

Part II
Mental Culture
Transcends Prison

Chapter 7

Mental culture and freedom

I have related the Myanmarfication project to a quote by one of the regime's journalists, namely that 'Myanmar resembled a house that tumbled down. The Tatmadaw had to pick up the pieces and build a new one.'¹ However, there is much evidence that, given their Buddhist tradition, many people in Burma have no desire to live in this house.

I have passed in ignorance through a cycle of many rebirths, seeking the builder of the house. Continuous rebirth is a painful thing. But now, housebuilder, I have found you out. You will not build me a house again.

All your rafters are broken, your ridge-pole shattered. My mind is free from active thought, and has made an end of craving.²

In Part I, I described Myanmarfication as a response by the military to Aung San Suu Kyi's effective challenge and as a compensation for the loss of Aung San to the opposition. It is a political programme to use impersonal means – culture, language, race and Buddhism – to attain to national unity by hegemonizing all diverse peoples in Burma into a singular Myanmar civilization and thereby uproot all opposition for once and all. The neutralizing element of the Sangha is gone, and its place has been taken by the army. Myanmarfication in itself is thus a counter-culture; it is a military response to the challenge posed by the opposition, and in particular Aung San Suu Kyi.³ The army and culture have both proved instruments that work well together since these do not permit rational argument surrounding their objectives. Both are presented at the core of Myanmariness – both are presented as defences against foreign colonialists.

As we have also seen, however, the paradox is that both are propped up by foreign money. I have suggested that foreign support, and in particular Japanese support, for the Myanmarfication project replicates the Japanese support Aung San and his comrades received during the national independence struggle. Also, within these ideas of culture there is a vast difference between the Pondaung archaeology scouts who are ordered into the field to find the earliest Myanmar being, and the regime's cultural advisors who advocate a more spiritual approach to culture. In this chapter I wish to more clearly delineate how these different ideas of culture live side by side and whether there is any overlap between them. Furthermore, how does the democracy movement position itself in relation to culture?

Pagoda culture or mental culture?

Steinberg suggested that Aung San Suu Kyi, because of her confinement and because of the general conditions of censorship, is not able to reach the common people. He recommends she should begin to participate in the platform of 'Burmese culture' by addressing the common Burmese people. He believes she should participate in the grand project of building her own kinds of housing for the Buddha's relics in the manner of King Manuha, who was captured and imprisoned by Anawratha.

To symbolise the psychic constraints to which he was subjected and the resultant emotional stress, he built a pagoda containing three massive Buddha figures. They were completely out of proportion to the space cramped and constrained by abutting walls that constricted their shoulders and a roof that pressed on their heads. This was an innovative, eloquent and politically acceptable means to protest his imprisonment and convey a timeless message. The pagoda still stands today in Pagan.

The Slorc is attempting to make her irrelevant internally. Each side seems to have become more intransigent, and her frustration seems to have become more strident. The Slorc attempts to portray her as a stooge of foreign 'neocolonialism' and 'hegemonism', both led by the United States. But in so far as her message is conveyed only to the outside world, her internal legitimacy may erode, and the Slorc's argument may have more local salience.

To begin meaningful dialogue between the two sides is what realistically the world hopes for at this sorry state of play. To do this requires will on both sides, but whether there are such mutual sentiments is unclear. But in any case, the need for the opposition is to operate within the dominant culture of the country, and deal with the authorities on a common platform, even if the differences are immense. That platform is Burmese culture.⁴

Steinberg proceeds to suggest that Aung San Suu Kyi should follow royalty of the distant past, as did her predecessors U Nu and Ne Win, and build herself a pagoda. Indeed, perhaps Steinberg was prompted by Aung San Suu Kyi's own earlier reflections on Manuha Min's predicament while travelling through Mon country on her way to the Thamanya Sayadaw. She had herself only just been released from house arrest at

¹ Nawrahta (1995:69).

² *Dhammapada* 153, 154.

³ I am indebted for this idea to my discussions with Miyazaki Koji and Setsuho Ikehata.

⁴ Steinberg, David I. 'What medium for the message?' *Bangkok Post*, 16.08.1997.

that point in time, and Manuha's act of building a pagoda while imprisoned in Pagan crossed her mind. Indeed, she identified with Manuha, who had caused Anawratha to experience such great fears. She concluded that 'the sympathetic account of King Manuha is one of the most admirable parts of Burmese history, demonstrating a lack of ethnic prejudice and unstinting respect for a noble enemy'.¹

The Myanmar culture myth

The regime has decided to make Myanmar culture, a singular idea of culture, the centrepoint for all peoples of Burma. Their propaganda has formulated the idea of the Myanmar family, all tied together by the Mongol spot. Against this stand the feeble attempts of the cultural advisers to loosen some of these ideas, but this proves difficult when using only old-fashioned and introductory anthropology textbooks.

Culture is by no means a simple concept, and the Burmese regime has not sufficiently problematised it before its wholesale adoption in their Twelve National Objectives. First, the very concepts of culture the regime employs have not been researched with any seriousness; there is no interest in describing the terminology and values whether in Burmese (*yin-gyei-hmú* ဝဋ်ဇကျိးမှု and *daleí-hton-zan* စေတနာ့စုံ) or the other languages in Burma. Second, even the 'international' concepts of culture used are drawn from sources that are not renowned for demonstrating the problems inherent in the concept of culture, but rather, aim to simplify for undergraduate students. Raymond Williams found culture to be one of the two or three most complicated in the English language.² More important, however, is that Kroeber and Kluckhohn distinguished 164 definitions in their famous review of what anthropologists meant by culture.³ However, by today's count such would represent but a fraction of the current range of definitions as one traces the diverse anthropological developments in different countries.

Major changes have taken place over time in the way the concept is understood. The earliest anthropologists at the beginning of this century, while European colonial power was at its height, interpreted culture as a good possessed only by the privileged few. Evolutionary anthropologists such as Tylor saw in culture a development away from the coarse state of nature into which we were born, so that the peoples closest to nature also had least culture. Societies were assumed to move through various phases in cultural development until they attained to civilization. This approach often assumed the conjunction between language, race and culture as joint evolutionary developments. On the other hand, diffusionists, less concerned with evolution according to set patterns of development, saw 'culture circles' (*kultur kreise*) which emanated from the point at which, for example, a pebble hits the water.

In these accounts, whether evolutionary or diffusionist, culture is a privileged centre from which high values are emitted across space and time, that should be gratefully accepted and consumed by weaker peoples; the strongest cultures have the greatest effect on their surroundings. Wright has reviewed the attributes of this old sense of culture as a relatively static culture as follows: unchanging, in balanced equilibrium or self-reproducing; underlying system of shared meanings; 'authentic culture'; identical, homogeneous individuals.⁴

If these early theories saw culture not only as desirable but as privileged central points dominating entire landscapes of human communities, subsequent ideas about culture developed that effectively did away with the view that culture necessarily belonged to the privileged centres of civilization. Culture was no longer inferred from spectacular reports that produced the idea in the early days of 'armchair' anthropology. At the time, fieldwork was rarely performed and knowledge hardly employed first-hand observation and linguistic skills, that are today regarded as vital tools in anthropology. It was in particular fieldwork and participant-observation that radically altered the view of culture. This initially gave rise to functionalist theories, such as Malinowski's fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders, who proposed that culture is produced and maintained independently in all societies, including societies in the periphery of strong civilizations. Also, peoples such as the Australian Aborigines, who had hitherto been assumed had no culture, were demonstrated to have highly sophisticated cultures.

A further step in the democratization of culture took place when Raymond Williams argued that all peoples not only accept and possess culture, but also *make* culture by their own agency. These cultures, in

¹ ASSK (1997a:7–8).

² Raymond Williams. 1976. *Keywords*. Flamingo, p. 87.

³ Kroeber, A.L. & Kluckhohn, Clyde. 1952. *Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions*. Cambridge, MA.: Papers of the Peabody Museum XLVII.

⁴ I am indebted to reading Susan Wright. 1998. 'The politicization of "culture".' *Anthropology Today*. 14, 1, pp. 7-15.

turn, contest the reified cultures of the elite. This permits us to speak of sub- and counter-cultures as appropriate responses to a centralised discourse of civilization.

The regime's culture discourse – in particular as based on the idea of Mongolian racial unity – reads like a standard colonial idea of culture that aims to produce a history consistent with old-fashioned western linguistic, geographic, but in particular racial classifications. It follows up on what historians such as Harvey said, namely that 'the Burmans are a Mongolian race, yet their traditions, instead of harking back to China, refer to India ... the surviving traditions of the Burman are Indian because their own Mongolian traditions died out'.¹ In similar vein, Luce wrote that, 'the Abhiraja/Dharaja legends showing the continuity in the Buddha's Indian lineage with those of Burmese royalty were presumably invented to give Burmans a noble derivation from the Sakiyan line of Buddha Gotama himself. But one only has to put a Burman between a North Indian and a Chinese, to see at a glance where his racial connections lie.'² To fight colonialism with old colonial ideas is the legacy of an army that has its origins and traditions ultimately outside Burma. The paradox is that the army demands the civilian population to wear *longyi* and accuse democracy protesters of westernisation, while they are themselves wearing trousers, the ultimate symbol of western decadence and can seemingly not come up with theories of culture that transcend those of their oppressors half a century ago.

The local values myth

The pagoda is too easy a way out of the culture quagmire. For the regime populating the landscape with bright and shining pagodas at the expense of the civilian population is as useful as is the colonial discourse and search for Mongolian origins in the Mongolian spot. This is based on a reductionist anthropology practised in the colonial idea, which proposed a concept of culture that permitted drawing larger boundaries of communities so as to assert domination over them. The idea that the regime can stand for 'local values' by adopting such discourse of the Myanmar family is damaging the fabric of society.

Anthropologists of the post-colonial period are of the opinion that the creative personal elements of culture are as dynamic as the call for civilisation. The smaller communities at the edges of larger communities are equally creative in developing their cultures. This discovery led anthropologists to realise that the creative aspects of culture always work to counterbalance the inherited and transmitted elements.

The Burmese army realise that it could not recover its Aung San ancestral lineage it had so carefully manufactured now that Aung San's charismatic daughter has entered the political arena. She contested and led the attack on their painstakingly crafted concept of institutional culture that could build some sort of a bridge between the people. It had to grab for what is available beyond Aung San's lineage, and is now rewriting Burma's entire history and remanufacturing and repackaging Burma's culture into a unique sub-type of an Asian value system which, they hope, Japan will finance, the package tourist will consume, businesses will support, the ethnic minorities will resign themselves to, and they will themselves benefit from politically and economically. The resulting cultural unification of the country, they hope, should be sufficient to overcome all forms political opposition.

Aung San Suu Kyi retorts that it is false to delineate such hastily forged ideas of national culture. She says that 'there is nothing new in Third World governments seeking to justify and perpetuate authoritarian rule by denouncing liberal democratic principles as alien. By implication they claim for themselves the official and sole right to decide what does or does not conform to indigenous cultural norms' [Y11].

Politics has thereby been transformed into a debate about what these local values called culture are that might go into local concepts of democracy. Indeed, democracy has become contested at the level of culture. In response, Aung San Suu Kyi perceptively commented on this rhetoric of culture and development at the level of the nation has no meaning without local empowerment, without permitting parallel cultural concepts to operate at the local level.

The question of empowerment is central to both culture and development. It decides who has the means of imposing on a nation or society their view of what constitutes culture and development and who determines what practical measures can be taken in the name of culture and development. The more totalitarian a system the more power will be concentrated in the hands of the ruling elite and the more culture and development will be used to serve narrow interests. Culture has been defined as the most recent, the most highly developed means of promoting the security and continuity of life. Culture thus defined is dynamic and broad, the emphasis is on its flexible, non-compelling qualities. But when it is bent to serve narrow

¹ Harvey (1925:5).

