

Indian Migrants in Myanmar: Emerging Trends and Challenges

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Abstract: *People of Indian Origin in Myanmar constitute about 4 per cent of the total population of the country. In the absence of a credible census in that country since 1989, this number could be more. The Singhvi Committee in 2004 had estimated that there are about 2.9 million PIO's in Myanmar, of which 2,500,000 are People of Indian Origin (PIO), 2,000 are Indian citizens, and 400,000 are stateless. The report also elaborated that following waves of Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora has been left extremely impoverished and vulnerable.*

On March 18, 1946, addressing a predominantly Indian gathering in Singapore, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "India cannot forget her sons and daughters overseas. Although India cannot defend her children overseas today, the time is soon coming when her arm will be long enough to protect them."

Unfortunately for the PIO's in Myanmar, this has not happened. However, with the BJP government's reiterated commitment to integrate PIO's with their homeland, it appears that there is great scope. Indian Diaspora has historically been instrumental in facilitating trade and cultural exchanges between the two countries. Being part of the same British colony, movement across the border was unrestricted. However, after the colonies underwent an administrative division in 1937, the situation changed. The Indian community was disenfranchised and disempowered. Many of them had to flee back to India leaving all their belongings.

This is predominantly a qualitative research based on primary and secondary sources. This paper assesses the present condition of the Indian

Community in Myanmar, tracing their origin back from the late 1800's. During a field visit, the pockets with high concentration of Indian community were visited and some personal interviews were conducted which also have been used as primary research. There were also interactions with the officials at the Indian Embassy in Myanmar and some data was collected therein which has been used.

The aim of this research is to fill gaps in the existing understanding of Indian migration into Myanmar and the circumstances that led to people of Indian origin to stay back or return to India; to initiate a debate among policymakers, academics and other stakeholders about possible future trends in similar migration and address the problems faced by current PIO's in Myanmar; to inform policy makers about the implications of existing Diaspora policies and the potential for transformation of the contextual environment through the elaboration of long term perspectives. This may enhance policy coherence and effectiveness for dealing with the PIO's in Myanmar in a better fashion, thereby enhancing India's stake and soft power potential in that country. Like China, India also must push for reforms and a more laissez faire treatment of the Indian community by our Eastern neighbor. This could help in strengthening people-to-people contact and consequently, deepening of relations between the two countries.

Conceptual Framework

Migration is one of the major causes of social and demographic change in a society. "Migration is a two – way process; it is a response to economic and social change and equally it is a catalyst to change for those areas gaining and losing migrants" (Lewis 1982).

A number of early theories on migration process revolve around neoclassical economics. According to this, migration occurs as a result of the rational economic calculation of the workers of the wage differentials, which results in

the spatial mobility of workers from low-wage to high-wage areas. Migration was thus labour reallocation in response to market need.

Lewis has tried to simplify the process by classifying migration into four categories: a) Spatial migration - based on the criterion that focuses upon the aerial units between which movements take place. It generally comprises two types of movements – internal migration (movement of people within a nation) and international migration (movement of people across political boundaries); b) Temporal migration – which focuses on the length of residence in the host community - daily, periodic, seasonal or long-term; c) Causal migration - based on the differences in the level of culture and presence or absence of violence – Voluntary and forced migrations and; d) Consequential migration – wherein distinction is made between the innovating and conservative. (Migrations of people to achieve something new are described as innovative and migration in response to a change in condition and to retain what they have had is conservative.

American Sociologist Henry Pratt Fairchild's attempts to analyse the process of migration also presents some interesting insights (Peterson 1970). He classified migration as follows: 1) Invasion of which the Visigoth sacks of Rome is given as the example. 2) Conquest in which "the people of higher culture take the aggressive" 3) Colonization, when "a well-established, progressive, and physically vigorous state" settles "newly discovered or thinly settled countries"; and 4) Immigration or the individually motivated, peaceful movement between well-established countries "on approximately the same stage of civilization."

There is also the Historical Structural Approach which explains migration in a capital-maximisation. Prominent exponents of this approach are Portes, Balan, Cardoz, Mangalam et al. This approach states that any study on migration must "probe into the pressures and counter-pressures both internal and external to the economy which cause changes in the organisation of production."

The Social Organisational Theory by Mangalam (1968) adheres to this approach. He sees migration as an agent of social change. He sees migration as a system in which the society of origin, the society of destination, and migrants are interdependent. In this interaction, each community undergoes social change which is described as the “difference between social organisation of a given society at two different points of time, comprising changes in any or all the three component systems namely the culture, social and personality systems.”

So migration is not independent endeavours made by individuals; rather it is a part of socio-economic changes that a society experiences. Migration “is an adaptive process whose major objective is maintaining the dynamic equilibrium of a social organisation with a minimum of change and at the same time providing those members ways to overcome the deprivation.”

Though, this approach connects migration to socio-political and economic changes that a society experiences through a considered timespan, it pays no consideration to individual factors in the process of decision-making.

Related to historical structural approach, there is the Marxian Structural Approach. They assign importance to the ‘hidden logic’ of the capitalist mode of production in explaining migration (Boyle 1998). However, primary attention must be paid to how the capitalist economy operates and evolves overtime.

In the context of Indian labour movement into Myanmar during the Colonial period, labour exploitation in the form of lower wages, poor standard of living and comparative disadvantage to the local population is relevant.

Labour exploitation is a longstanding problem dating back to the time of industrial revolution and is not a problem that is peculiar to one country or region, but it happens in every country of the world and especially in developing economies. International movement of migrants for economic reasons, especially during the colonial era has given it a new dimension, one which can be explained by the Theory of Alienation by Marx. While he wasn’t

the first one to come with a theory of Alienation (Hegel had cited it to explain differences in development of human mind), within a Capitalist paradigm, Marx brought it to attention.

Anyone that is engaged in labour activity can fall victim to labour exploitation whether working in own country or abroad. However some group of persons is seen as more vulnerable to being exploited than others. One group that is more prone to exploitation worldwide is migrant workers or persons involved in labour activity in countries other than their own. That does not mean that people cannot face labour exploitation in their own countries.

Key Research Questions

- 1) The study would try to examine whether economic factors are sustainable in keeping up with the trend of vast outbound migration in two colonies of the same colonial ruler.
- 2) How does the status of a migrant community change during transition from a colony to an independent nation state? Does the impact of decolonisation, the struggles of which brought local communities together, instil a greater sense of nationalism in the destination county and how does it impact the existing migrants and future trajectory of migration.
- 3) Can cultural integration with host country in a closed destination country impact the status of the existing migrant population?
- 4) In the period of transition, what drives a newly independent state to choose a form of government most conducive to its national interest? Can this choice impact their relations and attitudes towards existing minorities? If so, what can be a means of course correction?
- 5) In contemporary sense, can Indian communities in Myanmar which suffer statelessness be integrated with their motherland while assimilating themselves in the destination country's culture and social structures?

