Social changes, new identities and political activism in colonial Burma and India (c. 1880-1948)

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After the deposition of Thibawmin (1878-1885) and annexation of Upper Burma in 1886 which reunited it with Lower Burma, Tenasserim and Arakan the whole territory of so called Burma Proper became a part of British India. This situation formally continued until April 1, 1937 when the new constitution which provided the separation of Burma from India came into force, but in fact the lots of these two countries remained intertwined until they regained independence in 1948. During this time India and Burma shared similar institutional and socioeconomic environment, both were open to the play of basically the same forces. In both cases the imprint left by colonial period is still visible and has important bearing on current conditions. Yet despite all similarities one can find in Burmese and Indian colonial experience, those consequences of British rule which turned out to be decisive for subsequent development of these countries were quite different. The objective of this paper was to investigate and compare such consequences.

To see the unlikeness of principal social processes which took place in India and Burma throughout the colonial era even a superficial observation is enough. If we compare demographic data for India and Burma, we'll see that the growth of urban population in both countries was very slow. Yet we can speak about urbanization in India but not in Burma as in the latter case this growth was due to the inflow of immigrant labor. Actually in Burma through 1891-1921 the trend was towards ruralization (which was due to economic policy of the British, growing demand for Burmese rice, increased stimuli for agricultural employment and foreign competition in urban professions) and only in the 30-ies the rate of increase of urban population exceeded that of the whole population (Vyatkin 1979: 109-113).

The relative size of Burmese cities was also inferior to Indian ones. In 1931 being one of 15 large cities of Burma meant that its population exceeded 20,000 while in India the watershed rested somewhere around 200,000. The population of Calcutta equaled to 1,141,000 in 1931 and 2,109,000 in 1941, with Bombay accounting for 1,161,000 and 1,488,500, respectively. The figures for Rangoon were 398,967 and 500,800 with 134,950 and 163,243 representing Mandalay. In 1931 Rangoon was the sixth largest city in India, while in 1941 it would have been only the eighth were there no separation. The average annual rate of population growth in Calcutta equaled to 8,5% between 1931 and 1941 as compared to 2,3% in Rangoon. The latter could be roughly comparable to Bombay with its 2,8%.

The large share of population of the biggest cities in colonial Burma (Rangoon, Mandalay, Moulmein, Bassein, Sitwe) was expatriates. The share of Burman population in Rangoon amounted to 44,3% in 1891, 33,2% in 1911, 28,0% in 1921 and 33,9% in 1931. The share of Burman population of the largest centers of rice trade and milling (Rangoon, Moulmein, Sitwe, Bassein) exceeded 50% only in Bassein. These figures are corroborated by discrepancies in age and sex structure of population between largest cities and Burma as a whole which sets this type of settlement aside from the rest of the country (Vyatkin 1979: 114-116, 160). As A. Vyatkin observed, the "foreignness" of the city to indigenous population had an unfavorable effect on the development of urbanization in the next period - after the independence (Vyatkin 1979: 117). This factor also impeded the emergence of powerful Burmese entrepreneur and proprietor strata.

The data collected by Aung Thun Thet from "Burma Trade Directories" indicate how contradictory the process of formation of Burman business class was. Examination of lines of business engaged by Burmans (as a percentage of all establishments) reveals that the share of Burman merchants and brokers and dealers declined between 1895 and 1930 in Rangoon, district towns, and small towns (9.9%_7.9%, 56.8%_34.7%, and 64.0%_44.2% for merchants and 37.5%_6.6%, 82.1%_47.6%, and 85.7%_57.8% for brokers and dealers). This happened despite the fact that brokerage was one of the few business spheres where Burmans managed to play significant role (Christian 1942: 98, Aung Thun Thet 1989: 96-97). The share of Burmans

among owners and millers increased in Rangoon and small towns but decreased in district towns (5.0%_11.7%, 100.0%_65.8%, and 42.8%_75.3%). As bankers and moneylenders Burmans disappeared from Rangoon but managed to strengthen their position in district and small towns (3.2%_0%, 6.7%_34.3%, and 33.4%_52.4%). The growth was observed in such lines of business as manufacturers, service, agents and insurance companies, contractors, shopkeepres, distributors/suppliers, and import/export but only in three cases of forty two the share of Burmans exceeded 50% or was equal to it[1] (Aung Thun Thet 1989: 90). In general these data show that during the period under consideration Burmans were rather losing their dominant positions in certain sectors than assuming them.