² Luce (1959).

interests it becomes static and rigid, its exclusive aspects come to the fore and it assumes coercive overtones. The national culture can become a bizarre graft of carefully selected historical incidents and distorted social values intended to justify the policies and actions of those in power. At the same time development is likely to be seen in the now outmoded sense of economic growth. Statistics, often unverifiable, are reeled off to prove the success of official measures.

In her view, truly Burmese culture is mental culture – the culture of *Byama-so tayà*. This will be analysed later, but suffice to say her that these express universal and transcendent values – transcendent of material and substantive difference in status and power – in a way, first of all, to which people respond locally, and second, that it is a local ideal comparable to western values of democracy. As we have already seen, all politicians of repute have handled these concepts, and even the regime's own thinkers and journalists currently agree on their over arching importance.

Mental culture – the concept

To think that Aung San Suu Kyi's platform from which to appeal to the generals, or indeed, to the population at large, should be the supreme platform of 'Burmese culture' is fine, but that such culture is equated with material boundaries is, in my view, fundamentally out-of-date. Pagodas reify boundaries and permit call on 'voluntary' labour and the regime monopolises the 'tangible' realm by means of their *cetana*, for they have the authority (*ana*) to do so. Indeed, in a wide-ranging reform of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act and its Amendment in 1962, on 10 September 1998 the regime announced the 'Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law' which greatly restricts the independent building and renovating of Buddhist structures, resulting in prison sentences of up to seven years. It is 'deemed imperative to protect and preserve by legislation a wider range of Myanmar cultural heritage'.

In my view the current battlefront is now over the spiritual and psychological culture. This is something the regime wants to control but, unlike material culture, it cannot possibly control. If pagodas confront the foreigner, *vipassana* eludes such distinction between Burman and foreigner. Nyanatiloka Mahathera (1878–1957) gave a lecture entitled 'Mental culture' in Tokyo in 1920, jointly published with the addition of three other lectures in *Fundamentals of Buddhism: four lectures* in 1994. Hailed as 'the first Continental European in modern times to become a Buddhist monk', his work on Theravada Buddhism is still of interest. Born in Germany, he developed a keen interest in Buddhism in his youth and came to Asia intending to enter the Buddhist Order. He received ordination in Burma in 1903.¹ However, the greatest part of his life as a monk was spent in Sri Lanka, where he established the Island Hermitage at Dodanduwa as a monastery for Western monks. His translations into German include the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Milindapanha*, and he has left a legacy of 'new' Buddhism that now pervades Sri Lanka, known as 'the forest tradition' and which has been adopted as 'indigenous' by many Sinhalese Buddhists. The role of foreign, predominantly German monks in the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka was documented by Carrithers, who treats in detail Nyanatiloka's motivation to becoming a forest monk and the legacy of the Island Hermitage for reviving Buddhist mental culture in the Sinhalese Buddhist tradition.²

In his first lecture he set out 'the essence of Buddhism' in terms of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. He quotes Friedrich Nietzsche's admiration for the 'absolute soberness and clearness of Buddhism'.

Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity. It has entered upon the inheritance of objectively and coolly putting problems. It came to life after several hundred years of philosophical development. The notion of 'God' is done away with as soon as it appears. Prayer is out of the question. So is asceticism. No categorical imperative. No coercion at all, not even within the monastic community. Hence it also does not challenge to fight against those of a different faith. Its teaching turns against nothing so impressively as against the feeling of revengefulness, animosity and resentment.

He places Buddhism, in its emphasis upon mind and the inward condition, in a very different category from other religions and suggests that it is a system that operates beyond tradition and culture, as these are mere conventional templates.

The teaching of the Buddha is perhaps the only religious teaching that requires *no belief in traditions*, or in certain historical events. It appeals solely to the understanding of each individual. For wherever there are beings capable of thinking, there the truths proclaimed by the Buddha may be understood and realized, without regard to race, country, nationality or station in life. These truths are universal, not bound up with any particular country, or any particular epoch. And in everyone, even in the lowest, there lies latent the capacity for seeing and realizing these truths, and attaining to the Highest Perfection. And

¹ For a Burmese appreciation of Nyanatiloka see စင်္စလီယံ အတ္ထုပ္ပတ္တိတိုထူးများ [Unusual biographies: biographies of foreign (Buddhist) missionaries]. နေလုံးလှ, 1980, pp. 57–72. This also includes biographies of Ananda Mettaya (English monk), Lokanatha (Italian monk), Daw Sudhammawati (Nepalese nun), and Col. Olcott (American).

² Carrithers (1983:26–45).

whosoever lives a noble life, such a one has already tasted of the truth and, in greater or lesser degree, travels on the Eightfold Path of Peace which all noble and holy ones have trod, are treading now, and shall in future tread. The universal laws of morality hold good without variation everywhere and at all times, whether one may call oneself a Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Muslim, or by any other name.

It is the *inward condition* of a person and his deeds that count, not a mere name. The true disciple of the Buddha is far removed from all dogmatism. He is a *free thinker in the noblest sense of the word*. He falls neither into positive nor negative dogmas, for he knows: both are mere opinions, mere views, rooted in blindness and self-deception. Therefore the Buddha has said of himself. 'The Perfect One is *free from any theory*, for the Perfect One *has seen*:

Thus is *corporeality*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is *feeling*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is *perception*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus are the *mental formations*, thus they arise, thus they pass away; thus is *consciousness*, thus it arises thus it passes away.

He refers to this liberating Eightfold Path as 'a path of inner culture, of inner progress'. Having thus taken Buddhism out of the realm of religion, competitive faith and culture, into the realm of mental culture, i.e. personally confronting reality through the first-order instrument of one's own physical and mental manifestation, the second lecture he then proceeds to delineate the importance of *karma* and rebirth. He aimed to show that the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth 'has nothing to do with the transmigration of any soul or ego-entity, as in the ultimate sense there does not exist any such ego or I, but merely a continually changing process of psychic and corporeal phenomena', and to point out that 'the kamma-process and rebirth-process may both be made comprehensible only by the assumption of a subconscious stream of life [*bhavanga-sota*] underlying everything in living nature'.

The third lecture is devoted to *paticca-samuppada*, or the theory of dependent origination. Realised by the Buddha at his enlightenment, it represents the practical understanding of 'the conditional arising of all those mental and physical phenomena generally summed up by the conventional names "living being," or "individual," or "person"'. According to this theory, all life-forms arise from the *kamma* generated through ignorance (*avijja*).

The lecture 'Mental culture' is the last lecture. Here, having placed Buddhism, as the system of direct confrontation with reality outside the realm of culture, and having presented ignorance (*avijja*) as perpetuating life-in-*samsara*, he sketches 'mental culture' as the only form of mental training that attains release from the cycle of rebirth.

The whole of the Buddha's teachings may be summed up in three words: morality, mental concentration and wisdom, *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*. This is the threefold division of the Noble Eightfold Path leading to deliverance from the misery of *Samsara*. And of this Eightfold Path, right speech, action and livelihood are included in morality, or *sila*; right effort, mindfulness and concentration in mental concentration, or *samadhi*; right understanding and thought in wisdom, or *panna*.

Of these three stages, morality constitutes the foundation without which no real progress along the Eightfold Path to purity and deliverance is possible. The two higher stages, concentration and wisdom, are brought to perfection by that which in the West usually, but rather ambiguously, is called 'meditation.' By this latter term, the Buddhist Pali term *bhavana* is usually translated.

I have already emphasized Aung San's and Thakin Kodawhmaing's concept of national unity as rooted in *byama-so tayà* and, ultimately, in *samadhi* or concentration. These, together with *vipassana*, the next stage in mental training, are all comprised within the concept of *bhavana*, which represents, in Nyanatiloka's vocabulary, the system of mental culture in its entirety.

The word *bhavana* is a verbal noun derived from the causative of the verb *bhavati*, to be, to become, and therefore literally means 'the bringing into existence,' i.e. producing, development. Thus the development of mind is twofold:

1. Development of mental concentration (*samadhi-bhavana*), or tranquillity (*samatha-bhavana*);
2. Development of wisdom (*panna-bhavana*), or clear insight (*vipassana-bhavana*).

Nyanatiloka draws attention to Sri Lanka being lacking, unlike Burma, in mental culture.

In this popular exposition I only wish to give a general idea of the authentic method of this twofold mental culture, and I shall not be going much into details. It is to be regretted that in Sri Lanka one very rarely meets with laymen, or even monks, who are earnestly devoting themselves to these two higher stages of Buddhist life. In Burma and Siam, however, the other two strongholds of original Buddhism, we still find quite a number of monks and hermits, who are living in the solitudes of deep forests or in caves, and who, detached from all worldly wishes and anxieties, are striving for the goal set forth by our Master, and are training themselves in tranquillity and insight. Undoubtedly, for the real development of higher life, solitude, at least temporarily, is an absolute necessity.

Though the concentration exercises may serve various preliminary purposes, their ultimate object is to reach that unshakeable tranquillity and purity of the mind, which is the foundation of insight leading to deliverance from the cycle of rebirth and misery. The Buddha has said: 'Now what, monks, is Nibbana? It is the extinction of greed, hate and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). And what, monks, is the path leading to Nibbana? It is mental tranquillity and insight.

Mental tranquillity (*samatha*) is the unshakeable state of mind gained through the persevering training in mental concentration. Tranquillity, according to the Commentary *Sankhepavannana*, bestows a threefold blessing: auspicious rebirth, bliss in this very life, and mental purity and fitness for insight.

Insight (*vipassana*) is a name for the flashing forth of the light of wisdom and insight into the true nature of existence, i.e. into the impermanency, suffering and egolessness (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*) of all corporeality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.

Nyanatiloka's account of Buddhist mental culture sketches it as the ultimate goal in Buddhism and as the most accurate culture in its original sense of coping with nature. In that sense, since it is based on self-liberation, it goes beyond the collective aspects of culture.

The news of the Buddha's Awakening sets the standards for judging the culture we were brought up in, and not the other way around. This is not a question of choosing Asian culture over American. The Buddha's Awakening challenged many of the presuppositions of Indian culture in his day; and even in so-called Buddhist countries, the true practice of the Buddha's teachings is always counter-cultural. It's a question of evaluating our normal concerns – conditioned by time, space, and the limitations of ageing, illness, and death – against the possibility of a timeless, spaceless, limitless happiness. All cultures are tied up in the limited, conditioned side of things, while the Buddha's Awakening points beyond all cultures. It offers the challenge of the Deathless that his contemporaries found liberating and that we, if we are willing to accept the challenge, may find liberating ourselves.¹

We are thus left with Buddhism not only as a mental culture, an inner culture, but also a counter-culture. This permits us to understand one strand in the history of Burmese national independence politics of Aung San and Thahkin Kodawhmaing, who recognized in mental culture a vital counter-colonial instrument that permitted transcending factionalism and that would eventually result in national unity. It also permits us to understand why men such as Ba Han, who wrote a book on Blake's mysticism, should sketch 'The Good Life' in *The Planned State*, as the need for 'physical as well as mental culture'.²

Mental culture is 'high' culture

As Tambiah wrote, the ascetic 'erases the layman's cognitive and affective maps by crossing the latter's boundaries of social and physical spaces, culinary distinctions, and pure-impure categorizations', for 'the ascetic who closes his sense doors while the layman's are open is also a *breaker* of conventions, a dissolver of man-made cultural categories by which he orders and reifies the world into a durable reality'. The ascetic here is 'a mindful observer and contemplator of *process*, of growth and decay and dissolution; and what better subject is there for this than the human body and what better viewing ground than a place of cremation?'.³

The advantage of mental culture in a multi-cultural environment such as Burma, is that it permits the creation of a 'neutral' space where cultural differences are erased. Aung San Suu Kyi is suspicious and has expressed criticism of the institutionalization of a 'national culture' that is being devised by a dirigiste regime which she finds 'can become a bizarre graft of carefully selected historical incidents and distorted social values intended to justify the policies and actions of those in power'. 'It is often in the name of cultural integrity, as well as social stability and national security, that democratic reforms based on human rights are resisted by authoritarian governments'. She believes that the poor need more than material assistance, they need 'empowerment' so as 'to change their perception of themselves as helpless and ineffectual in a changing world'.⁴ Such empowerment is supplied not by culture, but by the development of spiritual resources as part of a 'revolution of the spirit'.

