjoys an extravagant lifestyle and ignores the spiritual need of austerity was no more acceptable at the time of the *Mahasammata* than he would be in Burma today. (ASSK 1991:172)

- [C33] Meditating develops a sense of awareness and that means better control of your emotions ... By nature I'm a disciplined person so it became very easy for me to develop a stringent routine. (ASSK in Victor 1998:107-8)

See also [E4], [J3], [R10], [S7]

D. Brahma-vihara (divine abidings)

- [D1] Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, Buddhists see as 'divine' states of mind which help to alleviate suffering and to spread happiness among all beings. The greatest obstacle to these noble emotions is not so much hatred, anger or ill will as the rigid mental state that comes of a prolonged and unwavering concentration on narrow self-interest. Hatred, anger or ill will that arises from wrongs suffered, from misunderstanding or from fear and envy may yet be appeased if there is sufficient generosity of spirit to permit forbearance, forgiveness and reconciliation. But it would be impossible to maintain or restore harmony when contention is rooted in the visceral inability of protagonists to concede that the other party has an equal claim to justice, sympathy and consideration. Hardness, selfishness and narrowness belong with greed, just as kindness, understanding and vision belong with true generosity. (ASSK 1995:242-43)

- [D2] What does Brahma Vihara mean? It simply means living together with Brahmas. It can also be interpreted as noble living. There are four Bhavanās [meditation] which can bring about noble living. (Nu 1983a:40) (Of these four (loving-kindness, compassion, happiness and equanimity) Nu was at that time mainly interested in loving-kindness (*P metta bhavana*))

- [D3] ALAN CLEMENTS: Just how far do your Buddhist roots go.

U TIN U: From the time of my birth my parents were devout Buddhists and they would bring me to the village monastery quite often. I was, I think, around eight years old when the abbot taught me the basics about Buddhism. And I still remember how much he stressed the four *brahma viharas* – the qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. My life began in the sweet environment of *dhamma*. (ASSK 1997b:206)

- [D3] His Majesty's desires – quickly they shall be fulfilled. When raiding enemies come up to destroy Pagan, and all four castes of people living there are borne off captive downstream and go to other countries, by the strength, lift and energy of the king, swiftly shall they ascend upstream and take their solace in Pagan again. Of those torn from their dear ones, of those who were sick at heart, by a course of benefits, with water of compassion, with loving-kindness which is even as a hand, he shall wipe their tears, he shall wash away their snot. With his right hand rice and bread, with his left hand ornaments and apparel, he shall give to all his people. Like children resting in their mother's bosom, so shall the king keep watch over them and help them. (About Kyanzitha in Luce 1969,1:47-48)

- [D4] I sincerely hope that she [ASSK] walks on well with loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity,

principles taught by the Buddha, which the majority of the people of Myanmar appreciate.

These principles are known as the Brahma Viharas, the Divine Abidings and have been principles the people of Myanmar have followed for centuries. If Suu Kyi and the members of SLORC abide by the principle of the Buddha's teachings and solve their problems, then they will succeed in building a democracy fit for Myanmar, and peace and stability will be restored to the land. (Rewatta Dhamma)

- [D5] Also at the interview, Suu Kyi called on the Thai government to help the Burmese refugees and migrant workers who were in Thailand.

She said that while she understood Thailand was facing an economic crisis, she hoped that Thais, as Buddhists, should be able to demonstrate 'loving kindness and compassion.'

'It is very easy to be compassionate and kind when things are going well, but it is when things are not going well for you that your kindness and compassion are really valuable. If you have a lot to eat, it doesn't matter much if you toss a cake for somebody, but if you are prepared to share your last bowl of rice with somebody, that is very kind and compassionate,' she said.

I don't think that Thailand is in a state that people are being forced to share their last bowl of rice with the refugees, so I would like to appeal to the Thai government to do what they can to alleviate their suffering, and if they themselves cannot do it, to allow those who are prepared to help the refugees, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the NGOs. (Steven Gan. 'Burmese Nobel laureate keeps all options open.' *The Nation*, 16.02.1998.)

- [D6] Engaged Buddhism is active compassion or active *metta*. It's not just sitting there passively saying, 'I feel sorry for them.' It means doing something about the situation by bringing whatever relief you can to those who need it the most, by caring for them, by doing what you can to help others.

Of course, the 'sending of loving-kindness' is very much a part of our Burmese Buddhist training. But in addition to that we have got to do more to express our *metta* and to show our compassion. And there are so many ways of doing it. For example, when the Buddha tried to stop two sides from fighting each other, he went out and stood between them. They would have had to injure him first before they could hurt each other. So he was defending both sides. As well as protecting others at the sacrifice of his own safety.

In Burma today, many people are afraid to visit families of political prisoners in case they too are called in by the authorities and harassed. Now, you could show active compassion by coming to the families or political prisoners and offering them practical help and by surrounding them with love, compassion and moral support. This is what we are encouraging. (ASSK 1997a:18)

- [D7] AC: What are the most important qualities of Burmese culture you wish to preserve?

ASSK: The Buddhist values of loving-kindness and compassion. A respect for education. (ASSK 1997b:56)

- [D8] We, the working people of the national races of the Union of Burma believe that man will never be set free from social evils as long as there persist pernicious economic systems which allow covetous men who are devoid of *kindness* and *compassion* to impose their designs on the unassuming majority by exploiting human weakness; that only when the pernicious systems characterised by exploitation of man by man and unjust pursuit of wealth are brought to an end and a socialist economic system based on justice is established in the Union of Burma will all the national races be emancipated from the social ills which flow from man's evil influence and rise to a happy stage of social

development where affluence and human values flower. (*System of Correlation of Man and his Environment*) [my emphasis]

- [D9] These things are happening because there is not enough active compassion. There is a very direct link between love and fear. It reminds me of the biblical quotation, that 'perfect love casts out fear'. I've often thought that this is a very Buddhist attitude. 'Perfect love' should be *metta* which is not selfish or attached love. In the *Metta Sutra* [a discourse by the Buddha] we have the phrase 'like a mother caring for her only child'. That's true *metta*. A mother's courage to sacrifice herself comes out of her love for her child. And I think we need a lot more of this kind of love around the place. (ASSK 1997b:18)

- [D10] AC: Your colleagues have made it perfectly clear to me that SLORC's disinterest in talking with you and the NLD is unequivocally rooted in fear. They've told me that it's their fear of losing power which translates down into a fear of 'losing their security – property, wealth, privilege and status'. They also said that 'they fear for the safety of their families'. And at the root of it all is their 'fear for retribution'. You continually encourage the powerless in your country to rise up against the injustices, but may I ask you for your views on SLORC having the courage to overcome their fears?

ASSK: In order to overcome your own fears you have to start first by showing compassion to others. Once you have started treating people with compassion, kindness and understanding, then your fears dissipate. It's that straightforward. (ASSK 1997b:135)

- [D11] AC: What is the way to activate that compassion that you speak of?

ASSK: Sometimes, of course, it's not by activating compassion that you make people change. Sometimes people change because they find that there's no other way possible for their own good. When you take the old government in South Africa, the Latin-American military dictatorships, and other authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe, I think they accepted change because they realized that it was inevitable and it was best for them to go along with it. But what I'm speaking about is the real change that comes from inside through learning the value of compassion, justice and love. (ASSK 1997b:136)

- [D12] Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand, known as one of Asia's leading social thinkers, describes the 'spirit of Buddhist development' as one 'where the inner strength must be cultivated, along with compassion and loving kindness'. He sees the goals of Buddhist development as 'equality, love, freedom and liberation' and goes on to say that:

... the means for achieving these lie within the grasp of any community from a village to a nation – once its members begin the process of reducing selfishness. To do so, two realisations are necessary: an inner realisation concerning greed, hatred and delusion, and an outer realisation concerning the impact these tendencies have on society and the planet ...

The qualities mentioned, both positive and negative, are not exclusive to Buddhist societies. It can be said that behind the materialism of developed countries lie greed, hatred and delusion. But there is also much of inner strength, compassion, loving kindness and strong support for equality and freedom to be found in these countries. (ASSK 04.01.1998)

- [D13] Buddhists speak of the four 'heavenly abodes' or divine states of mind: *metta* (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkha* (equanimity). A wise colleague once remarked to me that *upekkha* is well-nigh impossible for most ordinary beings; therefore we should concentrate on cultivating loving kindness and compassion, and sympathetic joy would naturally follow. (ASSK 04.01.98)

• [D14] Paradise on earth is a concept which is outmoded and few people believe in it any more. But we can certainly seek to make our planet a better, happier home for all of us by constructing the heavenly abodes of love and compassion in our hearts. Beginning with this inner development we can go on to the development of the external world with courage and wisdom. (ASSK 04.01.98)

• [D15] Once during my years of house arrest, one of the people who were – shall we say, ‘taking care of me’? – said in an accusing tone that I was always ‘on the side of the people’. Yes, I said, that was so, because I would always stand by those who were weaker; they were the ones who needed support. But, came the query, what if the weaker side were in the wrong? In that case, I replied, I would try to correct them with metta. The only response to this was a somewhat pained smile. But later I asked myself what one would do if metta did not succeed in correcting those who were weak but quite patently in the wrong. The conclusion at which I arrived was that one would have to work at perfecting one’s metta because perfect metta cannot fail.

But then what about self-sacrifice which demands that one puts others before oneself? The work of relief and development agencies often involves a certain degree of self-sacrifice. This is where compassion, the second of the heavenly abodes, comes in. What causes men and women to leave comfortable homes and give up lucrative positions to go out to bleak, even devastated lands for the sake of bringing relief to peoples of an alien race and creed?

The motivating factor is surely compassion. (ASSK 04.01.1998)

• [D16] The fruit of successful development projects should be the greater happiness of the beneficiaries and the reward for those who planned and implemented the projects should be mudita that rejoices in the good fortune of others, free from envy or ill will.

Fundamental to the kind of development that enhances the quality of life is justice. If there is true loving kindness that regards all beings with equal benevolence, and there is compassion balanced by wisdom, justice will surely not be lacking. And it will be the best kind of justice, that which is tempered by gentle mercy.

There are peoples in East as in the West who think the worth of a society is measured by its material wealth and by impressive figures of growth, ignoring the injustices and the pain that might lie behind them. Then there are those who believe that development must be measured in terms of human happiness, of peace within the community and of harmony with the environment. And so we come back to loving kindness and Compassion. (ASSK 04.01.1998)

• [D17] His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is surely one of the leading authorities on, and practitioners of, loving kindness in our world today. He teaches us that:

... we are not lacking in terms of the development of science and technology; still, we lack something here in the heart – real inner warm feeling. A good heart is needed ... The problems human society is facing in terms of economic development, the crisis of energy, the tension between the poor and rich nations, and many geopolitical problems can be solved if we understand each others’ fundamental humanity, respect each other’s rights, share each other’s problems and sufferings, and then make Joint effort ...

Things and events depend heavily on motivation. A real sense of appreciation of humanity, compassion and love are the key points. If we develop a good heart, then whether the field is science, agriculture, or politics, since motivation is so very important, these will all improve ... (ASSK, 04.01.1998)

• [D18] We want a better democracy, a fuller democracy with compassion and loving kindness ... We should not be ashamed about talking about loving kindness and compassion in political terms. Values like love and compassion should be part of politics because justice must always be tempered by mercy. We prefer the word ‘compassion’. That is warmer and more tender than ‘mercy’. (ASSK cited in Stewart 1997:118)

• [D19] At one point during our year together as monks, Tin Oo led me to a secluded spot on the monastery grounds. ‘I am Burmese and you are American,’ he said. ‘But the Buddha’s teachings go beyond nationality or language. I want to see the people of Burma live in a society built on the higher spiritual values, with human dignity and fairness for all. My belief is that love and compassion must be the guiding principles of our political system. I cherish the dream that, before I die, I’ll see this vision come true. (Tin Oo to Alan Clements in *Burma: the next killing fields*, p 14)

E. Metta (loving-kindness)

• [E1] AC: During your two years in the monastery what would you say that you learned that has had the most lasting influence on you?

UTU: That through attachment one lives a very shallow fearful life; and the value of *metta* or loving-kindness – because we all live to a certain degree with attachment and this *metta* eases the journey. (ASSK 1997b:229)

• [E2] If this seems to you very difficult, please start practising the Thirty-Eight Blessings [Mangala Sutta] taught by our Buddha. ... For even if politicians fall short of the Sotapāṇṇa stage, they can still be a great help if they follow the ethical principles, or even practice loving-kindness towards all beings as taught in the Metta Sutta. [If they do this] the achievement of a Socialist world will not take very long. (Nu quoted in King 1964:252-56)

• [E4] As for that non-violence business, I don’t condemn it, but I’m not a Gandhi. If I see the need for force, I would tackle it head-on without hesitation, if that is the only means available to me.

I was trained to fight and if somebody attempted to manhandle you, I wouldn’t tuck my tail between my legs and run away, listening to you scream with my back to you. That’s cowardice. It’s despicable. Nor would I sit there in meditation, trusting that my *metta* would dissolve the ordeal. I’m no saint. I would try and defend you. Now I don’t like the use of force, but I could never tell you that I would completely abstain from it. But Gandhi said that too. (U Kyi Maung in ASSK 1997b:190-91)

• [E5] ASSK: ... Perhaps what they should try to do is to love themselves better. Not in the selfish sense, but to have *metta* for themselves as well as for others. As you put it, if fear is motivated by lack of trust in oneself, it may indicate that you think there are things about yourself which are not desirable. I accept that there are things about me, as for the great majority of us, which are undesirable. But we must try to overcome these things and improve ourselves. (ASSK1995:19-20)

• [E6] Maybe they are learning something from our words. Maybe it is that they feel the *metta* among the people. Maybe they yearn to have that *metta* directed towards them rather than it being forced or coerced from people. It could be that this *metta* that is being generated among the people is having an effect on them. *Metta* does that you know. Maybe it is opening them to a new way of treating people, seeing them as human beings to be honoured and served rather than oppressed and robbed. It could be that they are moved by the people’s courage.

People who are not only willing to defy them but who are also ready and waiting to forgive them. It's all possible. (Interview with U Kyi Maung in ASSK 1997b:186)

• [E7] AC: ... Do you love your enemy into transformation, or do you criticise them into that transformation?

ASSK: I think I've said to you before that I have not got to the stage when I can claim that I feel *metta* towards everybody. And I do not think I can claim that I have these overwhelming waves of *metta* going out from me towards SLORC. But it is the truth that I don't feel hostile towards any of them. I would be very happy to be on friendly terms with them. And I can say with absolute truth that I have never used abusive terms in speaking about them. I don't mean just in public but even in private. The strongest things I have said against them is either that they are very stupid or that they are acting like fools. (ASSK 1997b:143)

• [E8] The dream of a society ruled by loving kindness, reason and justice is a dream as old as civilized man. Does it have to be an impossible dream? ... We are so much in need of a brighter world which will offer adequate refuge to all its inhabitants. (ASSK 1995:247)

• [E9] ASSK: We've learned from experience that the *metta* approach is misinterpreted by the authorities. they see it as a weakness.

AC: How do they interpret loving-kindness as a weakness?

ASSK: Well, let's take it in the political context. During my six years under house arrest, and while Uncle U Kyi Maung and Uncle U Tin U were in prison, Uncle U Aung Shwe [the NLD Chairman] tried very hard to keep the NLD together as well as trying to establish a harmonious relationship with SLORC. He never said anything to which they could object. During those six years the NLD behaved in such a gentlemanly way that some people accused it of sheer cowardice and the lack of will to act. And what was the result? They [SLORC] just came down heavier and heavier on the NLD.

AC: So there came a point in the struggle that the *metta* approach was determined not as effective as your present approach?

ASSK: We have not given up the *metta* approach. Because basically, we are always ready to work with them on the basis of mutual understanding and goodwill. But that does not mean that we're going to sit and wait. We believe in action. That's active *metta*, doing what is necessary at any certain point. (ASSK 1997b:143-44)

• [E9] You see, we've got to make *metta* grow. We've got to make people see that love is a strong, positive force for the happiness of oneself, not just for others. A journalist said to me, 'When you speak to the people you talk a lot about religion, why is that?' I said, 'Because politics is about people, and you can't separate people from their spiritual values.' And he said that he had asked a young student who had come to the weekend talks about this: 'Why are they talking about religion?' The student replied, 'Well, that's politics.'

Our people understand what we are talking about. Some people might think it is either idealistic or naïve to talk about *metta* in terms of politics, but to me it makes a lot of practical good sense. I've always said to the NLD that we've got to help each other. If people see how much we support each other and how much happiness we manage to generate among ourselves, in spite of being surrounded by weapons, threats and repression, they will want to be like us. They might say, well, there's something in their attitude – we want to be happy too. (ASSK 1995a:18-19)

• [E10] ASSK: I think the very first reason why the Burmese people trusted me was because of their love for my father. They had never doubted his goodwill towards them. And he had

proved with his life that he was ready to sacrifice himself for them. Because of that they loved him and I think a lot of that love was transferred to me. So I started off with an advantage – a ready-made fund of *metta* on which to build. So you cannot separate the fact that I'm my father's daughter from the fact that the people and I have managed to build up solid bonds of *metta* between us. (ASSK 1997b:21)

• [E11] ASSK: When I first think of *metta*, I feel it within our movement, especially between my colleagues and myself. We work like a family – we are not just colleagues. We have a real concern and affection for each other, which is the basis of our relationships. I think this may have a lot to do with the fact that we have to work under such difficult conditions. It's only *metta* that is strong enough to keep together people who face such repression and who are in danger of being dragged away to prison at any moment. And the longer we work together the greater our bond of *metta* grows. From there these ties of friendship and affection have spread outward to include the families of colleagues. From there it spreads further, and with it the feeling of family grows. A family with a love of justice, a love of freedom, a love of peace and equality ... if you are used to giving friendship and affection it's much easier to give it even to people who may think of themselves as your enemies. (ASSK 1997b:119)

• [E12] AC: Daw Suu, when it really comes right down to it, how do you cope?