As to accumulation of wealth in agricultural sector it should be noted that the government encouraged reclamation of new lands but failed to finance it thus causing the cultivators to rely on credit extended by landlords and moneylenders (the latter most frequently being the expatriates). All attempts to prevent the forfeiture of land and establish the system of agricultural credit were of only marginal success. According to calculations of A. Vyatkin, the absentee landowners possessed 25.1% of all land in 1901 and 29% in 1911. The increase in absentee landowning thus amounted to 37.6% for ten years as compared to 19.1% increase in land under cultivation (Vyatkin 1979: 133). This happened despite there still was a plenty of uncultivated land. As estimated by Daw Mya Tin, by 1936 *chettyars* possessed about 25% of land in major rice-growing districts of Lower Burma (Mya Tin 1961: 92). At the same time absentees and moneylenders held up to 50% of land under cultivation (Andrus 1948: 69-70). All this figures mean that indigenous capitalists enjoyed only a share of profits generated by agricultural development of Burma during the colonial era.

What really worsened the situation for Burma in the end was not the emergence of powerful expatriate communities itself. To my mind, much worse was the failure to utilize the creative potential of these communities for subsequent development after gaining independence. In this context the comparison with Malaysia, another British colony, is relevant. The case of Malaysia was even more complicated as by the end of colonial era the Indians and Chinese taken together accounted for more than 50% of the total population. Yet Malaysia under Mahathir managed to find “the magic formula” of ethnic cohesion and demonstrated impressive economic growth which was mainly due to activities of former expatriates. In Burma, on the contrary, the potential contribution of European and Indian communities to economic development was lost in three successive waves of re-immigration in 1942, after 1948 and after the adoption of new citizenship law and nationalizations of 1963.

Summing up the social implications of colonial economy, A. Vyatkin observes that indigenous labor was engaged in traditional sectors and possessed expertise mainly there, the functioning of agricultural production was dependent on foreign finance, the peasants were gradually losing their lands, material and technical base of agriculture stagnated, the flow of immigrant labor hindered the qualitative and quantitative growth of local working class and all the spheres of urban activities (industry, transport, trade and administration) were dominated by expatriates (Vyatkin 1979: 137). At least some of these factors were less typical to the most developed areas of India. Against this background the common observation that in contrast to Burma colonial India witnessed the emergence of indigenous middle class which plays important role until now is easily understandable. The data shown above signifies that the principal social actor in British Burma was the peasant.

This situation was reflected in the political development of both countries. Whereas in India new concepts and approaches to reality evolved (or were adopted), this was not exactly the case with Burma. Though new concepts and terms became widely used, this usage was somehow ambiguous.

Quite telling was the inability or unwillingness of the Burmese to devise their own equivalents for adopted terminology. The retaining of foreign forms was preferred, so the

[1] Such was the share of Burmans among manufacturers in small towns (75%), among agents in district towns (62%) and distributors in small towns (50%) in 1930.

political vocabulary of colonial Burmese abounded in loan words such as bureaucrat, non-cooperator, council, conference, party, president, chairman, member, secretary, home rule, diarchy, etc. Rendering such concepts as democracy, socialism or communism into vernacular turned out to be the problem also. For example, the word *bounwada* devised as an equivalent for socialism were used only infrequently with obvious preference for English form.

Unlike the case of India this phenomenon was not due to a necessity of common communication medium. I'm inclined to credit it to the fact that subconsciously Burmese public was reluctant to "domesticate" some foreign phraseology as concepts underlying it weren't meaningful for local power relations and social arrangements. At the same time those terms which could be reinterpreted in Burmese way were readily domesticated. Here we can quote such terms as "cooperative society" (*thama-wayama athin*), "association" (*asi-ayone*), "bloc" (*gaing*), "dictator" (*anashin*), "capitalist" (*danashin*), "imperialist" (*ne-che-thama*), "patriot" (*myo-chit*)[2], "development" (*to-tet-yei*), etc.

