

BROKEN GLASS
PIECES OF MYANMAR HISTORY

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Historians and the Search for Myanmar Nationhood

Myanmar has a diversity of ethnic peoples although the full extent of that diversity has never been clearly ascertained.¹ Before the 19th century, many of these peoples were non-literate, and, although they were not without substantial oral traditions about their past, had little in the way of formal history. Those with a formal history in the form of written records and chronicles were: the Bamar, whose historical homeland was in central Myanmar; the Mons, who historically occupied the south; the Rakhines (Arakanese), who occupied the west; and the Shans, who occupied the north and east. The traditional historiography of Myanmar depicted the relations between these four ethnic peoples primarily in terms of war and conquest.

When the British began their annexation of Myanmar in the early 19th century, the Bamar kingdom of central Myanmar had, for about a century and a half, established its control over other ethnic areas, administering them directly in the case of the Mon and Rakhine, and indirectly in the case of the Shan. British rule in Myanmar, from the first annexation in 1826 to the final relinquishment of power in 1948, lasted for about 120 years. The rule created fresh complexities in the ethnic situation. This was because, in their rule, the British made a differentiation between the plain areas and the hills. In the former, communications were easily developed and there were resources which the British could easily exploit; in them the British laid down the full apparatus of colonial administration. In the latter, communications were difficult, the population was sparse, and as it was not certain whether enough revenue could be derived to justify a regular administration; they were therefore mostly left to continue in their administration under traditional rulers.

There were two Myanmar towards the close of British colonial rule. One was the Myanmar primarily of the Bamar, but also of the Mons and Rakhines, whose lives had been radically transformed by colonial rule and whose political development had resulted in their demand for Myanmar independence. The other Myanmar was that of the Shans, Kachins, Chins and other hill peoples whose lives had been less changed and who were politically apathetic with no strong feelings about independence.

The great divide between the two Myanmar and, in particular, between the Bamar and the other ethnic peoples, was politically bridged by the statesmanship of Aung San, helped by the unwillingness of the British Labour Government to underwrite an unsustainable outpost of empire among the hill peoples.

Myanmar achieved independence on 4 January 1948 with a semblance of national unity. At the independence ceremony, Prime Minister U Nu declared:

On this day on which we attain independence, it is not only independence which we attain. We attain also the unity of all the ethnic peoples. In our past and in our history, the ethnic peoples who live in Myanmar were wont to fight against each other. Then we came under British rule, and the system of divide and rule appeared. With the appearance of this evil system our ethnic peoples who were of the same flesh and of the same blood became alienated from each other. Now this fighting and this alienation have all disappeared. We now witness with our eyes that although Mons, Bamar, Rakhines, Kayins [Karens], Shans, Kachins and Chins each live by their own culture they come together before the world as people of a single nation... May the independence which we attain today endure forever! May the unity of the ethnic peoples which we attain together with our independence endure forever!³

The unity of the ethnic peoples which U Nu proclaimed was a fragile attainment. In January 1949, just a year after U Nu's speech, an uprising of the Kayins broke out into which the Mons were drawn. A decade later, the Kachins and the Shans followed.⁴

Apart from the insurrection, there developed among the ethnic peoples in the early 1960's a movement for greater constitutional rights—the creation of new ethnic constituent states and of a more truly federal system. With a secession clause for the Shan and Kayah States in the existing Constitution, the movement was perceived as a threat to national unity and a military coup took place on 2 March 1962. One year later, on 12 February 1963, General Ne Win, Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, declared in his Union Day address:

Last February it seemed as if the young plant of Union unity which had just begun to give out shoots was going to die. Perceiving that if this plant of unity were to die, the Union would disintegrate wholly and be destroyed, the Revolutionary Council stepped in to control the situation.... Our main aim is the creation of unity by all means since unity is the most important issue for the whole Union and for each citizen of the Union.⁵

Transcending the changes of government and regime in post-independence Myanmar, the creation of a Myanmar nation out of the diversity of ethnic peoples has been a major concern. The concern has not been confined to the sphere of constitutional systems and political arrangements but has been projected into the realm of ideas and scholarship. With the problem of relationships among the ethnic peoples much affected by Myanmar history, Myanmar historians have tried to find in that history the elements making for national unity.

One of the high-profile works on the nation-building effort in post-independence Myanmar is U Thant's *Pyidawtha Hkayi* (The Pyidawtha Journey).⁶ Secretary to Prime Minister U Nu at the time he started on the work, U Thant described the circumstances in which he came to write the book:

Although Myanmar had become a sovereign state on 4 January 1948, there was as yet no work studying the struggle for independence, the role of the [anti-Fascist] Resistance, and the great political tides. Therefore, during 1954, Prime Minister U Nu directed the author to write on the Myanmar struggle as a work of contemporary history.⁷

The three-volume work took four years to write, the last volume being completed while U Thant was serving as the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations.