ASSK: I think what really sustains us, is the sense that we are on the side of right, as it were, to use a very old-fashioned phrase. And the *metta* between us keeps us going. (ASSK 1997b:132)

• [E13] In Buddhist countries an expression of the social dimensions of Dhamma is the guiding and softening influence which the ordained Sangha has traditionally exercised over rulers. Where this influence declines, we see the rulers become ever more cruel and irresponsible, and most of the Sangha equally irresponsible, preoccupied with ritual, textual studies and 'individual' development. No amount of pagoda building or formal respect for the Sangha can substitute for their mutual responsibility to serve the people and the Dhamma. (Rewatta Dhamma. Speech delivered to the Asian Leaders Conference, Seoul, December 1994)

• [E14] The adversities that we have had to face together have taught all of us involved in the struggle to build a truly democratic political system in Burma that there are no gender barriers that cannot be overcome. The relationship between men and women should, and can be, characterized not by patronizing behavior or exploitation, but by *metta* (that is to say loving kindness), partnership and trust. We need mutual respect and understanding between men and women, instead of patriarchal domination and degradation, which are expressions of violence and engender counter-violence. We can learn from each other and help one another to moderate the 'gender weaknesses' imposed upon us by traditional or biological factors. (ASSK keynote address on 31 August 1995 to NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95)

• [E15] As U Nu put it about the State Religion: 'It is perhaps possible that in some foreign countries their State religion has been discriminatory and has imposed disabilities on followers of other religions. This would certainly not occur in Burma because Buddhism does not curtail the rights of other religions ... Buddhism is not a religion which strengthens itself by persecuting others. Because it has *Metta* at its basis, it can establish in strength the principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality and ensure peace and prosperity to all beings for all times.. The establishment of Buddhism as the State Religion will

in itself make the Union of Burma and exemplary State to other nations. ('State Buddhist Religion in Burma.' *Buddhist News Forum*, Rangoon, October 1961; King 1964:262)

- [E16] Summing up, public servants are to be faithful to the State and fulfil their duties. The Tatmadaw and the People's police force are to protect the public and repulsed and eliminate all forms of danger faced by the public and in the process has used weapons similar to those used by the enemy. With good faith in the goodwill of the Tatmadaw, student youths should relax in the restful shade of their parents metta. (Wun-tha-nu, Maung. 'Relax in the restful shade of 'metta'. *The Working People's Daily*, 01.10.1988)
- [E17] The loving kindness and affection placed on her by State leaders as a real daughter was not reciprocated and the actions and attitude of the Puppet Princess changed completely at once and her dance steps changed and the tune also changed. All the audience who had waited in anticipation to hear and see her display with, original natural sense and concepts and her own style of Myanmar origin, Myanmar sound and steps, were greatly astonished, fed up and disgusted when they heard the English band and saw her to the soap-operas. (Myo Chit. 'Let's tell the truth'. *Myanma Alin*, May-July 1996)
- [E18] AC: It sounds like fear [of dialogue]. What do you think this fear is rooted in?

ASSK: When you really think about it, fear is rooted in insecurity and insecurity is rooted in lack of metta [loving-kindness]. If there's a lack of metta, it may be a lack in yourself, or in those around you, so you feel insecure. And insecurity leads to fear. (ASSK 1997b:4-5)

- [E19] ASSK: When I first decided to take part in the movement for democracy, it was more out of a sense of duty than anything else. On the other hand, my sense of duty was very closely linked to my love for my father. I could not separate it from the love for my country, and therefore, from the sense of responsibility towards my people. But as time went on, like a lot of others who've been incarcerated, we have discovered the value of loving-kindness. We've found that it's one's own feelings of hostility that generate fear. As I've explained before, I never felt frightened when I was surrounded by all those hostile troops. That is because I never felt hostility towards them. This made me realize that there are a number of fundamental principles common to many religions. As Burmese Buddhists, we put a great emphasis on metta. It is the same idea as in the biblical quotation: 'Perfect love casts out fear.' While I cannot claim to have discovered 'perfect love', I think it's a fact that you are not frightened of people whom you do not hate. Of course, I did get angry occasionally with some of the things they did, but anger as a passing emotion is quite different from the feeling of sustained hatred or hostility. (ASSK 1997b:122)
- [E20] ASSK: I encourage people to focus on deeds, rather than on people. I was once speaking about Angulimala [a mass murderer at the time of the Buddha]. I said, even he changed, his deeds were horrendous but the Buddha himself was able to separate the person from the deed. Once Angulimala had been made to understand that what he did was wrong and was genuinely repentant, he set out to follow the right path. And the Buddha was the first to take him under his wing, as it were. (ASSK 1997b:37)
- [E21] ASSK: ... we, in the NLD, have been given a lot of metta by the people at large – our supporters. And when you receive so much, you have to give in return. If you're very much loved, in the right way, then you cannot help but respond. That does not mean that we're totally free of negative feelings. And as long as we are not free of them we will be subject to them. But

the goodwill and the metta we've received have done a lot to push out these feelings from within us. (ASSK 1997b:20-21)

- [E22] U Tin U: The Buddha has said that good friendship [kalanya metta] is one of the greatest gifts of life. In our struggle for democracy in Burma we need more good friends – people who cherish freedom and desire to help us gain ours. (ASSK 1997b:239)

- [E23] AC: You often refer to your democracy movement here in Burma as a 'revolution of the spirit' that is rooted in Buddhist principles. How much, if at all, do you draw upon the wisdom of other religions in your approach to politics?

ASSK: I have read books on other religions but I haven't gone into any of them particularly deeply. But I find that the idea of metta is in every religion. The Christians say God is love. And when they say, 'perfect love casts out fear', I think at the core of all religions there is this idea of love for one's fellow human beings. (ASSK 1997b:66)

- [E24] When I was under house arrest for six years, while discussing with the people in charge of my security, I was accused of always taking the side of the people. I said that it was true. I must stand by the people because they are the weaker. So they asked me, 'What if the weaker side was wrong?' So I replied if the weaker side was wrong, they would rectify their wrongs with Metta (loving kindness). You must rectify the wrongs of others with Metta, never by bearing a grudge. (ASSK. Statement at the closing ceremony of the 9th NLD Congress on 15 October 1997)

- [E25] Our League may be a democratic one but we are not an organization that is unjust or repressive to others. If there are any grudges that stem from the past between our party members and the people, we will resolve them. At this time, as I have said, our party is thriving on Metta. We have no power, we have no weapons. We also don't have much money. There is also the matter of that eighty thousand dollars ... (laughter). What are our foundations? It is Metta. Rest assured that if we should lose this Metta, the whole democratic party would disintegrate. Metta is not only to be applied to those that are connected with you. It should also be applied [to] those who are against you. Metta means sympathy for others. Not doing unto others what one does not want done to oneself. It means not obstructing the responsibilities of those whom one has Metta. It not only means not wanting harm to befall one's own family, but also not wanting harm to befall the families of others. So our League does [not] wish to harm anyone. Let me be frank. We don't even want to harm SLORC. But SLORC also doesn't want to harm us. Our Congress has come this far because we have managed to reach a degree of understanding with the authorities. I would like to say from here that I thank the authorities for making things possible since this morning. We do not find it a burden to give thanks where thanks are due. Nor is it a burden to give credit where credit is due. So it is not true that we do not give thanks or credit where it is due. There will be thanks where thanks is due, credit where credit is due ... so be good. One is never overcautious. This is a Buddhist philosophy.

We are not working solely for the benefit of our party. We are not working to gain power. It is true, we are working for the development of democracy. Because we believe that it is only a democratic government that could benefit the country. Let me make it clear that it is not because we want to be the government. And also because we believe that it is only the people that have the right to elect a government. That is why we asked that the government be made up of people that were elected by the people. Not because we want power. Power only gives stress. Power comes with responsibility and I believe that anyone who understands that cannot be power-crazy. I know

how much responsibility goes with a democracy. That is why we are not power-crazy people. We are only an organization that wants to do its utmost for the people and the country. We are an organization that is free from grudge and puts Metta to the fore. (ASSKs statement at the closing ceremony of the 9th NLD Congress on 15 October 1997)

- [E25] AC: How do you work within yourself with democracy as a vision, democracy as a process, and democracy as a state of mind.

ASSK: When we visualize a democratic Burma, we do not visualize it in terms of great power and privileges for the NLD. We see it in terms of less suffering for the people. We're not starry-eyed about democracy. We don't think of it in terms of abstract institutions but in terms of what it can do to contribute towards the happiness and well-being of the people. We want a country where there is rule of law; where people are secure to the extent that one can be secure in this world; where they are encouraged and helped to acquire education, to broaden their horizons; where conditions conducive to ease of mind and body are fostered. That is why I would say that *metta* is the core of our movement – a desire to bring relief to human beings. (ASSK 1997b:134)

- [E26] He [Aung San] was a soldier who could fight – and fight well – when he had to fight, but who when the fighting was over could lay aside his sword without fear and pursue the path of peace. When political power came into his hands he could say with absolute sincerity and a complete lack of self-consciousness that we would govern 'on the basis of loving kindness and truth.' (ASSK 1991:191)

- [E27] The first of the heavenly abodes, metta, loving kindness, plays a crucial part in the process of human development. While Buddhists speak of metta, Christians speak of Christian love. Both refer to disinterested love, a love that seeks to give and to serve, rather than to take and demand. Inherent in the concept of this kind of love is understanding, sympathy, forgiveness and courage. A Father Damien or a Mother Teresa give tender care, for 'the love of Christ', to those whom humanity in general find physically repugnant, because Jesus had shown love and kindness towards the rejects of society, the lepers and the insane, the sick and the lame. (ASSK. 'Heavenly abodes and human development, 11th Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture, 3 November 1997, the Royal Institution of Great Britain, London)

- [E28] The Lord Buddha too set examples for the practical application of loving kindness. Once when the Lord Buddha and his cousin Ananda came across a sick monk lying in his own filth they washed him and tended him. Then the Lord Buddha called the other monks together, admonished them, for neglecting their sick brethren and taught them that it was more important to care for the sick than to tend to him, the Buddha himself. (ASSK 04.01.1998)

- [E29] Development projects should essentially be humanitarian labour on varying scales. Whether it is distributing milk powder to malnourished children or building a mega dam, it should be done with people in mind, people who need the balm of loving kindness to withstand the rigours of human existence. Projects undertaken for the sake of upping statistics or for love of grandiosity or praise, rather than for the love of live human beings with bodies that can be hurt, minds that can be damaged and hearts that can be bruised, seldom succeed in fostering the kind of development that enhances the quality of life. (ASSK 04.01.1998)

- [E30] His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is surely one of the leading authorities on, and practitioners of, loving

kindness in our world today. He teaches us that:

... we are not lacking in terms of the development of science and technology; still, we lack something here in the heart – real inner warm feeling. A good heart is needed ... The problems human society is facing in terms of economic development, the crisis of energy, the tension between the poor and rich nations, and many geopolitical problems can be solved if we understand each others' fundamental humanity, respect each other's rights, share each other's problems and sufferings, and then make Joint effort ...

Things and events depend heavily on motivation. A real sense of appreciation of humanity, compassion and love are the key points. If we develop a good heart, then whether the field is science, agriculture, or politics, since motivation is so very important, these will all improve ... (ASSK 04.01.1998. Heavenly Abodes And Human Development, 11th Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture)

- [E31] Only the army is mother,
Only the army is father,
Don't believe what the surroundings say,
Whoever tries to split us, we shall never split
We shall unite forever (Army Slogan billed all over Burma)
- [E32] Where there is no justice there can be no secure peace. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that 'if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression', human rights should be protected by the rule of law. That just laws which uphold human rights are the necessary foundation of peace and security would be denied only by closed minds which interpret peace as the silence of all opposition and security as the assurance of their own power. The Burmese associate peace and security with the coolness and shade:

The shade of a tree is cool indeed
The shade of parents is cooler
The shade of teachers is cooler still
The shade of the ruler is yet more cool¹
But the coolest of all is the shade of the Buddha's teachings.²

Thus to provide the people with the protective coolness of peace and security, rulers must observe the teachings of the Buddha. Central to these teachings are the concepts of truth, righteousness and loving-kindness. It is government based on these very qualities that the people of Burma are seeking in their struggle for democracy. (ASSK 1995:177-78)

- [E33] Q. What about loving kindness and your policy of non-violence?

A. As for loving kindness, that comes to me from my own experiences. In our struggles, what else do we have? We only have people who support our cause out of a sense of sympathy, a sense of solidarity. That's loving kindness, feelings for others. This is what our whole movement is based on. We don't have any weapons, no money, no rights. The laws in this country are used to crush us. What can we rely on? How can we keep together? We keep together because we believe in what we are doing. Some people get burnt out. We have to help each other keep going. And we cannot do that unless we have some basis of loving kindness. (Sanitsuda Ekachai. 'The lady of Burma'. *Bangkok Post*, 19.06.1998)

See D. Brahma-vihara

¹ This passage is taken originally from *Lokaniti* and was also cited by U Ottama, the monk protester against the British colonial occupation of Burma (Lwin 1971:42)

² This was also cited by U Ottama in the struggle against British colonialism.

See also [C19], [C28], [H8], [S5]

F. Karuna (compassion)

- [F1] UTU: ... forgiving the SLORC at this point is not the issue. Compassion is what is needed. The SLORC are the ones who need to feel compassion. If they could feel compassion they might just see that these atrocities are hurting people badly ... I can say to the people that if we have compassion for them we will remain blameless in our struggle to continue forward until that time when they see that we genuinely do not wish them harm ... Compassion [rather than forgiveness] is what is needed'. (ASSK 1997b:232)

- [F2] AC: Your colleagues have made it perfectly clear to me that SLORC's disinterest in talking with you and the NLD is unequivocally rooted in fear. They've told me that it's their fear of losing power which translates down into a fear of 'losing their security – property, wealth, privilege and status'. They also said that 'they fear for the safety of their families'. And at the root of it all is their 'fear for retribution'. You continually encourage the powerless in your country to rise up against the injustices, but may I ask you for your views on SLORC having the courage to overcome their fears?

ASSK: In order to overcome your own fears you have to start first by showing compassion to others. Once you have started treating people with compassion, kindness and understanding, then your fears dissipate. It's that straightforward. (ASSK 1997b:135)

- [F3] [UTU] ... I would say that compassion is something we all need more of in the world. Whether you are a human-rights activist or a despotic leader we can always find ways to be more compassionate. Through our compassion I feel that the world will be a much better place to raise our next generation, and their children. What all of us are struggling for today is a world that is free of fear. In so doing we must try to free our own hearts from fear. Let us all try. (ASSK 1997b:238-39)

- [F4] But compassion must be balanced by wisdom and wisdom must be balanced by compassion. This balance is essential that there might be harmony and that one might be able to make correct decisions for the general good. There are a number of Buddhist stories that illustrate the need for a healthy balance between compassion and wisdom. Of these stories, the following is one that I find most appealing.

Once there lived a dragon at the foot of the Himalayas, a fierce dragon king that breathed fire and smoke and reduced creatures to ashes with his incendiary glare. He was not unnaturally the terror of all who dwelled in the region. One day while the dragon was in one of his less amicable moods, a bodhisattva came by. The dragon king proceeded to give a fine display of his propensity for violence, no doubt imagining that he would succeed in terrifying the holy one (not that the dragon understood anything of holiness) before reducing him to ashes. To his surprise, the bodhisattva showed no fear or apprehension but instead gave him a brief sermon on the joys of non-violence and compassion. The dragon king was instantly converted to the path of non-violence and decided that he would never again harm any being under any circumstances.

Now, in an ideal world, that should be the happy end of the story. But ours is not an ideal world; it is a world conditioned by impermanence, suffering and the unresponsiveness of objects to one's wishes. When it dawned on the children who lived within the vicinity of the dragon's lair that the fire breathing monster had ceased to bristle with pyrotechnic ferocity, they began to approach it cautiously. Their confidence grew until they felt bold enough to touch the dragon king. On finding how docile the dragon king. On finding how docile and patient the dragon had

become, the children handled it more roughly. Eventually the children got into the habit of ill-treating the dragon, making life a miserable for him.

When the bodhisattva came by again, the dragon king complained of how unhappy he had been since following the path of non-violence. The bodhisattva replied that this had come about because the dragon had not balanced compassion with wisdom: when the children became unruly, he should show his fire to stop them from proceeding to cruel acts. The dragon king's failure to balance compassion with wisdom had been harmful both to himself and to the children, who had been turned into little bullies by his excessive forbearance. (ASSK 04.01.1998)

See also Brahma Vihara, and [Y24], [Y25]

G. Karma

- [G1] AC: So no one is above the law, no matter how lawless they may be?