Mental culture, which requires very little space and is highly portable, is not visible, yet has a cosmological reach, negotiating the boundaries of the largest domains known to mankind such as self, prison, country, cosmology and *samsara*. By contrast, culture can merely negotiate ethnic and national boundaries.

Buddhism has historically provided the idiom of transcending culture.

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¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. 'The Meaning of the Buddha's Awakening'. (<http://world.std.com/~metta/ftp/modern/awakening.html>).

² Ba Han, Maung. *The Planned State: an evaluation of the social and economic foundations of the State in the light of a comparative study of the conditions in the East Asiatic and Western Countries*. Rangoon: n.p., 1944, p. 105.

³ Tambiah (1984:37).

⁴ ASSK (1995:264).

liberating ourselves.¹

High culture is therefore ultimately rooted in a Buddhist spiritual quest. This overcomes difference and transcends locality through understanding, rather than fostering and asserting difference through the production of substantive material and ideological difference on the basis of locality or material culture. Such is an opinion shared with Buddhists elsewhere.² And it is indeed a feature of Aung San Suu Kyi's mental culture of politics.³ However, it is as well to bear in mind, that this concept of culture as mental culture is itself derivative from the very same crisis politics already outlined, which began with Mindon's realisation that reform must be undertaken in the wake of the Second Anglo-Burmese War to keep the long-nosed British, as Hpo Hlaing put it, from 'kissing the girls of Burma'.

When we investigate the meaning attributed to culture by the regime's own advisers, we see an elaboration of what they think are universal ideas of culture, drawn from old-fashioned and introductory anthropology texts. However, the regime's cultural think-thank do not quite see eye-to-eye with the generals on Myanmar culture in terms of locally originating Burmese ideas at all. Khin Maung Nyunt's definition of culture involves a distinction between 'tangible' culture and 'intangible' culture as follows:

Broadly speaking there are two aspects to cultural heritage – tangible and intangible. The tangible aspect covers all material objects of culture such as fossils, artifacts, monuments, antiquities and sites, whereas intangible refers to all mental and spiritual aspects such as belief, value system, custom, tradition, habit, attitude, character, behaviour, life style, etc.⁴

At the 'Human Resource Development, Nation-building and Culture' seminar Khin Maung Nyunt set out the roots of 'Myanmar culture' as close to the spiritual development and ethics as advocated by the NLD. Khin Maung Nyunt proclaims that 'Myanmar ethical and moral principles such as the 38 modes of auspicious conduct (Mangala Sutta) which includes advice for living a good and happy life as well as earnest advice for kings and ministers so that they may govern well and wisely'. He isolates the following as the main features of Burmese culture:

'To cite but a few, are *Majjhimatipada*, *Brahma Vihara* and *Hiri Ottappa*. *Majjhimatipada* means the via media or the middle way which avoids the two extremes. It takes a moderate course of actions ... *Brahma Vihara* is a set of four sublime states of living, namely metta or loving kindness, *karuna* or compassion, *mudita* or altruistic joy and *upekkha* or detachment which the Buddha advised men to practice in their social relations. *Hiri* is the shame of immorality and *Ottappa* means the fear of sinning. They prevent us from evil actions. Such Buddhist admonitions of a preventive nature serve as a brake on human greed, conceit, avarice, craving and hatred and minimize the social problems arising out of material progress.'

These moral principles indeed originated from the teachings of the Buddha, but they have permeated and spread and combined with other cultural influences to produce a culture that is uniquely Myanmar.⁵

The cultural adviser U Khin Maung Nyunt ends up saying what Aung San, U Nu, and since 1971 the BSPP, and now the senior members of the NLD also say – this is that *byama-so tayà* or *brahma-vihara*, mental culture, is the way for Burma. Ye Htut also adds to the definition of other speakers that 'Myanmar national

¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *The Meaning of the Buddha's Awakening*. 1997.

² 'A cultured man has grown, for culture comes from a word meaning "to grow." In Buddhism the arahant is the perfect embodiment of culture. He has grown to the apex, to the highest possible limit, of human evolution. He has emptied himself of all selfishness – all greed, hatred, and delusion – and embodies flawless purity and selfless compassionate service. Things of the world do not tempt him, for he is free from the bondage of selfishness and passions. He makes no compromises for the sake of power, individual or collective.

In this world some are born great while others have greatness thrust on them. But in the Buddha-Dhamma one becomes great only to the extent that one has progressed in ethical discipline and mental culture, and thereby freed the mind of self and all that it implies. True greatness, then, is proportional to one's success in unfolding the perfection dormant in human nature.

We should therefore think of culture in this way: Beginning with the regular observance of the Five Precepts, positively and negatively, we gradually reduce our greed and hatred. Simultaneously, we develop good habits of kindness and compassion, honesty and truthfulness, chastity and heedfulness. Steady, wholesome habits are the basis of good character, without which no culture is possible. Then, little by little, we become great and cultured Buddhists. Such a person is rightly trained in body, speech, and mind – a disciplined, well-bred, refined, humane human being, able to live in peace and harmony with himself and others. And this indeed is Dhamma.' Robert Bogoda *Buddhist Culture, The Cultured Buddhist*, Bodhi Leaves No. 139, Published in 1996, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.

³ The preposition 'mental' in 'mental culture', I fear, evokes in English a prejudicial connotation in the sense of 'mental', i.e. a term suggesting 'temporary or permanent impairments of the mind, due to heredity, birth injury, environment, or accident, which usually need special care.' It conveys such ideas as mental breakdown, deficiency, derangement, disease, disorder, handicap, illness, incapacity, retardation, subnormality. However, as Williams points out, the term 'culture' has undergone definite changes. It started life as meaning the cultivation of crops and animals, which remained its main sense until the beginning of the 19th Century. From the 16th Century onwards it was applied metaphorically to the mind, as in Bacon's 'the culture and manurance of minds' (1605). This use decreased after the 17th century. There ought to be a space somewhere in the English language for this concept.

⁴ Khin Maung Nyunt. 'The law to protect and preserve cultural heritage regions'. *MP*, September 1998.

⁵ *MP*, November 1997.

culture surpasses other cultures in subtlety and profundity', but it is not due to Burma's superior material culture. Rather, it is because 'Myanmar culture is culture that promotes spiritual refinement.'

One of the maxims from the Citta Vagga (Mind Section) of the *Dhammapada*, a Niti treatise (Book of Teachings) well-known in the Oriental Culture, which says, '*Cittan dantan sukha vahan*' which may be rendered into English as 'Mind well tamed by teaching and training brings the three-fold benefit of existence as a human being or a god or the realization of nirvana', points to the fact that Myanmar culture is the culture of the spirit. This maxim is now being put into practice at the University of Culture in Myanmar.¹

His view is that 'Myanmar culture' is 'the culture of the spirit', and the government's 'objective to raise the national character and spirit is now included in the State's [three] social objectives'. The cultural advisers to the regime, therefore, politely but firmly point the generals towards a less reified Myanmar culture that draws the ultimate freedom from Buddhist teachings. U Thittila's view of Burmese concepts of 'high' culture (as distinct from 'Burmese' culture) as ultimately centred upon mental culture, for the Burmese place it at the highest and most central level of their value system. U Thittila, the first Burmese monk to spend many years in Britain, put it that Buddhism is the most significant source of nourishment for Burmese culture. 'Take away our religion and what of culture is left? Just what would be left if you took away from the lotus the life-giving waters . . . nothing but the odour of decay'. He defines Buddhism according to the *Dhammapada* as the Buddha's teachings 'not to do any evil', 'to cultivate good' and most importantly, 'to purify one's thoughts'. His definition of culture is therefore a form of spiritual culture tightly integrated with Buddhism.

In the world as a whole there is enough material and no lack of intellect. What then is lacking? The spiritual basis of culture is lacking, the world is disturbed and peace eludes us. Men distrust each other. Conflicts, greed-based conflicts, racial, political, religious, economic, bring war due to the lack of a spiritual basis of culture.

The word 'culture' is here used in the sense of refinement of thought and activity in human life. This term 'culture' is very wide in its significance. It included religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, every human activity. The basic inspiring principles of a man's life or that of a race or that of a country, along with the way of life adopted, constitute the basis of their culture. It is therefore impossible to expect oneness or uniformity or identity of culture. In a profound harmony, it is the variety that gives depth and feeling.

But if culture is to amount to anything worth having and really worthy of the name, it must be spiritually based. With Asians it has been, and still is, spiritually based and a part of and not apart from their religions.²

Having sketched the generals' culture concept as centering upon racial purity and the Pondaung original Myanmar man, on the one hand, and the NLD and the regime's own cultural advisers' preference for Burmese culture as rooted in the spiritual concept of *brahma-vihara*, on the other, perhaps there is scope for their meeting. The *Gya-Aye* song [ဂျာအေသီချင်း] was composed by Pegu U Thet Tin, and deals with the YMBA and the dyarchy question. The last line says '*Brahma-vihara*, the old name for Burma' [ဗြဟ္မဝိဟာရေးအမိမြန်မာပြည်].³ Myanmar and Burma, we are told by many Burmese authors, are words derived from 'Brahma' [ဗြဟ္မာ] (see App. 1.8). This suggests that the spiritual and the material views of culture may yet be reconcilable. The question is how this reconciliation might be attained. What on earth do these military intelligence Pondaung fossil scouts and civilian practitioners of the *byama-so tayà* social meditation have in common? Are they not both looking for the limits of culture, each in their own way? The difference is that one seeks to assert material difference between outsiders and insiders on the basis of race and culture, while the other opens up the higher Brahma heavens, where cultural and gender distinctions no longer exist because it is beyond the distinctions that belong to material form. One houses it, and the other uproots the very foundations of the house, not wishing to live in it any longer. The question is, which is the more fruitful and beneficial to society?

¹ Ye Htut (1997:179–80).

² Thittila (1996:215).

³ See မေမြို့မိုးကြည်၊ နယ်ချဲ့ဖက်ဆစ်ဆန့်ကျင်တုံ့သွေး ဇာတိစာနိတေးသီချင်းများ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ သီဟမင်း၊ ၁၉၈၁၊ မျက်နှာ ၁၂။

Chapter 8

Democracy imprisoned

'Disciplined democracy' has a peculiar ring to it. As if imprisonment through the web of Myanmar national culture and the framework of the law alone were not enough, the regime has made determined attempts to arrest and imprison all who get in its way. By 19 November 1998, shortly after the regime cracked down on the NLD after its call to hold a Parliament, 182 NLD MPs and 600 other Party members were in detention, 'staying at government guest houses'.¹ They were released on condition that they resign their party activities.

Tin U was in prison when the election results came out. He realised, when the prison was filling up with new prisoners, that the regime was not pleased with the results. He characterised his realisation by saying that at that point in time 'the prison became Parliament', for all prominent leaders had been imprisoned.² From yet another point of view, a BBC journalist wryly commented that Aung San Suu Kyi, together with Nelson Mandela and Terry Waite, provided the BBC with a 'captive audience'.³ Unable to receive independent news coverage they relied heavily on the BBC for objective news coverage, they were both captive and captured, for they were confined between four walls.