U Thant felt it necessary to include a chapter on the ethnic minorities in his book, explaining:

It is necessary to include matters relating to the ethnic peoples of the Union in describing the Pyidawtha journey. It is only because all the ethnic peoples of the Union have united together with one mind and worked together that independence has been achieved and safeguarded. Special note needs to be made that the majority ethnic peoples of the Union, the Mons, Bamars and Rakhines, are advancing on the Pyidawtha journey together in agreement with the minority ethnic peoples of the Union, the Shans, Chins, Kayins, Kayahs, etc.⁸

Lumping the Mons and Rakhines with the Bamars, U Thant focused his attention on the ethnic minorities who had been given political recognition in the Constitution—the Shans, Kachins, Kayahs and Kayins who had been granted States, and the Chins who had been granted a Special Division. He identified the language groups to which they belonged,⁹ the areas in which they were settled, their numbers in the 1941 Census, and the administrative arrangements under which they were placed in the colonial period.¹⁰

U Thant's treatment of the ethnic minorities was made within the larger framework of an interpretation of Myanmar history. In that interpretation, all the peoples of Myanmar were seen as migrating into Myanmar from central Asia, becoming divided into three linguistic groups during the course of that migration—the Mon-Khmers, the Tibeto-Burmans and the Tai-Chinese, with the Mon-Khmers the first to arrive in Myanmar and the Tai-Chinese the last.¹¹ On their first arrival in Myanmar, the various peoples lived a wandering life looking for favourable places of habitation, then, in the course of time, came to live in settled communities. Two trends then developed. In the areas where hills and forests were barriers and communications were difficult, the ethnic peoples came to differ from each other in language and customs and grew distant from each other. In the plain areas, where there were no barriers to communications, social intercourse between the various communities resulted in a mingling of cultures and traditions.¹²

In U Thant's interpretation of Myanmar history, although differing in language, customs and traditions, the ethnic peoples formed a single family by being common inhabitants and citizens of Myanmar who came together in times of need. He mentioned three periods of history in which the ethnic peoples united together:

About 900 years ago, during the reign of Anawrahta, king of Bagan, the ethnic brothers who lived in their own communities united together and established a great nation which might be called the first Myanmar nation. A second time, during the reign of Bayinnaung, they united again, and the great Myanmar nation, with renewed vigour, developed and advanced again. Then, during the reign of the tenth and last king of the Nyaungyan dynasty, when the nation was in disarray and on the verge of division through internal and external destruction, the Myanmar brothers rallied, came together again and formed a single brood.¹³

With the Sixth Buddhist Council held in Yangon in 1956 to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of the Buddhist religion, U Thant gave prominence to Buddhism as a unifying force. Clarifying the relationship between the Bamars and the Kayins, he asserted that Buddhism provided the basis for the common culture, literature and traditions of the Mons, Bamars and Kayins of the plains:

It is true that the Mons, Bamars and Kayins differed in their customs because they were not only descended from different lineages but also lived at first in separate regions. But these differences gradually disappeared during the long course of their relationship and their mingling. The cultures which appeared after Buddhism flourished developed on the basis of a common religion and, therefore, there could be no differences.... Thus the culture, customs and beliefs of the Kayins living in the plains adjoining Myanmar proper were almost not different at all from those of the Bamars.¹⁴

With his view of Buddhism as a unifying force, U Thant provided an account of the propagation of Buddhism in the hill areas, a subject largely ignored by other historians. He related that Buddhism was

introduced into the Kayah State by U Thiri during the reign of King Mindon, with Mindon himself contributing five images and the Pitakas, and that Buddhism flourished in the Kayah State during the time of Sawbwa Sawlapaw, one-third of the Kayahs becoming Buddhists.¹⁵ He also related that the Chin leader U Vamthu Mawng started the propagation of Buddhism in the Chin Hills in 1929 and that, on the instruction of the Visutarama Sayadaw of Pakokku, he sent youths from the Chin Hills to Pakokku to study there and raise the level of Chin culture.¹⁶

For U Thant, it was British colonialism which was mainly responsible for the division among ethnic peoples in modern times. He asserted:

The Myanmar ethnic peoples did not have unity under the imperialist British. Because of the various imperialist methods of bringing about division the ethnic peoples again became disunited as in the old days when there was not much intercourse because of the barrier of hills and forests.¹⁷

In U Thant's view, Christianity was one of the devices used by British colonialism—together with such other devices as placing the hill areas under an administration separate from Myanmar proper—to bring about disunity among the ethnic peoples. In relation to the Kayins again U Thant related that when the British first colonized Myanmar, the Kayins of the plains were Buddhists just like the Bamars and the Shans, but that the British encouraged Christian missionary efforts, which, unsuccessful in the plains, turned to the hill areas, and that the British colonial government gave privileges to the Christians and worked for the increase of the Christian population in the conviction that the greater the number of Christians the longer colonial rule would endure, and that the result was a division, not only among the ethnic peoples, but also among the Kayins themselves.¹⁸

According to U Thant, the ethnic peoples united again in the Panglong Agreement of 1947, and his account of the ethnic peoples ends on a triumphant note:

Although the imperialist British tried by various means to prevent and destroy the unity of the ethnic peoples, the ethnic brothers came together again in a lasting unity. The uniting together this time was not like those of before but an everlasting unity. Not only did the ethnic peoples understand well the strength which lay in unity but there was also a maturing of the Union spirit.¹⁹

While U Thant was a history teacher turned publicist, Ba Shin was a professional historian, a protégé of G. H. Luce who had rewritten early Myanmar history on the basis of inscriptions, and also a member of the Myanmar Historical Commission from its establishment in 1955.²⁰ In 1968 Ba Shin wrote six articles on early Myanmar history for the *Pyinnya Tazaung* (Light of Knowledge), a periodical catering mainly to educationists and schoolteachers.²¹ The articles were later published as *Anawrahta ayin ga Myanma naingngan* (Myanmar before Anawrahta).²²