- 6) Finally, the study would investigate if the Indian government can play a major role in assisting the Indian communities in Myanmar to follow growth and development potential while working bilaterally with the present government in Myanmar. Can this be a sustainable effort which can have far-reaching implications for the relationship between the two countries?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study based on unstructured interviews during field visits and secondary data. A set of preliminary field researches were conducted in Myanmar from March to September 2012, through January, 2014 to understand the process of nation building and ethnic integration under the nascent democratically elected government in Myanmar. In total of 11 weeks were spent in Myanmar and interviews were conducted in Yangon, Zayewaddy, Sittwe, Mrauk Oo, Bagan and Mandalay. In addition to the Indian communities, the Indian Ambassador to Myanmar was interviewed in August 2013. Many local NGO's were consulted too.

These visits allowed for a better understanding of the problems of the disintegrated Indian Diaspora in Myanmar. It also allowed for a deeper understanding about the differences in the Diaspora from different states. The current research is based on these interaction and interviews.

This paper reflects both primary and secondary research. Primary data was collected through the field research in Myanmar in the form of sample surveys of the size of about 100 respondents. The Secondary data was referred to through various publications, both government and non-government.

This Paper analyses the historical roots of Indian migration into Myanmar and follows the trajectory on which it moved. It is a general account of history and development of Indian migration in Myanmar and examines how this could shape the overall relationships between the two countries.

Introduction

The Indian Diaspora has been estimated at over 20 million worldwide. In Southeast Asia, there are approximately 2 million Indians in Malaysia comprising about 7.6 per cent of the total population (Kaur 2006: 156). In Singapore, this number stands approximately at 295,000 or 8.4 per cent of the total population (Rai, 2006: 176). In Myanmar, the numbers are a bit sketchy because of how closed the country has remained since the military takeover in 1962. In addition, there was no census since 1989 in the country until 2013 and the legitimacy of the last census has come under doubt. However, various estimates have indicated that the Indian Diaspora in Myanmar constitutes about 4 per cent of the total population.

The geographical contiguity, with India sharing both land and maritime boundaries with Burma, facilitated large-scale migration of Indians into Burma. Though the term Indians encompassed all sections of people who migrated from British India, which today consists of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, the Indians were not a homogenous group. In terms of religion, there were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. In terms of language, there were Bengalis, Hindi-speaking people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam speaking people from the former Madras Presidency and Punjabi-speaking people from Punjab. They belonged to various caste groups and were also economically stratified, the rich Chettiars, the poor Tamils, and Hindi-speaking people, and the English educated middle classes from all parts of the country.

What must be remembered is that the Burmese perception of Indians depended upon which strata of society various Indian groups occupied in the Burmese society. The Burmese had contempt for the poor Indians, who monopolised jobs such as scavenging, rickshaw pulling, and other menial jobs, which the Burmans themselves were reluctant to do. They hated the Chettiars, who lent money at exorbitant rates and gradually became absentee landlords in Lower Burma.

Social tensions began to build up when the Muslims from Bengal began to marry Burmese women, exploiting the simple traditions of the Burmese. Since Islamic law permitted polygamy, intermarriages became a common practice among the Indian Muslims. What added fuel to the fire was that many of them deserted their wives when they returned to their native villages. The educated Indians, who became doctors, lawyers, teachers, and political leaders, were an object of envy and admiration and there was friendly interaction between the Indian and Burmese intelligentsia. The Burmese nationalist leaders had great admiration for leaders like Gandhi and Nehru and the educated Indian middle classes represented the best of Indian nationalist traditions.

I

BACKGROUND AND BRIEF HISTORY

The documented prominent presence of People of Indian Origin (PIO) in Myanmar dates back to 1886 and shaped the course of the relations between the two inter-linked British colonies till the independence of Myanmar in 1948. This migration across the open borders of the two countries during the British rule was a result of the British policies of promoting co-dependent trade and labour movement throughout various British colonies during the period of colonisation. During India's freedom struggle, leaders like Subhash Chandra Bose and Rashbehari Bose used these intertwined people-to-people linkages between Indian and Myanmar to mobilise support for their anti-British movements.

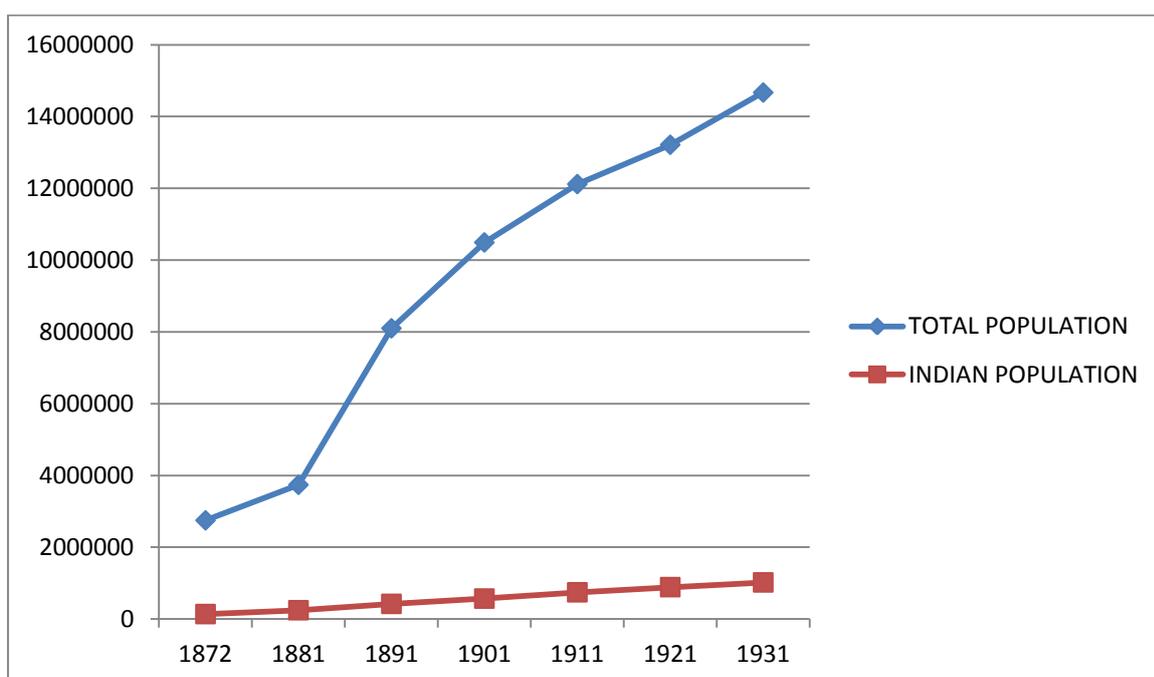
Since India was one of the bigger and more advanced British colonies in the region in terms of education, skills and infrastructure, the movement of PIO's was indelibly linked to the expansion of the British occupation in Southeast Asia, especially in countries like Myanmar, Malaya, Fiji, Mauritius etc. In most of these countries, PIO's occupied positions of authority under the overall supervision of the British Empire. The major sectors recording their presence were education, judiciary, constitutional experts, medical practitioners,

infrastructure development (engineering, railways, urban planning etc.), trade and defence.