ASSK: They may be above human laws, but not above the law of *karma* because the law of *karma* is actually very scientific. There is always a connection between cause and effect. It's like the light of a star, isn't? The light we see now was initiated so many light years ago, but there it is. In science too, there can be a seemingly long gap between cause and effect. But there's always the connection between them. (ASSK 1997b:61)

- [G2] ASSK: ... I remind the people that *karma* is actually doing. It's not just sitting back. Some people think of *karma* as destiny or fate and that there's nothing they can do about it. It's simply what is going to happen because of their past deeds. This is the way in which *karma* is often interpreted in Burma. But *karma* is not that at all. It's doing, it's action. So you are creating your own *karma* all the time. Buddhism is a very dynamic philosophy and it's a great pity that some people forget that aspect of our religion.

... If something goes wrong, people tend to do something just for themselves, as it were. But I think you can also carry on working for others. Perhaps we should encourage this more; the idea that you can gain a lot of merit by working for others, as much as by working for yourself. In fact, I would like more of our Burmese Buddhists to understand this point. (ASSK 1997b:124-25)

- [G3] AC: You've been called 'Burma's woman of destiny' ...

... ASSK: Well, you know, I'm a Buddhist, so 'destiny' is not something that means that much to me, because I believe in *karma*. And that means doing. You create your own *karma*. And in a sense, if I believe in destiny, it's something that I create for myself. That's the Buddhist way. (ASSK 1997b:140)

- [G4] ASSK: ... In Buddhism ... we believe that you will pay for all the bad things that you have done, and that you will reap the rewards of all the good that you've done. And I think because of that, a lot of Buddhists think that because the authorities are cruel and unjust, you don't have to do anything at all, they will get their own deserts. I don't accept that. I don't think that one should just sit back and expect *karma* to catch up with everybody else ... (ASSK 1997b:127)

See also [Y27].

H. Politics and religion

- [H1] AC: It's a matter of debate, but politics and religion are usually segregated issues. In Burma today, the large portion of monks and nuns see spiritual freedom and socio-political freedom as separate areas. But in truth, *dhamma* and politics are rooted in the same issue – freedom.

ASSK: Indeed, but this is not unique in Burma. Everywhere you'll find this drive to separate the secular from the spiritual. In

other Buddhist countries you'll find the same thing ... almost everywhere in the world. I think some people find it embarrassing and impractical to think of the spiritual and political life as one. I do not see them as separate. In democracies there is always a drive to separate the spiritual from the secular, but it is not actually required to separate them. Whereas in many dictatorships, you'll find that there is an official policy to keep politics and religion apart, in case I suppose, it is used to upset the *status quo*. (ASSK 1997b:7-8)

- [H2] ASSK: ... Organized movements are essential to the way in which Christianity works. Their churches are organized that way, whereas Buddhists are not really organized around their monasteries. Although one might go to the local monastery, or have one's favorite monastery in which to worship, one does not necessarily stay confined to that one monastery only. It's not like Christians who go to the same church for years and years, and in so doing develop congregational relationships. Perhaps your parents too went to the same church and you know a lot of people through your ongoing association with them. You also know what their parents were like and what affiliations they had. I think this is the way the base for organized movement is formed.

I have often thought that this is probably one of the reasons why Christian-based political movements tend to take off quickly and efficiently. The organization is already there. Look at Latin America, you'll find that a lot of their political movements against the dictatorships, although they were not non-violent, were church-based, which made them take off rather quickly. Even in Islamic countries they have the mosque, which is formally organized, with regular mosque meetings taking place weekly. This sort of formal organization does not exist in Buddhist countries ...

I think that it's just the fact that they [Muslims, Christians] can meet regularly. Even in India the government can not say that Muslims must not go to the Mosque. It would create such a reaction. They must allow them to go to the Mosque, so they can always meet regularly a minimum of once a week. Whereas, where can Buddhists meet? If the Buddhists started meeting once a week at a particular monastery, the MI [Military Intelligence] would be on to them immediately to find out what the meeting was about. But you can't stop people from going to church ... There was a great deal of church-based political activity. (ASSK 1997b:111-12)

- [H3] AC: Is it fair to say that the regime – SLORC – are Buddhists?

ASSK: I would not like to comment on other people's religious inclinations. It's not for me to say who is Buddhist or who is not. But I must say that some of their actions are not consonant with Buddhist teachings.

AC: For example?

ASSK: There's so little lovingkindness and compassion in what they say, in what they write and what they do. That's totally removed from the Buddhist way ... This is the problem with a lot of authoritarian regimes, they get further and further away from the people. (ASSK 1997b:2-3)

- [H4] The first intimation that something was amiss in the last bastion of the Burmese monarchy came when rumors of strange happenings at the Mahamyatmuni Shrine began to trickle down to Rangoon. It was said that the breast of the sacred image had been riven in two. While people were still debating on such a possibility and the implications of so distressing an omen, word came out that the monks of Mandalay were making an enquiry into a large crack – some said a gaping hole – that had appeared in the thick gold with which devotees had encrusted the image over the centuries. Fast on the heels of the news about the

enquiry we heard that monks in Mandalay had ransacked mosques because a Buddhist girl was assaulted by a Muslim man.

Traditionally, Buddhists and Muslims in Mandalay have maintained harmonious relations and this sudden eruption of hostilities was a surprise to many. But it was no surprise when we heard there had been attempts by the authorities to place the communal tensions at the door of the NLD. According to an official Information Sheet, 'it is very much regretful to learn that some elements who are bent on creating unrest in the country exploited the situation and managed to agitate some of the Buddhist religious communities in Mandalay to attack Muslim communities and some mosques. On the surface, it seems like a religious clash but it is actually very much politically motivated.' I quite agree that the communal conflicts were probably orchestrated by those with political motives of some kind but I can say with absolute confidence and a clean conscience that the NLD has nothing to do with dirty politics of that ilk. (ASSK. 'Season ripples with riots and revolutions'. Letter from Burma No. 3. *Mainichi Daily News*, 07.04.1997)

- [H5] Lt-Gen Myo Nyunt, minister of religious affairs, met monks who are members of the State Sangha [Buddhist Order] Maha Nayaka Committee in Rangoon on 29th September, Burmese radio reported. The minister and the monks discussed the need to keep religion and politics apart.

The report said: 'It has been discovered that the NLD [National League for Democracy] covertly directed its groups to engage in the anti-government movement by entering monkhood so as to benefit their party. They are doing this to divide the monks. Although they are Buddhists, they are unaware of the sin of dividing the monks.' Myo Nyunt told the monks: 'I would like to inform the Sangha that these monks are covered in the darkness with avarice, anger and ignorance; and they are creating disturbances to destroy the people and the country.'

The report continued: 'He [the minister] also urged the revered monks to clarify and inform all levels of Sangha organizations about their [the NLD's] plan to enter the monkhood. The State Law and Order Restoration Council's Orders No 6/90 and No 7/90, and Law No 20/90 on Organization of Sangha, were issued to protect them from this danger. The Sangha has also been directed to coordinate with the respective division, state, district, township and ward law and order restoration councils.' ('Minister says opposition trying to "divide the monks"'. BBC, 29.09.1996; Radio Myanmar, Rangoon)

- [H6] In my political work, I have been helped and strengthened by the teachings of members of the sangha. During my very first campaign trip across Burma, I received invaluable advice from monks in different parts of the country. In Prome, a Hsayadaw told me to keep in mind the hermit Sumedha, who sacrificed the possibility of early liberation for himself alone and underwent many lives of striving that he might save others from suffering. 'So must you be prepared to strive for as long as might be necessary to achieve good and justice,' exhorted the Venerable Hsayadaw. In a monastery at Pakokku, the advice that an abbot gave to my father when he went to that town more than 40 years ago was repeated to me: 'Do not be frightened every time there is an attempt to frighten you, but do not be entirely without fear. Do not become elated every time you are praised, but do not be entirely lacking in elation.'

In other words, while maintaining courage and humility, one should not abandon caution and healthy self-respect. When I visited Natmauk, my father's home town, I went to the monastery where he studied as a boy.

There the abbot gave a sermon on the four causes of decline and decay: failure to recover that which had been lost, omission

to repair that which had been damaged; disregard of the need for reasonable economy; and the elevation to leadership of those without morality or learning. The abbot went on to explain how these traditional Buddhist views should be interpreted to help us build a just and prosperous society in the modern age.

Of the words of wisdom I gathered during that journey across central Burma, those was a 91-year old Hsayadaw of Sagaing are particularly memorable. He sketched out for me tersely how it would be to work for democracy in Burma.

- 'You will be attacked and reviled for engaging in honest politics,' pronounced the Hsayadaw, But you must persevere. Lay down an investment in *dukkha* (suffering) and you will gain *sukha* (bliss). (ASSK)

- [H7] AC: Do you ever teeter on the edge of your existential plight – your individual struggle for spiritual freedom and your socio-political struggle for your people's freedom?

ASSK: No. Since we live in this world we have a duty to do our best for the world. Buddhism accepts this fact. And I don't consider myself so spiritually advanced as to be above all worldly concerns. Because of this, it's my duty to do the best that I can.

- [H8] Has the Slorc changed? It is ostentatious now in its religious devotion; barely a day goes by without reports on state TV or press (both of which failed to report Daw Suu's release) of generals dedicating pagodas around the county. 'I hope that they will pay more attention to the essence of Buddhism, that would help a lot.'

But does she regard such piety as politically expedient? As ever, her words come readily, yet are carefully chosen. 'I would not like to judge other people's religious activities or attitudes and all I would say is that if there is real respect for the teachings of Buddhism on the part of the authorities, it is all to the good of the nation.'

The junta's zealotry extends, according to some reports, to desecrating the temples and burial grounds of religious minorities like the Muslims and Christians. 'If that is so then it's a great pity because Buddhism after all teaches tolerance and loving kindness – *myitta* – so it would be against the essence of Buddhism to persecute anyone, whether on religious, political or any other grounds.'

This year's Martyrs' Day, which commemorates the assassination of my father and eight associates, coincided with the full moon of the Burmese month of Waso, which marks the beginning of the rainy season Buddhist retreat. The National League for Democracy arranged a ceremony for offering food and robes to fifty monks for the sake of merit to be shared between those who have passed away and those who have been left behind. It was an occasion that afforded us with an opportunity to reflect on the three aspects common to all conditioned things: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (the unresponsiveness of objects to one's wishes) and on nirvana, the unconditioned, undefiled state where *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* become extinct. Spiritual matters are as much an integral component of the fabric of human existence as politics, which has to do with how man relates to others of his kind. Whether we like it or not, the spiritual and political will remain part of the design of our lives. (ASSK. 'Political, spiritual struggles inseparably linked'. *Mainichi Daily News*, 04.08.1997)

See also [E9], [I3], [I4], [I5], [Y20], [Y27].

[H9] A 90-year-old abbot I knew gave me two pieces of advice. He told me that, to achieve happiness, you must be prepared to suffer. He also warned me that anyone who indulges in honest politics must be prepared to be reviled. Monks like him have given me some wonderful advice over the years. Though an old and religious man, he certainly understood politics in Burma. (Interview between ASSK, Rep. Bill

Richardson, UNDP Resident Representative Jehan Raheem and New York Times Correspondent Philip Sheehen on 25.02.1995. BurmaNet News 13.05.1994)

I. Buddhism

- [I1] AC: Do you consider yourself a Theravada Buddhist?

ASSK: I am a Theravada Buddhist but I respect Mahayana Buddhism as well ...

AC: What are the elements of Mahayana Buddhism that you respect?

ASSK: In Mahayana Buddhism there's much more emphasis on compassion than in Theravada Buddhism. I'm very sensitive to this, because we need a lot of compassion in this world. Of course, compassion is also a part of Theravada Buddhism. But I would like to see more of our people putting compassion into action. (ASSK 1997b:60)

- [I2] UTU: ... Buddhism is very democratic, isn't it? The idea that members of the *Sangha* talk to each other and admit their mistakes, particularly in the *Pavara* ceremony that occurs at the end of the rains retreat, is a very democratic idea. In the army you learn to be obedient to authority, whereas as a monk you lean obedience to the truth. As monks, you talk to each other, admit you mistakes openly, and sort out differences in a very respectful and dignified manner. (ASSK 1997b:229-30)

- [I3] AC: ... there are a lot of monks and nuns who have played a very courageous role in our movement for democracy. Of course, I would like to see everybody taking a much more significant role in the movement, not just monks and nuns. After all, there is nothing in democracy that any Buddhist could object to. I think that monks and nuns, like everybody else, have a duty to promote what is good and desirable. And I do think they could be more effective. In fact, they should help as far as they can. I do believe in 'engaged Buddhism', to use a modern term. (ASSK 1997b:8)

- [I4] AC: How might they [monks and nuns] be more effective

ASSK: Simply by preaching democratic principles, by encouraging everybody to work for democracy and human rights, and by trying to persuade the authorities to begin dialogue. It would be a great help if every monk and nun in the country were to say, 'What we want to see is dialogue.' After all, that is the way of the Buddha. He encouraged the *Sangha* to talk to each other. He said, 'You can't live like dumb animals. And if you have offended each other, you expiate your sins and offences by confessing them and apologizing.' (ASSK 1997b:8)

- [I5] AC: How do you feel the *Sangha* in Burma could play a more active role in supporting the struggle for democracy?

UTU: The *Sangha* have a responsibility for the health and happiness of their lay disciples. Under such circumstances where the people are so poor and so unhappy, where they are undergoing both physical and mental suffering, the *Sangha* have a duty to speak out and to speak up for their disciples. They must not just ignore what is happening. They must speak out for whatever needs to be done in order to bring health and happiness, that is, mental and physical ease. If democracy is to be achieved in Burma it is everyone's duty to help, monks and nuns included. Everyone can do their part. I am not saying that it has to be a big part, but many little parts do make a big difference. That's what we want from the people. (ASSK 1997b:230)

See also [C17], [D3], [Y20], [Y27].

J. Buddha/Bodhisattva

- [J1] When I said that any human being can become an enlightened being ... This is what every Buddhist knows. And

we have a saying in Burmese 'if you try hard enough, you can become a Buddha.' That was what I was saying and that is what I was quoting. I was saying to the young people that you must all try, you must all try very hard to be as noble and as elevated as possible ... And the Buddha became a Buddha as a human being. That is what I said. (ASSK at a press conference on 10 July. Mya Maung 1992:153)

- [J2] AC: ... In strictly Buddhist terms, I have heard you referred to as a female *Bodhisattva* – a being striving for the attainment of Buddhahood – the perfection of wisdom, compassion and love, with the intention of assisting others to attain freedom.

ASSK: Oh, for goodness' sake, I'm nowhere near such a state. And I'm amazed that people think I could be anything like that. I would love to become a *Bodhisattva* one day, if I thought I was capable of such heights. I have to say that I am one of those people who strive for self-improvement, but I'm not one who has made, or thought of myself as fit to make a *Bodhisattva* vow. I do try to be good (*laughs*) ... I'm not saying that I succeed all the time but I do try. I have a terrible temper. I will say that I don't get as angry now as I used to. Meditation helped a lot. But when I think somebody has been hypocritical or unjust, I have to confess that I still get very angry. I don't mind ignorance; I don't mind sincere mistakes; but what makes me really angry is hypocrisy. So, I have to develop awareness. When I get really angry, I have to be aware that I'm angry – I watch myself being angry. And I say to myself, Well, I'm angry – I'm angry, I've got to control this anger. And that brings it under control to a certain extent. (ASSK 1997b:9-10)

- [J3] AC: Many years ago I interviewed Burma's former Prime Minister U Nu who stated as a matter of fact that he was a committed *Bodhisattva* ... I asked him what was it like being the Prime Minister with full control of the army and to have made the vow to become a Buddha. He said rather explicitly, if I remember correctly, that it was a major burden, a nearly constant moral dilemma. What he was saying was that being a devout Buddhist was incompatible with being a political leader who had a responsibility to use the armed forces. Don't you feel any such dilemma?

ASSK: No, I do not see a dilemma. I would not think that I'm in any position to even contemplate taking the *Bodhisattva* vow. My first concern is to abide by Buddhist principles in my worldly dealings. Of course, I do meditate. That's because I believe that all of us, as human beings have a spiritual dimension which cannot be neglected. Overall, I think of myself as a very ordinary Burmese Buddhist who will devote more time to religion in my older years. (ASSK 1997b:59)

See also [C1], [D6], [E20], [E22], [E28], [E32], [I4], [L2], [O12], [Q2], [Q3], [R1], [S1], [T1], [Y15]

K. Freedom

- [K1] Each year large numbers of people of many different races and creeds are driven to an uncertain life as unwanted refugees because of political and economic mismanagement under systems that do not foster the two basic freedoms without which human beings cannot lead dignified, meaningful lives: freedom from want and freedom from fear. As long as there are parts of the world where the two freedoms are not fostered there will be refugees. (ASSK. Message in acceptance of the 1995 IRC Freedom Award, 21 November 1995.)
- [K2] The people of my country want the two freedoms that spell security: freedom from want and freedom from fear. It is what that has driven so many of our young girls across our borders to a life of sexual slavery where they are subject to constant humiliation and ill-treatment. It is fear of persecution

for their political beliefs that has made so many of our people feel that even in their own homes they cannot live in dignity and security. Traditionally the home is the domain of the woman. But there has never been a guarantee that she can live out her life there safe and unmolested. (Message in acceptance of the 1995 IRC Freedom Award by Daw ASSK, 21 November 1995)

- [K3] We in the movement for democracy in Burma recognize that democracy and human rights are interdependent, that one cannot survive without the other. In working for democracy and human rights we are striving to establish political and social institutions and values that will free our people from want and fear. We wish our country to be a genuine refuge for all who come under its protection. In our endeavours we are strengthened by the support of organizations that have acquired firsthand knowledge of the indissoluble links between freedom and security. (Message in acceptance of the 1995 IRC Freedom Award by Daw ASSK, 21 November 1995.)