Ba Shin had earlier covered some of the ground for the 1968 articles in his *Myanma naingngandaw thamaing* (History of Myanmar), first published in 1951.²³ The earlier work grew out of lecture notes which Ba Shin had prepared for his duties as a history instructor in the Myanmar Army and ended up as a school textbook approved by the Textbook Committee.²⁴ The work drew praise from his former professor and mentor G. H. Luce:

A sound piece of scholarly work, infinitely better than the old-fashioned type of work which goes by the name of Burmese history, and I heartily approve—as far as a foreigner can sympathize with it—your nationalist approach to the problems of modern Burma.²⁵

In the years following the first publication of the *Myanma naingngandaw thamaing*, much work was done on the pre-Bagan period of Myanmar history and Ba Shin's *Anawrahta ayin ga Myanma naingngan* profited from it. Nevertheless, in certain aspects of his work, such as the entry and settlement of the ethnic peoples in Myanmar, Ba Shin continued to be much influenced by the ideas of his mentor, Luce.

In *Anawrahta ayin ga Myanma naingngan* Ba Shin clarified his concept of Myanmar history in the following terms:

The history of the Union of Myanmar does not only mean the history of the majority people who speak the Bamar language. It is the history of all the ethnic peoples who form the Union of Myanmar. In their appearance and in the language which they speak, these ethnic peoples would seem to be different. They are also at different levels in their economic status and their cultural expressions. Despite all these differences, the culture and history of all these peoples, that is to say, the culture and history of the Union, may be said to rest on a common dynamic and a common tradition.²⁶

That common dynamic and tradition Ba Shin found in the conditions of the early life of the ethnic peoples and in the nature of Bagan civilization.

In Ba Shin's view, most of the Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples presently inhabiting Myanmar had their early homeland in the present Gansu province in the valley of the Tao, a tributary of the Hoanghe. Known as Qiang to the Han Chinese, they were driven out from the Tao valley by the advance of the latter and moved, first westward, then southward. Ba Shin traced the routes taken by the various Burman-speaking peoples as they entered Myanmar. Of these, the ancient Bamars first entered Yunnan, becoming part of the Nanzhao kingdom, then taking the opportunity of the destruction of the Pyu kingdom of Sriksetra in AD 832, moved rapidly southward from western Yunnan via the Shan State to the Myelat region, thence westward into the plains and the Kyaukse area.²⁷

On the basis of his account of the movement of the various ethnic peoples into Myanmar, Ba Shin concluded:

The ancient Bamars were originally a hill people. They were just like the present hill peoples of the Union, such as the Shans, Pa-oss, Palaungs, Kachins, Chins and others.... They were of the same stock and had lived together in the same place. It is true that because they had enjoyed the benefits of Buddhism and modern civilization, the peoples of the plains differ in appearance from the peoples of the hills who are their blood relatives. But the peoples of the plains still carefully observe the traditions and customs which they had observed when they lived in the hills. The traditional customs which the peoples of the plains observe today clearly confirm that their forefathers were peoples of the hills.

There are those who are wont to interpret the historical event of the hill peoples moving down and settling in the plains in ethnic and political terms. One wonders whether they do this to bring about division among the ethnic peoples. In fact, the process of hill peoples coming down into the plains is a natural process of history in every country.²⁸

Apart from his argument that the Bamars were no different at all from the ethnic peoples of the hill areas in their customs and traditions, Ba Shin also asserted that the first civilization which the Bamars created in Myanmar, the Bagan civilization, was not a purely Bamar creation but represented a melding of Bamar, Mon and Pyu resources.

According to Ba Shin, the Mon-Khmer speaking peoples had been early migrants into Myanmar and were dominant in Myanmar at the beginning of the Christian era. They were later split into two—a northern and a southern group—by the later arrival of the Kayins who settled in the region of the Kayah State and northern Kayin State. As the early Mons who formed part of the northern group developed an advanced civilization in the Kyaukse area, the early Bamars who entered the Kyaukse area received many elements of civilization from the Mons, most prominently the art of writing, but also other elements as well, which were reflected in the Bamar borrowing of terms from the Mons relating to religion, administration, economy and culture.²⁹

The Pyus, who were among the earliest Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples to come into Myanmar,³⁰ established two kingdoms, Visnu (1st-5th century) and Sriksetra (ca 500-832). According to Ba Shin, the Pyus in Sriksetra invented the arch and employed it in their building of such pagodas as the Bebe, East Zegu and Lemyethna, and it was the arch of the Pyus which made possible the later construction in Bagan of such magnificent temples as the Ananda, Thatbyinnyu, Sulamani and Htilominlo.³¹

For Ba Shin, then, Bagan—which he characterized as “the first Myanmar nation”—was the conjoint creation of the early Bamars, Mons and Pyus:

The basic necessities of economy, society, culture, belief, thought, and administration for the emergence of a new nation were developed in the *hkayaing* areas³² These necessities were created in common by the Pyus and the early Mons, who were already settled in the region, and by the ancient Bamars who had moved in from the hills. ... The laying down of the foundations and the construction [of a new nation] could not have been accomplished by the ancient Bamars alone. ... It was accomplished through the ancient Mons, Pyus and ancient Bamars each contributing the qualities they had and working together unitedly.³³

One of the most ambitious attempts to re-interpret Myanmar history in the post-independence period came in the late 1960s when the Burma Socialist Programme Party assigned its Research Department the task of producing a work on Myanmar history conforming to the Party's philosophy as expressed in *The Correlation of Man and His Environment*. A three-volume work was planned: Volume I to cover Myanmar history from early times to 1752; Volume II from 1752 to 1900, and Volume III from 1900 to 1962. Volume I was published in 1970; Volume II (in two parts) in 1978; but the final volume was only in draft when the BSPP was dissolved in the wake of the pro-democracy movement of 1988.