Table 1: Burma: Total Population, 1872-1931

CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION	INDIAN POPULATION	INDIAN % OF POPULATION
1872	2,747,148	136,504	4.9
1881	3,736,771	243,123	6.5
1891	8,098,014	420,830	5.1
1901	10,490,624	568,263	5.4
1911	12,11,5217	743,288	6.1
1921	13212,192	887,077	6.7
1931	14,667,146	1,017,825	6.9

**Source: Baxter (1941)*



For the purpose of this paper, four prominent waves of migration, both outbound (to Myanmar) and inbound (to India) have been identified. These are as follows:

- a) 1886 – 1935
- b) 1935 – 1948
- c) 1948 – 1962
- d) 1962 - Present

The British annexed Upper Burma in 1885 to their Indian Colony following the Third Anglo-Burmese War. After this campaign, almost all of the country was taken over by the British Colonial Rulers and became the part of British India. This allowed for free movement of skilled and unskilled labourers under the aggressive British Policy of importing labour which was inked in the 1862 Treaty between the then king of Burma, Mindon Min from the Konbaung Dynasty and the British Commissionerate entrusted with the responsibility of managing administrative affairs in Burma. The effects of this treaty became evident after the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885 after which, the British declared a large chunk of this newly acquired territory as Scheduled/Excluded Area. This covered a large part of eastern and western hill tracts in the country, some of which bordered undivided India. The Arakan Hill Tracts, Irrawaddy Delta and Rice Plains in Lower and Middle Burma were brought under direct British Rule.

Since Burma was always seen a less progressive province of British India, it was excluded from the Morley-Minto Reforms and later the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms which led to Self-Rule in India. As a consequence, free movement of PIO's continued.

Historically, like other parts of Southeast Asia, Burma came under the spell of Indian cultural influences. Thanks to priests, princes, poets, and artists, the Indian culture spread into Burma in a big way; the spread of Buddhism directly from India and indirectly through Ceylon profoundly influenced all aspects of Burmese life.

Imperialist domination made India the pivot of the British Empire and the vast reservoir of manpower were exploited to serve the colonial interests of Britain. Large armies of labourers, soldiers, clerks, and traders migrated to different parts of the Empire to serve the politico-economic interests of Britain. Few moneylenders and educated people also went to those countries on their own initiative.

II

Indian Influx into Burma and their role in Rice Production

The annexation of Burma led it to be brought under the British rule as a part of the Indian colony. The expansion of its rice industry due to a spike in demand was because of the disruption of rice supplies from the United States during the American Civil War.

Steadily, Burma became the largest exporter of rice leading to a higher demand of labour in the country. The majority of early migrants were poor and chose to go to Burma because of the population pressure, poor land tilling practices, exploitation and agrarian overpopulation (Kaur 2009). Tamil and Telugu unskilled labourers and farmers initially dominated this migration flow. The percentage increase in the number of Indian migrants to Myanmar is elucidated in Table 1 and its graphical representation. The inflow of Indian migrants into Myanmar steadily followed the same wave as the total population of the country, as is evident from the graph. By 1931, the number of Indians in Myanmar had exceeded 1 million (Baxter 1941) and unsurprisingly, they were concentrated in the rice-producing Lower Burma.

The later British policy of on land divided rice production activities into Industrial Agriculture based and Processing and specialisation in financing, cultivation and exporting of rice (Furnivall 1948). Myanmar was a resource-rich but labour-scarce country leaving a vacuum where the Indian labourers found a comfortable spot to carry out all agricultural activities, from bunding to threshing. This also allowed the money-lending Chettiar community to rise as primary moneylenders to farmers and peasants in Lower Burma. The

British skilled workforce took care of processing and exporting the end product thus, establishing a set chain of command in the rice production line.

There were three prominent phases in the growth of the rice industry in Myanmar: The Open Frontier – 1870-1900; Maturity and Change – 1900-1929; and Depression and Social Problems – 1930-1940. These phases coincided with the fluctuating fortunes of the industry and Myanmar's growing dependence on international markets (Adas 1974).

In the beginning, the role of Indian farmers was seasonal as they would travel to Myanmar only during the prime rice-season. In the intervening periods, they either went back to India or found small employment in Myanmar itself. While, most Indians followed an annual system of cyclical employment and returned home every once a year; many of them worked for three years in one go (Pillai 1947). Three-year contracts eventually became more and more common.

The British started exporting rice globally which led to the rise of port towns in Yangon, Bassein, Sittwe, and Moulmein. Until the First World War, these towns were mainly occupied by Indian workers hired in rice processing mills because Indian communities dominated the working class in this industry, while the export and management of processing activities was taken over by the British (Cheng 1968). Indian brokers and contractors started rising in the ranks becoming more and more influential in the entire process and thriving with the gains accrued.

In terms of Governance of the migrant population, the British government, after the annexation of Pegu in 1852, consistently continued to encourage Indian labour force to take up work in Myanmar. With a large number of Indian workers migrating to Myanmar, the Indian Government in 1876 enacted the Labour Act which mandated appointment of Emigration Agents and Medical Inspector of Emigrants to regulate the methods of recruitment, transport and employment and to safeguard the welfare of the emigrants heading to Myanmar (Cheng 1961). This contained the outflow of labour to a

certain extent because with the strict laws and directives under the act, it became increasingly difficult for mill owners to get cheap labour from India - which was the case with getting it through labour contractors.

The Labour contractors, who were known as Maistry in the Telugu speaking belt, also managed the in-bound labourers and acted as a buffer for the mill owners. Therefore, a black market for labour movement emerged whereby; Indian labourers arrived in Myanmar as free men, not falling under any contract and took up employment independently. The reality was vastly different.