Aung San Suu Kyi in 'Locked doors cannot stifle the call for liberty: Czechs and Us' compares the Czech imprisonment experience under the communist regime with that of prisoners in Burma. She argues that in choosing a symbol for the party, forced upon the NLD by the regime, 'it would be very appropriate if the symbol for the National League for Democracy (NLD) were a locked prison door'. Such a choice, she says, would mean that 'everybody would know that such a symbol could only represent the NLD' and so they would not mistakenly vote for another party.⁴ She points out that, unlike the now liberated Czechs who were permitted to write, albeit censored, letters from prison, the military regime of Burma excels in its prison mentality and 'could make a reasonable bid for grade A'. Vaclav Havel 'could write letters to his wife from prison!' whilst 'political prisoners in Burma are not allowed reading or writing material of any kind'. The only way Burmese prisoners can communicate with their families if they are not allowed visiting rights, is by 'smuggling out clandestine messages which often cost them a considerable sum in the way of bribes'.

There is no doubt that the incessant harassment of Aung San Suu Kyi and her many colleagues, their relatives and friends, in terms of arrest, trial and imprisonment, and the invasive nature of this experience, has moved senior NLD leaders. As one observer commented, 'MPs have had to choose one of two ways; either to go to prison or to sign testimonies and documents which state that they do not support the NLD's activities and the Committee Representing People's Parliament', thus defeating the point of their own election.⁵

It has been reported that Aung San Suu Kyi was motivated to organize a committee to collect funds for political prisoners. One thousand Kyat, including one towel and necessary medicine, was collected per prisoner. She also organized money collections for poor family members of those who died in prison, amounting to five thousand Kyat per family. Though at first permitted, by August 1995 these funds were reported to have been confiscated.⁶

Her concern for the prisoners was expressed by one of the soldiers guarding her who was interviewed by Victor.

I asked about her mental state during those months when he guarded her.

'The one thing I remember best about her was how she seemed completely calm and at peace with the situation. I never saw her upset or frightened. There was a great dignity about her and the way she responded to everything that happened and, although I can't mention specific incidents for obvious reasons, I can say that her biggest concern was always about her friends who were in prison.'⁷

¹ David Brunnsrom. 'Interview (with Aung San Suu Kyi): Suu Kyi hits out at military gag attempt'. Reuters, 30.11.1998.

² Tin U cited in ASSK (1997b:219).

³ Interview with Aung San Suu Kyi by Steve Weiman. 'Patience pragmatism pays off for "The Lady"'. *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

⁴ 'Letter from Burma.' *Mainichi Daily News*, 11.05.1998.

⁵ Moe Aye. 'Hostages and scapegoats: how long?' *The Nation*, 04.11.1998.

⁶ 'Aung San Suu Kyi's contribution to political prisoners confiscated'. ABSDF *Voice of the Peacock*, News & Views, Vol. 2, No. 4, Aug-Sep 1995.

⁷ Victor (1998:106).

She has repeatedly published on the plight of political prisoners, including her reflection on a poem sent to her by a female prisoner on the conditions of prison for women and the difficulties faced by their relatives. In this way ‘one-third [5 out of 15] of the women members of parliament were deprived of their positions and their liberty’.¹ These women, ‘confined by the walls of prison and bound in uncongenial companionships must have longed for the wings of a dove that they might fly to gentle lands ruled by compassion’.

The unfortunate ones who are kept in prisons far from their home towns – a gratuitous piece of cruelty – can only look forward to a monthly visit at best. Octogenarian mothers have made this bittersweet trip regularly, determined to exchange a loving look and a smile of encouragement with sons grown gaunt after years away from the comforts and the carefully prepared food of home.

Young wives, pretty brows furrowed with anxiety, try to present a brave image of strength and health as they search for words that will not betray the difficulties faced by families torn apart.

Children chatter inconsequentially, unconsciously following the lead of their elders in the attempt to make the abnormal appear as everyday fare. And all the while they are thinking of the years of separation that still stretch ahead.

In ‘Young birds outside cages’ she expresses her concern for the devastating effect imprisonment has on relatives, especially the young people who are left outside when parents are ‘imprisoned for their beliefs’. Detention without trial can last three years disrupting and damaging parent-child relationships before any evidence of guilt has even been entertained. When Aung San Suu Kyi met her youngest son after being separated for two years and seven months ‘he had changed from a round faced not-quite twelve-year-old into a rather stylish ‘cool’ teenager. If I had met him in the street I would not have known him for my little son.’ The children, however, are traumatised even when their parents are released, for they continue to fear their parents being taken away.

When the parents are released from prison it is still not the end of the story. The children suffer from a gnawing anxiety that their fathers or mothers might once again be taken away and placed out of their reach behind barriers of brick and iron. They have known what it is like to be young birds fluttering helplessly outside the cages that shut their parents away from them. They know that there will be no security for their families as long as freedom of thought and freedom of political action are not guaranteed by the law of the land.²

Imprisonment in Burma

In the days of Burmese royalty, those detained for crimes were rarely dealt with lightly. However, long-term prison sentences were never imposed. Indeed, the institution of prison was not even conceptualised. Men would be locked up for an indefinite period, but only awaiting interrogation and court decision.³ Furthermore, there was a long tradition that kings, when they opened up the Throne Room at the beginning of their reign, would release those detained, including those involved in conspiracies along with caged birds, chained bears and confined carnivores. Annually, before the rainy season, captured animals and human beings would be released.⁴ Amnesties were common and frequent.

In many respects, therefore, the long arbitrary sentences handed out to Burmese political party members, and the swelling of the prison population over the last decade with many sentences exceeding a decade, is very un-Burmese. It does not form part of the traditional Burmese value system. It is not a local custom. And it is not within the bounds of the local law however it is interpreted.

The unfortunate fact is that many in Burma have experienced imprisonment, and many have mentally and physically succumbed. There are today many well-researched reports that detail the miserable conditions under which these people come to trial and how they are kept in prison.⁵ After the NLD called for the convention of parliament in August 1988, imprisonment was greatly extended and the regime rounded up virtually all NLD representatives. The regime described it thus: ‘we didn’t arrest any members of Parliament and members of the NLD. We just invited them to discuss the situation of Burma. We are

¹ e.g. ‘The “Fighting Peacock Maidens” of freedom. Letter from Burma by Aung San Suu Kyi.’ *The Nation*, 08.05.1997.

² ASSK (1997:23–25).

³ e.g. ROB 3 Jun 1784, 10 Jul 1784; Than Tun (1983–90,X:88).

⁴ e.g. ROB 21 Aug; Than Tun (1983–90,X:87).

⁵ For substantive reports by reputed international organization see in particular: Amnesty International *Myanmar: conditions in Prisons and Labour Camps* ASA 16/22/95, September 1995; *Myanmar: Intimidation and Imprisonment September – December 1996*. ASA 16/01/97, February 1997; United Nations (Special Rapporteur Judge Rajssoomer Lallah). *Report of Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar A/51/466*, October 1996 (see in particular E. Prison Conditions pp. 72–82). See also *Tortured voices: personal accounts of Burma’s interrogation centers* (ABSDF, forthcoming). See also Mya Maung (1998a:31–37).

taking good care of them, they are just in our guesthouse.¹

I could not possibly begin to convey all the details of prison life, and some paragraphs lifted from reports that sum up prison conditions should suffice to illustrate my point here that prison conditions are more than stressful, and are often life-threatening. The *Amnesty International Report 1997: Myanmar* makes much mention of imprisonment, and below are just two paragraphs that convey the overall conditions:

Reports of ill-treatment of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in both prisons and labour camps continued throughout the year. Prisoners of conscience U Pa Pa Lay and U Lu Zaw, two comedians sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in March for satirizing the slorc, were transferred to a labour camp for several months and forced to work under extremely harsh conditions while shackled. Both men were reported to be in poor health after their transfer to Mandalay prison. Prolonged sleep deprivation was reportedly used during interrogation. In June, prisoner of conscience James Leander Nichols, a Myanmar national of European and Burmese descent, who suffered from a heart condition, died after having reportedly been deprived of sleep for four nights. A close friend of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, he had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment in May under Section 6(1) of the 1933 Burma Wireless Act for operating unregistered telephone and facsimile lines from his home.

Prison conditions for political prisoners were harsh, often amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Prisoners suffered from lack of medical care and an inadequate diet. From January to April, a group of 29 political prisoners, including prisoner of conscience U Win Tin, were reportedly held incommunicado in dog kennels in Insein Prison. In March, 21 of them were sentenced to additional terms of imprisonment for attempting to pass on information about poor prison conditions to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. In August, U Hla Than, an NLD member of parliament-elect who was part of the group, died of tuberculosis associated with aids, which opposition sources claim he may have contracted while in prison. Hypodermic needles are reportedly re-used without sterilization by medical personnel in Myanmar's prisons.

Also, the United Nations Rapporteur reported in 1996 on the overall conditions under which prisoners are held as follows:

73. The reports received suggest that ill-treatment is common. Prisoners are allegedly tortured and subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment such as beatings, various forms of water torture and electric shock treatment. Prisoners breaking the prison rules are said to be subjected to harsh punishments, including beating, being kept in the hot sun for long periods and being forced to crawl over sharp stones. The treatment of the political prisoners in Insein prison is reportedly especially harsh. They are allegedly subjected to torture both before and after sentencing and are liable to be sent to solitary confinement in the so-called 'police dog cells' (a small cell where police dogs are normally kept), without any bed or bedclothes.²

The UN Rapporteur calls for the regime's public and military officials to end their 'culture of impunity' by instituting disciplinary proceedings against the violation of human rights. Prisoners are denied writing materials, leading in some cases to solitary confinement simply for possessing a piece of paper. Convicts are often 'taken from prison to serve as porters, often shortly before their sentences are to expire, and then forced to work under very poor conditions long after they should have been released from prison. In Ywangan labour camp, Hanmyinmo Road, Sagaing Division, it is reported that '400 prisoners ... died within a month.'³

Insein Prison

Of its thirty-six prisons, Insein Prison, Rangoon, is Burma's largest prison housing between 9–10,000 inmates, including 400–500 political prisoners among which about 200 are monks. Despite a recent policy to place political prisoners as far away from their families as possible, so as to inflict maximum punishment and inconvenience, the majority of political prisoners were and still are held in Insein Prison.

In *Cries from Insein*,⁴ Win Naing Oo provides a personal account of his imprisonment and an overview of the conditions in Insein Prison. In May, while organising political activities for the All Burma Students' Democratic Front, he was arrested after which he spent a total of three years in prison, including two years in Insein and one year in Thayet Prison. He sketches for us the structure of Insein Prison, the arrival process, the lack of legal representation, the routine torture on arrival, the punishment, the way hardened criminals are used to inflict damage on political prisoners, the lack of elementary medical care and corruption of prison authorities. Also of particular concern are rape and the spread of HIV, through lack of medical care, with reportedly one injection needle per day for 250 patients.

*Pleading not guilty in Insein*⁵ is the English translation of a report of the trial of twenty-two prisoners by

¹ Moe Aye. 'Hostages and scapegoats: how long?' *The Nation*, 04.11.1998.

² *Situation of human rights in Myanmar*. In Human rights questions: human rights situations and reports of Special Rapporteurs and Representatives. Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 8 October 1996.

³ *Ibid.* See also Amnesty International. *Myanmar – conditions in prisons and labour camps*. September 1995.

⁴ ABSDF, 1996.

⁵ ABSDF, 1997.

the trial judge. Not intended for publication, this report gives an insight into the way political prisoners are dealt with in their repeated trials. Without legal representation, all were uniformly given an additional seven-year prison sentence with hard labour for attempting to pass information about prison conditions to a UN representative in March 1996, and for hiding radio sets and circulating a newsletter in prison. Sentencing does not reflect the crime.