The BSPP's history, the *Acheibya Myanma naingnganyei thamaing* (A Basic Political History of Myanmar), took a strong anti-Western stance, criticizing the histories of Myanmar written by Western

historians during the colonial period as “distorted histories, their facts all awry, written in defence and advocacy of imperialism” and furthermore asserting that the majority of histories of Myanmar written by foreign scholars after Myanmar independence were not fair and objective histories based on deep and careful analysis.³⁴

Apart from its anti-Western stance, the main effort of the *Acheibya* was directed at interpreting Myanmar history universalistically on the basis of historical materialism, but nevertheless, maintaining a nationalistic position at the same time by asserting the distinctive character of Myanmar socio-economic development.³⁵

With its main effort directed towards fitting Myanmar history into a historical-materialistic interpretation, the *Acheibya* made little attempt at a serious study of the ethnic peoples—ignoring, for instance, the question of ethnic migrations into Myanmar which was a major preoccupation of most histories of Myanmar—or of relationships among the ethnic peoples during the long course of Myanmar history. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the *Acheibya* from making general comments on the question of the unity of the ethnic peoples during various periods of Myanmar history.

For the *Acheibya*, the unity of the ethnic peoples began with the efforts of Anawrahta in the Bagan period to extend his authority over neighbouring city-states using “various military, economic and social means.”³⁶ It declared, “The Myanmar state of the Bagan period which produced a great and magnificent civilization was unitedly established by the various ethnic peoples of that period,” and listed those ethnic peoples.³⁷

Together with other historians who insisted on an enduring ethnic unity during the whole course of Myanmar history, the *Acheibya* had to confront the problem of explaining those historical events which had been depicted in the chronicles as ethnic conflicts: the series of attacks by the Shan kingdom of Mohnyin which led to the fall of the Bamar kingdom of Inwa in 1527, and the Forty Years' War (1386-1422) between the Bamar kingdom of Inwa and the Mon kingdom of Hanthawaddy.

In his *Myanma naingngandaw thamaing*, Ba Shin did not altogether deny the ethnic nature of the conflicts, but he took the view that they arose, not out of ethnic animosities but out of the movement of peoples. Noting that in the Forty Years' War between Inwa and Hanthawaddy there were only a few occasions in which the men of lower Myanmar (Hanthawaddy) advanced into upper Myanmar (Inwa) while it was generally the case that the men of upper Myanmar attacked lower Myanmar and that Shan forces formed part of the army of upper Myanmar, Ba Shin explained:

The War may be said to be a means of opening the way for the men of upper Myanmar to migrate into lower Myanmar. ... It was as if lower Myanmar invited men from upper Myanmar which was not economically sufficient. That being so, the basic nature of the War was that, as many new ethnic peoples entered upper Myanmar, there was a migration to lower Myanmar from the pressure of the new peoples. The basic nature of the War was economic.³⁸

In line with its characterization of the period as a feudal period, the *Acheibya* gave a different explanation of the conflicts from the founding of Pinya in 1302 to the fall of Inwa in 1752:

Although there was a differentiation into such ethnic peoples as the Kayins, Mons, Bamars, Rakhines and Shans, there was no question of ethnic discrimination during the whole of

the period. There was only the phenomenon of the feudal lords of these ethnic peoples establishing themselves as lords in their respective regions and a struggle for power among them.³⁹

Together with its interpretation of the conflicts as a struggle for power among feudal lords, the *Acheibya* also spoke of a national consciousness and an underlying ethnic unity:

Although the ethnic feudal lords were wont to wage war against each other in times when there were no threats of external aggression, they cooperated and united together in times of external aggression.⁴⁰

When confronted with issues of a national character—for example, Chinese aggression, Thai aggression, the aggression of Europeans—great armies composed of all the ethnic peoples—Kayins, Mons, Bamars, Rakhines, Shans and others—crushed, repelled and removed the aggressors throughout the whole course of [Myanmar] history.⁴¹

While speaking of a continuous unity of the ethnic peoples throughout the whole course of Myanmar history, many Myanmar historians of the post-independence period also gave prominence to historical figures who made efforts to create ethnic unity. In this regard, Kyansittha, Tabinshwehti and Bayinnaung received particular attention.