The divergence of frequently used Burmese terms from their English equivalents is noticeable if we look at such terms as "the state" (*nain-ngan*), "politics" (*nain-ngan-yei*) and "unity" (*nyi-nyut-yei*). Initially the term *nain-ngan* which first appears in Dhammayazika inscription (1198) of king Narapatisithu connoted the seats of power and the number of conscripts owing allegiance to a certain overlord (SMK I 65-66$^{6-13}$). During the 19th century it gradually assumed the meaning of royal jurisdiction or the state. In the latter sense it was used throughout the 20th century but retained the meaning of something structured from top downward and not vice versa in contrast to modern state.

From the standpoint of Burmese morphology the term "*nain-ngan-yei*" literally means "statecraft" or "state affairs" thus cutting down the spheres where politics are possible. At the same time it implicitly connotes something which is done mainly at the top level, something to which general public can have only limited access.

The word *nyi-nyut-yei* is another traditional concept which assumed quasi-modern guise. Its verbal and name forms appear quite often in the 18th and 19th century texts having its canonical foretype in *samagga*, one of the seven factors of preventing decline (*aparih_niya*), expounded in "Mah_parinibb_na Sutta" of "D_gha Nik_ya" (D ii 16.1.4). Analyzing the usage there one can arrive at interesting conclusions. The meaning of *nyi-nyut-yei* is "doing something in accord" which implies absence of open differentiation, opposition and conflict. In practice it must be achieved by subjection of minority to majority, by subjugation to recognized authority. "Unity" was one of the most popular rallying cries of Burmese political activists from GCBA to AFPFL era. It remains a frequently cited value until now. Here one should not feel surprised with the results of such quest for unity, i.e. incessant civil war. If unity is normatively achieved by silencing the opposition, the flexibility in negotiation is hard to expect. In this context it's conspicuous that many thinkers of colonial Burma like P. Monin expressed distrust in party politics for such don't represent the whole nation and encourage factionalism (Zapadova 1985: 64). Similar passages in contemporary military propaganda (cf. Houtman 1999: 68-69) simply echo these concerns.

Referring to values appealed to by political activists it may be appropriate to say that mass politics in Burma didn't evolve into (at least partially) rational affair. Numerous vivid descriptions contained in sources and research papers speak for themselves (cf. Butler 1927: 149, 155; Craddock 1929: 118; Theophilus 1936: 45-46; Christian 1942: 332-333; Maung Maung 1962: 12; Smith 1965, 99; Aung Thein Han 1968: 363-364; Kirichenko 1998: 61-66). This reliance on emotion and personalism together with the lack of adherence to distinct political values may partly account for certain absence of continuity in political life of Burma which contrasts it to India.

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[2] It seems that this form emerged only in 30-ies while in 20-ies the loan word introduced by P. Monin (famous journalist whose numerous writings had greatly expanded Burmese scientific, economic and political vocabulary) was preferred.

Here it may be appropriate to argue that despite the pronounced influence of Gandhi ideas and INC strategies on Burmese national movement and well-known contacts between Indian businessmen and Burmese politicians, the general discourse of political activism in Burma was built on traditional concepts, now rethinked and reinterpreted, thus making newly adopted Indian and Western notions extensively used but irrelevant. In general, I'm inclined to estimate the role of India in Burmese liberation movement mainly as a medium for transmission of ideas. It would be incorrect to deny the numerous cases of cooperation and interaction of Burman and Indian communities throughout the colonial era but I feel that this interaction absorbed only a relatively small segment of population of British Burma. And when we evidence large groups of people coming into contact in the 30-ies, this relationship became fraught with conflict.

Still the authority of Indian leaders as trendsetters for the Burmese is beyond question. To give just one example, Thakhin Than Htun noted the following about the adoption of the term "socialism": "[It] became used in Burma only recently. Though the young had used it earlier, it became widely cited only after in April 1936 Chairman Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said at the Congress in Lucknow in India that only socialism can be a solution to world problems" (Bounwada 1967: 97). One may infer also that the spread of socialist and communist ideas to Burma was mainly via India as no contacts between the Burmese and Comintern are known.