Numerous other reports and comments are available, suggesting that the prison experience is central in the lives of members and sympathisers of the NLD, and central to the regime's political opposition in general. Even ordinary citizens without direct involvement in politics are at risk of various forms of unpredictable punishments, or requisitions of labour or portage 'for the good of the country'.¹

From these reports it is clear that the prison experience, quite apart from depriving a person of freedom, has been designed to inflict maximum physical and psychological damage. It is more than a punishment, for it is used by the State to reaffirm its own narrow and bizarre vision of normality. The prison has now also become a 'work house', an excuse for harnessing free labour for the sake of enrichment of the elite. For example, the Burmese press reports that on 22 July 1997 at a meeting of the Prisons Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Lieutenant General Mya Thin, the Minister for Home Affairs, recommended the use of prison labour to develop the country as '... the persons serving sentences at prisons constitute a considerable labour force. They too are members of the public but their performance gets wasted in the prisons'. He spoke of 'the need to make use of their working abilities in nation-building work. He said the Prisons Department is involved in agriculture and livestock breeding and quarry as well as regional development projects.'²

The fact is that even 'members of the public' have their labour requisitioned. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been working on roads, dams, railway lines and other state-sponsored infrastructure projects under the rubric of 'voluntary labour'. The tragedy was summed up by Christina Fink.

What is really pushing people to the margins of survival is the extensiveness of forced labor. Virtually every railroad, irrigation canal, reservoir, and road are constructed with forced labor. When an infrastructure project is being carried out in a particular area, adults from each household must either go to work or pay a large sum instead. Schools are closed for the duration of the project, because teachers must go out and supervise the work or even do the digging as well. No food, money, or medicine is provided, and for people who are living from day to day, the loss of a day of labor means a significant cut in food supplies.

Mothers must bring their small children with them to the project sites, and in some cases, these children have died of heatstroke because of the lack of shade. With teachers also forced to participate, there is no one to teach the older children. In fact, children are spending fewer and fewer years in school. Most drop out after the third standard, and only 25–30% of the students complete the fifth standard.³

Courage in prison

In spite of the imprisonment conditions, many claim to have been strengthened by the prison experience and to have found dignity in their suffering.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent six years under house arrest⁴ between 1989–95, has often made the comment that 'we are prisoners in our own country'. By this she refers to the serious lack of freedom of the Burmese people as a whole. She first used this in reference to Martyrs' Day on 19 July 1989, when the military declared a curfew and used force to keep people in their houses, making quite clear that it would use its battalions to shoot those who joined the march. In the event, she was forced to cancel the march to her father's Mausoleum in order to prevent bloodshed. At around that time many of the NLD Executive were being arrested. At this point she said, 'let the world know that under this military administration we are prisoners in our own country'.⁵

Ironically, it was the following day, 20 July 1989, that she was herself placed under house arrest. She

¹ Reports on prison conditions and arrests by journalists and observers of human rights in Burma include: Aung Zaw. '1997 HIV scare in Burma's Insein.' *The Nation*, 19.10.1997; Mahn Nyunt Maung. 'Experience of a political prisoner.' *Burma Issues*. January 1994; Thet Hmu. 'Darkness to light' (*Burma Debate*, Sept–Oct 1997); Moe Aye. 'The last days of Mr. Leo Nichols.' *Burma Debate*, Vol. V, No. 1, Winter 1998, pp. 18–20; Ahaluck Bhatiasavi. 'Released prisoners talk of terrible jail.' *Bangkok Post*, 14.11.1997.

² *NLM*, 22.07.1997.

³ 'Notes on a trip to Rangoon.' *BurmaNet News*, 28.06.1995.

⁴ Some have characterised her house arrest as a 'private prison' (Victor 1998:27).

⁵ ASSK (1991:315) citing AI (1989:65).

went on hunger strike, demanding to be transferred to Insein jail to be kept under the same conditions as other prisoners. The regime did not dare imprison her. She ceased her demands only upon being assured that the prisoners would not be subjected to ‘inhuman interrogation’ and that ‘due process of law’ would be exercised.¹

One of her biographers summed up her attitude to house arrest as follows:

Despite the barbed wire around her house and withering garden, Suu Kyi didn't feel imprisoned, at least not in her mind. She hardly noticed the soldiers outside. Because she was unafraid of what SLORC would do to her, she felt free.²

About her period of arrest she says ‘... I always felt free because they have not been able to do anything to what really matters – to my mind, my principle, what I believe in. They were not able to touch that. So I am free.’³ She proclaims inspiration from the Indian nationalist Rabindranath Tagore's poem ‘Walk Alone’ [Z]8]. She says she is not bitter about her own experience but has expressed worry about the general conditions of repression throughout the country. As she says, ‘most of our people who have lived under far worse conditions than I, in Insein jail and other jails, have no ill feelings ... I was under house arrest ... All right, this is not the most beautiful house in the world but it is a lot [more] comfortable than Insein jail or any other jail in the country.’⁴ As for the fears for her own safety, she says ‘the official papers are always talking about “annihilating” our forces (she laughs again)’ but ‘we don't think about that too much’ [Z]7].

Her struggle is to accomplish ‘a sense of security that as long as we're not doing harm to others, as long as we are not infringing the laws ... we should be able to rest secure in the knowledge that we ourselves will not be harmed’ and that ‘the authorities cannot remove you from your job, kick you out of your house, throw you in prison, or have you executed, if you have done nothing to warrant such actions’ [Y23].

In their attempts to gradually arrest all those she relies upon, in August 1997 three members of her family were sentenced to ten years imprisonment, so that in total four members of her family are in prison.⁵

Apart from her house arrest, however, there were also several episodes known as her ‘car arrest’, in which Aung San Suu Kyi was confined in her car because her road was blocked by the military to prevent her from visiting NLD township officers.

The regime explains confinement of Aung San Suu Kyi in terms of its concern for ‘her own safety’. It proclaims that her life is in danger because of her unpopularity caused by her call for boycott of investment and tourism and her support for sanctions.

U Kyi Maung

U Kyi Maung, who spent eleven years in prison,⁶ has said ‘I don't base decision on whether I would be rearrested. I couldn't care less ... However, I always consider myself a free man.’⁷ Imprisoned for the first time at the end of May 1965, he said that ‘on the third day of my incarceration I overcame the feeling of loss in a flash, and quite unexpectedly at that’. He says that ‘ever since, I believe I have been able to manage my life, to live with a degree of success on a path free from excessive anger and frustration’.⁸ He is no longer worried about going to prison, for he says ‘I am as free in prison as I am in my own home’,⁹ and ‘you don't seem to understand that imprisonment is not a concern of mine’.¹⁰ In reply to the question whether he and his colleagues have the stamina to continue going to prison he replies ‘you can ask Abel [Brigadier General David Oliver Abel, minister for National Planning and Economic Development] whether he could stand the stress? How long can he survive under the strain and the peace pressure? [giggling]’ [Z]5].

Tin U

NLD Tin U, who spent ten years in prison,¹¹ says that he ‘never felt the slightest bit bored throughout

¹ Kreager in ASSK (1991:316–17).

² Stewart (1997:101).

³ BBC interview, ABC Nightline, 13.07.1995.

⁴ *The Nation* (Bangkok), 02.08.1995.

⁵ ‘Military govt. sentences Suu Kyi's relatives to 10-years jail. *Times of India* (New Delhi), 19.08.1997.

⁶ Twice imprisoned for a total of seven years between 1962–88, one month in 1988, and four-and-a-half years between September 1990 and March 1995. ASSK (1997a:173–74), ASSK (1997b:76–77). He was again arrested for five days on 23 October 1996 in the wake of a protest by students of the Yangon Institute of Technology on 20 October.

⁷ ASSK (1997a:174).

⁸ ASSK (1997a:185).

⁹ ASSK (1997a:191).

¹⁰ ASSK (1997a:199).

¹¹ Sep 1976–80, July 1989–1995 (ASSK 1997b:206), ASSK (1997a:76–77).

the time I languished in prison.' He adds, 'it comes and goes. And without attachment to it there's no problem. It's just a thought. That's all.'¹ About the prospect of going to prison again, he says 'Why should I be concerned with things that are out of my control? I'm fully prepared to be taken away day or night.' Also, his view is that 'the momentum for democratic change' is there, so that going to prison 'would do nothing to stop it, in fact, if would only serve the cause',² for 'incarceration didn't impede our struggle, it enhanced it.'³

NLD Tin U sums up the general state of the country when he says that 'we are prisoners within a prison', for imprisonment is a double concept that extends beyond the confines of the prison-cell itself. Like Aung San Suu Kyi, he views the experience of imprisonment as encompassing the country as a whole and as inescapable for the Burmese people over this last decade. I will return to Tin U later, for his experiences exemplify the hopes of many Burmese, namely the transformation of a repressive Burmese General into a civilian supporting the democratic cause.

The main point, however, is that the experience of imprisonment may be used to sum up the absence of legal space in Burma for any form of political activity independent from the army. The NLD as the elected party is the largest form of organised opposition, and has become the regime's most important target for repression. As Tin U put it in his recent address to the International Bar Association members, supporters and sympathisers of the NLD are kept under close surveillance 'as though they were habitual offenders' and

Intimidation, harassment, oppression, violation of basic rights and perpetual persecution are daily fare for us. Legitimate, democratic activities are deemed to be against the law. Political prisoners are detained for indefinite periods before charges are brought against them and they are not given the dignity of a proper trial. They are kept in unhygienic, crowded cells. Without adequate water or food and medical care is almost non-existent. Due to lack of required treatment, the spread of HIV in the prisons is alarming. There have already been a number of deaths and all prisoners can be said to be endangered to some degree. Worst of all, political prisoners are at times beaten and tortured cruelly and made to languish in solitary confinement at the whims and fancies of jailers, who usually operate in accordance with the instructions of the military authorities.

'Spiritual strength' from within prison

The senior NLD leadership, in spite of its predicament, sees positive developments in this extended period of political crisis. Indeed, as Aung San Suu Kyi said, 'I think a lot of us within the organization have been given the opportunity to develop spiritual strength because we have been forced to spend long years by ourselves under detention and in prison. In a way, we owe it to those people who put us there' [S5]. She also says:

Political prisoners have known the most sublime moments of perfect communion with their highest ideals during periods when they were incarcerated in isolation, cut off from contact with all that was familiar and dear to them. From where do those resources spring, if not from an innate strength at our core, a spiritual strength that transcends material bounds? My colleagues who spent years in harsh conditions of Burmese prisons, and I myself, have had to draw on such inner resources on many occasions. [Z]6]

She then proceeds to say that 'we may not be able to control the external factors that affect our existence but we can decide how we wish to conduct our inner lives.'

However, she was aware of this very early on, even before her house arrest and before the NLD crackdown. During her tour of the Irrawaddy on 4 April 1989, prior to her own house arrest, she said

... feel always free. Keep it always in your mind. Nobody can detain someone else's mind though they can detain the physical body. Therefore, if you were master of your mind nobody can abuse you. We need to remember this very very much.

... t l r v v v y a e y g v , / ' g u l l p i v k h i x m ; y g / v p i v u l l b , b r s r z r f x m ; e l l b t / u l l u l l u b m z r f x m ; e l l w , / u l l p i v u l l e l l w , b k i f b , b r s t e l f r , e l l b t / ' g u l u r w l r s m ; r s m ; u l l r s v k m ; z l v l w , /⁴

It may well be asked what this 'spiritual strength' and this concept of 'master of your mind' is based on? What is the meaning of prisoners conducting their 'inner lives'?

It is common in prisons all over the world to find substance abuse to help the mind cope with the boredom and suffering in prison. However, Burmese use of mental culture is a home-grown solution to a problem based entirely on techniques to focus and develop the mind.⁵ The 'spiritual strength' these leaders have shown in the face of their confinement has been much misunderstood. It unambiguously refers to a

¹ ASSK (1997a:218).

² ASSK (1997a:208).

³ ASSK (1997a:209).

⁴ Kei Nemoto transcript of Aung San Suu Kyi's video campaign speeches.