Of Kyansittha, Ba Shin wrote in his *Myanma naingngandaw thamaing*:

The two most important peoples in the Myanmar kingdom at the time were the Bamars and the Mons. Kyansittha fully realized that in terms of population and status the Mons were a people whose uniting [to the Bamars] in the Myanmar kingdom was important and needed special attention. ... He not only carried out measures for the Bamars to think of the Mons not as a separate people but as a people who were the same as themselves but also made the Mons hold the same attitudes as the Bamars towards the Myanmar kingdom by giving them the status which was due to them.⁴²

Ba Shin mentioned such measures of Kyansittha as ascending the throne with the Mon princess Khin U as his queen, following Mon custom in performing the ceremony, including Mon songs and dances in the ceremony, having the record of the ceremony inscribed in the Mon language, appointing Mon ministers, and making his grandson, who was part Mon, rather than his Bamar son, his heir.⁴³

Of Tabinshwehti, the *Acheibya* noted:

To bring about unity among Mons, Bamars and Shans, Tabinshweti during his reign behaved in accordance with their customs and cultures. He established unity by giving Mon, Bamar and Shan ministers and generals the position that was due to them. He cut his hair and performed the *abhiseka* ceremony in accordance with Mon custom.⁴⁴

Of Bayinnaung, Kyaw Thet, Professor of Oriental History of the University of Rangoon and member of the Myanmar Historical Commission, observed in his *Pyidaungsu Myanma naingngan thamaing*

(History of the Union of Myanmar) that he united the Mons, Shans and Bamars and made them accept Bamar leadership by winning the confidence of the Mons and securing their services, and by removing the threat of the Shans and establishing security in central Myanmar through periodical attacks into Shan territories. To Bayinnaung he gave the accolade:

By a prominent display of the qualities necessary for accomplishing national unity and by giving attention to the hopes and desires of all the ethnic peoples in Myanmar, Bayinnaung was able to lay the foundations of national unity.⁴⁵

Kyansittha, Tabinshwehti and Bayinnaung were historical figures of the chronicles made into Bamar national heroes in pre-independence nationalist accounts. Now, in post-independence histories, they achieved a new status as creators of ethnic unity.⁴⁶

Apart from these traditional heroes, post-independence Myanmar historians rescued from obscurity and created new heroes from the early Myanmar resistance against British colonial rule. Largely ignored before, the early resistance movement became a new area of historical study in which the theme of ethnic cooperation and unity was developed.

One of the early attempts at drawing attention to the early resistance against British rule was Bamaw Tin Aung's *Kolonihkit Myanma naingngan thamaing* (History of Myanmar in the Colonial Period) published in 1964.⁴⁷ A leftist intellectual, Bamaw Tin Aung was not only critical of British colonialism but also conscious of the common destiny of the ethnic peoples. Naming Phayre, Cocks, Harvey, Hall and Christian, he commented:

The colonial historians could not in any way view the development and changes of Myanmar history in the interest and from the viewpoint of the Myanmar people. They only viewed them in the interest and from the viewpoint of the colonial administration, that is the enslavement and the irrecoverable oppression of Myanmar and its ethnic peoples.⁴⁸

Bamaw Tin Aung's account of the Myanmar resistance to colonial rule begins with the resistance in lower Myanmar at the end of the Second Anglo-Myanmar War in 1852. Saying that although the British were able to crush the Myanmar troops in the brief space of six months they were unable to establish law and order in lower Myanmar until 1870 because "the Myanmar people did not admit defeat and did not retreat," he described the resistance offered to British rule by Gaung Gyi, Myat Tun and Bo, former officials of the Myanmar king, and by an unnamed Kayin who attempted to establish a Kayin kingdom and dynasty in the Sittaung valley.⁴⁹

Bamaw Tin Aung's account of the more extensive resistance to British rule after the Third Anglo-Myanmar War similarly dealt with both the Bamar resistance and the resistance of the ethnic peoples. On the one hand, he described the divisive policy employed by the British to crush the resistance, and on the other, spoke in laudatory terms of the stubborn resistance which was offered.

Of British policy in lower Myanmar, Bamaw Tin Aung related that, employing the bulk of their armed forces in upper Myanmar and unable to make the Bamar armed police suppress the resistance, the British armed the Christian Kayins and used them to suppress Bamar resistance, creating Kayin-Bamar hatred and conflict in the Toungoo-Shwegyin area and sowing the seeds of Kayin-Bamar division.⁵⁰

Regarding the Bamar resistance in central Myanmar, “the cradle of the Bamars,” Bamaw Tin Aung named twelve “patriotic leaders”⁵¹ and wrote:

It was only gradually that the guerrilla war of resistance of the Bamars came to a close nearly ten years after the annexation of Myanmar, but many of the patriotic leaders who offered this resistance did not admit defeat nor surrendered and accepted position. Many of the leaders took their banner of resistance with them to their grave.⁵²

Bamaw Tin Aung described the resistance of the Shans, Kayahs, Was, Kachins and Chins in much the same terms as he did the Bamar resistance, saying of the Kayah leader Sawlapaw, “To the day of his death he did not lay down the national flag of the Kayinnis [Kayahs] from his hands.”⁵³

Other works followed in the wake of Bamaw Tin Aung’s book which focused more completely on the early resistance. One such work was Tekkatho Aye Thant’s *Kolonihkit-u tawhlanyei thamaingwin azanimya* (Heroes of the Resistance of the Early Colonial Period) published in 1969. A staff member of the Defence Services Historical Research Institute, Tekkatho Aye Thant gave the reasons for writing his book: “I not only wanted to provide evidence of the unity of the ethnic peoples of the Union but also to indicate how strong the spirit of patriotism was.”⁵⁴ And writing about this patriotism and ethnic unity, he used language which was emotionally charged.