Yet one has to investigate how deep this influence was. I'd argue that though the importance of INC approach for some pioneer Burmese activists like U Ottama was significant, the ideal of non-cooperation and peaceful resistance captured the minds of majority only for a brief period of time circa 1920-1926. In this very time a local perception of colonial experience emerged which persisted even after the WWII. It was the concept of treating colonialism as an ascetic practice (*dukkaracariya*) of the *buddha*-to-be (U Ottama 1967: 51) which would eventually culminate in release that is *nibb_na*. The linking of liberation with *nibb_na* is pronounced in many works by U Ottama, U Wizara, Thayawaddi U Neyya, Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing, Thakhin Soe, Aung San, Thakhin Than Htun, U Ba Khaing, etc. which appeared from 20-ies to 40-ies. Usually termed as *lokanibb_na* or *lokinibb_na* (worldly *nibb_na*) it was soon linked with socialism and Russia became its embodiment. Another equivalent was "*nibb_na* of the poor" (*hsinyetha nibb_na*)[3].

The ideal of instant collective realization of *nibb_na* resembling some concepts of popular Burmese mysticism (*htwe-yap-pauk*) is obvious in the following passage from Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing's opening speech at All-Burma Students Conference at Bassein (April 1938): "Once on my tour with public sermons I've met an old man. He asked me: "Hey, *yogi* (i.e. meditation) teacher Hmaing /he called me "teacher Hmaing"/, are not you the same with Mohnyin *yogis*?" I've said to him: "How can we be the same? We're *yogis* who want to be *thakhins* (masters). Yes, we try to reach *nibb_na*. Assume we invite the great Mohnyin sayadaw to preach a sermon. We want *nibb_na*. We want the whole country to reach *nibb_na*. If the whole country reaches *nibbana*, it's good. And it seems that the great Mohnyin sayadaw preaches so that the people from the whole country possessed the ability of forbearance and were contented with the life of

[3] Cf., for example "Nibb_na of the Poor" by U Ba Khaing, which contains passages such as the following: "In Russia the great *nibb_na* of the poor is already found. Still it's necessary to explain what the taste of *nibb_na* of the poor is. In Myanmar there are a lot of people who have nothing to eat, nothing to drink, and who have no work. Similar to this there are approximately 1500000 such people in England in accordance with 1937 census. More than 300000 in Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, France, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, more than 1100000 in Germany – in various countries there are many unemployed and starving people. In Russia there are no unemployed, there are no starving people. Everyone enjoys benefits equally. They not just eat regularly, but have a plenty. There are no exploiters and those who really work eat fully. People love each other like brothers, they are kind to each other for there are no exploiters, proprietors or bourgeoisie. As there is a division into two types –villagers and workers – but their status is equal, there is no reason for them not to be on good terms. If we look at the system of government, everyone is satisfied as every person could participate in it on equal basis after reaching the age of 18 without division into men, women, proprietors, propertyless, those who have permanent residence, those who don't have such, educated, uneducated and so on. In appointing the office holders they don't look at ancestry, don't differentiate between men and women, don't care for present office, and don't recognize authority. They appoint judging by the qualities of a candidate" (Bama ayei n.d.: 33-34), with "Stalin Who is Building Worldly Nibb_na" by U Ba Swe (Bounwada 1967: 113-122).

misery. We don't want to go with those who think that we can not reach *nibb_na*" (Bama ayei n.d.: 207).

The drift towards finding modern concepts corresponding to some popular beliefs is notable even in writings of P. Monin (1883-1940). This journalist who received Catholic training is famous for his numerous pamphlets ("Social Problems", "Spirit of Success" "Life Struggle", "Human Abilities", etc.) on success in trade, right conduct, harmony in family relations, health and hygiene. For a long time the message of his writings was about the importance of thrift, of being industrious and energetic, receiving education, reading newspapers, studying foreign languages. He called for unity and mutual respect between people of different nations, praised rationality and criticized prejudices. Yet in his latest articles written in 1937-1939 new ideas emerge. Some of them show influence of Nitsche with his ideals of strong personality, a dictator embodying the energy of the nation while others narrate the achievements of Russia surely referred to as "*lokanibb_na*". In the "Light of the World" P. Monin states that "in Russia there are no poor and miserable, there is no anxiety about tomorrow, about food or clothes. They plan so each citizen was well-to-do" and so on in the manner similar to that of U Ba Khaing (Zapadova 1985: 60, 76).

