

Burma: The Road to Democracy

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Once we were happy and blithe. Our throats were full of song and our granaries were full of stores. But during the decades-long military rule, our blood turned into water and filled the bottles of drinks for the rulers. They have been sucking our bloods like leeches and snatching away our plated rice. Children die at the breast of their parents, but we can not prevent their death. The military regime has been continuously playing ducks and drakes with our fate. They plunder the crops that grow in our spilled sweat. With hunger at home and torture outside, we have no place for shelter. The hordes of the military regime have been striking us from all sides.

Since the military takeover in 1962, thousands of innocent people of Burma gave their life at the hands of the military rulers. Ever since the great Pro-Democracy Uprising of 1988, tens of thousands of democracy-seeking people, including students, monks, government employees, workers, farmers, traders and even housewives, have fallen victims to the military brutalities and thousands of others have been either maimed or imprisoned without any trial. And despite the landslide victory of NLD (National League for Democracy) in the General Election of May 1990, the army has denied to hand over power to it and instead, Burma's legitimate leader Nobel Peace Prize Winner Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been put in house detention.

However, this is not for the first time that the military rulers have committed such a heinous massacre of the pro-democracy activists of the country. Many times in the past the military rulers have set example of many more brutalities. As Dr Shwe Lu Maung has stated in his famous book " Burma", on the evening of 7 July 1962, the army has indiscriminately massacred more than 100 students of Rangoon University, wounded many others and arrested about 3000 students. It was simply because the students of the Rangoon University raised protest against some rules and regulations which were imposed upon them by the regime restricting their usual movement like those in the military barracks.

For example, the hostel doors were closed and locked up prohibiting students coming in or going out after 8 pm and the students had to sign the register book to ascertain that they were in. As a result, the students could not go out at supper time that is 9-10pm. It is worth mentioning here that the dinner provided by the hall was served from 4.30 to 6.30pm. But supper was not provided by the hall and the students had to manage it according to their convenience. However, as the students could not go out after the imposition of the restriction, the mobile food vendors began to come to them. This caused a mess around the hall with the food vendors passing through the narrow gratings of the gate.

This went on about a month amidst the protest of the students and accusations that the hostels had been turned into military barracks. Then to everyone's surprise, the authorities once banned the mobile food vendors from the premises of the campus. This sent students to bed hungry and exhausted their tolerance. Then in the last week of June, the students broke open the hostel gates, seized the university campus and demanded the resignation of the military government. "Down with Ne Win", "Down with military Govt", "Hell to the military dogs", "Give us national education, not the military boots" – were their popular slogans.

However, the siege of the campus dragged on for about five days. Then the military regime asked the students to give up the siege or face the consequence. But the students rejected it outright and got ready to see what can lie ahead. Then in the morning of the 7th July 1962, the campus was surrounded by about 2000 soldiers. At first an exchange of abuses took place between the students and the soldiers. The soldiers were just waiting for the order to shoot. At dusk the order was given and the shooting began in no time which lasted about half an hour. The death toll of the students was 135 according to the students source and 34 according to the govt announcement.

After the shooting, the campus was cleared up, the dead and the wounded were carried away and at midnight the historic "Students Union Building" was dynamited and bulldozed. Everything was done swiftly and precisely. Next morning everything was normal and quiet.

Similar grim showbiz was perpetrated by the military regime on 11 December 1974 , where hundreds of university

students were brutally killed by the army following the tug-of-war over the siege of the body of U Thant, the Ex-Secretary General of the UN. U Thant was and still is regarded by the people of Burma as a most serene and brightest son of Burma. However, the students were massacred because they wanted to put the body of U Thant to final rest in an honorable site which would stand for the people of Burma as the milestone of glory and pride. But Gen. Ne Win wanted to bury the body in a common cemetery of "Kyandaw" where the body of notorious Khine May Than (Ne Win's first legal wife) was buried.

Thus, there arose a tense situation centering the siege of the body. At this critical situation, once the students seizing the body buried it in the ground of the Students Union Building of Rangoon University on 10th December 1974. But next morning at about 5 am, the army entered the campus using tanks. The Chancellor Gate was first bulldozed off. The army began arresting everybody on the way and herded them off in the military trucks. When the soldiers started digging for the body, students began to march onward to stop them. Then began indiscriminate shooting. When the body was raised, there was a tug-of-war over the body.

All those students who rushed onwards to snatch the body of U Thant, were shot dead. A popular high school girl student, Khin Khin Myint (?), was one of those who clung on to the coffin of U Thant. First the soldiers began to kick her down to depart her from the coffin, later seeing that she was not leaving the coffin off, the soldiers shot her down. Thus, the UN flag with which the body of U Thant was wrapped, was drenched with the blood of the students.

Nevertheless, the stream of blood which started since then, has been flowing still. The military rulers have been constantly defying all international norms and conventions as well as the resolutions of the world bodies including the UN. Now, only the time can speak when the sun of emancipation will rise for the Burmese Nation and also for the Rohingyas so that they can live in peace as equal citizens in their motherland.

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