- [K4] AC: And the struggle continues fifty years later [after national independence]. When do you think it will end?

UTU: Soon. Very soon our country will be as lawful as the *dhamma*, a place of peace and justice where our people can enjoy their basic freedoms. (ASSK 1997b:207)

- [K5] AC: Just how repressed is free speech in Burma today?

UKM: You can answer that yourself. Practically, I suggest that you put my words to the test, if you have the courage to do it. Go into the city to a corner teashop and stand on a box and say a few words about democracy. Now see what would happen. You would no sooner get the word 'justice' out of your mouth than you would be grabbed and put on the next plane out of her. And for a Burmese to do that, it's a one-way truck-ride to Insein [prison]. This is why I say Suu's compound is the only liberated area in Burma. From there we say all sorts of things. We joke about the SLORC and tell them how much happier everyone would be, themselves included, if they would just talk to us ... (ASSK 1997b:189)

- [K6] Saints, it has been said, are the sinners who go on trying. So free men are the oppressed who go on trying and who in the process make themselves fit to bear the responsibilities and to uphold the disciplines which will maintain a free society. Among the basic freedoms to which men aspire that their lives might be full and uncramped, freedom from fear stands out as both a means and an end. A people who would build a nation in which strong, democratic institutions are firmly established as a guarantee against state-induced power must first learn to liberate their own minds from apathy and fear. (ASSK 1995:183)

L. Personal Attacks on ASSK

- [L1] Hardly a day goes by without an article or two in the state-controlled newspapers vilifying me or other leaders of the NLD or the supposed activities of the party. Every time there is a sign of public unrest or opposition to the military government, or a controversial incident, or an undesirable situation of any kind, it is promptly attributed by the authorities to the NLD. Rising prices, student demonstrations, a bomb going off in the inner sanctum of a sacred relic, communal conflict, even an attack on NLD leaders by hooligans obviously operating in collaboration with official security forces, the authorities do not hesitate to point an insinuating finger at our party. The government either has an extremely high regard for our abilities or has ceased to be concerned with the truth in its obsessive desire to attack the democratic opposition. (ASSK. 'Season ripples with riots and revolutions.' *Mainichi Daily News*, 07.04.1997, 'Summer', Letter from Burma No. 3)

- [L2] SLORC has been trying to move with false propaganda

about me [ASSK] – all sorts of nonsense. Things like I have four husbands, three husbands, two husbands. That I am a communist – although in some circles they say I am CIA. They have been trying to get prominent monks to say I have been insulting the Buddha. They can say that I'm married to a foreigner – but I've always admitted that freely – I'm not trying to hide that. (ASSK 1995:225)

- [L3] If there's anything they [SLORC] are afraid of ... if they're really *serious* about thinking that I have some sort of neo-colonialist bogey behind me – they've got to talk to me about that ... That's just pure nonsense and I think they know it. (ASSK 1995:259)

- [L4] AC: I know SLORC has made, and continues to make, repeated attempts to smear your character. What are their most frequent criticism?

ASSK: They focus on the fact that I'm married to a foreigner and have spent many years abroad. They also say other things, such as, I have not kept my promise of not founding a political party. I never made such a promise. I've only said, 'I do not wish to have to found a political party.' ... (ASSK 1997b:37-38)

- [L5] MR. SHENON: Do you have access to monks?

ASSK: When I was first put under house arrest, I wasn't allowed to offer food to monks [Note: a standard and necessary practice for devout Buddhists]. My mother had always made a point of making such offerings on July 19th, the anniversary of my father's assassination. I tried to continue this practice. I also wanted to make offerings on December 27, the anniversary of her death. They told me I couldn't do this, so my aunt, while she was living here, did this for me, in December 1989 and July 1990. Since then I haven't asked to do this again. The SLORC used this for propaganda purposes. Now I won't ask for anything. The same goes for visits by my family. The government says they permit such visits as a favor, but under the law these visits are my right. I am only forbidden to see diplomats and politicians. It is on the basis of my rights that I agreed to the family visits. (ASSK, 25.02.1995; BurmaNet News, 13.05.1994)

- [L6] Those who wish to discredit me and a few who entertain genuine fears have also implied that I am surrounded by communists. While it is true that a number of veteran politicians of varying political colour are giving me practical assistance, I have only accepted their help on the clear understanding that they are working for the democratic cause ... (ASSK 1995:206)

- [L6] There is another reason why we can never forget 19th July. Aung San Suu Kyi came back to Myanmar temporarily – the time which coincided with 19th July. Well, I don't remember the exact year. Up to that time, we were not even aware that she existed. When we became aware of her, we became greatly disconsolated. It is because we came to learn that she had fallen in love and married a long-nosed Englishman Michael Aris and even given birth to two sons. As soon as I learnt this I burst out into uncontrollable rage. She had smeared her own father's face black and had no regard for the honour of own race and honour of her own father, a Myanmar leader. She had forgotten how patriotic leaders had died together with her father in a brutal manner and had joined hands with a person whose race had brutally taken her father's life. I felt so deeply that I even began to utter to myself that she had no shame to come and even live in Myanmar ...

- [L7] On that day, when I saw the picture of ASSK laying a wreath at the tomb of Bogyoke Aung San, my thoughts began to wander – If her father, Bogyoke Aung San should become alive again and rise from his tomb and see his daughter, what would he do. I thought of the things I would do if I was in his place. Would he slap his daughter's face left and right like the Japanese

do or would he take out the automatic from its holster and empty the bullets into her. These were the thoughts which flashed into my mind. Then at once I came to remember that although Bogyoke Aung San apparently looked rough in speech and manner, he was a true gentleman and had a kind and gentle heart. He would not indulge in any acts like those which came into my mind. I then realized that he would simply admonish her like true Myanmar people do and spit on her face and make her be come shameful. Whenever, these thoughts flash into my mind I come to remember 19 July.

- [L8] As she had forgotten the honour of her parents and relatives and was enjoying herself in the West as much as she liked and had forgotten everything, it would have been better for her and it would have nothing to do with us. But now, it is nothing like this, my grandchildren. She was incited and instigated and forced to climb the Myanmar stage and she was made to dance according to their tune and according to the strings they pulled. While made to dance according to their tune, they change their play into another pattern and began the story of direct confrontations. I think it was on 19 July 1989. She pulled out a confrontation trump card and used it in the political arena on that day and is creating problems in succession up to the present day, my grandchildren. Even on the day on which the British colonialists had brutally shot and killed her own father, she wants to make political gain.

M. Samadhi (concentration, one-pointed mind)

- [M1] [young men trying out an 'executive stress tester' at Christmas] Of all those who tried it out to see who had nerves of steel we discovered that two young men who came from a part of Rangoon known for its strong political traditions did best. Such are obviously the qualities necessary for those who wish to pursue politics in Burma. (ASSK 1997a:33)

- [M2] He impressed me deeply as a man possessed of great powers of concentration; I thought that nothing could distract him from what he was thinking or doing. (U Thein on Aung San in Maung Maung 1962:115)

See also C. *Bhavana* (in particular [C4])

See also D. *Brahma-vihara* (in particular [D13])

See also R. *Sati* (in particular [R2-R3])

See also X. *Kilesa*

N. Communism

- [N1] There have been speculations that some politicians might be influencing my actions. Those who wish to discredit me and a few who entertain genuine fears have also implied that I am surrounded by communists. While it is true that a number of veteran politicians of varying political colour are giving me practical assistance, I have only accepted their help on the clear understanding that they are working for the democratic cause without expectation of future political advantage of personal gain. (ASSK 1995:206)

O. Fear

- [O1] AC: Why is diversity so disgusting to SLORC?

ASSK: Fear. Fear of losing their power. Fear of facing the truth. Fear of finding out that if they face the truth they will have to admit that they've been doing all sorts of things they should not have been doing. (ASSK 1997b:137-38)

- [O2] The great majority of the people in Burma live in a constant state of fear and insecurity. Forced labour is only one of the fears with which we have to cope. (ASSK in Marceaux 1996)

- [O3] This [portering] is a term which refers to people who

are taken by the armed forces to work for them to carry their arms, their rations, and in many cases it has been clear they are used as human mine fields [sweepers]. They go ahead of the troops so that if there are any land mines, those land mines will blow up under them and therefore they clear the way for the troops. So portering is one of the worst feared things on Burma. People lose their health and even their lives if they are taken to do a stint of portering. And then, of course, there is the other kind of forced labour which is working on local projects. There in villages and in towns people are told you turn out on such a day and you help with building bridge, road, dike, and if they don't participate in the forced labour projects they are fined. (ASSK interviewed in Marceaux 1996)

- [O4] Most totalitarian regimes fear change, but the longer they put off genuine democratic reform the more likely it is that even their positive contributions will be vitiated: the success of national policies depends on the willing participation of the people. (ASSK 1995:270)
- [O5] The great majority of the people in Burma live in a constant state of fear and insecurity. Forced labour is only one of the fears with which we have to cope. If the European Union can do something to alleviate that one fear, that will be of great help to us. We have to struggle for our own cause. We know that it is up to us to achieve democracy, but in this day and age the help of the international community means a lot, and in the name of a common humanity we look to you to help us as far as you can. (ASSK interviewed in Michelle Marceaux 1996)
- [O6] It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it. Most Burmese are familiar with the four *a-gati*, the four kinds of corruption. *Chanda-gati*, corruption induced by desire, is deviation from the right path in pursuit of bribes or for the sake of those one loves. *Dosa-gati* is taking the wrong path to spite those against whom one bears ill will, and *moha-gati* is aberration due to ignorance. But perhaps the worst of the four is *bhaya-gati*, for not only does *bhaya*, fear, stifle and slowly destroy all sense of right and wrong, it so often lies at the root of the other three kinds of corruption. Just as *chanda-gati*, when not the result of sheer avarice, can be caused by fear of want or fear of losing the goodwill of those one loves, so fear of being surpassed, humiliated or injured in some way can provide the impetus for ill will. And it would be difficult to dispel ignorance unless there is freedom to pursue the truth unfettered by fear. With so close a relationship between fear and corruption it is little wonder that in any society where fear is rife corruption in all forms becomes deeply entrenched. (ASSK 1995:180)
- [O7] If someone has a frank yet confrontational mindset in doing this [talking about their hatred and fears], how do you convince them of the importance of interdependence?

ASSK: I think that first of all, you must listen to that person. You've got to try to ask him to explain why he feels the way he feels. You have to ask, 'Why do you hate that? Why do you think a certain color is bad?' or, 'Why do you think a certain belief is bad?'

Then, I think, you would have to carry on from there, because if you want to create understanding between two people, both sides must learn to listen to each other—both sides, to a certain extent, must be frank about their fears.

Quite a lot of people do not like to admit their weaknesses to others and they hide these weaknesses. In doing so, they create a barrier. And of course people do not want to confess their weaknesses to just anybody because it might be exploited. That's understandable, too.

The first step is confidence building. If the two sides can start

having confidence in the other's good will, then you can carry on from there. Then I think they will be much more honest and not just talk about what they hate, but what they fear.

Hate and fear are the opposite sides of the same coin. It's the same thing. You don't hate unless you fear, basically. (Suvanji Jeff 1996)

- [O8] JP: You've written about fear and fearlessness. Was there a point during your house-arrest when you actually had to conquer fear?

SK: No, not during my house-arrest, but when I was small. It was in this house that I conquered my fear of the dark.

JP: How did you conquer your fear of the dark?

SK: By wandering about in the dark, at night, for about two weeks running. In the end I got a bit bored with the whole idea. (ASSK interview with John Pilger. 'Icon of hope.' *The New Internationalist*, June 1996)

- [O9] ASSK: ... it's because I have lived in free countries for a large part of my life that I'm not easily frightened. Fear is very much a habit. People are conditioned to be frightened.

In free countries it is quite normal to ask 'why?' if anybody, even a security officer, asks you to do something which seems unreasonable. In an authoritarian state asking such questions can be dangerous so people simply do what they are told to do. So those in power get more oppressive and the people get more frightened. (ASSK 1997b:38)

- [O10] ASSK: ... What I've learned in life is that it's always you own wrongdoing that causes you the greatest suffering. It is never what other people do to you. Perhaps this is due to the way in which I was brought up. My mother instilled in me the principle that wrongdoing never pays, and my own experience has proved that to be true. Also, if you have positive feelings towards other people they can't do anything to you – they can't frighten you. I think that if you stop loving other people then you really suffer. (ASSK 1997b:43)

- [O11] ASSK: She [ASSK's mother] also taught me to admire and respect the values for which my father stood. She emphasized that fear was not something you should encourage. In fact, she would get very angry with me if I was frightened. She did not like cowardice at all. And she would get very angry about the fact that I used to be afraid of the dark. She would not encourage such namby-pamby feelings. She thought very highly of courage, responsibility, spiritual service, and sharing ... (ASSK 1997b:165)

- [O12] AC: And specifically, as you speak on the weekends to the crowd?

UTU: We speak about the repression and unhappiness' of the people. The fact that the people are too afraid either to speak out or to do what they want to do, is not according to the teachings of the Buddha. The fact that they are so inhibited by fear is against the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha taught us to confront our fear.

That can be done in many ways. The first way is to say no, I'm not going to be controlled by fear. Then say yes, I will do my part in bringing democracy to my country. Fearlessness must become a habit. (ASSK 1997b:230)

- [O13] Tin U directly applies this idea of kind words as a technique for SLORC to cope with their fear.

UTU: ... Fear is unpleasant, now, isn't it? No one likes to live in fear. But it's up to each person to deal with their fear. For SLORC, they can deal with their fear by listening to words that encourage them to lay down their weapons and stop their atrocities. This would make the people very happy. At once their fears would dissipate. Then we would be on the road to forgiveness ... (ASSK 1997b:232-33)

- [O14] UKM: Nor does she play the role of a saint either (*laughing*). There is nothing saintly in Suu. She would readily admit that as a child she was afraid of the dark and ghosts and that she has no exceptional courage in her, only that her sense of duty drives her. 'Even though you may be afraid,' she says, 'you have to face it, get over it, and do your work.' That's Suu's simple message and she delivers it every time. (ASSK 1997a:181)
- [O15] Those who believe in the sanctity of human rights do not reject the concept of law and order as such but they would wish to ensure that the law is not just 'the will of the dominant faction' and that order is not simply 'the reflex of an all-pervading fear'. The majority of the people in Burma desire a state which preserves *dhamma* and *abhaya* – righteousness and absence of fear. (ASSK 1995:215)
- [O16] Pointing out the human tendency of the strong to bully the weak, he Aung San urged the fearless opposition of immoral strength and the practice of scrupulous justice towards the weak. (ASSK 1991:188)
- [O17] Always one to practise what he preached, Aung San himself constantly demonstrated courage – not just the physical sort but the kind that enabled him to speak the truth, to stand by his word, to accept criticism, to admit his faults, to correct his mistakes, to respect the opposition, to parley with the enemy and to let people be the judge to his worthiness as a leader. It is for such moral courage that he will always be loved and respected in Burma – not merely as a warrior hero but as the inspiration and conscience of the nation. The words used by Jawaharlal Nehru to describe Mahatma Gandhi could well be applied to Aung San: 'The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth, and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view.'

Gandhi, that great apostle of non-violence. and Aung San, the founder of a national army, were very different personalities, but as there is an inevitable sameness about the challenges of authoritarian rule anywhere at any time, so there is a similarity in the intrinsic qualities of those who rise up to meet the challenge. Nehru, who considered the instillation of courage in the people of India one of Gandhi's greatest achievements, was a political modernist, but as he assessed the needs for a twentieth-century movement for independence, he found himself looking back to the philosophy of ancient India: 'The greatest gift for an individual or a nation ... was *abhaya*, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but absence of fear from the mind.' (ASSK 1991:183-84)

- [O18] Q. You have written in your book 'Freedom from Fear' that it is not power that corrupts but fear of losing power. What is your own fear today?

A. Fear of letting down people who have at faith in me. I would rather go down myself than letting them down. But I do not think I will let them down though I will not be able to do everything they want. But I have never promised them anything. I simply said I would try my best. (Interview with ASSK, *The Nation*, 01.08.1995)

- [O19] You should never let your fears prevent you from doing what you know is right. Not that you shouldn't be afraid. Fear is normal. But to be inhibited from doing what you know is right is dangerous. You should be able to lead your life in the right way – despite fears. (In relation to the Danubyu incident Victor 1998:88)

See also [C22], [D6], [D9], [D10], [E1], [E4], [E5], [E18], [E19], [E26], [F2], [F3], [Q3], [R8]. [S5], [S7], [Y23]

P. Anger

See also [E19], [C25], [J2], [R8]

Q. Pañña (wisdom)

- [Q1] And of course the great majority of the world's refugees are seeking sanctuary from situations rendered untenable by a dearth of humanity and wisdom. (ASSK 1995:247)

- [Q2] AC: One of the most basic and essential questions: what does being a human mean to you?

ASSK: As a Buddhist, if you really want to consider what we, as human beings, are here for it's quite simple: we are trying to achieve enlightenment and to use the wisdom that is gained to serve others, so that they too might be free from suffering. While we can't all be Buddhas, I feel a responsibility to do as much as I can to realize enlightenment to the degree that I can, and to use it to relieve the suffering of others. (ASSK 1997b:148)

- [Q3] AC: So the overcoming of complacency is the principal focus?