⁵ An example of substitution of meditation for substance abuse is found in Mambuca, Annette, ed. *Free at last – daily meditations by and for inmates: the dramatic promise of recovery from substance abuse*. Park Ridge, IL: Parkside Pub., 1994.

change in perception as the result of the Buddhist practice of ‘mental culture’. Aung San Suu Kyi has often described the conditions of her entire country in terms of the discourse of imprisonment (‘Let the world know that we are prisoners in our own country’) and she has characterised the struggle by her colleagues and herself as ‘the second independence struggle’. She has also suggested, however, that the state of imprisonment has naturally led to the adoption of mental culture (‘meditation’) as an instrument for liberation:

Aung San Suu Kyi: ... I suppose one seeks greatness through taming one's passions. And isn't there a saying that ‘it is far more difficult to conquer yourself than to conquer the rest of the world’? So, I think the taming of one's own passions, in the Buddhist way of thinking, is the chief way to greatness, no matter what the circumstances may be. For example, a lot of our people [political prisoners] meditate when they're in prison, partly because they have the time, and partly because it's a very sensible thing to do. That is to say that if you have no contact with the outside world, and you can't do anything for it, then you do what you can with the world inside you in order to bring it under proper control [C23].

Buddha's disciple Ananda said, ‘by virtue of cultivating and developing fourfold mindfulness, I know the thousandfold world’.¹ The main technique of mental culture that helped her cope with her house arrest is *vipassana*. She said that ‘Like many of my Buddhist colleagues, I decided to put my time under detention to good use by practising meditation. It was not an easy process.’ Without a teacher she found her early attempts ‘more than a little frustrating’, and sometimes failed to discipline her mind ‘in accordance with prescribed meditation practices’. She followed, however, her teacher's advice accepting that ‘whether or not one wanted to practise meditation, one should do so for one's own good’ [C10].

Indeed, Aung San Suu Kyi says that ‘I am very grateful to the Slorc that I was allowed this period in which to practise my meditation’ [C5], ‘house-arrest has given me the opportunity to try to overcome my own weaknesses and faults, especially through meditation’ [R13], and ‘I think a lot of us within the organization have been given the opportunity to develop spiritual strength because we have been forced to spend long years by ourselves under detention and in prison. In a way, we owe it to those people who put us there’ [S5]. This strength is an ‘inner strength’, ‘the spiritual steadiness that comes from the belief that what you are doing is right, even if it doesn't bring you immediate concrete benefits. It's the fact that you are doing something that helps to shore up your spiritual powers. It's very powerful’ [S6].

Apart from *vipassana*, an important technique for overall coping with the social dimensions thrown up by house arrest, she points at *samatha*, in particular *byama-so tayà* (*metta* and *karuna*). While under house arrest, she attempted to address ‘the wrongs’ of people with *metta* [E24]. She furthermore suggests that, while fear reigns on the outside of prison, ‘It's only *metta* that is strong enough to keep together people who face such repression and who are in danger of being dragged away to prison at any moment’ [E11], and ‘many people are afraid to visit families of political prisoners in case they too are called in by the authorities and harassed. Now, you could show active compassion [*karuna*] by coming to the families or political prisoners and offering them practical help and by surrounding them with love [*metta*], compassion [*karuna*] and moral support’ [D6]. She sometimes cried for the imprisoned students, and it is this *byama-so tayà* practice that allowed her to feel she provided assistance when ‘she sent them blessings through her meditations’.² As we shall see later, her concept of democracy is also subsumed by these practices.

Furthermore, *vipassana* also greatly helped her colleagues cope in the much more cruel environment of the prison. For example, when U Kyi Maung declared that during his prison sentence he continued ‘to struggle from within’ [C30] while in solitary confinement he means that he coped by practising the *anapana vipassana* technique.

Aung San Suu Kyi's personal advisor, U Win Htein, also managed to get through his prison term by practising mental culture [C8–C9]. He lived in solitary confinement witnessing how his prison inmates ‘were broken’ and ‘suffered severe mental disorders’. Their experiences in prison resulted in suicide attempts, paranoia, and he had to live in absolute silence so as not to provoke these disturbed fellow inmates. Yet Win Htein says, ‘I could withstand solitary confinement due to reason, plus meditation’ and that ‘I always tried to occupy my mind with something sometimes reciting the sutras, sometimes meditating, sometimes keeping my consciousness on whatever I was doing.’ His main fear was that if his mind was not occupied, he would be overcome by ‘angry feelings about the fate I was suffering, the injustice’. In short, he says that he ‘was basically successful in curbing my bad feelings with my meditations’ which he learnt after visiting a Buddhist monastery in 1982. It was his meditation that helped him ‘greatly in dealing with the

¹ S.N., V:299.

² Whitney (1997:100–1).

solitary confinement ...’.

Monywa Tin Shwe, a lawyer at the High Court and founder member of the NLD, died in Insein prison on 8 June 1997. He had been arrested in 1990 and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment under Section 5 of the Emergency Provisions Act. He was found on the morning of 8 June 1997, ‘collapsed in his cell while he was meditating’, and died on the way to the in-jail hospital.¹

When Tin U speaks of his impending arrest on 20 July 1989 on the charge of ‘endangering the security of the state’, he says that he prepared himself through meditation [C11]. Commenting on his psychology while confined in jail, he felt that mental culture provided him with the strength to carry on. He says that he adjusted to prison and joined those who used ‘the isolation and cruel living standards to their favour’ because he ‘had ways to keep my spirit alive’. Although his hut within the prison compound was completely encircled with barbed wire and he spent all his time indoors, ‘the wire was a constant reminder of how precious freedom was’ and it gave him joy to find that, ‘like in the Buddha’s teachings, obstacles can be seen as advantages; the loss of one’s freedom can inspire reflection on the preciousness of freedom.’ He knew from his time as a practising monk the benefits of *sati* – mindfulness meditation because ‘everything you see, hear, taste, think, and smell becomes simply an experience, without anything extra placed upon it. Just phenomena.’ This is how ‘in that way too, the thought of imprisonment, is seen as just a thought. It comes and goes. And without attachment to it there’s no problem. It’s just a thought. That’s all’ [C12].

Emphasising mindfulness (*sati*) as ‘the key to sanity’, Tin U says that if you do everything with mindfulness ‘there is no room in one’s mind for negative thoughts’ and this way he could keep his ‘mind free of unobstructive emotions that might otherwise upset me’ [C13]. The best way in solitary confinement is to ‘overcome any inner hindrance’, which means ‘to train yourself in *sati* – mindfulness or awareness – it’s shining light on one’s darkness’ [R4].

This emphasis on mental culture is repeated among some of the students, such as Zaw Zaw. He had also been imprisoned and tried to meditate and calm down, but had difficulties concentrating.² Victor also cites ‘William’, who spent six years in solitary confinement in Insein prison without trial for supporting students financially, where he says:

I survived because I’m a Buddhist and I meditated – that gave me great solace – and because I believe that human beings are resilient and can survive almost anything. Eventually, I learned to sit for hours without moving a muscle or blinking.³

Finally, as Aung San Suu Kyi points out, it is the mothers, the fathers, the wives, the husbands, and the children who are having to cope with the threat posed to the lives of their loved ones. In good Burmese tradition, for them too, asceticism and meditation are one of very few instruments available to transcend their misery. Thus, Aung San Suu Kyi points out she knows a mother

who made a vow to wear the tree bark brown colour [of the hermitess] of ascetics for the rest of her life if her son was not released by her 60th birthday. That birthday has come and gone and her son remains in prison. She continues to face each another step with pride, her sad face beautifully above the sombre colour of her clothes.⁴

¹ Statement No. 06/97, NLD, 10 June 1997.

² Whitney (1997:72).

³ Victor (1998:92).

⁴ ‘The “Fighting Peacock Maidens” of freedom.’ Letter from Burma by Aung San Suu Kyi. *The Nation* (Bangkok), 08.05.1997.

Chapter 9

Transcending boundaries: samsara, the State, the prison and the self

So far, I have traced the coping mechanisms of imprisonment, both for the prisoner and their relatives, to the Buddhist practices of mental culture. The purpose of mental culture is very much to understand and uproot the ultimate causes of confinement, namely confinement to bodily existence and its implication of suffering. Since the possibilities of developing a political philosophy for the NLD are limited, the ideas surrounding the prison experience itself, I will show in a later section, informs what is becoming a particularly rich political philosophy that is close to addressing the common peoples' suffering. Here I wish to investigate more closely the role of mental culture, in particular *vipassana*, as a historical tradition of coping with imprisonment beyond the particular conditions of the NLD.

'Buddhist' imprisonment

In the Burmese context imprisonment may be regarded as something very different from the way Foucault has used the concept, in particular the way he used it prior to his technology-of-the-self period.¹ Of course, unlike Foucault, my focus here is not on the means whereby the individual and the population of prisoners are isolated into victims in a social and institutional sense. I am not writing a total history of the prison as a Burmese institution. Nor is my focus on the history of discourse on discipline and punish.

I adopt here a minimal definition of imprisonment as an undesirable condition arising from the application of superior institutional powers to confine and isolate persons or groups of persons through instruments of institutional repression. These instruments can take the form of imprisonment, house arrest, car arrest, exile, hostage-taking, bondage through forced labour and portering and forced relocation. The concept of imprisonment flows naturally from the regime's Myanmarification policy of spatialising and territorialising its concept of purity. Today it is being extended to health care, whereby HIV patients are now being placed behind barbed wire in camps.² Indeed, it extends to the wish that Saw Maung expressed that democracy and politics does not spill over into public institutions but remains within the confines of the home.³

My primary interest is, however, does not lie in the technology of confinement, but rather in the technology of liberation from the prisoners' point of view. And in particular, I focus on the imprisonment concept as the Buddhist idea applied to samsaric existence. It is this latter idea which permits transcending the dichotomy between the jailed and the jailers, and offers prisoners dignity in their suffering, for both are subject to the same laws of impermanence. Furthermore, this allows analogies between the political order and the condition of imprisonment to be made.

The most common word for prison in Burmese is *htaung* [ထောင်]. As a verb this means to 'set a trap', 'entrap' or 'catch', in the sense of animals. Alternatively, it means to 'erect' as in the walls of a house or a marriage (literally 'to fall into an erected house' [အိမ်ထောင်ကျ]). It can also mean to build as in a country as in the 'Union' of Myanmar ('erecting a country by gathering together' [ပြည်ထောင်စု]), or a family ('erecting a house by joining together' [အိမ်ထောင်စု]). The meaning of binding is implicit in the older concept of prison as meaning a cage or 'house which binds' [နှောင်အိမ်]. One is not simply imprisoned, but one 'falls into' [ထောင်ကျသည်] or 'is made to fall into the trap (prison)' [ထောင်ချသည်].

When we translate Aung San Suu Kyi's words that 'we are prisoners in our own country' and Tin U's 'we are prisoners within a prison', we find a wordplay on the use of 'prison' or 'trap' (*htaung*) as a component in the concept for 'nation' (*pyei htaung sú* [ပြည်ထောင်စု]). This is an extension of the common

¹ He wrote his work on the prison prior to his interest in technology-of-the-self bloomed in the context of his own suffering as the result of his contracting a terminal illness in the early 1980s. Shortly before his death in 1984 there was evidence at a seminar at Vermont in 1982 that he had changed his views on power from an instrument of confinement and self-confinement (as in the institution of the prison), to a personal instrument of liberation. See Leter H. Martin *et al* (eds). *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1988.

² Bryer (1998:12).

³ Saw Maung (1990b:162–63).

wordplay on the concept of getting married, which literally means ‘setting up a house’ [အိမ်ထောင်ကျသည်], but can also jokingly be used to say ‘falling into the prison of the house’. The meaning then can be elaborated into various alternative puns, so that the NLD and all the people in Burma are characterised as ‘assembling in the country [state] prison’ [ပြည်ထောင်စုစုသည်].

