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PREFACE

While there has been for a long time a considerable literature on the guerilla resistance of the Vietnamese to the French and of Indonesians (for example the Atchinese) to the Dutch conquest, Daw Ni Ni Myint's work is practically the first detailed, documented monograph about the Burmese resistance to the British conquest of 1885-1886 in Upper Burma and the very first presentation of the ensuing guerilla warfare in Lower Burma.

The work is an outstanding example of the enormous positive change that took place in Burma since the 1950's in the attitude towards its recent history. No longer is but little relevance attributed to the past because it is passed. Unlike the situation in the 1950's, Burma has now national archives, systematic collection of Burmese historical materials and documented national Histories, written by Burmese historians with prominent inclusion of Burmese sources.

Although, if seen only on the surface, the present book may appear to be a dry chronology of military engagements, it does reveal—to those who do not let details distract from the larger pattern—an almost epic story of human heroism and existential tragedy. Such was the gallant stand of the Burmese at Minhla Fort. Though exposed to shelling from the British gunboat, they kept the invaders down with their fire until they were overwhelmed in a hand-to-hand assault of the fort. The two Burmese commanders fell with 168 other dead defenders while the British lost only four killed. Further up the Irrawaddy, at Myingyan, "an artillery duel developed between the Burmese shore batteries and the British gunboats". (pp. 24-25)

The confrontation which Daw Ni Ni Myint describes, the struggle of pre-industrialized peoples to defend their self-determination and independence against mechanized professional armies that are equipped by one of the great Powers, has, alas, not lost topicality to this day. In this sense this history about 1885-1886 is also a history that is still confronting us now:

It was a struggle which pitted muskets and swords against rifles and machine guns. It was a struggle which pitted peasants against a professional army. Nevertheless, the struggle was for a long time fought on equal terms as the Burmese threw into the balance a spirit of indomitable resistance and techniques of fighting adapted to an environment which they knew well. On these terms the struggle stretched to every corner of the land. Even in the province of Lower Burma, which the British were fond of holding up as a model of good administration and progress patriots rose against the British. ... Both laymen and *sangha* alike pitched their strength against the imperialists. It was a struggle which threw up a great many heroes, but it was, in essence, a struggle of the common man fighting for what he felt to be his national identity. (pp. 156-157).

As the undersigned heard from a participant of the movement of the Thakins, more than one of them became attracted to it by reading Fielding Hall's *Soul of a People*. That author observed about Upper Burma in 1885:

Think of the peasant lying there in the ghostly dim-lit fields waiting to attack us at the dawn. Where was his help? He thought, perhaps, of his king deported, his village invaded, his friends killed, himself reduced to the subject of a far-off queen. He would fight—yes, even though his faith told him not. There was no help there. His was no faith to strengthen his arm, to straighten his aim, to be his shield in the hour of danger.

If he died, if in the strife of the morning's fight he were to be killed, if a bullet were to still his heart, or a lance to pierce his chest, there was no hope for him of the glory of heaven ...

And so the Burmese peasant had to fight his own fight in 1885 alone. His king was gone, his government broken up, he had no leaders. He had no god to stand beside him when he fired at the foreign invaders, and when he lay a-dying, with a bullet in his throat, he had no one to open to him the gates of heaven.

And yet he fought—with every possible discouragement he fought. But no British military participant in the conquest of Burma is known to have expressed admiration for the boundless heroism of the conquered who had honorably defended their homeland and independence up to complete exhaustion as had an unnamed contemporary Czarist officer about the conquered "natives" of the Caucasus (or as had the French Captain Cosselin about the "anti French" Vietnamese guerillas of 1885).

The plans for a continuation of resistance on the part of Burma's last king who for this purpose was to withdraw to Shwebo and even to Chinese territory have been made known internationally for the first time by Daw Ni Ni Myint (on the basis of Maung Maung Tin).

While writing a military history, Daw Ni Ni Myint has been the first to document (p. 112) an important phenomenon from the sphere of the history of ideas. She documented that Burma's resistance drew inspiration also from the historical tradition of Buddhist kingship of Sri Lanka, of King Dutthagamani (161-137 B.C.) who successfully defended his country "not for the kingdom but for Buddhism". The Myinzaing Prince, half-brother of Burma's last king, invoked the example of Dutthagamani when proclaiming a war to defend the Buddhist Religion, the Dynasty and the People. (The source comes from a British archival report of 1886 and goes beyond another proclamation of the Myinzaing Prince, published by Sao Saimong Mangrai in *The Shan States and the British*

Annexation in 1965. It would be interesting to know if there are more Burmese sources for Buddhist rationalisation of self-defense during the Burmese Resistance of the years following 1885 beyond the reference to Buddhism in the Royal Proclamation, calling for a defensive war against the invader.) Daw Ni Ni Myint also documents (on page 42 through the concluding passage of the *ratu* verses of the Zibani Sayadaw) the association of the catastrophic loss of the Kingdom, its Palace and Throne, not only with the Age of Decline but also with the end of the enormously long World Age, when this world was to disappear (before it would be regenerated).

In contrast, on the invader's side the conquest was held to be a step of what was imagined to be inexorable Progress. The Manchester Capitalism of early industrial society was projected into norms for relations between nations in terms of developing social Darwinism, supplementing the 17th century theories of Hobbes that Right came from Might with new arguments about the Survival of the Fittest. Notions that the struggle for existence, with the survival of the fittest, were to be eternal laws of nature facilitated the freeing of international relations of remnants of ethical principles, while "medieval" notions of just (and unjust) wars were abandoned as categories of international law in favour of pragmatic expediency. Precisely three years before the British annexation of Upper Burma the sociologist Gumplowicz published his *Race Struggle* (1883). Weakness became a sign of inferiority for the Victorian colonial Englishman east of Suez. If the Burmans were conquered, it was because they were weak—and weakness to the Victorians was a sign of racial inferiority....Even Fielding Hall—once he had become a patronizing colonial—wrote: "It is our duty to sweep away the... inefficient, the weak... and to put in their place the strong and useful".