It's clear that the late 30-ies were marked by obvious increase in rhetoric which appealed to Burmese mysticism. The emergence of Freedom bloc (a block of Dr. Ba Maw's party, Dobama asiayone and All-Burma Student Union) rendered in Burmese as Htwe-yap gaing, a traditional name for mystic association seeking for magic release from reality, is conspicuous. The word *gaing* which above all connotes the meaning of a mystic association also became used more frequently[4].

One may argue that phraseology cannot be taken as serous evidence. Certainly, such analysis has its limitations yet it allows some insights. It's difficult to ascertain to what extent the leaders believed in ideas they professed or their reliance on arguments of that kind was due to a necessity of appealing to broader audience. Anyhow all this demonstrates the general failure to develop new concepts of secular and modernistic nature to define the political discourse. It also hints at the main addressee of this discourse, the strata which became the backbone of liberation movement in Burma. Generally speaking, while both the discourse of Indian opinion leaders and realities of Indian politics gradually exhibited more secular and modernistic trends, Burmese politics were increasingly dominated with matters of religious nature or revealed religion-centered approach to political and social problems. Here lies the most striking mismatch between Burma and India.

At the same time it should be noted that the whole attitude to modernity was somehow different in both countries. People, who like Ram Mohan Roy linked the village *panchayats* with representative government and trial by jury, corrected the Hindu law of marriage, inheritance, religious worship, women's status, etc. by introducing the liberal principles of justice and equity, finding sanction for such in ancient law codes, paved the way for adaptation of Indian tradition to modernity. To the contrary, the reinterpretation of colonial dependence as *dukkaracariya*, socialism as *lokinibb_na*, etc. was a sort of adaptation of modernity to traditional Burmese usage.

Next, the identities developed through the colonial time were also quite different – while in India they contributed to incorporation of diverse people inhabiting the country, in Burma they encouraged ethnic and social differentiation. The colonial period contributed to shaping ethnic, linguistic, social and historical identities among the Burmese. As to ethnic identities one can observe a marked failure to develop certain nation-wide identity which would be relevant and acceptable to various ethnic groups. This task was consciously approached only by the present regime, though in somewhat clumsy manner. As to colonial times the most common appellations

[4] Cf., for example, Thakhin Than Htun's reference to the Bolsheviks as a "political *gaing* of workers and peasants" and U Thant's reasoning about "the right bloc" (*let-ya gaing*) which means capitalism and imperialism and "the left bloc" (*let-we gaing*) connoting the doctrine of the poor (*hsin-ye-tha-wada*) also called the doctrine of community (*bounwada*) or socialism (Bama ayei n.d.: 120, 130).

in speeches and writings of political activists were Mon-Burmese (*munmyanma*)[5] and Burmese (*myanma*) in 1910-1920-ies and Burman (*bama*) in 1930-ies (see C.P. Khin Maung 1920: 6, 15, 44; Ba Yin n.d.: 63; and especially "The Doctrine of Do Bama" approved by its working committee in 1938 in Bounwada 1967: 4). This indicates a trend to more ethnocentric vision. On the contrary, the availability of such term as India which had no direct reference to a certain ethnic or linguistic group was a real benefit for this multiethnic country.

Besides that it should be noted that Burmans actually failed to adopt the term "nation" at all. The word *amyotha* which is usually translated as "national" in fact conveys the meaning of belonging to a certain lineage or race[6]. It's a more traditional and particularistic concept. In the 20th century it connoted the idea of being a citizen but was unable to foster the feeling of belonging to a single entity. The Burman equivalent for nation had not been devised even until now. Thus, seeing this word in translations of speeches delivered by nowadays Burmese officials one can feel sure that the original text would have "state" (*nain-ngan*) (cf., for example, English and Burmese texts of the recent "Seven Point Roadmap" where "modern" or "developed nation" implies "modern" or "developed state" (*hki-hmi phun-byo-to-tet-do nain-ngan*) (Khin Nyunt 2003)).