It is based upon this experience that Moe Aye writes that ‘in Burma, if you ask someone which prison they would prefer, the answer is that there are only two prisons, the one with walls and the one without.’¹ Indeed, this concept of ‘country prison’ resonates with the Cambodian expression of ‘prison without walls’ (*kuk et choncheang*), used by Cambodian survivors during the genocidal Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea regime between April 1975 and January 1979.² This gives rise to the commonly made characterisation of Burma as ‘a country of 50 million hostages’.

This concept of imprisonment of the entire community resonates with Burmese interpretations of the entire world-system (*loka*) as a form of prison, having its locus in ‘I’-ness and embodiment. According to Buddhist interpretation, the ultimate form of imprisonment is neither family, prison, nor country, but it is inherent in the concept of ‘I’ [အတိတ် *atta*] which maintains ‘mundane existence’ (*loka*) or the samsaric life-cycle itself. Craving makes one attain new lives (houses) within *samsara*, and by uprooting this one becomes truly homeless:

I, who have been seeking the builder of this house (body) failing to attain Enlightenment which would enable me to find him, have wandered through innumerable births in *samsara*. To be born again is, indeed, *dukkha*!

O housebuilder! You are seen, you shall build no house (for me) again. All your rafters are broken, your roof-tree destroyed. My mind has reached the Unconditioned (i.e. *Nibbana*); the end of craving (*Arhatta Phala*) has been attained.³

If the Myanmarification programme is about confinement – by erecting real (prison walls, national boundaries) and metaphorical walls (culture, law) – then mental culture breaks down these walls that are responsible for people’s ignorance and isolation. The freedom that prisoners in isolation experience through mental culture in isolation means that Insein Prison itself has become an instrument of liberation. The prison, on the one hand, is dubbed ‘Moscow University’ and ‘The University of Life’, drawing attention to the harsh regime of deprivation of freedom within. However, on the other hand, in an inversion of this concept, newly arrived prisoners are known as ‘New York’ [နယူးယောက်], as if they were entering a new phase of liberation. Ultimately, to draw attention to the prison as an instrument for self-liberation, the prison is also known as *Insein taw-yá* or ‘Insein forest (monastery)’, a place dedicated to the practice of mental culture.⁴

The Buddha, and much hope is invested by Buddhists in particular in the future Arimettaya Buddha, ‘sets free *Samsara*’s captives by his holy word’.⁵ Among the omens of Gautama’s birth inaugurated the breaking up into pieces of ‘prisons and fetters keeping men in bondage’, including the ‘elimination of the conceited notion of “I”’.⁶ After seeing the Four Omens – the old, the ill, the dead and the ascetic – he realised that ‘all beings who have not yet discarded craving for sensual pleasures have to remain like prisoners amidst the swords or spears of the five sensual objects aimed straight at them in whichever existence they might find themselves’.⁷

However, Gautama was unable to set free the prisoners tied to the wheel of rebirth merely by preaching – he had to liberate himself first. He needed first to practise the Thirty Perfections (*parami*) throughout his countless lives, and to apply himself to mental culture. The fact that Burmese kings and politicians are proclaimed, and sometimes proclaim themselves, as *bodhisattva* means that much of Burmese politics is

¹ Moe Aye. ‘Hostages and scapegoats: how long?’ *The Nation*, 04.11.1998.

² Hilton, Alexander Laban. ‘Why did you kill?: The Cambodian Genocide and the dark side of face and honor’. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57, no. 1, February 1998, pp. 93.

³ *The Dhammapada* Translated by Daw Mya Tin. Rangoon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana, 1993, pp. v, 54 (verse 153–54).

⁴ For example, the regime makes a cynical reference to its right and power to take action against the NLD as a communist-influenced party, which would result in their imprisonment as an acolyte in ‘Forest Monastery’ prison Insein. ‘Had the government, true to its nature as a military government; taken drastic action according to ordinances and laws there would surely have been a row of *phothudaws* (white-robed acolytes) spending time in white robes at Insein *tawya* (hermitage far away from habitat).’ ‘Very sorry – in the Tawgyi’. *NLM*, 04.06.1996.

⁵ Alaungsitthu (1131) in Pe Maung Tin & Luce (1960:379,382–84); Sarkisyanz (1965:62–63).

⁶ ‘(7) Prisons and fetters keeping men in bondage broke up into pieces. This was the omen presaging his complete elimination of the conceited notion of “I”.’ (Mingun 1990–96,2.1:34)

⁷ Mingun (1990–96, 2,1:140).

necessarily based on this concept of prior self-liberation through mental culture before social and communal liberation can take place.

As a result of Gautama's realisation, he taught the methodology of mental culture. And as the Dhammapada states, 'those who enter the path, and practise meditation, are released from the bondage of Mara'.¹

Mara is often identified with mental defilements and with *loka*. The point I wish to make here is that collective freedom in the Buddhist tradition is thus necessarily preceded by mental culture practised to first liberate oneself. In the Buddhist texts, true freedom is a mental disposition attained only after release from the Five Hindrances (*nivarana*), namely 'sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and sceptical doubt'. Release ensures 'unindebtedness, good health, release from prison, freedom, a place of security.'² Such hindrances 'envelop the mind' and prevent all forms of mental culture.

The Buddhist concept of true freedom is about the encouragement of certain mental dispositions that must be attained by oneself before it can be encouraged with others. So also the techniques which senior NLD leaders advocate are about personal spiritual freedom which must necessarily precede the institutional political concept of freedom. In conjunction with morality (*sila*) and one-pointed mind (*samadhi*), *vipassana* promises liberation from the wheel of *samsara* into the state of bliss that is *nibbana*. In adopting *vipassana* as their instrument of liberation, Burmese political prisoners thus shift the agency and locus of imprisonment. *Vipassana* is the ultimate instrument for liberation, for it liberates from the prison within, in relation to which freedom is attained from all other conditions of imprisonment. Thus it is possible to attain mental freedom from all forms of imprisonment even though physically they may be still imprisoned in the other respects in the sense of prison, household or country.

Vipassana furthermore asserts a very different agency, both taking responsibility for maintaining the conditions of imprisonment and as the subject of imprisonment itself. Foucault argued, in his last phase of scholarship before his death, that he regretted his view of humans as unwilling victims of the power of discourse. It is in fact possible to develop a technology-of-self to assert one's own sense of reality and dignity against that of the State and the prison authorities through the techniques of dreaming, writing reflexive diaries to oneself (meditations), and through meditation. However, here we have a technique yet more radical than this. As a technology leading towards the realisation of non-self (*anatta*) it transcends the dichotomy between the jailed and the jailers, for the ultimate laws of existence are the same for them also. There is no-self (*anatta*) to experience, and so there is also no-jailed (self to isolate and confine) and no-jailer (self who isolates and confines another self). Through self-observation of all mental processes, furthermore, the agency of Bentham's panopticon itself is internalized – mental culture is paradoxically both a technique of liberation and self-control. I will return to this later.

¹ Dhammapada 276.

² § 134. Suppose that a man, taking a loan, invests it in his business affairs. His business affairs succeed. He repays his old debts and there is extra left over for maintaining his wife. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, taking a loan, I invested it in my business affairs. Now my business affairs have succeeded. I have repaid my old debts and there is extra left over for maintaining my wife.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man falls sick – in pain & seriously ill. He does not enjoy his meals, and there is no strength in his body. As time passes, he eventually recovers from that sickness. He enjoys his meals and there is strength in his body. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, I was sick ... Now I am recovered from that sickness. I enjoy my meals and there is strength in my body.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man is bound in prison. As time passes, he eventually is released from that bondage, safe & sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, I was bound in prison. Now I am released from that bondage, safe & sound, with no loss of my property.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man is a slave, subject to others, not subject to himself, unable to go where he likes. As time passes, he eventually is released from that slavery, subject to himself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where he likes. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, I was a slave ... Now I am released from that slavery, subject to myself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where I like.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

Now suppose that a man, carrying money & goods, is traveling by a road through desolate country. As time passes, he eventually emerges from that desolate country, safe & sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him, 'Before, carrying money & goods, I was traveling by a road through desolate country. Now I have emerged from that desolate country, safe & sound, with no loss of my property.' Because of that he would experience joy & happiness.

In the same way, when these five hindrances are not abandoned in himself, the monk regards it as a debt, a sickness, a prison, slavery, a road through desolate country. But when these five hindrances are abandoned in himself, he regards it as unindebtedness, good health, release from prison, freedom, a place of security. *M.* 39

Practise of *vipassana* changes the locus of the battlefield from a conflict between people and institutions organised as political rivals, to a conflict within one's own mind. This totally changes the concepts of 'friend' and 'enemy', as we shall see later, to mean states of mind – the friends are mindfulness (*sati*) and loving-kindness (*metta*), and the enemies are the 'mental defilements' (*kilesa*). The ultimate form of liberation is realisation of 'no-self' through elimination of the mental defilements that cloud a wrong-viewed vision, perpetuating samsaric existence.

The Burmese prisoners restore dignity to themselves by mentally internalizing agency and domain of conflict. This technology of non-self helps the prisoner literally rise above their imprisonment. They need no other instruments, just their own minds and bodies. In reference to this attitude, Guha, a barrister, characterises it: 'I have seen [Burmese] prisoners condemned to death, talking and behaving normally without any worry, nay, assuring grieving mothers not to be unhappy'.¹

Furthermore, the technique is sufficiently portable for prisoners and refugees stripped of their possessions and marks of identity. Unlike space-intensive leisure activities, *vipassana* can be practised anywhere and permits even full practice in the tiniest of confined spaces. *Vipassana* is self-sufficient for unlike *samatha*, which often requires a suitable external object and a suitable place, in this practice only the body and its senses, in the context of daily life, are the universe. As the Buddha put it:

What monks, is the universe?: The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, the mind and mental objects.²

The concept of imprisonment is therefore not just a two-fold concept – a prison (the prison establishment) within a prison (the country) – but rather a three-fold concept, including Buddhist ideas of imprisonment in *samsara* or *loka*.³ It is through self-reliant liberation by means of the practices associated with this third concept, namely through mental culture (through *samatha*, including *byama-so tayà*, and *vipassana*), that the individual prisoner is empowered to find freedom and dignity, in spite of apparent continuity in terms of imprisonment in the first two senses. Aung San Suu Kyi's concept of the 'revolution of the spirit' in the context of Burmese history is therefore a necessary self-reliant attainment that must prelude the attainment of democracy in the collective sense.

Imprisonment and the Hpo Hlaing lineage of practice

In the previous section I have demonstrated there is a 'Buddhist logic' to mental culture in that it permits release from imprisonment within all kinds of domains, and not merely the prison. I have slipped a few hints as to the particular historical relevance of mental culture to imprisonment. However, I have not indicated in any concrete historical detail how such response to imprisonment by means of mental culture was perpetuated in Burma prior to the 1988 situation.

I now wish to demonstrate, by focusing on a number of historical personalities known for their involvement in the *vipassana* movement prior to the SLORC-SPDC conflict, that in their lives also there is use of mental culture in the search for freedom from constrained environments. Techniques of mental culture sharpened as tools for the release from the bonds of *samsara* are conceived of as the ultimate instruments of liberation from all prison-like conditions and, therefore, from those political conditions that give rise to imprisonment – embodiment, household, prison, and country. Furthermore, mental culture is not just about liberating from, but also transformation of these very domains. I am thinking here in particular in terms of the relationship between government reform and *vipassana*. This practice addresses a myriad of positive benefits – it promises national independence, harmony, law and order, good government, good health, and all that requires some kind of transformation of identity for the good.

The history of *vipassana* popularisation goes back to Mindon's reign immediately after the Second Anglo-Burmese War. Its history correlates to the increased experience of repression from the days of British colonialism in 1823 to today. Through political support for the practice of mental culture, its profile as the

¹ Guha (1960b:51).

² S 35, 23, 3 IV p.15 cited in Hans Wolfgang Schuman *Buddhism: an outline of its teachings and schools*. Quest : Quest Books, 1974, p. 48. Also, 'within this very body, mortal as it is and only six feet in length, I do declare to you are the world and the origin of the world, and the ceasing of the world, and likewise the Path that leads to the cession thereof' (Conze 1959:97).