How this was done has been immortalized by a British police officer:

Under a spreading mango tree
A Burmese Chieftain stands.
His time has come, a captive he
Within the conqueror's hands.
And they fasten around his sturdy neck
A noose of hempen strands.

Under a spreading mango tree
A lifeless body swings.
Though bound its limbs, a soul is free
And spreads on joyful wings
To solve the perplexing mysteries of
Ten thousand hidden things.

Under a spreading mango tree
A Buddhist chapel stands,
Where children play on bended knee,
Amidst the shimmering sands,
That the seeds of Western culture
Take roots in Eastern lands.

How wrong it was, even at that time, that "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet" was proved by the example of that author, Conway Pole of the Imperial Police Service. He showed that the West could meet the East—at least in posthumous compassion. But he was an exception.

It was in too many cases accepted as an axiom that all that was necessary was to shoot out of hand whoever was found under circumstances of suspicion, and thereby to establish a terror which would produce the immediate submission of the population. Making prisoners is therefore regarded as a mistake The idea fades out that the population which has to be brought into subjection by terror has any claim whatever to be regarded as possessing human rights. The one virtue is to inspire fear, anything not calculated to produce that effect is regarded as evidence of weakness, which will interfere with the effect to be produced.

This was reported by a contemporary British observer of the scene, Grattan Geary (who also knew about "Europeans firing... on men armed with a stick").

As Daw Ni Ni Myint points out (p. 127):

An outstanding characteristic of this military effort was the ruthlessness displayed by the British. In an effort to overawe the Kachins and to create a psychology of fear, the British column killed indiscriminately and destroyed whole villages. Moreover, in order to impose economic hardships on the Kachins and to starve out their resistance, the British destroyed the grain of the Kachins every where The British troops first burned the paddy ... then on capturing the village, set it on fire before leaving. Two days later... a body of British soldiers rushed in and brutally murdered old and young, men and women. All in all, 46 villages containing 639 houses, and 509,000 lbs of grain and many cattle were destroyed during the military operations.

If humanitarian contemporaries objected, it did not matter in terms of the Imperialist mythology of Kipling:

While over the waters the papers cried,
The Patriot fights for his countryside.
But little they cared for the Native press.
The worn white soldiers in Khaki dress.

Nowhere did notions of universal human rights cause such irritation as in England, notes Hannah Arendt. Only in England could and did race ideologies develop directly out of national traditions—out of the consciousness that civil rights belonged to a privileged in-group only. It is a peculiarity of English national character to consider freedom to be a hereditary possession of Englishmen and not a natural human right. From this derives the Englishman's (no matter of what class) conception of the English as a nation of noblemen, superior to all other peoples (no matter of what class), a racial nobility among a world of commoners ("the lesser breeds").

And just as racist Imperialism was inherited by racist Fascism, so did the heritage of the Anti-Imperialist Resistance

of 1886 pass to Burma's Anti-Fascist Resistance of 1944-1945. As Daw Ni Ni Myint rightly points out (pp. 157-158)

The resistance struggle was subdued and the hills and plains "pacified", but it did not end with the close of the decade. The Kachins continued their struggle ... until the uprisings of 1914-15 which marked the conclusion of Kachin resistance to British occupation The resistance struggle lived on in the memory of the people, germinating and growing there, to provide inspiration for later struggles and within the next decade nationalist groups sprang up leading to further struggle, until it culminated in total independence when the wheel of fate came full circle since King Thibaw.

The independence of Burma was reconquered by a mass movement whose name, according to Hugh Tinker, attributed fascist qualities not only to the Japanese militarists but also to late British imperialists. It was not accidentally that Jawaharlal Nehru deduced that, if European Imperialism were to be applied in the European home country itself, then it would amount to fascism. Indeed, something of the Second World War, whose outcome returned independence to Burma, was started already in July 1936, when a colonial army, the colonial legionaries of Spanish Morocco, crossed into Spain itself to crush the self-determination of the Spaniards the way they had previously crushed the self-determination of Moroccan "natives."

Meanwhile world opinion has passed judgement on them—as it has on earlier aggressions, like that of Britain against Burma in 1885. But if, amidst a radically changed world opinion, the resistance of "native" peoples against one of the Powers is no longer as hopeless as it has been a century ago, humanity owes this not last to those who, even when native states were in practice outside international law, had again and again defended themselves, no matter how hopeless their resistance. Daw Ni Ni Myint rightly emphasizes (pp.153-154):

The British came cold-blooded and clear-eyed, knowing the order of things they wanted and determined to create it. Many of the resistance leaders of the hills did not have this vision. As if by instinct, they fought for their homes, fought for their land. But there was no commitment to an overriding vision, a commitment which has become the essential ingredient of success for modern guerilla bands.

And yet, though the Burmese resistance fighters of 1885-1895 did not have a vision in a subjective sense, perhaps, by the very act of their defending the independence and thereby self-determination of their country, they might have served a vision in a teleological sense. The vision that all peoples, "developed" or "underdeveloped," "advanced" or "backward," all of them together constitute Humanity—in a world in which the sum and coexistence of self-determining nationalisms amount to the ecumenical human symphony. The vision of Herder, the forgotten German romantic inspirer of original European nationalism, the vision which, almost two centuries later, Sukarno may have echoed when he said (in his Pantja Sila speech of 1945) that internationalism has to have its roots in nationalism while true nationalism can only flourish in the garden of internationalism.

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