ASSK: Yes, complacency is very dangerous. What we want to do is to free people from feeling complacent. Actually, with a lot of people it's not a sense of complacency either. I think that many people accept things out of either fear or inertia. This readiness to accept without question has to be removed. And it's very un-Buddhist. After all, the Buddha did not accept the status quo without questioning it.

In Buddhism, you know the four ingredients of success or victory: *chanda* – desire or will; *citta* – the right attitude; *virija* or perseverance; and *pañña* – wisdom. We feel that you have got to cultivate these four qualities in order to succeed. And the step prior even to these four steps, is questioning. From that you discover your real desires. Then you have got to develop *chanda* ... [the 'wish to do' or 'intention'] ... to do something about the situation. From there you've got to develop the right attitude and then persevere with wisdom. Only then will there be success in your endeavour. Of course, the five basic moral precepts are essential, to keep you from straying as it were. With these we will get where we want to. We don't need anything else. (ASSK 1997b:124)

- [Q4] If there is understanding then you don't have to solve your problems through violence; you can solve them by just talking it over. If there was understanding, in fact, there would be few problems. (ASSK cited in Stewart 1997:33)

- [Q5] We will produce the form of government that the people want ... But at the same time, we must not be reckless. We will surely get to our destination if we join hands. We will not bear grudges against anybody else. We have to try to understand each other. (ASSK cited upon release from house-arrest by Stewart 1997:113)

See also [R2], [R3], [R12], [Y13]

R. Sati (awareness, mindfulness, attention)

- [R1] AC: Are you a religious man?

UKM: It is a difficult question for me to answer. I live by a few precepts taught by the Buddha ... these few precepts have enabled me to get on well with my life ... The 'I' and 'me' of the past are dead and gone. By the same token, the narrator of the present is not worried about what might happen to 'him' of the future. In fact, 'he' is not status-conscious at all. What I strive for is to live a life of complete awareness from moment to moment and to provide the best service I possibly can to all living beings without discrimination and with a detached mind. Does religion serve politics? I do not speculate. I just try to do my best ... One of the things that Buddha taught us was to step

outside ourselves and see our own stupidity – as often as we can. We regard the teachings of the Buddha as an inner compass to keep ourselves on course. Actions geared to the mood of the moment and not related to the overall strategy could prove to be disastrous. (ASSK 1997b:189)

- [R2] U Pandita's instructions are repeated in *Voice of Hope*:

AC: I know that you occasionally pay your respects to the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita at his monastery, here in Rangoon. May I ask you to share some aspect of his teachings that you have found helpful?

ASSK: I remember everything he has taught me. The most important of which was that you can never be too mindful. He said you can have too much *pañña* – wisdom – or too much *virīya* – effort; but you cannot overdo mindfulness. I have been very mindful of that (laughing) throughout these last seven years.

Also, he advised me to concentrate on saying things that will bring about reconciliation. And that what I should say should be truthful, beneficial, and sweet to the ears of the listener. He said that according to the Buddha's teachings, there were two kinds of speech: one which was truthful, beneficial, and acceptable; and the other which was truthful, beneficial but unacceptable, that is to say that does not please the listener. (ASSK 1997b:9)

- [R3] The Hsayadaw also urged me to cultivate *sati*, mindfulness. Of the five spiritual faculties, *saddha* (faith), *virīya* (energy), *sati*, *samādhi* (concentration) and *pañña* (wisdom), it is only *sati* that can never be in excess. Excessive faith without sufficient wisdom leads to blind faith, while excessive wisdom without sufficient energy leads to undesirable cunning. Too much energy combined with weak concentration leads to indolence. But as for *sati*, one can never have too much of it; it is [never] in excess, but always in deficiency. (ASSK 1996a:66?)

- [R4] CLEMENTS: Are you asking the SLORC to go through the same gruelling psychological process that you went through?

UTU: ... It's one thing to profess Buddhism and it's another thing altogether to practise it. Perhaps the best way to overcome any inner hindrance is to train yourself in *sati* – mindfulness or awareness – it's shining light on one's darkness.

I had to learn the hard way. I was forced to confront myself while in prison. you can't just run away in solitary, you can certainly try but there is no place to go. If members of SLORC wish to avail themselves of what I have come to see as a shortcoming in myself – blind obedience – then I think they must first want to make that change. It's always better to initiate change than to have it forced upon you. But until they show a real change in their ways, we at the NLD will continue in every way possible to point out democracy. (ASSK 1997b:227)

- [R5] AC: Everyone of us has some level of ignorance that shrouds us from reality [a propos SLORC's ignorance] ... what safeguards can be developed by even the most prominent well-respected leaders to support their ethical judgement and not be unconsciously lured into self-deceptive activities?

ASSK: ... I think people just have to go on trying. I don't think anybody can afford to sit back and say, 'That's it, I'm perfect; I don't have to try any more.' It's a simple answer. A constant self-awareness. That's very Buddhist and I don't find any great mystery in that. Which is not to say that all those who try to develop awareness succeed to the extent to which they aspire. I think even monks have to practise this all the time. Constant effort is always required.

AC: I do know as a meditator that awareness is essential. But isn't self-deception a very subtle and insidious veil? The corruption of consciousness can take place in a split second. How to be aware of what one doesn't see about oneself?

ASSK: I think self-deception is something everybody practises, not only those who have power. Some say, 'There's nothing we

can do about the situation and we just have to accept it.' That in itself is self-deception. If someone really wants to get involved there is always something to do. So I do not think self-deception is the prerogative of the powerful. It's just a human failing to which we are all prone. And the best defence against it is the awareness of what you're doing, even if you're trying to deceive yourself. If you have really developed awareness you know that you're trying to deceive yourself, or you should know it anyway. (ASSK 1997b:141-42)

- [R6] ASSK: It's a form of spiritual cultivation – a spiritual education and a purifying process. Basically, it's a learning awareness. By being aware of whatever you're doing, you learn to avoid impurities. (ASSK 1997b:65)

- [R7] AC: I wonder. A personal question. In Buddhism it's understood that it's more difficult to conquer oneself than to conquer one's enemy. What are the inner struggles that you face in conquering yourself?

ASSK: Oh ... I'm soldiering on. And it's constant. It's always a matter of developing more and more awareness, not only from day to day, but from moment to moment. It's a battle which will go on the whole of my life. (ASSK 1997b:41-42) (see also [C23])

- [R8] ASSK: The search for truth has to be accompanied by awareness. And awareness and objectivity are very closely linked. If you are aware of what you're doing, you have an objective view of yourself. And if you are aware of what other people are doing you become more objective about them too. For example, awareness means that when you are aware of the fact that somebody is shouting, you don't think to yourself: 'What a horrible man.' That's purely subjective. But if you are aware you know that he's shouting because he's angry or frightened. That's objectivity. Otherwise, without awareness, all kinds of prejudices start multiplying. (ASSK 1997b:31-32)

- [R9] ASSK: And it's awareness that leads to objectivity. The more aware you are the more objective you become. This is very Buddhist, isn't it? And I think that those who have no sense of awareness of what's going on around them and inside them cannot have these feelings which are so important for doing the right thinking in this world. If you are not aware that what you are doing is wrong, then you will not feel ashamed of it. One is living in pure fantasy – a type of madness and a total lack of objectivity. (ASSK 1997b:162)

- [R10] ASSK: I don't know if it has been a process of self-discovery as much as one of spiritual strengthening. I was always taught to be honest with myself. Since I was quite young I had been in the habit of analysing my own actions and feelings. So I haven't really discovered anything new about myself. But meditation has helped to strengthen me spiritually in order to follow the right path. Also, for me, meditation is part of a way of life because what you do when you meditate is to learn to control your mind through developing awareness. This awareness carries on into everyday life. For me, that's one of the most practical benefits of meditation – my sense of awareness has become heightened. I'm now much less inclined to do things carelessly and unconsciously. (ASSK 1997b:65)

- [R11] I suppose what you need is the courage to face yourself. I think that's the best safeguard against corruption. If you're brave enough to face yourself, I mean, to really look in the mirror and see yourself, warts and all, then I think you would not be liable to corruption. As a Buddhist, I cannot help thinking that if one really understood the meaning of *anicca* [impermanence] one wouldn't chase power and wealth at the expense of one's moral being ...

I think it's probably, in part, my Buddhist background which

makes me feel that everything will pass away, but my deeds and their effects will stay with me. So while all the trappings of wealth and power will pass, the effects of my actions will remain with me until they have been fully worked out. (ASSK 1997b:153)

- [R12] The product of a Buddhist monastery school, he would have acquired early the concept of strength as a mental and spiritual force, learning that the five *bala* (synonymous with the five *indriyani* or controlling faculties) were confidence, energy, mindfulness, mental discipline and wisdom. The five strengths which were desirable form a worldly point of view – those of conduct, body, wealth, knowledge and friendship – would be considered relatively inferior, capable of reaching honourable fruition only when regulated by a proper cultivation of the mind and spirit. (ASSK about Aung San in ASSK 1991:188-89)

- [R13] Perhaps my great aunt helped me to cultivate self-awareness ... I have always been aware of my faults, so nothing has come as a shock to me. But, house arrest has given me the opportunity to try to overcome my own weaknesses and faults, especially through meditation ... I am very short-tempered, but I think that I am far less shot-tempered now than I used to be. (ASSK in Stewart 1997:94)

See also C. *Bhavana* (in particular [C2], [C12-C13], [C17], [C24-C25], [C28], [C31])

See also [J2], [Y23], [S7].

S. Revolution of the Spirit

- [S1] Although my mother is often described as a political dissident who strives by peaceful means for democratic change, we should remember that her quest is basically spiritual. As she has said, 'the quintessential revolution is that of the spirit', and she has written of the 'essential spiritual aims' of the struggle. The realization of this depends solely on human responsibility. At the root of that responsibility lie, and I quote, 'the concept of perfection, the urge to achieve it, the intelligence to find a path towards it and the will to follow that path if not to the end, at least the distance needed to rise above individual limitation ...' 'To live the full life', she says, 'one must have the courage to bear the responsibility of the needs of others ... one must *want* to bear this responsibility'. And she links this firmly to her faith when she writes '... Buddhism, the foundation of traditional Burmese culture, places the greatest value on man, who alone of all beings can achieve the supreme state of Buddhahood. Each man has in him the potential to realize the truth through his own will and endeavour and to help others to realize it.' Finally, she says, 'The quest for democracy in Burma is the struggle of a people to live whole, meaningful lives as free and equal members of the world community. It is part of the unceasing human endeavour to prove that the spirit of man can transcend the flaws of his nature. (Alexander Aris, Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in ASSK 1995:237-38)

- [S2] ASSK: When I speak about a spiritual revolution, I'm talking a lot about our struggle for democracy. I have always said that a true revolution has to be that of the spirit. You have to be convinced that you need to change and want to change certain things – not just material things. You want a political system which is guided by certain spiritual values – values that are different to those that you've lived by before.

- [S3] But still, our lives are not all politics, we have our personal concerns, our intellectual and cultural interests and our spiritual aspirations. The spiritual dimension becomes particularly important in a struggle in which deeply held convictions and strength of mind are the chief weapons against armed repression (ASSK 1997a:199)

- [S4] [As for the way in which democracy is to be attained under SLORC, Tin U replied] I firmly believe in kindness and compassion as the best ways of winning the sympathy of SLORC.

This is one of the reasons why Daw ASSK has called our movement for democracy a 'revolution of the spirit'. We must all have a change in spirit, all of us. We must make this spirit grow. (Tin U in ASSK 1997b:223)

- [S5] AC: Clearly, your vision of a democratic Burma includes a genuine reconciliation with your oppressors – SLORC. What do you think is required of the individual to confront his adversary and possibly win his friendship and understanding – not seeking to defeat him?

ASSK: Well, it has to begin with one's self, doesn't it? You have to develop inner spiritual strength, and those who have it do not feel hatred or hostility because they do not easily feel fear. It's all connected. If you can look upon someone with serenity you are able to cope with the feelings of hatred. But there cannot be serenity if there is fear. However, let me say, ordinary people like us, within the NLD, are nowhere near that level where we can look upon everybody with perfect love and serenity. But I think a lot of us within the organization have been given the opportunity to develop spiritual strength because we have been forced to spend long years by ourselves under detention and in prison. In a way, we owe it to those people who put us there. (ASSK 1997b:123)

- [S6] AC: What is the core quality at the centre of your movement?

ASSK: Inner strength. It's the spiritual steadiness that comes from the belief that what you are doing is right, even if it doesn't bring you immediate concrete benefits. It's the fact that you are doing something that helps to shore up your spiritual powers. It's very powerful. (ASSK 1997b:123)

- [S7] AC: ASSK has called the democracy struggle a revolution of the spirit, saying that 'a people who would build a nation in which strong democratic institutions are firmly established as a guarantee against state-induced power must first learn to liberate their own minds from apathy and fear.' I'd like to ask you as a man who has engaged in combat, who has seen death, who has killed and has been wounded on numerous occasions, and you, a man who has been treated inhumanely through imprisonment and harsh living conditions, how does one learn to 'liberate their own mind from fear', other than in engaging in the long-term practice of Buddhist meditation?

UTU: You might think this is an over-simplification but my belief is that to overcome fear one acts despite the fear. You just do it and face the consequences, because if you know something is right then you should just do it. Also, the more that one acts courageously, the more it becomes a habit. Like mindfulness in meditation. At first you must try to be mindful. Later on as one goes on trying the mindfulness just occurs naturally, it becomes effortless, it too becomes a habit. (ASSK 1997b:230-31).

- [S8] *The quintessential revolution is that of the spirit*, born of an intellectual conviction of the need for change in their mental attitudes and values which shape the course of a nation's development. A revolution which aims merely at changing official policies and institutions with a view to an improvement in material conditions has little chance of genuine success. Without a *revolution of the spirit*, the forces which produced the inequities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration. It is not enough merely to call for freedom, democracy and human rights. There has to be a united determination to persevere in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance and fear. (ASSK 1991:185)

See also [E23], [J3], [R12], [Y16], [Y17], [Y18].

T. Enlightenment

- [T1] I believe that here are people who are capable of learning and people who are not. I have always given examples of this. Devadatta was a close cousin of Lord Buddha. Although Lord Buddha had tried very hard to preach to him, it was only when he died that he gained enlightenment. Ingulimala was a mass murderer who at his first meeting with Lord Buddha, gained enlightenment. So we cannot brand one person bad and the other good. What is important is a person who is capable of learning and a person who is not. Those who are capable of learning can become good at any time. Those who are not, well we'll only lose our breath, we can't do anything about it. This is also true for our League. This is not an institution to others. I am referring to our own members. Those who are capable of learning and those who are not should make their own self-judgement. Well, I declare that I shall change whatever attitudes that I should change, here and now. (Statement by Daw ASSK at the closing ceremony of the 9th NLD Party Congress, 29.09.1997)

See [Q2]

See also [J] Buddha

U. Parami (perfection)

- [U1] Aung San saw life as a pilgrimage in the quest of truth and perfection and he sought to carry his country with him in the quest (ASSK 1991:191)
- [U2] Even after he [Aung San] had entered the world of student politics which was to absorb him so completely, he wrote to one of his closest friends of his 'pilgrimage in quest of Truth and Perfection' and of his conscious striving after 'sincerity in thought, word and deed'. He also expressed his concern over the 'spiritual vacuum ... among our youth' and the fear that 'unless we brace ourselves to withstand the tide ... we will soon be spiritual bankrupts *par excellence*'.¹ (ASSK 1991:8)
- [U3] AC: In essence what does 'perfection' mean to you?
ASSK: My father once talked about purity in thought, word and deed. That's what I mean by perfection. Purity ... I think the greatest protection in life is absolute purity. I believe that nobody can hurt you except yourself, ultimately.

See also [C1], [J2], [Q2], [S1], [V2], [Y2]

See Buddha

V. Purity

- [V1] ASSK: My highest aspiration is very much a spiritual one: purity of mind. (ASSK 1997b:28)
- [V2] ASSK: ... when one says that he wishes to be pure, you have to first discover what he means by purity. Like truth, it's a very large concept. It's something towards which you aspire and struggle all the time. If anybody says, 'I have achieved purity,' he or she is probably not that pure. I doubt that anybody who is not an *arahant* [enlightened one] could actually say, 'There's no impurity in me.' But I think that if you are in search of purity, you've got to know what impurity means. For people brought up in Buddhism, I don't think it's so difficult, because we have our concepts of greed, hatred and ignorance which create impurity. So anything that you can trace to ill-will and greed, that is impure. And anything that you can trace to ignorance, now that's a problem. How do you know that you are ignorant, if you are

ignorant? (ASSK 1997b:31)

See also [R6], [U3]

See X. Mental defilements (impurity)

X. Kilesa (mental defilements)

See also [V2], [C25]

See [P] Anger, [R] Sati

Y. Democracy

- [Y1] ALAN CLEMENTS: Buddhist philosophy explains the transformation of an apparently negative experience into its positive opposite. For example, seeing cruelty as an opportunity to love, or deception as an invitation to honesty. In other words, everything is workable. There are no obstacles, only challenges, if spiritual attitude is well-focused. To explain this point the Buddha once chastised his monks for criticizing his arch-nemesis Devadatta, upon his death. As you know, Devadatta attempted to kill the Buddha on several occasions. But if I'm not mistaken, the Buddha said that without Devadatta's aggression he would never have been able to become fully accomplished in patience. One could see this as praise for the adversary or the opposition.