Speaking about linguistic identity, in India the English language rather than Hindi became a common mean of communication (at least in the sphere of politics) between different linguistic communities. As initially foreign to everyone it didn't favor one group against the rest. In Burma the situation was completely different as Burmese was a language of a distinct linguistic majority which was ethnically compact at the same time. The domination of Burmese over languages of other indigenous ethnic groups is a constant theme in separatist propaganda.

Situation with social identities was even more intriguing. By late 30-ies Burma witnessed a suggestion of such terms as "the poor", "the miserable" (*hsinyetha*) as rallying points for those who struggle for liberation. At the culmination of colonial rule the dominant position among the political parties in one of the richest provinces of British India was assumed by "Hsinyetha (Poor Man's) Party" of Dr. Ba Maw and "Dobama Asiayone" (Our Burma) which associated themselves with the poor.

A representative example of positive and negative social identifications of this time could be found in already cited "Nibb_na of the Poor" by U Ba Khaing. He lists the relations where conflict and exploitation exist – between the rich and the poor, the king and the people, owners and cultivators, landlords and tenants, debtee and debtor, strong and weak, powerful and powerless, educated and illiterate, townsmen and villagers. Then he remarks: "As this vicious system exists, the bourgeoisie, the educated, those who are in authority, those who have influence, landlords, industrialists and entrepreneurs, merchant princes and rich men prosper and accumulate wealth from day to day while peasants, villagers, cultivators, coolies, uneducated and porters become more hungry, more destitute, more poor each day and now live reduced to a life of a debt slave" (Bama ayei n.d.: 29-30). Significant here is the differentiation into educated and illiterate and townsmen and villagers with preference given to the latter. Here one can notice the hint at observed "foreignness" of cities and contempt for education which is unprecedented in history of Burma noted for her relatively high traditional literacy. Still one should remember that later on in Socialist Party and in AFPFL the division into educated and uneducated was a really important one (Sein Win 1959: 14-16).

Finally, the historical identities developed in Burma also favored segmentation. The emergence of colonial historiography above all meant the interpretation of history through the concept of ethnicity which was largely irrelevant for traditional historical writing. The dissemination of books like J. Stuart's "Burma Through the Centuries: Being a Short Account of the Leading Races of Burma, of their Origin, and of Their Struggle for Supremacy throughout Past Centuries; also of the Three Burmese Wars and of the Annexation of the Country by the

[5] This term was used by some thinkers of Mon descent until early 60-ies. This special position of Mons was also reflected in measures taken by pre-Ne Win government to foster Mon culture and traditions.

[6] Sometimes it's even used as a polite equivalent for "husband".

British Government" implied that from now different ethnic groups should have a history of their own and all of them are competitors in this field.

As to the efforts of local historians the most important concept developed during the colonial period was put down in "History of Myanmar for Schools" by U Ba Than. This teacher from Moulmein suggested that historically there were three states of Myanmar, the first established in the 11th century by Anowratha, the second in the 16th century by Bayinnaung and the third in the 18th century by Alaungmintaya (Ba Than 1950). This concept eventually became the official version of the evolution Burmese history and was reproduced elsewhere from textbooks to editorials. But ethnic-centered interpretation meant that all these states emerged as a result of Burman conquest of other peoples.

When U Nu in a commemorative speech in 1947 claimed Aung San to be the founder of the next Myanmar state (Maung Maung 1962: 145), it was a recognition that the history of the newly born Union would be traced back to polities considered Burman by ethnic minorities. Thus it became impossible for them to regard the new political body as something unprecedented, a creation of all the so called "indigenous people" (*taing-ying-tha lumyo*) of this Union. Instead, as some activists argue, it became an imposition by the ethnic majority in continuation of centuries-long domination and oppression.

To sum up, the influence of colonial transformation on India and Burma was divergent in certain respects. While India emerged as relatively better prepared for sustainable development on modern lines, Burma was left stuck between deep non-modernity of its approach and relative contemporaneity of its expectations of economic prosperity and social well-being, an important pressure factor upon successive regimes of independence era.