Since, the labourers traveling to Myanmar in search of employment on farmlands or mills were extremely impoverished and often reeling under huge debts, they relied heavily on the recruitment agents and Maistris. The recruitment agents were like foot soldiers of the labour contractors, going village to village to find cheap labour which was then handed over to the contractors. The contractors would provide them with documents and put them through the due process of migration under the law, but as free and independent labourers, not falling under contract. Once in Myanmar, they were given employment on farmlands and in mills and were put under the direct charge of the Maistry. From a simple system of liaison and welfare management of labourers, the Maistry system eventually became an exploitative system of bonded labour (Kaur 2006). It was a system between the labourer and the Maistry of 'mutual but unequal interdependence' (Adapa 2002).

A similar system was in place in Malaya around the same time called the Kangani system. Tapping the labour surplus of South India, mostly in Tamil Nadu, the managers of tea, coffee, and rubber plantations in Sri Lanka, Malaya authorized Indian headmen, known as Kangani, to recruit entire families and ship them to plantations. India, Malaya, and Sri Lanka played a role in this system by licensing the recruiters and partly by subsidizing transportation to the plantations. In Malaya, Kangani migration took place in addition to the indentured labour system and mostly replaced it from 1900 onwards.

However, the Maistry system in Myanmar was a little different in the way that the Maistry was the direct employer of the labour brought in as opposed to the employer they were working with. The Maistry handled recruitment, transportation, housing and compensations due to the labourers. In most cases, there was no indication of the number of labourers required and the Maistry's contract with the employers agreed to supply 'those needed' (Thompson 1947). Explaining this trend, Kingsley Davis (1968) said the pressure to emigrate has always been great enough to provide a steady stream much larger than the given opportunities.

This wasn't the case in the Kangani system. Another difference was that due to the cyclical nature of employment under the Maistry system, the Maistry had a much larger function as opposed to the permanent settlements of labourers on the Malayan rubber farms.

The poor migrant communities from India were more than willing to settle for a sub-standard living and work far more for far less wages than their Burmese counterparts. This allowed for unsupervised and unregulated inflow of migrants from India into Myanmar.

The labour was usually taken into Myanmar for harsh physical work on either farmlands or processing mills. This required more of brute strength than skills and therefore, the Maistris preferred male labourers to female. This vastly skewed the gender ratio of the Indian community in Myanmar. From the initial 8.2 males to 1 female, this ratio declined to as low as 250 males to one female (Kondapi 1951). Due to the poor living conditions and hard work, the male labourers who migrated to Myanmar, mostly from the lower class in the class structure of India, preferred to leave their families behind. Most of these were settlers in the eastern state of Rakhine. The Upper caste and class males only travelled with their families after they had permanent or long term contracts in place along with better living conditions.

Sociologist Chandrashekhar Bhat estimates that about 6 million people had left Indian shores when the system was abolished in 1938: about 1.5 million to Sri Lanka, 2 million to Malaya, and 2.5 million to Burma.

In addition to low-skilled workers, members of India's trading communities settled in many countries where indentured labourers had been brought or where business opportunities in the British Empire were promising. For example, Gujarati merchants became shop owners in East Africa, and traders from present-day Kerala and Tamil Nadu provided rural credits for peasants in Burma, Ceylon, and Malaya or were involved in retail trade.

Table 2: Burma: Expansion of Paddy Land in British Burma

YEAR	ACRES SOWN WITH PADDY
1852-53	6,00,000
1872-73	1,871,542
1882-83	3,466,439
1892-93	5,086,853
1902-03	6,712,719
1912-13	8,081,677
1922-23	8,870,342
1932-33	9,711,396
1936-37	9,855,258

**Source: Mahajani (1960)*

Case of Rakhine (Arakan) State

The Indian population in Myanmar never exceeded 6.9 per cent of the total population which was in the year 1931 (Mahajani 1960). This figure included

the population in Arakan state. The immigration of Indian communities, especially Bengali-speaking from undivided India (including Bangladesh) was considered rather natural given that in the River Naf divided Chittagong in undivided Bengal from Myanmar. The ancient capital of Arakan, Mrauk-Oo was considered the most lucrative destination for Indian migration. Since Bengali, Arkanese and Persian were already prevalent languages in Arakan due to the massive interlinkages between Arakan and Bengal, it saw consistent waves of immigration, especially from the Bengali Muslim communities (Bhattacharya 2007).

The physical isolation of Arakan state from mainland Myanmar due to the presence of the Bay of Bengal and its close geographical proximity to Chittagong contributed to this unabated transnational movement. Towns like Buthidaung and Maungdaw were major centres of Indian communities from Bengal and except Sandoway and Kyokphoo, most of the state had a very high percentage of Bengali Muslim immigrants.

In the late 19th century, Sittwe was one of the busiest rice-exporting ports in the world. In Sittwe, the Indian community was as high as 97 per cent of the city's population totaling to 2,10,990 in 1931 (Pearn 1946). Most of these immigrants were second generation migrants, ie: they were born in Sittwe as opposed to those in Yangon or other parts of Myanmar who were brought in from India. In terms of gender ratio as well, there were far more women of Indian origin than elsewhere in Myanmar, again, mostly born in Arakan. Arakan state's case is peculiar because of this reason as it paints a very different picture of Indian migration than prevalent in rest of Myanmar. According to the 1901 Indian Language Speaking Census in Myanmar, Bengali was the third most spoken language by the Indian community in Myanmar and this was largely owing to their huge presence in Rakhine state. The following table elucidates this fact.

Table 3: Indian Language Speaking Population in Myanmar in 1901

LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
English	18,500
Hindustani	95,122
Bengali	204,973
Hindi	28,689
Punjabi	15,803
Tamil	99,576
Telugu	96,601

Source: The Imperial Gazetteer 1901

As is evident from the table, the maximum number of Indians in Myanmar in 1901 was Bengali-speaking. This further consolidates that the free movement from Chittagong to Arakan across the Naf River had a major role to play in defining Indian migration to Myanmar. The other linguistic communities were mostly settled in the Lower Burma region and urban industrial centres like Yangon where they were employed in rice cultivation and processing.

In addition to this independent movement across the border, the British government, after annexing Pegu, wanted the country to come under cultivation (Furnivall 1948). According to JS Furnivall, the policy of promoting migration by the British government from India to Myanmar changes in the 1880's. This is evident in a file correspondence by P. Nolan, Esq. Secretary to the Government of Bengal, general Department where he placed a report in front of the government to promote emigration of 'able-bodied labourers' from Bengal to Burma. This included emigrating Bihari migrant labourers as well who were already used to much lower wages in agro-based activities than their counterparts in Myanmar. Lucrative tax benefits were also offered to promote such emigration.

Following this, the policy of rigorous emigration was followed by the British government and a sizeable number of labourers were sent to Myanmar through Bengal and Arakan, many of whom settled their and other parts of the country eventually.