In Burma today we have a nearly identical metaphor with SLORC's politics of repression being confronted by a spiritual revolution. May I ask you for your views on the transformation of negativity into freedom as it applies to your struggle for democracy.

ASSK: In order to have a really strong, healthy democracy, we need a strong, healthy opposition. I always explain that you need a good opposition because they'll always point out your mistakes and keep you on your toes. In many ways, the opposition is your greatest benefactor. In worldly terms the opposition in a democracy plays the role of Devadatta for any legal government. It stops the ruling party from going astray by constantly pointing out its every mistake. The opposition as the potential next government keeps the current one from misusing its power. (ASSK 1997b:57)

- [Y2] AC: Or perhaps in the more immediate sense, like the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh said, 'In the grain of rice see the sun.' Do you see yourself as just a seed-sower of democracy?

ASSK: I'm thinking of a book I once read, by Rebecca West. She was talking about musicians and artists as a 'procession of saints always progressing towards an impossible goal. I see myself like that – as part of a procession, a dynamic process, doing all that we can to move towards more good and justice; a process that is not isolated from what has happened before or what will come after. And I do whatever I have to do along the path, whether it's sowing seeds or reaping the harvest or (*laughing*) tending the plants half-grown. (ASSK 1997b:61) (See also [K6])

- [Y3] Richardson: I think the key ... to democratic change in Burma is a dialogue between you and Khin Nyunt ...

ASSK: I think I would rather put it as between the SLORC and the NLD, or the democratic forces, because I'm not in favour of promoting any kind of personality cult or personality politics. This is something we've got to avoid from the very beginning. When we set up a democracy we want to see a democracy which is based on solid principles, not on any personalities. You will say, 'but this is what happens all over Asia,' but [there's] no reason why we can't change that, why we shouldn't *try* to change that ... I'm only human and of *course* I like it when people care for me. But it's also rather worrying. I would like people to think of the democracy movement as a whole, not just as me. Just releasing me tomorrow is not going to do any good if the attitude of SLORC does not change ... Whatever they do to me, that's between them and me. I can take

¹ Aung San, letters to Tin Aung c. 1935, extracts quoted in Tin Aung, 'My recollections of Bogyoke Aung San', *Guardian* (Rangoon), August 1971, p. 15.

it. What is more important is what they are doing to the country. And national reconciliation doesn't just mean reconciliation between two people – I don't accept that at all. It's a reconciliation between different ideas ... What we need is a spiritual *and* intellectual reconciliation ... I've always said that the only answer to Burma's problems is dialogue ... I'm ready at any time, but they [SLORC] seem not terribly keen. And I wonder why. (ASSK 1995:249)

- [Y4] Myriad unions and groups, all resolved upon democracy, have established links to enable them to work together with a unity of purpose amazing in a nation where freedom of association, albeit illegal, has only become possible within the last month. 12.09.1988 – (ASSK 1995:203)

- [Y5] Those working for democracy in Burma would wish to differentiate between the 'rule of law' which would mean the fair and impartial administration of legal rules – i.e. measures passed by a legally elected assembly after free and open discussion and debate – and the process of law and order which merely involves the enforcement of arbitrary edicts decreed by a regime which does not enjoy the mandate of the people. (ASSK 1995:214)

- [Y6] UKM: Clearly, Suu's years abroad were a great gift to her as well as to her country. It was her time of education. To live and learn and to absorb democracy. To get freedom into her blood so to speak, to get it flowing through her veins. She had the rare and wonderful opportunity of serving at the United Nations under one of Burma's great statesmen, Secretary-General U Thant. She's lived in so many different cultures – America, England, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Japan; she knows diversity. Suu's absence from Burma was not an absence at all. It groomed her, matured her into adulthood, into womanhood, so that she could come back and serve her people, to help them to help themselves to challenge the deadening cruelty of authoritarianism. At least that's my way of seeing things. Perhaps I'm trying to interpret her destiny. But the situation speaks for itself. (ASSK 1997b:181)

- [Y7] Instant democracy cannot be obtained just by slinging on the pasoe [trousers – a mark of western decadence] and girding of woman's apparel and uttering mystic words. The most fundamental thing is for the country to have a firm and strong economy. Then only will it be possible for the people residing in the country to meet their food, clothing and shelter needs proportionately. As long as the food, clothing and shelter needs of individual persons are fulfilled, proportionately, the moral character of individual persons will become good and proper. Once the people become morally good, they will be able to abide by the disciplines, become duty-conscious and law-abiding persons. Then only will the democratic procedures, which have been prescribed and accepted to suit the natural conditions and traditions and culture of the country become alive. (Byatti. 'Not satisfied dear love, let's begin from the start. *New Light of Myanmar*, 07.06.1996)

- [Y8] We must make democracy the popular creed. We must try to build up a free Burma in accordance with such a creed. If we should fail to do this, our people are bound to suffer. If democracy should fail the world cannot stand back and just look on, and therefore Burma would one day, like Japan and Germany, be despised. Democracy is the only ideology which is consistent with freedom. It is also an ideology that promotes and strengthens peace. It is therefore the only ideology we should aim for. (ASSK 1995:194)

- [Y9] Many people ask me how I came to be involved in this nationwide movement for democracy. As the daughter of the man regarded as the father of modern Burma it was inevitable that I should have been closely attuned to political currents in

the country ... (ASSK 1995:205)

- [Y10] If we divide ourselves ethnically, we shall not achieve democracy for a long time. (ASSK 1995:223)

- [Y11] Opponents of the movement for democracy in Burma have sought to undermine it by one the one hand casting aspersions of the people to judge what was best for the nation and on the other condemning the basic tenets of democracy as un-Burmese. There is nothing new in Third World governments seeking to justify and perpetuate authoritarian rule by denouncing liberal democratic principles as alien. By implication they claim for themselves the official and sole right to decide what does or does not conform to indigenous cultural norms. Such conventional propaganda aimed at consolidating the powers of the establishment has been studied, analysed and disproved by political scientists, jurists and sociologists. But in Burma, distanced by several decades of isolationism from political and intellectual developments in the outside world, the people have had to draw on their own resources to explode the twin myths of their unfitness for political responsibility and the unsuitability of democracy for their own society. (ASSK 1995:168)

- [Y12] Members of the Buddhist *sangha* in their customary role as mentors have led the way in articulating popular expectations by drawing on classical learning to illuminate timeless values. But the conscious effort to make traditional knowledge relevant to contemporary needs was not confined to any particular circle – it went right through Burmese society from urban intellectuals and small shopkeepers to doughty village grandmothers. (ASSK 1995:168)

- [Y13] Why has Burma with its abundant natural and human resources failed to live up to its early promise as one of the most energetic and fastest-developing nations in South-East Asia? ... The Burmese people ... got to the heart of the matter by turning to the words of the Buddha on the four causes of decline and decay: failure to recover that which had been lost, omission to repair that which had been damaged, disregard of the need for reasonable economy, and the elevation to leadership of men without morality or learning. Translated into contemporary terms, when democratic rights had been lost to military dictatorship sufficient efforts had not been made to regain them, moral and political values had been allowed to deteriorate without concerted attempts to save the situation, the economy had been badly managed, and the country had been ruled by men without integrity or wisdom. (ASSK 1995:169)

- [Y14] By invoking the Ten Duties of Kings the Burmese are not so much indulging in wishful thinking as drawing on time-honoured values to reinforce the validity of the political reforms they consider necessary. It is a strong argument for democracy that governments regulated by principles of accountability, respect for public opinion and the supremacy of just laws are more likely than an all-powerful ruler or ruling class, uninhibited by the need to honour the will of the people, to observe the traditional duties of Buddhist kingship. Traditional values serve both to justify and to decipher popular expectations of democratic government. (ASSK 1995:173)

- [Y15] It was predictable that as soon as the issue of human rights became an integral part of the movement for democracy the official media should start ridiculing and condemning the whole concept of human rights, dubbing it a western artefact alien to traditional values. It was also ironic – Buddhism, the foundation of traditional Burmese culture, places the greatest value on man, who alone of all beings can achieve the supreme state of Buddhahood. Each man has in him the potential to realize the truth through his own will and endeavour and to help

others to realize it. Human life therefore is infinitely precious. 'Easier is it for a needle dropped from the abode of Brahma to meet a needle stuck in the earth than to be born as a human being'. (ASSK 1995:174)

- [Y16] The people of Burma want not just a change of government but a change in political values ... Of the four Buddhist virtues conducive to the happiness of laymen, *saddha*, confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values, is the first. To instil such confidence, not by an appeal to the passions but through intellectual conviction into a society which has long been wracked by distrust and uncertainty is the essence of the Burmese revolution for democracy. It is a revolution which moves for changes endorsed by universal norms of ethics. (ASSK 1995:178)
- [Y17] The people of Burma want not just a change of government but a change in political values ... Of the four Buddhist virtues conducive to the happiness of laymen, *saddha*, confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values, is the first. To instil such confidence, not by an appeal to the passions but through intellectual conviction into a society which has long been wracked by distrust and uncertainty is the essence of the Burmese revolution for democracy. It is a revolution which moves for changes endorsed by universal norms of ethics. (ASSK 1995:178)
- [Y18] The quest for democracy in Burma is the struggle of a people to live whole, meaningful lives as free and equal members of the world community. It is part of the unceasing human endeavour to prove that the spirit of man can transcend the flaws of his own nature. (ASSK 1995:179)
- [Y19] A political system that denies the full enjoyment of human rights to the people militates against the ideal of full independence. That is why I say that the present demands of the people of Burma for democracy constitutes their second struggle for independence (ASSK 1995:200)
- [Y20] The Buddhist PAVARANA ceremony at the end of the rainy season retreat was instituted by the Lord Buddha, who did not want human beings to live in silence 'like dumb animals.' This ceremony, during which monks ask mutual forgiveness for any offence given during the retreat, can be said to be a council of truth and reconciliation. It might also be considered a forerunner of that most democratic of institutions, the parliament, a meeting of peoples gathered together to talk over their shared problems. All the world's great religions are dedicated to the generation of happiness and harmony. This demonstrates the fact that together with the combative instincts of man there co-exists a spiritual aspiration for mutual understanding and peace.

This forum of non-governmental organizations represents the belief in the ability of intelligent human beings to resolve conflicting interests through exchange and dialogue. It also represents the conviction that governments alone cannot resolve all the problems of their countries. The watchfulness and active cooperation of organizations outside the spheres of officialdom are necessary to ensure the four essential components of the human development paradigm as identified by the UNDP: productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment. The last is particularly relevant: it requires that 'development must be BY people, not only FOR them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives.' In other words people must be allowed to play a significant role in the governance of their country. And 'people' include women who make up at least half of the world's population. ('Opening Keynote Address By ASSK', NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95, 31 August 1995)

- [Y21] It is often in the name of cultural integrity, as well as social stability and national security, that democratic reforms based on human rights are resisted by authoritarian governments. It is insinuated that some of the worst ills of Western society are the result of democracy, which is seen as the progenitor of unbridled freedom and selfish individualism. It is claimed, usually without adequate evidence, that democratic values and human rights run counter to the national culture and therefore, to be beneficial, they need to be modified – perhaps to the extent that they are barely recognizable. The people are said to be as yet unfit for democracy; therefore and indefinite length of time has to pass before democratic reforms can be instituted. (ASSK 1995:264-65)

- [Y22] ASSK: My immediate thought [upon the award of the Nobel Peace Prize] was that people would take a greater interest in our cause for democracy ... (ASSK 1997b:67)

- [Y23] AC: What would you say are the main qualities of consciousness that you try to foster in yourself and encourage others to embrace, as the foundation of your struggle for democracy?

ASSK: first of all, what we would like is vision. We would like the people to see and understand why a political system is tied up with our daily lives. Why we cannot ignore politics and just concentrate on economics, as the authorities would like us to do. We want them to understand that our struggle for democracy is a struggle for our everyday life, that it's not removed. It's not something that you do when you have a bit of free time, or when you feel like it. You have to work at it all the time, because it affects your life all the time. You can never separate the political system of a country from the way in which you conduct your daily life. This is basically the spirit that we want – an awareness that what we are struggling for is not some distant goal or ideal. What we are struggling for is a change in our everyday lives. We want freedom from fear and want. There are people today who enjoy materially secure lives, but they can never be sure when this will be taken from them. There must be a sense of security that as long as we're not doing harm to others, as long as we are not infringing the laws which were brought about so that we should not harm each other, we should be able to rest secure in the knowledge that we ourselves will not be harmed. That the authorities cannot remove you from your job, kick you out of your house, throw you in prison, or have you executed, if you have done nothing to warrant such actions. (ASSK 1997b:81)

- [Y24] AC: What do you think would be Burma's unique expression of democracy?

ASSK: I don't know because we have not started our democracy yet. But I would like to think that it would be a democracy with a more compassionate face. A gentler sort of democracy ... gentler because it's stronger.

AC: Would it be a capitalistic form of democracy?

ASSK: We've never thought of it as a capitalist democracy as such. We do not see why democracy should be made a part of capitalism or vice versa. We think that democracy means the will of the people. It means certain basic freedoms, which will have to include basic economic freedoms that would allow for capitalism ... (ASSK 1997b:83)

- [Y25] ASSK: ... I have always said that once we get democracy, there will be people who misuse their democratic rights and use them just for their own pleasure or personal gain. Probably there will be people who use the right of associations in order to found the kind of organizations that will be used to attack democracy itself ... But I don't agree with everything that's happening in the West, which is why I say that I would like our democracy to be a better, more compassionate and more

caring one. That is not to say we have fewer freedoms. But we will use these freedoms more responsibly and with the well-being of others in mind. (ASSK 1997b:157-58)

- [Y26] ASSK: What we have to make them understand is that the struggle is about them. That is what we always explain to the people. Democracy is about your job and your children's education; it's about the house you live in and the food you eat; it's about whether or not you have to get permission from somebody before you visit your relatives in the next village ... The struggle is about their everyday life ...

When Uncle U Kyi Maung was under detention, one of the Military Intelligence officers interrogating him asked, 'Why did you decide to become a member of the National League for Democracy?' And he answered, 'For your sake' That's what our struggle is about everybody's everyday lives, including those of the MI. (ASSK 1997b:121)

- [Y27] AC: How do you work within yourself with democracy as a vision, democracy as a process, and democracy as a state of mind? The reason I ask is that I've seen how the attachment to any goal often compromises, if not prevents one from actually achieving it.

ASSK: Well, the three have to be simultaneous. First of all it has to be a state of mind. You've got to act democracy. Then you have to work out the process towards the vision that you have. You can't really separate the three. They all go together. And this is very Buddhist, isn't it? Work, action and self-reliance. Both work and action come down to *karma* – action and doing. And of course, self-reliance is very Buddhist. We say, '*atta hi attano natho*.' In the end we only have ourselves to rely on. (ASSK 1997b:134)

- [Y28] ASSK: In our movement I use very practical, simple arguments. I always say, 'I can't do it alone. If you want democracy, it is no use depending on either me or the NLD alone. What democracy means is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. If you want democracy, you'll have to work for it. You've got to join in. The more people are involved the quicker we'll reach our goal. (ASSK 1997b:125)

- [Y29] It might be asked who indeed are 'the people' working for democracy. They are the vast majority of the Burmese public who have suffered civil, political and economic privations under the rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). It could be said that the party by its wanton oppression and lack of sensible economic policies has become the unwitting instruments for unification. (ASSK1995:204)

- [Y30] The chief aim of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and other organizations working for the establishment of a democratic government in Burma is to bring about social and political changes which will guarantee a peaceful, stable and progressive society where human rights, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are protected by the rule of law. (ASSK 1995:214)

- [Y31] After establishing democracy, we may have new responsibilities in the economic sphere, but at this time work towards democracy. (ASSK 1995:222-223)

- [Y32] Q: You have put political reform before economic development. But material well-being is one of the SLORC's preconditions for holding elections.

A. What I am saying is that people shouldn't be sidetracked by all these so-called economic reforms from the fight for democracy. If we don't change the political system, we're not going to progress economically either. A government that cannot guarantee basic human rights certainly won't be able to guarantee any economic rights. (ASSK 1995:226)

- [Y33] When asked if I intend to form a political party my

reply is that it is not a prospect which I find at all attractive. However, I am prepared to engage in the very kind of party politics I wish to avoid if I am convinced that it would be necessary to uphold the democratic system for which we are all striving at this moment. (ASSK 1995:207)

- [Y34] Another question I am frequently asked is how long I intend to stay in Burma ... It has always been my intention to come back and live in my country some day in order to set up a chain of public libraries and to organize scholarship schemes for students. Whether or not I continue to engage in political activities after a transition to a democratic system of government I would hope to fulfil these aims. (ASSK 1995:201)

- [Y35] A third question that is often put to me is whether I believe that the people's movement for democracy will succeed. The answer is an unequivocal YES. Contrary to the predictions of those who are totally out of touch with the mood of Burma today, I believe that not only will the people achieve democracy but that once it is achieved they will be able to make it work for the greater good of the nation. (ASSK1995:207)

- [Y36] We have all entered this struggle for democracy because we believe that we can win. For example, a person enters a race or buys a lottery ticket because he believes it's possible to win. So also if someone were to ask me whether I believe we can win in our fight for democracy, I should reply honestly, 'Yes, we can', and because I believe we can, I have chosen to take part. (ASSK 1995:212)

- [Y37] Even if there are elections and the forces of democracy win, the movement is not yet finished with its work; we still have to continue. Today the students are around twenty years old. Life expectancy in Burma is about sixty, and maybe under democracy and improved living conditions it will become seventy. That means that the youth will have possibly fifty years of struggle ahead of them. Democracy is something one must nourish all one's life, if it is to remain alive and strong. Like the health of a person: even if his parents have raised him to healthy adulthood, if he fails to take care of himself, his health will deteriorate. If each of you keeps in mind all your life that you have a responsibility for the welfare of your country, then we shall have no reason to worry that our country's health will deteriorate. (ASSK 1995:213)

- [Y38] Actually, it was to bring together the army and the people that the movement towards democracy was initiated. (ASSK 1995:223)

- [Y39] Richardson: I think the key ... to democratic change in Burma is a dialogue between you and Khin Nyunt ...