Up till now I've avoided suggesting explanations to this phenomenon reserving it for the concluding section. To my mind the following reasons could be identified in this context. Though it may seem paradoxic but I'll argue that the challenge of British conquest was not critical for Burmese tradition which displayed greater strength margin as compared to India. Despite all pronounced social changes of colonial times and dissolution of traditional social structure (Furnivall 1956: 71-141; Adas 1974: 28-102, Taylor 1987: 67-88, 98-110, 123-147;Aung Thun Thet 1989: 155-163, Thant Myint-U 2001: 217-244, especially pp. 235-240) Burmese tradition faced no challenge at the level of values and perception of reality. Few practices became discontinued but at the same time the country experienced important developments in the sphere of Buddhism (emergence of new system of lay support, progress of monastic and lay education, popularization of meditation, etc.) (cf. Woodward 1988; Kirichenko 1998: 30-58). Relative well-being enjoyed by the population of British Burma before 1929 which is testified by even tapering off pattern of age pyramids (Vyatkin 1979: 62-67) helped the majority of Burmese public to feel probably more comfortable in colonial setting than their Indian fellowmen. Such self-sufficiency could have hindered the urge to revalue one's position and philosophy.

Burmese social reality lacked such features as caste system, uneven access to education, unequal inheritance rights for men and women, prohibition on remarriage for widows, ritualism of Hindu religion which formed the subject of criticism by various Indian thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus it did not offer much opportunity to prospective reformers to unthink it. Criticism by YMBA activists or P. Monin of lavish spending and gambling on various festivals (*pwe*), their appeals to shorten the duration of monks' funerals (*zapana pwe*), halt using obscene language in public performances (C.P. Khin Maung 1920: 11, 15, 20; Zapadova 1985: 59) are futile as compared to fervency of public debate witnessed in India. In fact there was almost nothing in Burma which could be called "degrading and barbarizing customs" and thus serve a stimulus to develop something different on new terms.

An interesting evidence of persistence of traditional concepts in Burmese mind could be found in the "Compendium of King's Dhamma" (*Rajadhammasangahakyan*) written in 1878 by U Hpo Hlaing (1829-1883). Instructing Thibawmin in the right royal conduct the wise minister

expounds the categories and principles to be contemplated and upheld by a monarch. A large body of information given there traditionally formed the core of such literature. Unique to this text is an attempt to comment on the administrative practices of European nations and moreover to explain their recent military successes in Asia. The explanation sounds absolutely fantastic. According to U Hpo Hlaing the success of the British in India is a result of their perfection of seven factors of preventing decline (*aparih_niya*) and four laws of benevolent support (*sa_gaha*). To him the British somehow managed to realize the ideals laid down in Buddhist scriptures and central to traditional Burmese political thought. To put it in other words, the victory won by the British was not achieved by means of advanced technology or military superiority, nothing of that kind is mentioned. Above all things it was a victory by morality or by right conduct! The same applies to administrative practices – all of them are built on the concepts of *r_jadhamma* explained by the Buddha![7]

It should be noted that such was the vision of one of the most educated men of his age, a member of reformist faction at the Burmese court and reputedly a proponent of constitutional monarchy, i.e. a person admittedly ready to accept foreign ideas. And though subsequent Burmese thinkers were not inclined to credit the British with moral perfections, another thing is important here. It's the ability to interpret the crisis situation without transcending the tenets of

[7] I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting several most relevant passages *in extenso*: "Nowadays, seeing the abovementioned benefits of unity and defects of variance, the people who cover their heads with woolen caps (i.e. Europeans) became desirous of establishing *sannip_ta* which is meeting and *samagga* which is harmony. They also wished to avoid the opposition among the citizens and to complete the law of *avirodhana* (non-opposition). To this end they have arranged two groups, namely the group of elders concerning whom the towns and villages of the state had agreed and the group of ministers who came [there] in accordance with succession. After that the king and these associations of ministers have sworn an oath in the presence of monks, the teachers in the lineage of [their] religion, revered by the whole nation, not to make speeches to one's favor be he a king or queen or one or two ministers, but to discuss the matter and implement only those measures which have been approved by majority in all affairs of the country which may arise, beginning from removing and appointing to offices, collecting taxes and duties, controlling the troops and safeguarding the state. They have selected other people who possessed morality and right concentration and inspired confidence and sympathy outside these two groups of ministers, and established publishing houses for newspapers related to the king, newspapers related to the state, and these two groups of ministers have discussed all the affairs of the country, establishing the amount of taxes which should be collected throughout the state, the control of ground troops and navy so that the power of the state was sufficient. Thus they strived to complete the four laws of benevolent support beginning with *sassamedha*" (Hpo Hlaing 1992: 131).