Being a labour intensive industry, paddy cultivation also had several allied industries which facilitated further absorption of Indian migrants in Myanmar's economy. Indian labourers formed a big part of shipping and transportation of rice produce and also, the teak and timber industry along the Irrawaddy Delta. According to Mahajani, after the 1800's, the trend of emigration continued on an upward trajectory barring a year or two until 1930's.

III

1935 – 1948

Having left in search of greener pastures from their native villages, whether in Bengal, Bihar, United Provinces, and Madras Presidency, the Indian working classes braved the seas, provided the much needed labour to clear the swamps in Lower Burma and malaria-infested jungles and in that process also became the most exploited and vulnerable section of the Indian population. The laissez-faire policies of the British Raj and the xenophobic and ultra-nationalist policies of the governments in independent Burma have contributed to this.

As the nationalist movement in Burma began to gather momentum, it also took an anti-Indian dimension. The alienation of vast tracts of agricultural land to Indian Chettiars, the Burmese entry into the labour markets following the depression of the 1930s, which was hitherto an exclusive Indian domain; the opening of the University of Rangoon and consequent turning out of Burmese graduates searching for clerical jobs; all these proved as catalyst for the growth of anti-Indian sentiments. There were large scale riots against the Indians in the 1930's, due to social, economic, and cultural reasons. The

Burmese nationalists wanted freedom not only from the British political domination but they were also equally keen to throw out the yoke of Indian economic stranglehold.

Table 3: Percentage of Indians and Indigenous races in various occupations in 1930's as given in the Baxter Report 1941

OCCUPATION	PERCENTAGE OF INDIANS	PERCENTAGE OF INDEGINOUS RACES
Ordinary cultivation	3.9	-
Cultivation of special crops	5.1	88.2
Food Industry	26	70.9
Metal Industry	28.7	59.7
Industries of Dress, Toilet	26.1	68.3
Trade	17.3	73.3
Road Transport	35	58.4
Labourers on roads and bridges	37.5	49.9
Building Industries	4.9	50.9
41.655	6.5	92.9
Ceramic industry	41.6	55
Those occupied in	6.5	92.9

toilets, cafes, restaurants, including hawkers of drinks and foodstuff		
Bankingm insurance and exchange	26.4	61.6
Post Office, telegraphs and telephones	57.6	21.9
Labourers (excluding sweepers) on railways	69.3	29.4
Transport by water	51.3	45.1
Rice pounders	53.1	44
Occupations dealing with chemical products	53.7	43.4

Source: Kondapi (1951)

As is evident from the above chart, the Indian community was gainfully employed in almost every industry in Myanmar and in some, a very large extent. Moreover, because of the gains of the rice and timber trade, the early settlers managed to get quality education for their children, hence, the educated class of Indians occupied important positions in education, bureaucracy, politics and other important sectors.

By early 1900's, the Young Men Buddhist Association spearheaded a nationalist movement in Myanmar which gained steam in the coming years.

The British separated Burma Province from British India in 1937 and granted the colony a new constitution calling for a fully elected assembly, with many powers given to the Burmese, but this proved to be a divisive issue as some Burmese felt that this was a ploy to exclude them from any further Indian

reforms. Ba Maw served as the first prime minister of Burma, but he was forced out by U Saw in 1939, who served as prime minister from 1940 until he was arrested on 19 January 1942 by the British for communicating with the Japanese.

A wave of strikes and protests that started from the oilfields of central Burma in 1938 became a general strike with far-reaching consequences. In Rangoon student protesters, after successfully picketing the Secretariat, the seat of the colonial government, were charged by the British mounted police wielding batons and killing a Rangoon University student called Aung Kyaw. In Mandalay, the police shot into a crowd of protesters led by Buddhist monks killing 17 people. The movement became known as *Htaung thoun ya byei ayeidawbon* (the '1300 Revolution' named after the Burmese calendar year), and 20 December, the day the first martyr Aung Kyaw fell, commemorated by students as 'Bo Aung Kyaw Day'.

Japanese Occupation

The period of Japanese Occupation, 1942-45, was the darkest period in the history of the Indian community in Burma. The war entirely destroyed the pre-war economy and the commanding position which the Indian community enjoyed. Some Chettiars saw the writing on the wall and even before the war began they repatriated their vast wealth from the country. The majority of Indians suffered untold misery and hardship. Nearly 500,000 Indians left the country and out of these nearly half of them died on the way (Bhattacharya 2007). Those who were left in Rangoon joined the Indian National Army in large numbers. At a later period, they also supported the Burmese demand for independence.

After World War II, the thriving Indian communities at every level were no longer seen as a part of the Burmese community by the local Buddhists. They were viewed as a threat to the future employment and prospects of the local. Therefore, after the end of colonial rule, stricter immigration regimes were enforced along borders of the nascent nation states to discourage Indian

immigration. This also differentiated between inhabitant (locals) and aliens (minorities, Indian communities).

During the Japanese occupation, there was a steep rise in the ultra-nationalist sentiments in Myanmar. The Japanese put nationalist leaders in positions of authority to govern the people. This in turn further added to the ferment through which the Indian communities were being subjected to.

Introduction of Citizenship Rules and Land Reforms

The independent Government of Burma introduced large number of progressive measures to give the land back to the tiller. These measures naturally hit the interests of Chettiars very badly. The Standard Rent Act, Tenancy Disposal Act, Agricultural Debt Relief Act, Land Nationalisation Act, Agricultural Bank Act, and Burma Foreigners Act; all these had the cumulative effect of depriving the Chettiars of their enormous wealth. No one, with a tinge of social conscience, could protest against these progressive measures. At the same time, the compensation paid to the landlords was meagre; what is more, the Chettiars found it difficult to repatriate their money into India due to stringent foreign exchange restrictions.

When the new Constitution was promulgated, it was stipulated that those who had been in continuous residence in Burma for eight out of the past ten years immediately preceding war years were eligible for citizenship. But the immediate prospects of stability in the country were so uncertain that most Indians preferred to sit on the fence and did not apply for citizenship.

Adding to the political uncertainty was the assassination of Aung San, who was generally considered to be a great friend of India and the Indian community. Only 400,000 applications were received for citizenship and out of these only 10,000 were granted Burmese citizenship. The rest were treated as aliens. At this time, if the government of India under Prime Minister Nehru had

intervened and pushed for citizen status for Indian communities with relevant documentation, the situation could have been different now.

When the Government introduced Burmanisation of public services in the 1950s large number of Indians employed in the railways, water transport, customs, post and telegraph, and public works and other departments were retrenched. In the 1960s under the Burmese Socialist Programme, the government even nationalized petty trade. These measures sounded the death knell of the poorer sections of the Indian community in Burma. To add insult to injury, they were not even allowed to bring back their savings to India. Women were not even allowed to take back their Mangalyasutra. The repatriates also complained of demonetization of currency notes, expropriation of properties, confiscation of valuables, and unimaginable humiliations. According to the Policy Note issued by the Government of Tamil Nadu, from June 1963 onwards, 1,44,353 Burmese repatriates have returned to India.⁴ What is more tragic, even after the lapse of forty-five years, the compensations due to these people have not been settled.