The blood brothers in every region of Myanmar who were not willing to bear that British domination and who harboured in their hearts the feeling that it was nobler to die than to be a slave fought the imperialist government to the best of their ability. They resisted with firm hearts ready to suffer the crushing of their bones, the drying up of their juices. Listening not to the talk of outsiders but to the call of blood, their resistance against the imperialists throughout the Union was all at the same time. As matters pressed they came closer together in blood, and in the emergency their blood joined together.⁵⁵

The work also ended on a high note of affirmation of ethnic unity:

From the beginning of the First Anglo-Myanmar War to the time when the British occupied Upper Myanmar and suppressed the patriotic resistance forces of the Union, the Kachins, Kayins, Kayahs, Chins, Kachins [*sic*], Bamars, Shans and Was throughout the Union united and together waged the great war against colonialism-imperialism. ... The resistance forces of the Union used the tactics of ambush, of guerrilla warfare and of lightning attacks. The final benefit which remained was the benefit of internal strength—the uniting, the coming together of blood, the being together of the same mind.⁵⁶

Tekkatho Aye Thant provided a list of 113 “patriotic leaders,” 24 of them ethnic minorities,⁵⁷ but the BSPP’s *Taingyintha lomyomya i neche hsankyinyei thamaing* (History of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the Ethnic Peoples) published two years after, in 1971, went still further to uncover the heroes of the early resistance. While Bamaw Tin Aung and Tekkatho Aye Thant had started their accounts of resistance from the Second Anglo-Myanmar War, the *Neche* went back to the First War to recount the resistance

activities of the Rakhines from 1829 to 1831, and of the Lushais in 1829.⁵⁸ A history which involved ethnic participation in the form of the authorities of the ethnic States providing accounts of the resistance movement in their respective areas, it uncovered resistance leaders among the lesser ethnic minorities such as the Gekhos and the Paletwa Chins.⁵⁹

The *Neche* also went further in its idea of ethnic unity and cooperation in the resistance to the British. While Bamaw Tin Aung and Tekkatho Aye Thant had described the resistance in terms of individual leaders each fighting in his own area, with the idea of ethnic unity being based on the simultaneity of the resistance, the *Neche* argued that there had been a full cooperation among the ethnic peoples:

After the British had annexed the whole of Myanmar, the ethnic peoples, each in their area, resisted the British for many years. In this resistance they not only resisted by themselves in their areas, but the Kachins cooperated with the Bamar-Shans in the area of Kachin resistance, the Kayahs with the Kayins, Bamars and Shans in the area of Kayah resistance, the Chins with the Bamars in the area of Chin resistance, the Shans with the Kachins, Kayahs and Bamars in the area of Shan resistance, and the Rakhines with the Bamars in the area of Rakhine resistance, all giving their life-blood in sacrifice to resist the imperialist foreign aggression.⁶⁰

The BSPP further enhanced the status of this early resistance movement by giving it the name “War of National Liberation” in the *Acheibya*. Adding still further to the list of resistance leaders⁶¹ and providing details about them from interviews with survivors and descendants,⁶² it also raised the rhetoric of the resistance to new heights:

The patriotic Myanmar ethnics who waged the war of national liberation faced the British bullets, and, giving their life a light regard as if it were a mere blossom or a leaf, fought without falling back. ... Fighting against the British forces, the Myanmar heroes fell thick like blossoms. With little regard, and as if the thickly piled up bodies of the fallen heroes were a fort which had been built [for them], they fought and died, whole forces decimated without a single survivor left. Thus was displayed the hereditary pride and courage of the Myanmar ethnic heroes who would not be slaves of foreigners.⁶³

A type of history emerged in post-independence Myanmar which attempted to make itself politically relevant and of use in the nation-building effort. In an ethnically diverse and problematic situation, the creation of Myanmar nationhood was high among the priorities of nation-building, and the political aspiration of Myanmar nationhood was projected back into the historical past. Addressing itself to the general public and not to a critical scholarly audience, the history resorted to a number of simplifications and unhistorical positions. Rather than thinking of nationhood as a process developing in the course of history, it regarded nationhood as an underlying constant of Myanmar history, innate throughout the political fluctuations of the Bamar kingdoms. Bearing the weight of traditional historiography, it conceived of the Bamar centre from the Bagan dynasty to the Konbaung as the one centre of Myanmar nationhood without taking into account other equally valid political and cultural centres—Mon, Rakhine and Shan—of Myanmar nationhood. Thinking of nationhood primarily in political terms, it did not take into account the social and cultural interactions which contribute to the development of Myanmar nationhood. Since the creation of Myanmar

nationhood out of its ethnic diversity still remains high on the agenda of Myanmar nation-building, the formulation of a more sophisticated history of Myanmar nationhood still remains as a challenge to Myanmar historians.

NOTES

¹ The Census of 1932, which classified ethnic groups on the basis of language, identified 135 groups on the basis of language and dialect, divided into 13 major groups: Burma group (16), Lolo-Muhso group (12), Kuki-Chin group (45), Naga group (2), Kachin group (9), Sak group (5), Mro group (1), Tai group (11), Malay group (2), Mon group (1), Palaung-Wa group (11), Karen group (17), Man group (2). *Census of India 1931 Volume X: Burma Part I, Report*. (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing & Stationery, 1933, 173-200.

² In the current convention, Bamar denotes the majority ethnic people of the country, Myanmar all the indigenous ethnic peoples of the country.