"In the states of those who cover their heads with woolen caps, which are fully endowed with the above mentioned factors of preventing decline (*aparih_niya*), *sannip_ta*, *samagga*, the ministers of the king are in existence for approximately five or six hundred years which up to present day makes about six or seven hundred years of life. Those ministers of the king who did not descend [from proper families] or who are unfit for promotion could not rebel and become kings" (Hpo Hlaing 1992: 133).

"Beginning with the western country of Majjhimadesa, Rajagaha, Savatthi and other big royal cities called Indra (i.e. India) were the place where *buddhas*, *paccekabuddhas*, *arahantas*, *cakkavatti* kings, great richmen possessing one hundred sixty *ko_is* [of wealth] existed. It was the country which was extremely rich and powerful. Then it gradually grew weaker because *brahmans* had eradicated the four laws of benevolent support and caused the five great sacrifices to appear. Subsequently the four laws of benevolent support had reached the states of those who cover their heads with woolen caps which [then] were the home to wild people. As those who cover their heads with woolen caps behaved in accordance with the four laws of benevolent support, they had overwhelmed the sixteen great countries, the sixteen great royal cities beginning with the royal city of Rajagaha in Magadha country, royal city of Savatthi in Kosala country. Now the kings and ministers of those who live in these great countries, great royal cities have disappeared and [they themselves] became slaves through the arrival of the people who cover their heads with woolen caps. Few states that remain live in fear of the people who cover their heads with woolen caps" (Hpo Hlaing 1992: 134).

"Among the people who cover their heads with woolen caps the wars arise mostly because there are barriers to efforts to encourage the merchants and develop the law of *samm_p_sa* (lending money without interest). The fighting of war and ending the war can take place only with consent of merchants and cultivators. The merchants and cultivators collect and give money to fight a war. Thus they greatly respect the four laws of benevolent support and strive to foster them and because of that the states of those who cover their heads with woolen caps became exceedingly prosperous among other nations. Now they have so much gold, silver, solders and arms as it was the case with Majjhimadesa of ancient times" (Hpo Hlaing 1992: 135).

traditional concepts and approaches. This clearly was a general trend of Burmese accommodation to the vicissitudes of colonial times.

In India the modernizers enjoyed somehow better competitive position against the traditionalists. The diversity of India offered an opportunity of multidirectional development, with various strata and sectors of population having limited ability to put checks upon each other. Probably, the emergent middle class was negligible as compared to population of India as a whole, but such comparisons are meaningless because in sociological terms British India never was a single entity. It remained an assemblage of diverse ethnic, confessional, social and occupational groups among whom the relative position of various middle class groups was really powerful. Urban sector may have accounted for 9,35-12,78% of the whole population of India between 1911-1941 (9,0-10,2% in Burma), but this minority was decisive. On the contrary, Burma Proper represented much more tight and undifferentiated social unit. Here the indigenous middle class had a largely uniform mass of agricultural workers, tenants, poor cultivators, peddlers and porters as its counterpart. And in this case the majority mattered. In his masterly study Partha Chatterjee argued that Gandhian ideology opened up the possibility of "political appropriation" of the subaltern classes and especially peasantry by a "bourgeoisie aspiring for hegemony in the new nation-state" (Chatterjee 1986: 100, 124). Borrowing this term we can say that in Burma bourgeoisie eventually became appropriated itself.

Negative consequences of colonial rule became fully visible in Burma only in the 30-ies. Rapid deterioration or rather rapid manifestation of accumulated social problems also contributed to divergence of Burmese and Indian ways. As the trend of expressing popular mystic beliefs through political activism had been already created the new conditions motivated radicalization of expectations and solutions conceived possible. The period of Japanese occupation altered the situation even more thus setting the country off in a quest for *lokanibb_na* and application of traditional responses to modern challenges.

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