IV

CURRENT STATUS

The legal status of Indian communities in Myanmar has gone a paradigm shift since the 1960's. The policies enacted by Gen Ne Win and subsequent military rulers of the country curtailed all freedoms, rights and privileges the Indian community enjoyed in Myanmar (Taylor 2006). The Indian communities are no longer recognized as an ethnic minority in Myanmar. They were classified as an alien minority leading to a suffocating death to their status in Myanmar.

In this context, it is important to note that at the time of Myanmar's independence in 1948, Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru made a call to pursue economic and political relations with the first Prime Minister of Myanmar, U Nu. However, in his quest to forge strong economic ties with

Myanmar, which, at that time, was considered one of the most promising and upcoming countries, owing to being the largest exporter of rice worldwide, Nehru did not take up the issue of providing citizenship to the large Indian community in Myanmar. This set the stage of their alienation and eventual persecution. Later, in 1961, when India and Myanmar joined hands in the Non-Alignment Movement also, this subject was not brought up.

On the other hand, the Chinese government, since late 80's, has pushed for reforms for the Chinese Diaspora in Myanmar. The Chinese Diaspora has been well represented in every aspect of Myanmar's society in commerce as well as politics. In fact, Gen Ne Win, who imposed the extreme Socialist agenda of Burmanisation and took over political power of the country in 1962, was himself an ethnic Chinese.

The discriminatory treatment to the Indian communities, however, continued through the last five decades and as a result, the Indian communities are left orphaned and impoverished. There are restrictions imposed on their movement, cultural and religious freedom, right to employment and livelihood, education, land holdings and asset acquisition.

According to the Singhvi Committee Report, the total Indian population in Myanmar is estimated to be 2.9 million, of which 2,500,000 are PIO, 2,000 are Indian citizens, and 400,000 are stateless. Regarding the Stateless category, it must be mentioned that all of them are born in Myanmar, they belong to the third or fourth generation. But since they do not have any documents to prove their citizenship under the Burmese citizenship law of 1982 they are deemed to be "stateless" (V. Suryanarayan 2008) As TP Sreenivasan, former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar has pointed out "they had no rights either in the land of their origin or in their land of adoption, and neither the two governments seemed concerned." In fact, of the Indian diaspora, Myanmar has the largest number of "stateless" people.

The statelessness of the PIO's can be attributed to the consistent decline in their status in the Burmese society since the Japanese occupation during

World War II and the biggest blow to their position came after the military takeover of the country's administrative affairs by Gen Ne Win in 1962. From largely composing the upper middle class of the Burmese society, the Indian community has now been reduced to becoming one of the most impoverished section in the country.

There are two separate groups of minorities vying for recognition in Myanmar. One is composed of the recognized ethnic minorities like Karen, Kachin, Wa, Chin etc. whose allegiance to the state, not their nationality, is in question. Frequent military reprisals have caused large sections of these groups to relocate to bordering countries over the years, where they have settled in camps along the border. The second group comprises those who have lived in Myanmar for generations but are simply not recognised as citizens -- like the Rohingya Muslims, and those of Indian and Chinese origin.

Both the Indians and Chinese have been in Myanmar for at least a century. Indians, in particular came after the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824-26, encouraged by the British Empire to relocate from Bengal, Bihar and South India to Myanmar in an attempt to develop the country. PIO's came to dominate the Myanmarese economy as traders, civil servants, merchants, river pilots, soldiers, indentured labourers and moneylenders.

Financial prosperity combined with high positions in the British bureaucracy and their role as money-lenders made the community a target of Burmese nationalist sentiment.

Once independence was achieved, however, the British left Myanmar without making provisions for the grant of official citizenship to these migrants. Latent tensions intensified by the racial and religious differences between the communities -- the Indians were dark-skinned and continued to practice Hinduism or Islam in Buddhist Myanmar -- making intermarriage and communal mingling rare.

The 1962 military coup in 1962 and Gen Ne Win's 'Burmanisation' policy substantially weakened the already weakening position of the PIO's. The

economy was overhauled, Indian and Chinese businesses and trade contracts were rescinded, and the Indian-majority Cabinet was dissolved. Although they had lived in Myanmar for many generations and had no connections with their original societies, approximately 100,000 Chinese and 300,000 Indians were forced out of Myanmar. Those left behind were the poorer immigrant groups, without the wherewithal to flee or start over again.

In 1982, a new Citizenship Act was passed, dividing Myanmarese into three categories. Naturalised citizenship would only be granted to those who could furnish "conclusive evidence" of entry and residence in Myanmar prior to the British annexation, those who were proficient in one of the national languages, and whose children were born in the country. Although many minorities fulfil these requirements, hardly any can supply documentary proof, partly as a result of decades of exclusionary policies and practices.

Consequently, there are over two million stateless persons scattered in villages and rural areas across Myanmar. Without official recognition, they have limited or no access to education, employment and healthcare, and their right to travel, marriage, reproduction and communication is severely restricted.

For the Chinese Diaspora, respite came when China's influence grew in Myanmar. However, for the Indian communities, the long wait to achieve equal rights and egalitarian practices is still not over.

III

Case Studies

(Based on personal interviews)

Two contrasting views about the prospects of the Indian community in Myanmar are given below, one by a Burmese bureaucrat and the other from the Singhvi Committee Report. Thet Lwin, who is a member of the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science, Ministry of Education, Government of Myanmar, in a recent essay on Indians in Myanmar has presented an

optimistic view. To quote The Lwin, "Indian presence in Burma is a historical legacy; a section of Myanmar's Indian community is engaged in business while a majority is in agriculture or in menial labour." The younger generation through education is moving fast towards integration into the mainstream Myanmar society. The rise of India has a profound impact on the image-building attempts of overseas Indians. For Myanmar Buddhists, India is the place for pilgrimage, and for those of Indian stock, it is the country of their forefathers. Culture and religious links could be strengthened by promoting tourism. What he has said the situation of the Indian community in Myanmar may be improving.

On the other hand, to quote the Singhvi Committee Report, the Indians are "fairly impoverished in Myanmar," the more prosperous elements having left, following waves of nationalization and other measures which hurt their livelihood. The educational scene is pathetic. At one time, the faculty and alumni of the University of Rangoon comprised mainly of Indians. Today, "there are hardly any Indian students in the Universities," and results in a virtual extinction of a professional class. The main reason was that "between 1964 and 1988, Indians were denied admission to the Universities and professional courses."