³ U Thant, *Pyidawtha Hkayi* (The Pyidawtha Journey). Yangon: Sarpay Beikman, 1961, I, 261.

⁴ The variety of ethnic involvement in the post-independence insurrection is indicated by the “armed ethnic groups”

which concluded cease-fire agreements with the Government during the period 1989-1997: Burma Communist Party (Rakhine), Kachin Defence Army, Kachin Independence Organization, Kayan National Guard, Kayan New Land Party,

Kayinni National People's Liberation Front, Kayinni National Progressive Party, Mong Tai Army (Shan), Myanmar National Democracy Alliance (Kokang), Myanmar National Solidarity Party (Wa), National Democracy Alliance Army (Shan/Akha), New Democratic Army (Kachin), New Mon State Party, Palaung State Liberation Party, Pa-o National Organization, Shan State Army, Shan State Nationalities People's Organization. *Endeavours of the Myanmar Armed Forces Government for National Reconsolidation*. Yangon, 2000, 107-108.

⁵ *Taingyintha lumyomya ayei hnin patthet ywei Tawhlanyei Kaungsi i amyin hnin hkanyugyet* (Outlook and Stand of the Revolutionary Council on Affairs of the Nationalities). Yangon: Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1965, 14.

⁶ Yangon: Sarpay Beikman, 1961. Pyidawtha, literally meaning “pleasant land”, was the name given to the programme of social and economic development launched in 1952.

⁷ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, Foreword. U Thant's friendship with U Nu dated back to their student days in the University of Yangon (1926-1928) where U Thant was the junior by two years. Later, they were together in the National High School, Pantanaw, where U Thant was Headmaster and U Nu Superintendent. June Bingham, *U Thant: The Search for Peace*

London: Victor Gollancz, 1966, 89-100.

⁸ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 189.

⁹ Strangely enough, U Thant identified the Kayahs—whom he mentioned as having been formerly called Kayinnis (“

Red Kayins”)—linguistically with the Mon-Khmers rather than with the Kayins whom, he said, were identified by some with the Tai-Chinese and by some with the Tibeto-Burmans. Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 147, 210.

¹⁰ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 189-223 *passim*.

¹¹ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 189-190, 197, 210-211.

¹² Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 189, 224.

¹³ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 225.

¹⁴ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 198.

¹⁵ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 211-212.

¹⁶ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 205-206.

¹⁷ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 225-226.

¹⁸ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 199-200.

¹⁹ Thant, *Pyidawtha*, I, 227.

²⁰ The Burma Historical Commission was established on 26 January 1955 in the Prime Minister's Office. It had U Kaung, the Director of Public Instruction, as its Chairman, and U Thant, Secretary to Prime Minister U Nu, as one of its members. Ba Shin was not only a member of the Commission but was Chairman of one of its Sub-Commissions, that on the period 1301-1752. The other Chairmen of the Sub-Commissions were all from Rangoon University: G. H. Luce, Special Professor of Oriental History (early times to 1301); Kyaw Thet, Professor of Oriental History (1752-1824); Ba Nyunt, Professor of History and Political Science (1824-1948); Myo Min, Professor of English (1948 onwards). Bohmu Ba Shin, *Sityei naingnganyei hnin luhmuyei hsaingya sadan mya* (Articles on Military, Political and Social History). Yangon: Bagan Books, 1968, 23-26.

²¹ *Pyinnya Tazaung*, June-October 1968. The articles were entitled: “The Stone Ages in Southeast Asia”, “The Primitive Communal System”, “The Beginning of the Early Feudal Phase”, “The Pyu Feudal Period”, “The Entry of the Early Bamar”, and “The Establishment of the Tampadipa Kingdom”.

²² Yangon: Bagan Books, 1971.

²³ Yangon: Pyithu Alin Literature House.

²⁴ An Oriental History Honours graduate of Rangoon University, Ba Shin joined the wartime Burma Defence Army in 1943 and was subsequently assigned to teach history in the Officers Training School in Mingaladon.

²⁵ Ba Shin, *Naingngandaw thamaing*.

²⁶ Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 19.

²⁷ Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 122-126, 129-130, 138-140, 149-151.

²⁸ Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 140-141.

²⁹ Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 145-146, 160-162.

³⁰ The others were the Thets, Nagas, Chins and Kayins. Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 126-127.

³¹ Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 79-81, 93-96, 162.

³² The *hkayaing* were the earliest areas of Bamar settlement in the plains—the Myittha 11 *hkayaing* (Kyaukse), the Minbu 6 *hkayaing* and the Taungbyon *hkayaing*. They were distinct from the secondary areas of settlement, the *taik*.

³³ Ba Shin, *Anawrahta*, 164-165.

³⁴ *Acheibya Myanma naingnganyei thamaing*. Vol. I. Yangon: Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1970, 17-18.

³⁵ In its *Ludo i konlokhsethsanyei thamaing* (History of Production Relations) (Yangon: Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1964), the Burma Socialist Programme Party specified primitive communal, slave-owning, feudal, capitalist and socialist as the epochs of human history; in the *Acheibya*, the epochs of Myanmar history were defined as: prehistory, ancient, mixed feudal-slave, feudal, capitalist-imperialist colonial, and post independence.

³⁶ *Acheibya*, I, 236.