ASSK: I think I would rather put it as between the SLORC and the NLD, or the democratic forces, because I'm not in favour of promoting any kind of personality cult or personality politics. This is something we've got to avoid from the very beginning. When we set up a democracy we want to see a democracy which is based on solid principles, not on any personalities. You will say, 'but this is what happens all over Asia,' but [there's] no reason why we can't change that, why we shouldn't *try* to change that ... I'm only human and of *course* I like it when people care for me. But it's also rather worrying. I would like people to think of the democracy movement as a whole, not just as me. Just releasing me tomorrow is not going to do any good if the attitude of SLORC does not change ... Whatever they do to me, that's between them and me. I can take it. What is more important is what they are doing to the country. And national reconciliation doesn't just mean reconciliation between two people – I don't accept that at all. It's a reconciliation between different ideas ... What we need is a spiritual *and* intellectual reconciliation ... I've always said that

the only answer to Burma's problems is dialogue ... I'm ready at any time, but they [SLORC] seem not terribly keen. And I wonder why. (ASSK 1995:249)

- [Y40] Revolutions generally reflect the irresistible impulse for necessary changes which have been held back by official policies or retarded by social apathy. The institutions and practices of democracy provide ways and means by which such changes could be effected without recourse to violence. But change is anathema to authoritarianism, which will tolerate no deviation from rigid policies. Democracy acknowledges the right to differ as well as the duty to settle differences peacefully. Authoritarian governments see criticism of their actions and doctrines as a challenge to combat. Opposition is equalled with 'confrontation', which is interpreted as violent conflict. Regimented minds cannot grasp the concept of confrontation as an open exchange of major differences with a view to settlement through genuine dialogue. The insecurity of power based on coercion translates into a need to crush all dissent. Within the framework of liberal democracy, protest and dissent can exist in healthy counterpart with orthodoxy and conservatism, contained by a general recognition of the need to balance respect for individual rights with respect for law and order. (ASSK 1991:176)

- [Y41] In their quest for democracy the people of Burma explore not only the political theories and practices of the world outside their country but also the spiritual and intellectual values that have given shape to their own environment. (ASSK 1995:179)

- [Y42] ASSK: There is nothing on the side of the NLD that prevents this. It's the SLORC which is not taking this up. The NLD has always been prepared to talk to them ...

Shenon: Well, assuming the dialogue begins [and] some confidence is developed in each other's words, do you see the possibility that there could be a democratically oriented government in Burma that could include a substantial component of the army? A political prospect?

ASSK: I'm not prepared to discuss it, because that's not for me to say. What I do want to make clear is that it's got to be a serious democracy, not a sham. That I would insist on. But of course, everybody in Burma has a role to play in the country and we've never ruled it out ... We've just got to agree on who plays what role and how. But one group should not impose that on the country. (ASSK 1995:256)

- [Y43] I am one of a large majority of people in Burma struggling for democracy. It is my aim to help the people attain democracy without further violence or loss of life. (ASSK 1991:205-6)

- [Y44] The future of course is democracy for Burma ... It is going to happen, and I'm going to be here when it happens. (ASSK cited in Stewart 1997:122)

See [D18], [E25], [E32], [I2], [I3], [I4], [I5]

See S. Revolution of the Spirit

ZA. Non-violence

- [ZA1] ASSK: I do not believe in an armed struggle because it will perpetrate the tradition that he who is best at wielding arms, wields power. Even if the democracy movement were to succeed through force of arms, it would leave in the minds of the people the idea that whoever has greater armed might wins in the end ... I don't have any doubts about it. I know that it is often the slower way and I understand why our young people feel that non-violence will not work. Especially when the authorities in Burma are prepared to talk to insurgent groups but not to an organization like the NLD which carries no arms. That makes a

lot of people feel that the only way you can get anywhere is by bearing arms. But I cannot encourage that kind of attitude. Because if we do, we will be perpetuating a cycle of violence that will never come to an end. (ASSK 1997b:6-7)

ZB. Evil

See [C25], [D8]

ZC. Myanmar/Burma

- [ZC1] How do you feel about Burma being renamed Myanmar?

ASSK: No one should be allowed to change the name of country without referring to the will of the people. They say that Myanmar refers to all the Burmese ethnic groups, whereas Burma only refers to the Burmese ethnic group, but that is not true. Myanmar is a literary word for Burma and it refers only to the Burmese ethnic group. Of course, I prefer the word Burma. (Michele Manceaux. *Marie Claire Magazine*, May 1996, Singapore Edition)

ZD. Dhamma, tayà, úbadei (law, justice)

- [ZD1] ASSK: ... SLORC does not abide by the existing laws and what they are doing is contrary to the existing laws. They keep saying when they want to attack us that they won't tolerate any action contrary to the existing laws. But they are the ones to constantly flout the law. (ASSK 1997b:145)

- [ZD2] UKM: ... The Karen elder proceeded to tell us his story of incarceration. During his trial for his non-offence the judge called him up close to his desk and said, 'Brother, you have done nothing. You are absolutely innocent. But my superiors have ordered me to give you a seven-year sentence.. However, I will reduce your sentence to only three years' Now the Karen elder told us how pleased he was to hear that, especially after having already waited well over a year for his non-trial. He thought to himself, well, I only have to serve less than two years more. After the sentencing was over and he was on his way back to his cell the judge came over to him and said, 'I'm sorry about what I just did. They just sacked me and sentenced me too.' 'Why?', the elder asked. The gentleman replied, 'Because I gave you three years instead of seven which the higher authorities had ordered.' (ASSK 1997a:178)

- [ZD3] ASSK: Whenever they [SLORC] think they need a particular piece of land for a building project, then off these people go ...

AC: These people have no rights whatsoever?

ASSK: No. People have no rights.

AC: So they are simply told by the authorities to get out of their homes on such and such a date and that's it?

ASSK: That's right.

AC: Where do they go?

ASSK: Most of them are just dumped in fields and told to put up their huts.

AC: How widespread is this today?

ASSK: It happens all over Burma

AC: And the reason?

ASSK: Forced relocations are mostly carried out with a view to make a place more attractive for tourists. (ASSK 1997b:82)

- [ZD4] The words 'law and order' have so frequently been misused as an excuse for oppression that the very phrase has become suspect in countries which have known authoritarian rule. Some years ago a prominent Burmese author wrote an article on the notion of law and order as expressed by the official term *nyein-wut-pi-pyar*. One by one he analysed the words, which literally mean 'quiet-crouched-crushed-flattened', and concluded that the whole made for an undesirable state of

affairs, one which militated against the emergence of an alert, energetic, progressive citizenry. There is no intrinsic virtue to law an order unless 'law' is equate with justice and 'order' with the discipline of a people satisfied that justice has been done. Law as an instrument of state oppression is a familiar feature of totalitarianism. Without a popularly elected legislature and an independent judiciary to ensure due process, the authorities can enforce as 'law' arbitrary decrees that are in fact flagrant negations of all acceptable norms of justice. There can be no security for citizens in a state where new 'laws' can be made and old ones changed to suit the convenience of the powers that be. The iniquity of such practices is traditionally recognized by the precept that existing laws should not be set aside at will. The Buddhist concept of law is based on *dhamma*, righteousness or virtue, not on the power to impose harsh and inflexible rules on a defenceless people. The true measure of the justice of a system is the amount of protection it guarantees to the weakest. (ASSK 1991:177)

- [ZD5] Where there is no justice there can be no secure peace. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that 'if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression', human rights should be protected by the rule of law ... The Burmese associate peace and security with the coolness and shade ... The shade of the ruler is yet more cool. But coolest of all is the shade of the Buddha's teachings. (ASSK 1991:177) (See *loka niti* for Four Shades – trees, parents, teachers, and Buddha in Sankyaung Sayadaw 1957:116-19, who relates in particular parents and teachers to the quality of *metta*).
- [ZD6] There was no ... real rule of law when laws in shape of ordinances and the [laws] appeared suddenly, like rabbit[s] out of a conjuring hat at the will of [the in]dividual or a dictating group. Jawaharlal Nehru [directed against the British colonial regime]. (Example of a saying ASSK posted from Jawaharlal Nehru and her father to communicate with SLORC guards who came and went as included in Stewart 1997:94)

ZE. Culture

See [C16], [D7], [E8], [S1], [S3], [Y6], [Y7], [Y11], [Y15], [Y21].

ZF. Economics

- [CF1] Q: In November, the SLORC launched its tourism campaign called 'Visit Myanmar Year.' Are you still calling for tourists to boycott Burma?

ASSK: Yes, my mind has not changed in any way. I still oppose 'Visit Myanmar Year,' and I would ask tourists to stay away. Burma is not going to run away. They should come back to Burma at a time when it is a democratic society where people are secure where there is justice, where there is rule of law. They'll have a much better time. And they can travel around Burma with a clear conscience. (The Progressive Interview, March 1997, ASSK, By Leslie Kean and Dennis Bernstein)

- [CF2] Part of our struggle is to make the international community understand that we are a poor country not because there is an insufficiency of resources and investment, but because we are deprived of the basic institutions and practices that make for good government. There are multinational business concerns which have no inhibitions about dealing with repressive regimes. Their justification for economic involvement in Burma is that their presence will actually assist the process of democratization. Investment that only goes to enrich an already wealthy elite bent on monopolizing both economic and political power cannot contribute towards equality and justice, the foundation stones for a sound democracy. I would therefore like

to call upon those who have an interest in expanding their capacity for promoting intellectual freedom and humanitarian ideals to take a principled stand against companies which are doing business with the military regime of Burma. Please use your liberty to promote ours. (ASSK. Commencement address on receiving Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree in absentia at American University, 26.01.1997)

- [CF3] We want Burma to be free and prosperous. We are not anti-business, but we oppose investment in Burma today because our real malady is not economic but political. What we are really suffering from is not lack of investment or infrastructure, but misgovernance. Until we have a system that guarantees rule of law and basic democratic institutions, no amount of aid or investment will benefit our people. Profits from business enterprises will merely go towards enriching a small, already very privileged elite. Companies such as Unocal and Pepsi, ARCO, and Texaco only serve to prolong the agony of my country by encouraging the present military regime to persevere in its intransigence. (ASSK. Speech in support of the 7-9 October 1996 Free Burma Fast, Rangoon, September, 1996)

ZG. Elections

- [ZG1] ASSK: They're [SLORC] like a blinkered horse. Why do they not see the picture as a whole? Let's take the case of the elections in Burma. The authorities obviously thought that the NLD would not win such an overwhelming majority. As I understand it, there were a lot of people – including foreign observers and journalists – who had come to the conclusion that the NLD would probably win the greatest number of seats, but it would not get an absolute majority. What made them come to this conclusion? I can understand the foreign journalists getting the wrong impression of what was going on in the country. They were only allowed to come for a short time and were never allowed to talk freely to the people who would know. But it's amazing that the authorities with the whole machinery of government at their disposal, and all their people in the intelligence services running around spying on people in the intelligence services, didn't realise that the results were going to turn out to be overwhelmingly in favour of the NLD.

... I think it is perhaps more about ignorance than stupidity. Because people are always afraid to tell a truth that would bring the anger of the dictators down upon them. And it is quite likely that their men at the grass-roots probably knew which way the elections would go but did not dare to tell the truth to their superiors ...

ASSK: It does seem to me that they really don't know how to handle the situation. They're not the only ones – I think few dictators really know how to handle a country in the long run. Because of the very nature of authoritarian governments and dictatorships they effectively prevent themselves from learning the truth, because people living under such regimes get into the habit of hiding it from them and from each other. Even those whose job is to find out what's happening in the country for the dictators acquire the habit of not telling the truth to their superiors. So everybody gets out of the habit of telling the truth, while some even get out of the habit of seeing the truth. They see what they want to see, or only what they think their superiors want them to see. Now, if you get into that habit, later you develop the habit of not daring to hear what you don't want to hear. So you end up not seeing, hearing, or saying the truth. And in the long run this blunts their intelligence. (ASSK 1997b:136-37)

- [ZG2] AC: Sir, a simple question: why did SLORC hold their free and fair multi-party elections for the establishing of a democratic nation when in fact as the results came in they

imprisoned the majority of elected MPs, tortured to death a few, forced others into silence ...

UKM: They thought they were going to win ... SLORC thought we as a party were broken. They went as far as to say, 'Now that the head is chopped off, the limbs are useless.' Now you can deduce for yourself the kind of people we are dealing with ... they were shocked and angry when they realized they had lost in their own places – in all the military areas. They were utterly sure that their own people at least would vote for them. You see, we were told that SLORC's Military Intelligence made a rough secret survey to determine how the voting pattern might turn out, and they didn't realize until it was too late that the majority of people would be voting for the NLD. They were really shocked when the result turned out to be so contrary to their own expectations. (ASSK 1997:176-77)

ZH. Aung San

• [ZH1] Q. Did you feel at any stage that some harm might come to you?

A. No. Let me put it this way, It didn't worry me. I was objectively aware of the fact that I was in a very vulnerable position. They could do anything they liked to me at any time. My greatest protection was the affection and the support of the people of Burma. The international community too, of course. But in the end it was really the support and affection of the people of Burma and respect they had for my late my father which they extended to me which gave the best protection

• [ZH2] 'I always felt close to my father,' she said. 'It never left my mind that he would wish me to do something for my country. When I returned to Burma in 1988 to nurse my sick mother, I was planning on starting a chain of libraries in my father's name. A life of politics held no attraction for me. But the people of my country were demanding for democracy, and as my father's daughter, I felt I had a duty to get involved. (Edward Klein, *Vanity Fair* October 1995, p. 120-144)

• [ZH3] TIME: Did you fear that the military might place conditions on your release?

Suu Kyi: I was sure they would not impose any restrictions, because they knew I would not accept them. But I must admit that I like people in the Burmese army because I tend to associate them with my father. That's why I don't feel any ill will against them, whatever they do. Some people might criticize this attitude and call it a weakness, but that is the truth, and I am very frank. (Interview with ASSK, *Time Magazine*, 23.07.1995)

• [ZH4] ANNCR: Of course you know quite a lot about military mind. Your father, considered the father of modern Burma, was himself general; that he saw the risk of military gaining too much power.

ASSK: I am not sure that I know that much about military mind. But I do know a lot of military people. Of course my father and many of my colleagues in the NLD, the Chairman U Aung Shwe, the Deputy Chairman U Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung and the Secretary U Lwin. They are all ex-military officers, but, they are all the kind of people that you would call the officer and gentleman. So let us say that I know one kind of military mind, that of those are both officers and gentleman. (*Time Magazine*, 23.07.1995)

• [ZH5] ANNCR: Now, I'm told that your name, which is beautiful to say, but even more beautiful in translation that it to mean a bright collection of strange victories. Are your parents obviously prescient?

ASSK: Well, I think, I don't know whether they were thinking of the meaning of name I suppose. Aung San is my father's name, but it just is not my surname. In Burma we don't have family names. My name is pretty unusual. Because it is man's

name, Aung San is a much muscular name at the beginning; and Kyi at the end is part of my mother's name; Suu in between represent my grandmother's name, and also represent the day of week on which I was born. (ABC Radio National, Interview with ASSK, 06.06.1996)

• [ZH6] It is most appropriate that this International Convention for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma should take place anniversary of Burmese Independence, forty-eight years ago to this day Burma became a sovereign independent nation as result of the combined effort of all her peoples. The greatest lesson that the struggle for independence taught us was that nothing of national significance could be achieved without the wholehearted participation of all those whose fates are linked to the dignity of the nation.

Burma took her place in the family of independent nation as a democratic state, aware of its obligations to its own people as well as to the rest of the world. The founding fathers of independent Burma understood that self-government alone was not enough: there was a clear perception of the people and accepts the duties due to a member of the international community.

A resolution proposed by my father U Aung San on 16 June 1947 in the Constituent Assembly encapsulated the hope of the people of the Burma for a state sustained by democratic values that would enable them to live in freedom and dignity. The salient points of the resolution, as relevant today as they were then, are as follows:

all powers and authority of the sovereign independent Republic of Burma, its constituent parts and organs of government shall be derived from the people ... the constitution shall guarantee and secure to all the peoples of Union justice, social, economic and political; equality of status, of opportunity, and before the law freedom of thought, expression, belief, worship, subject to law and public morality ...

(a) this historic land of Burma shall attain its rightful and honored place in the world, make its full and willing contribution to the advancement and welfare of mankind and affirm its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly cooperation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality.