The following two case studies may highlight the problem at hand:

Tamil Community

After Burmese independence in 1948, the introduction of land reforms, the imposition of the Burmese language and the decision to give preferential treatment to the majority Burmese community pushed Tamils down in the social hierarchy. They are now trying to revive their language and culture by opening new schools.

Tamils from south India began migrating to Myanmar during the early 19th Century. But unlike indentured labourers who went from India to countries such as Sri Lanka and South Africa, Tamils in Burma were not taken on by the colonial administration.

Instead they worked as agricultural labourers for members of the traditional merchant caste known as Nagarathars. At the turn of the 20th Century, Tamils established themselves in agriculture and trade in what was then Burma. But their fortunes took a huge downturn during the World War Two and subsequent political upheavals. After the Japanese invasion of Burma, many thousands of Tamils who worked in urban areas for the British colonial administration returned to India. Once independence was secured, the Burmese government introduced land reforms and took over vast tracts of irrigated land and businesses as part of a nationalisation drive.

The imposition of the Burmese language as the medium of instruction - combined with the forced closure of Tamil schools in the 1960s - triggered another wave of reverse migration. But many Tamils have deep roots in the country. They kept a low profile and slowly improved their fortunes by mending their relationship with the majority community and staying away from politics.

The younger generation of Tamils eat Burmese food, speaks the Burmese language in their homes and in many cases prefers to wear traditional Burmese costumes. Unlike the previous generation they have very little emotional connection with the land of their ancestors. This trend is giving way to fears of total assimilation.

To arrest this trend he has started organising religion classes for Hindu children. Barring a small number of Muslims and Christians, Burmese Tamils are predominantly Hindu.

There is a visible bond between Hinduism and Buddhism. There are more than 1,000 Hindu temples in present-day Myanmar. In some of the more famous temples ethnic Burmese visitors outnumber Tamils.

All Hindu temples have a statue or image of Buddha. Even though some Hindu traditions accept Buddha as a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, not many temples in India have Buddha statues. Members of the Burmese Tamil community say that this mutual understanding means that they have largely

escaped religious violence which sometimes has plagued Burma. But while Myanmar's military rulers did not interfere with temple administrations, the closure of Tamil schools meant that the Tamil language was only taught in temples - and then only for the purposes of fostering religious education and music and dance.

The restrictions meant that Burma's Tamil population has remained isolated for many years. It maintained very little contact with Tamil Nadu or with other well-established Tamil communities living in Singapore and Malaysia. Many Tamil teenagers - and their parents - have not even seen India.

But with change sweeping Myanmar, many new schools - which are keen to go beyond religious education only - have emerged. Tamils in Burma are thinly spread, except in a few villages. In many places it is difficult to muster enough students to justify the salaries of teachers - usually paid by the voluntary contributions from Tamil businessmen. Motivating young students to attend classes is a formidable challenge. Tamil teachers say that if present efforts are sustained, the community will be able to keep the Tamil culture and language alive for years to come.

CN Annadurai, who became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu when the DMK was voted to power in the 1967 elections, was very concerned about the developments in Burma and was keen to resolve the issue of compensation expeditiously. In a conversation with the author, Thomas Abraham, then Minister Counsellor in the Indian Embassy in Rangoon, recalled his meeting with Annadurai in the Chief Minister's residence in Mambalam. The meeting was arranged through the good offices of common friends. After discussing the pros and cons of the matter, Annadurai wrote a letter to the central government suggesting that India should enter into a long term agreement with Burma for the import of rice and the compensation due to Burmese repatriates could be adjusted in the proposed deal. It may be recalled that during 1967 India was facing an acute crisis in food grains. On his return to

Rangoon, Thomas Abraham also made a similar proposal to the Ministry of External Affairs. It is unfortunate, but true, that these concrete proposals did not elicit any favourable response from either government.

Zayawaddy Township

Placed between Mandalay and Yangon, Zayawaddy is a cluster of predominantly Indian villages. The population of this township is estimated to be around 70,000. Most of the people here are the descendants of farmers brought by the British from India – mostly from Bihar, but also Uttar Pradesh – to cultivate land in these parts. In the years that the military junta ruled Myanmar with an iron thumb, they largely escaped the authorities' attention and have now become Myanmarese citizens. The Little India has a Hindu Kalyan Sahyog Samiti to take care of religious affairs, Hindi is taught to children at a sprawling Gandhi Hall and in nearly a hundred schools, a temple with idols of Shiva, Lakshmi and Radha-Krishna draws many faithfuls, and there is an RSS branch to “liaise” with the authorities. An idol of the Buddha is also housed in the temple, “to show respect to the local religion”.

Around 1,500 of the Indian descendants are Muslims. The first batch of 3,500 farmers was brought in 1889, and then another 4,000 farmers joined them in 1902. The land was a dense forest then and they were told to cut down the trees and start cultivation. A sugar factory considered Myanmar's first was later started here by the British as sugarcane is one of the staple crops here.

The farmers were brought by Raja Keshav Prasad Sinha of Dumraon (from Ara, Bihar), who had been gifted 20,000 acres of land in and around Zayawaddy for services rendered to the British, on a 30-year lease. He handed over the land to his Dewan, Harihar Prasad Sinha, who took charge of cultivating it under the supervision of the British. As the population grew and the Indian community came to occupy as many as 40 villages, these were divided into four tracts named Jaipur, Ramnagar, Sadhugaon and Gopalganj. In 1965, when all business concerns, land, banks and schools, including those

owned by Indians, were nationalised by the Burmese government, around 2,000 families from here went back to Bihar.

However, while the Indians are now Burmese citizens, they can't take part in the country's politics. The RSS itself functions under the name of Sanatan Dham Swayam Seva Sangh. Not many here have been to India even once.

However, there are exceptions. From Zayewaddy Township, Suren Verma managed to not only get quality education at school level, but also completed his MBA and is now teaching in an Australian MBA college in Yangon. But, such exceptions are far and few.

IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current BJP-led Indian government has shown great interest in reaching out to Indian communities globally. However, despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar in November 2014 and bilateral talks in July 2015, the issue of stateless Indians remains unaddressed. Considering Myanmar's great importance to India economically, strategically and geopolitically, it is in the best interest of India to engage with the Myanmar government bilaterally to resolve the issue of citizenship and a better standard of living to the Indian communities in that country. The following are some recommendations for facilitating such action.