³⁷ *Acheibya*, I, 279-280. The peoples listed were the Mon-Khmer speaking peoples—Mons, Palaungs, Lawas; the Kayin speaking peoples—Kayins and Taungthus; the Thet speaking peoples—Thets, Kadus and Thawkadus; the Chins; the Bamar speaking peoples—Yaws, Rakhines and Bamars. Despite its strictures on Western scholarship, reference was made to G. H. Luce's "Note on the Peoples of Burma in the 12th-13th Century AD," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, XLII, 1 (June 1969).

³⁸ Ba Shin, *Naingngandaw thamaing*, 123-124.

³⁹ *Acheibya*, I, 516-517.

⁴⁰ *Acheibya Myanma naingnganyei thamaing*, Vol II, Pt 2. Yangon: Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1977, 52.

⁴¹ *Acheibya*, I, 517.

⁴² Ba Shin, *Naingngandaw thamaing*, 68-69. Kyansittha was a particular favourite of Ba Shin's mentor Luce. To Ba Shin he wrote, "I was very much impressed by he late Aung San's statesmanlike attitude to the non-Burmese peoples of Burma. It seems to me that he was almost the first Burman since Kyansittha to attempt seriously and sensibly to unite Burma by statesmanship rather than by sword." Ba Shin, *Naingngandaw thamaing*.

⁴³ Ba Shin, *Naingngandaw thamaing*, 69-72.

⁴⁴ *Acheibya*, I, 354-355.

⁴⁵ Kyaw Thet, *Pyidaungsu Myanma naingngan thamaing*. Yangon: Ava House, 1962, 197-198.

⁴⁶ Kyansittha, Tabinshwehti and Bayinnaung were among the Bamar heroes of U Po Kya's *Myanma gonyi* (The Dignity of Myanmar) published in 1924, and the expanded *Myanma gonyi yazawin hpatsa* (The Dignity of Myanmar History Reader) published in 1939. U Po Kya's works were intended to stir up the nationalist fervour of Bamar youths by recounting the exploits and achievements of heroes of the Myanmar past. Kyansittha was depicted as a heroic warrior who repelled the Gyun (Khmer) invasion of the Mon kingdom of Bago (Pegu) and a general of unshakeable loyalty who rescued his sovereign who had fallen prisoner to the rebelling Mons. The youthful Tabinshwehti was depicted as possessing great courage, performing his ear-boring ceremony at the Shwemawdaw Pagoda in the very heart of enemy Mon territory. Bayinnaung was depicted as a general whose daring and precipitate action when in command of the vanguard won him victories against the Mons and the Thais and as a king of great moral strength against whom the occult powers of his enemy Smin Htaw Rama could not prevail. U Po Kya, *Myanma gonyi yazawin hpatsa*, Part I. Yangon: Myanma Gonyi Press, 1956, 11-14, 106-107, 126-128.

⁴⁷ Yangon: PyithuAlin Literature House, 1964.

⁴⁸ Bamaw Tin Aung, *Kolonihkit*, 27. A.P. Phayre was the author of *History of Burma* (London: Tubner & Co, 1883), S. W. Cocks of *A Short History of Burma* (London: Macmillan, 1910), G. E. Harvey of *History of Burma* (London: Longman Green, 1925), D. G. E. Hall of *Burma* (London: Hutchison's University Library, 1950) and John L. Christian of *Burma and the Japanese Invader* (Bombay: Thacker, 1945).

⁴⁹ Bamaw Tin Aung, *Kolonihkit*, 203-208.

⁵⁰ Bamaw Tin Aung, *Kolonihkit*, 243-245.

⁵¹ Bo Chone (Bagan), Bo Yar Nyunt (Welaung), Bo Hla Gyaw (Kyungingyi), Bo Ywe (Mindon), U Ottama (Sinbyugyun), Bo Tha Gyaw (Kyaukse), Prince Myinsaung (Zibingyi), Hteik Tin Hmat (Shwebo), Wuntho Sawbwa U Aung Myat (Wuntho), Bo Net Kyaw (Papa), Bo Yein (Sheinmaga) and Shwelayaung (Natmauk).

⁵² Bamaw Tin Aung, *Kolonihkit*, 247.

⁵³ Bamaw Tin Aung, *Kolonihkit*, 251.

⁵⁴ Tekkatho Aye Thant, *Kolonihkit-u tawhlanyei thamaingwin azanimya*. Yangon: Awaing, 1969, 6.

⁵⁵ Tekkatho Aye Thant, *Azanimya*, 50-51.

⁵⁶ Tekkatho Aye Thant, *Azanimya*, 200.

⁵⁷ Tekkatho Aye Thant, *Azanimya*, 52-56.

⁵⁸ *Taingyintha lummyoma i neche hsankyinyei thamaing*. Yangon: Burma Socialist Programme Party, 1971, 41-43.

⁵⁹ *Neche*, 46-51, 67-74.

⁶⁰ *Neche*, 25.

⁶¹ The *Acheibya* gave an account of the resistance movement in Dawei (Tavoy) and of the Jingphaws and Khamti Shans following the First Anglo-Myanmar War, the resistance activities of three more leaders (U Ngo, Tha U and K yaw Zan Hla) following the Second War, and gave a list of 127 leaders for the period following the Third. *Acheibya*, II (1), 155-158, 228-229, 374-379.

⁶² e. g. the manner of Bo Cho's death, including the gory detail of his chest being cleft open and his heart removed after his execution. *Acheibya*, II (1), 367, 373.

⁶³ *Acheibya*, II (1), 372.