The aspiration of those who dedicated their lives to building an independent Burma are at one with the hopes of all of us now striving to establish in Burma a genuine democratic system that will guarantee to the people all basic human rights as recognized by the United Nations. While it cannot be doubted that our principle strength lies in the resolve of our own people, we are fully aware that in the world today all nations are indissoluble linked by myriad ties. We welcome warmly the support and ethical values. (Message to international convention for the restoration of democracy in Burma, 04.01.1996)

• [ZH7] I ask how far the thought of her father had stiffened her resolve. She looks to where Aung San's picture hangs, as it hangs on so many walls in Burma. 'There were times when I would look at his photograph and say to him: 'Well, it's just you and me – but we'll make it.' I felt that I always had his spiritual support.'

The people's regard of her father is, she believes, 'perhaps even stronger than ever'. But like him she has become the focus of a personality cult. Does that worry her?

'A little, but I think the Burmese people are canny enough and if I do the wrong thing they will boot me out. Good for them, and good for me, too. They are not fools, they are very shrewd and very loving.

'If they love somebody like my father or myself they really take that person to their hearts and they will forgive a lot as long

have learned to put a much greater value on compassion. I think compassion is very important in this world.' (Steve Weinman. 'Patience pragmatism pays off for "The Lady".' *Nation*, 01.11.1995)

- [ZJ2] AC: ... back in 1989, days before you were placed under house arrest, you made the statement: 'Let the world know that we are prisoners in our own country.' It has been a few months since the time of your release. Has anything really changed?

ASSK: The world knows better that we are still prisoners in our own country. (ASSK 1997b:16)

- [ZJ3] UTU: ... Please do understand this, Burma today under SLORC is lawless. There are no human rights. We are under siege! ... This is why Daw ASSK repeatedly says, 'Let the world know that we are prisoners in our own country,' She's not exaggerating, it's a prison within a prison. (ASSK 1997b:236)

- [ZJ4] ASSK: ... I suppose one seeks greatness through taming one's passions. And isn't there a saying that 'it is far more difficult to conquer yourself than to conquer the rest of the world'? So, I think the taming of one's own passions, in the Buddhist way of thinking, is the chief way to greatness, no matter what the circumstances may be. For example, a lot of our people [political prisoners] meditate when they're in prison, partly because they have the time, and partly because it's a very sensible thing to do. That is to say that if you have no contact with the outside world, and you can't do anything for it, then you do what you can with the world inside you in order to bring it under proper control. (ASSK 1997b:162)

- [ZJ5] Q: You were arrested and harassed. You spent 12 years behind bars – seven during the Ne Win regime and another five under SLORC. Do you think you and your colleagues have the stamina to go on? Have you ever been tortured?

U Kyi Maung: No, no, not an old person like me. But by the same question, you can ask Abel [Brig Gen David Oliver Abel, minister for National Planning and Economic Development] whether he could stand the stress? How long can he survive under the strain and the peace pressure? [giggling] Thailand is different. It could find someone who would come up with US\$15 billion. Burma has great difficulty getting US\$100 million. (Interview with U Kyi Maung. *The Nation*, 25.08.1997)

- [ZJ6] ... happiness takes on many forms. Political prisoners have known the most sublime moments of perfect communion with their highest ideals during periods when they were incarcerated in isolation, cut off from contact with all that was familiar and dear to them. From where do those resources spring, if not from an innate strength at our core, a spiritual strength that transcends material bounds? My colleagues who spent years in harsh conditions of Burmese prisons, and I myself, have had to draw on such inner resources on many occasions.

Nobody can take away from us the essential and ultimate freedom of choosing our priorities in life. We may not be able to control the external factors that affect our existence but we can decide how we wish to conduct our inner lives. We may live in a society that does not grant freedom of expression but we can decide how much value we wish to put on the duty to speak out for our rights. We may not be able to pursue our beliefs without bringing down on us the full vengeance of a cruel state mechanism but we can decide how much we are prepared to sacrifice for our beliefs. Those of us who decided to work for democracy in Burma made our choice in the conviction that the danger of standing up for basic human rights in a respective society was preferable to the safety of a quiescent life in servitude. (Commencement Address by Daw ASSK upon Receiving Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree in absentia at

American University, 26.01.1997)

- [ZJ7] Q: How much personal danger do you feel? Have you been threatened that if you leave your compound or try and speak to the people, you will be in trouble or you might be imprisoned?

ASSK: I haven't been told anything like that, but of course the official papers are always talking about 'annihilating' our forces (she laughs again). But we don't think about that too much. There is no time to be thinking about such things. (The Progressive Interview with ASSK by Leslie Kean and Dennis Bernstein. Free Burma Coalition, March 1997)

- [ZJ8] Those who have to tread the long and weary path of a life that sometimes seems to promise little beyond suffering and yet more suffering need to develop the capacity to draw strength from the very hardships that trouble their existence. It is from hardship rather than from ease that we gather wisdom. During my years under house arrest I learnt my most precious lesson from a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, many of whose verses, even in unsatisfactory translation, reach out to that innermost, elusive land of the spirit that we are not always capable of exploring by ourselves. The title of the poem, Walk Alone, is bleak and its message is equally bleak:

If they answer not your call, walk alone;
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,
O thou of evil luck,
Open the mind and speak out alone.
If they turn away and desert you when crossing the wilderness,
O thou of evil luck,
Trample the thorns under the tread,
And along the blood-lined track travel alone.
If they do not hold up the light when the night is troubled with storm,
O thou of evil luck,
With the thunder- flame of pain ignite thine own heart,
And let it burn alone.

There are no words of comfort in the poem, no assurance of joy and peace at the end of the harsh journey. There is no pretence that it is anything but evil luck to receive no answer to your call, to be deserted in the middle of the wilderness, to have no one who would hold up a light to aid you through a stormy night. It is not a poem that offers heart's ease, but it teaches that you can draw strength from your harshest experiences, that a citadel of endurance can be built on a foundation of anguish. How can anybody who has learnt to ignite his heart with the thunder-flame of his own pain ever know defeat? Victory is ensured to those who are capable of learning the hardest lessons that life has to offer. (ASSK. Address in absentia for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, from The University of Natal, Durban, 23.04.1997)

- [ZJ19] Q. Did the six years of house arrest have any effect on you physically and mentally?

A. Physically, I have had problems with my neck even though it had nothing to do with my house arrest. I spent a lot of time reading. Mentally and emotionally, I think it has strengthened me. This is what all of us who were in prisons during the last six years have found out. Very few have been weakened but the majority of us have become stronger. We have had to in order to survive. So perhaps we should be thankful to them (the authority).

Q. Did your separation from your family any point weaken your resolve?

A. No, it did not weaken my resolve. I have to admit that I had to train myself not to think about them too much. There was nothing I could do to help. It was a matter of discipline that

1) Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views

[pɔvAa:kipSniA:SiŋchihA:Aa:Snk'cikX]

2) Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation

[NtsaA:at'viciŋA:K'hi:ter:NeNtsaA:at'

t'it'kar:k'ik'rik'Siq'uhA:Aa:Snk'cikX]

3) Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the state

[NtsaA:at'pɔv'ta:er:kiŋc'arak'sa:rk'eNdiy'ka:qa

pɔv'NtsaA:Aa:Snk'cikX]

4) Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy

[pɔv'ta:er'p'AP'k'qma:ŋhA:Aa:Baŋ'p'p's'q't'hih'k'ŋh'k'X]

(SLORC/SPDC *The New Light of Myanmar*, 19.06.1998 – placed on every back page of dailies)

• [ZM4] The Armed Forces, since its formation as an organized and disciplined force has never evaded its responsibilities even in the face of great odds and great sacrifice. This spirit is at the very core of its foundation and both officers and other ranks carry out their duties with dedication. Moreover, it should be noted that the leaders, at every level, are always personally involved in all tasks in the interest of the nation and the people – no task is ever too small for care and attention. There is always this personal and comradely touch that uplifts morale and ensures that a job is well done ...

The leaders of the State law and Order Restoration Council, in spite of other pressing matters of State, make time in their busy schedules to visit the remote areas in the country to inspect various projects being undertaken for the development of the country and the well-being of the people. They unfailingly keep in close touch with the people in order to have first-hand knowledge of their difficulties and needs so that they can try to resolve their difficulties and ease their life. (Development projects and the uplift of morale, *Myanmar Perspectives*, September 1997 – Vol. 3, No.9)

ZN. Religion

• [ZN1] I'm all for a broadminded attitude. People of all different religions should be given the opportunity to pursue good in their own way. I assume that is what religion is all about. Religion is about increasing peace and harmony in the world. Everyone should be given a chance to create peace and harmony in their own way. (ASSK cited in Stewart 1997:31)

ZO. Influence

• [ZO1] 'National governments must find new ways of enabling their people to participate more in government and to allow them much greater *influence* on the decisions that affect their lives. Unless this is done, and done in time, the irresistible tide of peoples rising aspirations will inevitably clash with inflexible systems, leading to anarchy and chaos. A rapid democratic transition and a strengthening of the institutions of civil society are the only appropriate responses'. (*Human Development Report*, p 5 cited in ASSK 1995:272)

• [ZO2] Hence, the public wish to live in peace and desire the development of Myanmar Naing-Ngan. They want to make effective use of genuine democracy which would assure the public the right to make efforts for the development of the country. Therefore, it is time Ma Suu came to understand the attitude and the real desire of the Myanmar public. If so she should abandon the existing ways of her being under *foreign influence* to cause disintegration of the State and to return peacefully to her family in London. As for us, we wish to continue with our peaceful teaching work. Ma Suu please go

back. Democracy does not mean power. (Kaythari. 'Democracy is not power.' *NLM*, 12.06.1996)

• [ZO3] It became more vivid that Ma Suu stayed abroad for a long time and got married to a foreigner and even came under a *foreign influence*. At the end of the four-eights disturbances, Ma Suu, who said should return to England for the sake of education of her two sons, after meeting with US Congressman Stephen Solarz in September 1988, made efforts to form an interim government. It looked as though she had calculated on becoming leader of the interim government. (Kaythari. 'Democracy is not power.' *NLM*, 12.06.1996)

• [ZO4] I think, though, that it is very remote that this road-side anyeint [theatre] troupe [NLD] would come to see light and become good, firstly because it is very hard-headed and dogmatic, and also because it has been possessed by *external influence*. I fear it would be like quails futilely waiting for their tails to grow. ('Feeling prickly heat, instead of pleasant cool'. *NLM*, 30.05.1996)

• [ZO5] Due to these facts, it is obvious that what was written and broadcast about, with a loud cry, how she had read literature and bout Myanmar to save the suppressed Myanmar people and how she was preparing to qualify herself and serve the well being of the nation were not true.

If she had been actually preparing for the country with foresight, patriotic spirit should have surged up on thinking of her marriage. The daughter of an Arzani should have contemplated the affair of racial denigration. She had not pondered so. Due to the *influence* of her environment, she had not taken into account how her marriage would become involved in the future of Myanmar and how it would affect the prestige of her father. (Myo Chit. 'Let's tell the truth'. *NLM*, 30.05–05.06.1996)

• [ZO6] This person whom the Puppet Princess thinks is very good to her as a spouse is no ordinary person. He is a good acquaintance of people of high society and aristocracy of England and moves in and out of the Oxford circle of scholars and keeps company of famous reporters and is capable of influencing and is capable of influencing them to write whatever he would like them to. He is a great director and puppeteer who can pull the strings. (Myo Chit. 'Let's tell the truth'. *NLM*, 30.05–05.06.1996)

• [ZO7] Most Myanmar women are 'no-nonsense' types. They see what needs to be done and they do it either individually or together in a group. But they do not hanker for power or position – there is no need to. They already have the power, authority and *influence* to do good for the people and the country. So they spout no slogans, mouth no cliché's nor do they advertise and publicize their aspirations for the country. (Kyi Kyi Hla. 'The All Myanmar Women's Affairs Committee.' *MP*, June 1997.)

• [ZO8] 'The hand that rocks the cradle' is a well known adage the world over. It implies that it is the woman of the household who keeps gentle and unobtrusive control of the family. She is responsible for its general well-being, keeps order and discipline, provides love and sympathy, controls the family's finances and makes sure that each member of the family is healthy, happy and if possible, wise. But there is a deeper implication. It maintains that *behind every great man, there is a woman who influences and guides him*, that she is the power behind him. (*MP*, June 1998)

• [ZO9] Currently, crimes threatening community peace and breaking the laws have occurred due to instigations by internal and external axe-handles [*sic*] and *influences* by local and alien political interferences. Internal destructive elements are attempting to hamper the nation politically, economically and

socially ...¹

• [ZO10] CONGRESSMAN RICHARDSON: What do you want the SLORC to do at this point?

ASSK: We must start with dialogue. Only then can we know what steps are really needed. The SLORC can sort out their fears in the process of holding such a dialogue. Look, for example, at the issue they are making of my marriage to Michael. It is the British who should be complaining. The SLORC doesn't seem to have a very clear understanding of Burmese women. [Far from worrying about my coming under foreign influence from my husband] they should be feeling sorry for Michael!²

• [ZO11] The poor are powerless and have no voice. Power is the responsibility of expressing and imposing one's will in a given social relationship, in the face of any resistance. The poor are incapable of either imposing, coercing or, in many cases, having any influence at all.³

It is not enough merely to provide the poor with material assistance. They have to be sufficiently empowered to change their perception of themselves as helpless and ineffectual in an uncaring world. (ASSK 1995:263)

• [ZO12] Shenon: But you can see a situation in which authority/influence could be shared?

ASSK: I don't think I'm going to talk about shared influence. I want the government of Burma, the political system of Burma, to be based on confidence, and any arrangement that can win the confidence of the people will be acceptable. You could have a nominal and token democratic government, but if the practical fact is such that the people have no confidence in it as a democracy it's no use at all. You can have a country where there's no constitution at all, such as Britain, but nevertheless it is a democracy and nobody doubts that it's a democracy, least of all its own people. They have confidence in the fact that the government's a democracy. But in fact there is no document which says 'these groups have this sort of influence. You must accept that it is very difficult for me to make pronouncements on important matters on my own. It's not what I want to do. Whatever is agreed on must be agreed on through discussion and through consensus among ourselves and perhaps eventual compromise with other groups ...

I do know that a lot of us in the NLD were very anxious about giving the opposition a proper role, honoring it, respecting it, giving it an effective role ... I don't know what's happened to the National Unity Party (NUP) now, but certainly if the NLD had been allowed to form a government at that time [after the election] I'm sure that we would have heard a lot more of the NUP's voice than we do. We would have allowed them a very loud voice in government. This is a sort of pseudo-Golkar party, the USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association). (ASSK 1995:256-57)

• [ZO13] Would you consider it an interference if an Asean country starts commenting about the pace of democratic change in Burma?

ASSK: I don't think so because the world is getting smaller all the time. We have to accept that no country is really free from external influence. We are all subject to some degree to international opinions and external influence. There is, of course, a limit as to how far people can be allowed to interfere in the internal affairs of a nation. One does not expect them to come marching in or to introduce measures that would interfere

with our sovereignty. But if we care about our regional peace and stability we should care about the kind of governments that are in place in those countries. ('People are more important.' *The Nation*, 01.08.1995)

• [ZO14] The West-influenced puppet actress Mrs Race Destructionist and her cohorts connived with the neocolonialists by going to the embassy, holding talks, writing letters and holding discussions. The final result was to commemorate the founding of that autocratic league and to hold a general meeting from Friday 27th September through 29th September. (Pauk Sa. 'What do you think? The ugly American.' *Kyemon*, 14.10.1996, pp 6, 7)

• [ZO15] For her own good and for the good of the country she had to be restrained in order to prevent her from promoting the cause of these unsavory political elements who found their way and got themselves into positions of influence around her to create disunity among the only unified establishment left in the country, the tatmadaw (military). (Ohn Gyaw. 'SLORC tells reason for Suu Kyi's detention.' *The Nation*, 21.12.1994)

• [ZO16] Adopted sons and daughters of the colonialists, under external influence, are attempting to cause the disintegration of the union and the loss of independence ... Without seeing to national well-being they are moving to cause disruption to the national convention only for their party's interest ... It is necessary to be aware of all attempts of internal and external subversive elements to cause change in the nation's path towards political, economic and social objectives. (Gen. Khin Nyunt cited in 'Suu Kyi accused of trying to break Burma.' *Bangkok Post*, 26.12.1995.)

• [ZO17] ... in the fight to repulse the Leik, and to regain the lost independence, beginning with Bo Min Yaung, Saya San counted in the middle, and Bogoyoke Aung San and his comrades in the end, patriotic heroes had emerged, that beginning with 1905, the GCBA, the Group of 21, Fabian, Myo Chit, AFPFL, Communists (Red & White Flag) political parties had also emerged but that the one and only institution that involves the different nationals, purely nationalistic, with no party influence, uninterruptedly working for the weal of the nation and still continuing in that direction has been the Tatmadaw founded with the leadership of Bogoyoke Aung San, and that this organization and its members must get to play a participatory leadership role in the discussions and endeavours for the wellbeing of the future State ... (Myo Chit. 'Let's tell the truth - 8'. *NLM*, 29.06.1996)

See also [D8], [E1], [E13], [S8].

¹ *NLM*, 17.10.1996 (BBC SWB, 13.12.1996.)

² (BurmaNet News, 15.02.1994 version of interview of Michael Richardson with ASSK not in ASSK 1995:253).

³ Henry (ed.), 'Poverty, Progress and Development'. p. 34

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