- **There is an urgent need for registration of PIO's for recognition in Myanmar to address the issue of statelessness.** The process must be made simpler and more accessible to the communities even in the most remote parts of the country. For this, a concerted effort is required by the Indian mission in Myanmar and the Central government.
- **Myanmar is an extremely important geo-strategically and economically and now the Indian government has huge investments in the country.** Perhaps the time is right to use this

influence, like China does, to engage with the Indian Diaspora and bring up their status. Government intervention is therefore, a must.

- **India has extensive soft power potential, especially in promoting itself as the birthplace of Buddhism, the majority religion in Myanmar.** There is also great potential in promoting language centres, Bollywood, arts and cultural centre on the lines of Confucius Centres of China. This can help in making the Indian communities feel more connected to their roots and
- **Indian government could initiate education exchange programs for the Indian origin residents of Myanmar to give them opportunities to explore higher education in India.** This way, a strong network of inter-linked educated individuals can be created who can add value to India's interests in Myanmar. For this, assistance can be sought from agencies like Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) to initiate three month to one year programmes for deserving candidate to spend some time on their proposed projects pertaining to Indian Diaspora. Cultural exchanges under Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) can also be facilitated with scholarships. Easier visa regulations for this purpose can be granted to such individuals. Setting up remote campuses by Indian universities could also help.
- **As the Chinese companies tend to hire Chinese employees on their projects worldwide, be it in Southeast Asia, Africa or the middle east, India too can follow a similar policy thereby generating employment for deserving individuals on the vast array of Indian projects in Myanmar.** This way the Indian community would not feel orphaned by their own government. Skilling programmes can be initiated by Indian institutions in Myanmar for relevant industries.

- **The way that the Indian government deals with Indian migrants in the GCC countries, replicating the model in Myanmar can bear favorable results.** While in GCC countries, most of the emigration is based on pre-guaranteed employment, for existing migrants, relevant amendments can be made. This would include setting up nodal agencies for recruitment agents, providing consular assistance and a crisis intervention centre. Initiatives like MEA helpline Madad which has been extended to Indian citizens for all consular assistance can be strengthened in Myanmar. .

V

CONCLUSION

There are four distinctive characteristics of Indian migrant movements in Myanmar and the rest of the Southeast Asia region. Firstly, labourers, mostly indentured, and auxiliaries dominated the flow of migrants. However, there was always a steady flow of traders and merchants as well.

Secondly, rapid economic boom in the region owing to rich natural resource-led economies led to a greater movement of Indian communities to Southeast Asia, predominantly in Malaya and Myanmar. This movement was not temporary or cyclical in nature, but allowed for permanent settlements, especially, since Myanmar in India were parts of the same colony.

Thirdly, the Indian communities were neither uniform in demographic composition nor geographic origins. These differences still remain; and fourthly and lastly, post-World War II, the dominance, prominence and importance of the Indian communities faced a sharp decline, consolidating through the process of decolonisation and emergence of independent nations.

With the emergence of Colonial powers like Britain and France in the second half of the 19th century, six major Southeast Asian states emerged namely Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Indochina, the Philippines and Thailand (Reeves

(ed.)/Kaur 2009: 72). Owing to largely open borders and free movement of labour, a favourable environment was created and sustained for an intra-region migration in labour scarce growing economies. Growth in the economic activity of the region can be attributed to the expansion of primary products like rice, rubber and teak and their free movement transcending international boundaries. The Chinese and the Indian communities, which had better wherewithal in terms of education, commerce and experience with the colonial masters, hence took centre stage in facilitating such movement.

Burma's rich natural resources were an asset to the British, however, utilising them in a way that they become a critical part in the ever-growing world commodity and capital market, was challenging. This was due to lack of skilled/unskilled labour. In this context, India's role as the provider of such labour became integral to the rise of Myanmar's status as a leader in the commodity market worldwide in the 19th century.

In the current context, an important clue to the understanding of modern Burmese history is to keep in mind the demographic and ethnic diversity in the country. With more than 100 ethnic groups, languages, and dialects, no other country in Southeast Asia displays such a diversity. It is a veritable kaleidoscope. Historically Burma had been the buffer among the neighbouring countries of China, India, and Thailand.

More than 2,000 years of cultural interaction among various races and ethnic groups has resulted in the development of diverse ethnic settlements, residing both in the mountainous frontier zones and lowland plains. Burma has a population of 56 million, the majority Burman number nearly two-thirds. The largest minorities are Shan - 9 per cent and Karen - 7 per cent. Other indigenous minority groups include Mon, Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Kayan, Danu, Akha, Kokang, Lahu, Rohingya, Tavoyan, and Wa peoples. They constitute nearly 5 per cent of the population.

Until the annexation of Burma as an integral part of the Indian Empire in 1886, the country had never existed as a unified State. What is more, the

British permitted many indigenous groups living in the frontier areas to have their own administrative set up. It was only after independence that the Government made attempts to integrate the various ethnic groups into one nation. The nation-building experiment was based on the language, culture, and religion of the majority Burmans. This policy was resisted by the minority groups, many of them belonging to the Christian faith. The post-independence history of Burma is full of struggles by the minority groups for autonomy and self-determination.

The Chinese and the Indians who migrated to Burma under the protective umbrella of the British rule are considered to be alien minorities, unlike the ethnic groups mentioned before, who are indigenous minorities. It may also be pointed out that the history of Myanmar is riddled with two types of struggles, one fight against the military junta for restoration of democracy and the struggle by the minorities for autonomy and self-determination. The problems of the alien minority groups Indians and the Chinese for citizenship and fair treatment have not attracted the attention that they richly deserve.

The Chinese have one advantage, compared to the Indians, though their number is less than that of the Indians, they have far greater economic clout and they own a disproportionate share of the Burmese economy. The good relations between the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and the military junta have also led to a situation where their problems are attended to with greater sensitivity by the military rulers. According to media reports, the number of Chinese has been increasing in the country with many of them settling down in the Burmese side of the Sino-Burma border.

The Chinese government has been fairly proactive in engaging with its Diaspora and using soft power as a means to keep them connected to their roots. This has improved their status in Myanmar remarkably. In fact, there are text books in the norther states of Myanmar like Kachin and Shan which are in Mandarin.

However, so far, the Indian government has not had much success in engaging the Indian Diaspora. While the Singhvi Committee has put a number on the large multitude of stateless people in Myanmar, it is albeit an outdated number. The number of stateless PIO's in Myanmar could be at least 10-15 per cent higher than the report. The large number of stateless people and the PIO's who are Burmese citizens being extremely impoverished and under employed or unemployed bears testimony to this.

India now has a sizeable bilateral economic relationship with Myanmar. The government could consider capitalizing on this developing equation with the nascent democratic country to uplift the status or at least provide consular assistance to the PIO's in Myanmar. Talks could yield positive results in the form of better migrant policies for the Indian community in Myanmar which could pave way for their development.

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