³ It may be argued that the contemporary meditation centres even aim to recreate something alike to prison conditions for its practice for as a yogi entering such a centre one is confined to it for the duration of practice. One cannot leave the centres without special permission. The daily schedule is also highly regimented and visitors are also discouraged. Bodily positions are closely scrutinised, and reading and writing is against the rules.

only 'legal' and officially sanctioned technique of liberation has been enhanced. It was during Mindon's time that state sponsorship of lone reformist forest dwellers, emphasizing mental culture over scriptural learning, caused major sectarian fission within the Sangha,¹ which in turn had a significant impact on reforms in royal government. Below, I would like to trace the involvement of four particular individuals influential in the application of mental culture to imprisonment, two of whom – U Hpo Hlaing and U Ba Khin – were particularly significant in their attempts to reform government. The four are historically linked through the lineage of Buddhist practice – U Hpo Hlaing, the Ledi Sayadaw, U Ba Khin and Goenka.

The central focus is the employment of a connotative language rooted in practice, and not an explicit and rational fully-thought-out ideology. The power of this lies in its opacity which permits it to operate beyond the prying eyes of the authorities. In other words, it is not contaminated by any one particular framework outside the practitioner's control. Thakkin Kodawhmaing's discourse of political transformation was very effective, and every page of his many writings contains several allusions to mental culture. With this language he sought to overcome the British authorities. However, he was never arrested because the British could not penetrate the significance of what he wrote. Thus the internal cultural debate surrounding political dissent makes use of a connotational language, which evokes and resonates with people's religious and cultural value systems without appearing to be political; in other words, it is not denotatively political.

Yaw Atwinwun U Hpo Hlaing (1829–83)

U Hpo Hlaing [ယောအတူင်းဝန်ဦးဘိုးလှိုင်] was the most significant advocate of political and economic reform during the closing period of the monarchy before the British seized Upper Burma, the last remaining area under the Burmese monarchy. His life and works have been described in at least three different booksize biographies published between 1960 and 1997.²

The English had already annexed Lower Burma during the first Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1824. He joined the monkhood in 1845, and in 1852, just after the Second Anglo-Burmese War, he disrobed to join the Mindon rebellion, to which he made a critical contribution because of his bright intelligence. He was appointed Minister of the Interior under Mindon at age 29 and was assigned to carry out collection and preservation of the Tipitaka and the stone inscriptions, which he did until 1868.

Together with Prince Kanaung, King Mindon's brother and Crown Prince, he sought to encourage learning of European knowledge in Burma for which he arranged meetings between youngsters and he sent 90 scholars to countries such as France, Italy and England – Yaw was made responsible for this plan.³ He encouraged foreign learning while yet retaining Burmese ways.⁴

He wrote at least twenty-two works, and biographers characterise his writing as partaking of both the mundane (*loki*) and the supramundane (*lokuttara*). These touch upon politics, Buddhism, science, grammar, medicine, alchemy, and many other topics learned persons pursued in those days. I will below briefly touch both on his political writings and on his writings on *vipassana*.

Political writings

Hpo Hlaing served under King Mindon and King Thibaw. He held many titles and responsibilities, but under Mindon and Thibaw he served for the most part as Minister of the Interior. He was also of great significance in taking charge of foreign policy matters.

As Maung Maung explained in his section 'the choice of democracy' in Burma's 1948 democratic constitution, it was U Hpo Hlaing who first introduced Burma to democracy. Hpo Hlaing had 'tried to press upon him [Thibaw] a democratic constitution'.

¹ Mendelson (1975:49).

² Though there have been several articles and chapters in books on Hpo Hlaing, going back to as early as 1937, the following are to my knowledge the principal booksize biographies on his life. Number 1 is the earliest book-size biography I know, first published in 1960 and reprinted in 1962. Number 2 was first published jointly with *Companion of Dhamma for Royalty (Raja-Dhamma-Singaha-Kyan)* in 1979 and reprinted in 1983. Number 3 was first published in 1997.

(1) ။အယ်ဒီတာ ဦးတင်အုန်း (ရွှေသွေး)၊ ပညတ်ခွန်လူရည်ချွန်သော မြန်မာပညာရှိရွှေပြည်ဝန်ကြီး သတိုးမင်းကြီး မင်းလှမင်းခေါင် သီဟသူဘွဲ့ရ ယောအတူင်းဝန် ဦးဘိုးလှိုင်အတ္ထုပ္ပတ္တိ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ယုဝ၊ ၁၉၆၀ (၁၉၆၂)၊ မျက်နှာ ၂၅၉။

(2) ။မောင်ထင်၊ ယောမင်းကြီးဦးဘိုးလှိုင် <အတ္ထုပ္ပတ္တိ > ရာဇဓမ္မသင်္ဂဟကျမ်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စပယ်ဦးစာပေ၊ ၁၉၇၉ (၁၉၈၃)၊ မျက်နှာ ၄၇၆။

(3) ။ရွှေဘိုမိမိကြီး၊ မဟာလူရည်ခန့် ရွှေပြည်ဝန်ကြီး ဦးဘိုးလှိုင်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စာပေဗိမာန်၊ ၁၉၉၅၊ မျက်နှာ ၁၃၉။

I am grateful for having had the privilege to attend to Professor Tin Soe's interesting seminar entitled 'Political economic ideas of U Po Hlaing' at the Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 25.12.1997.

³ Htin Hpat (1979:365).

⁴ Htin Hpat (1979 :363).

arising from disharmony-disunity and dispute
 Having recognised that free from danger happiness prevails
 harmony-unity must be developed through assembly without dispute
 As successive Buddhas have taught
 ‘May harmony-unity prevail amongst all of you’¹

As I already pointed out, it was Maung Maung who was not only the author of Ne Win's own sanctioned biography and legal architect of the BSPP period, but who also appreciatively pointed out in his book on the constitution that Burmese democracy began with U Hpo Hlaing. In conclusion, then, a uniquely Burmese concept of democracy may be traced back to Hpo Hlaing, for whom *vipassana* was a practice at times of political crisis, to whom has been attributed the idea that unity proceeds from harmony among the monks observing their Vinaya and frequently assembly, and for whom advocacy of political reform towards ‘traditional democracy’ coincided with *vipassana* practice. Thahkin Kodawhmaing, Aung San and U Nu had appreciated these ideas. Under the military regimes since 1962, however, and in particular since 1988, in spite of Maung Maung's high estimation of the man, Hpo Hlaing's ideas have been impoverished to mean unity *without* regular assembly and without enlightenment and internationalisation.

The Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923)

U Hpo Hlaing was a significant influence on many revolutionaries. He also significantly influenced the famous *vipassana* teacher, Ledi Sayadaw, who, while engaged in his studies at the Sankyaung monastery after 1869, used to visit Hpo Hlaing's house. The Ledi Sayadaw imbibed Hpo Hlaing's scholarship and clarity of expression in vernacular Burmese. At that time Hpo Hlaing had a reputation for his independent and insubordinate (lit. ‘revolutionary’ – see chapter 11) stance against the king [kMaṅZṀṅ; and Ledi Hsayadaw also took up writing in a way which was insubordinate [kMaṅZṀṅ to established custom [ṂWadṀṅ: ၀ kṀṀṀ Xi B k ^ a > ṀWad: ṅZ FdkMaṅZṀṅ kS \ FṀṀ]. In contemporary parlance we would say that the Ledi Sayadaw was a ‘leftist’ [Z: ṀṀBṀṀ FṀṀ. From this we can conclude that the Ledi at that time held views which belonged to ‘a revolutionary person outside of his time’ [ဦးညာဏ၏ ထိုစဉ်က ယူဆချက်တို့မှာ ခေတ်ပြင်တော်လှန်ရေးပုဂ္ဂိုလ်တို့၏ ယူဆချက်များဖြစ်နေပေမည်။]²

The Ledi Sayadaw was worried about the British designs on Upper Burma. His biography describes how, immediately prior to British capture of Burma, this monk faced the dangers of the foreigner's impending destruction of Buddhism. When the Ledi Sayadaw learnt that Burma was likely to be governed by foreigners, he said:

‘If foreigners are to rule Burma, it will cause many terrestrial animals to be killed and destroyed. The reason is that western foreigners are the type of people who have appetite for enormous quantities of meat. If they arrive, they will set up killing factories of cows, of pigs, of goats, where so many such creatures will meet their death.’ After musing thus, he spoke the following to the monks: ‘... When they rule, many creatures are likely to die. Among these creatures, it is the cow that is the saviour of man's life. This animal is both our mother as well as our father, and mankind is much in debt with them. Therefore, from this day onwards, I shall not eat cow's meat, and please I implore you not to eat it either. From the day he had spoken like this, he eliminated cow meat from his diet.’³

A common perception of the capture of King Thibaw with his queens was that our kings ‘were captured and taken away like chicklets, like small birds’ [ကြက်ငှက်ပမာလက်ဖမ်းဆီးခေါ်ဆောင်သွားကြပြီးနောက်].⁴ It should be remembered that to him removing the great sponsor of the *sasana* from political power meant the immanent destruction and imprisonment of Burma. When the British took Upper Burma, the Ledi Hsayadaw prepared himself for the ‘destruction of the era’ (*kalá pyet thi*); on 15 February 1887 he ‘retreated into the frightening Ledi Forest of which many alleged that there were malignant ghosts, that it was rough and a spooky forest’. He found a big tree, and resolved, ‘that tree is an excellent place, and he meditated under it’. Through the Ledi Sayadaw's presence, the forest became a friendly forest.⁵

The Ledi Sayadaw came out of the forest experienced in mental culture and strengthened with a mission. After his sponsors established him in a monastery, pupils soon flocked to him for his teachings. It was ‘from round about 1896 after his studies’ that ‘he toured the various parts of Burma and spent many rainy seasons in various places ... to preach and treat people to that medicine which is the cool water of

¹ Maung Maung (1969b), inner front cover.

² Hla Baing (1967:63–66).

³ Wunnitá (1967:28).

⁴ Ludú Daw Ama (1976:46), see also Lwin (1971:31). In contemporary NLD discourse, what Ledi felt was that ‘we are prisoners in our own country’.

⁵ Wunnitá (1967:29).

insight (*vipassana*) which dispels darkness (*a-maik [hlwín] hsei*)'.¹ Between 1905–22 he preached right across the whole of Burma and during his life he wrote 105 books and pamphlets, most in the Burmese vernacular.

If Ledi's practice was intended initially, to liberate his own mind in response to foreign conquest and control over the country, so the technique he taught proved to be useful also in questioning the boundaries set by the colonial and military masters.

First, the imprisonment experience is relevant to the Ledi's teachings, for during the first decade of the 20th century some preachers imitated him and began to 'visit the convicts in prison and try to awaken in them a sense of shame for their past criminal acts ...'.²

Second, the Ledi Sayadaw's teachings greatly inspired nationalists preoccupied with the liberation of the country. When the Ledi Sayadaw founded the International Missionary Organization in 1913, the nationalist Thahkin Kodawhmaing saw this as a great advance in the Burmese liberation cause.³ For example, he compared the Ledi Sayadaw to Maheindra, and wrote of the prospect that this Missionary Society would visit England:⁴

let the world be enlightened with the light of Buddhism – I believe this is the time to form the [Foreign Missionary] Society.
And the glorious Ledi, King of Maha-Thera is like the great Buddhist missionary arhat Mahindra
It's true, I swear it,
This is the only time we have heard such news.
In Burma, this wonderful news filled all of us with delight and joy
The captain of the Barge of *dhamma* which must be the most unusual event of all time,
With the light of the Buddha's Sasana
Now it is time to cross
To the pleasant Isle of England⁵

More strongly even, he wrote of the Ledi:

Though the Champion of the Sasana [King Thibaw] was in exile,
From outstanding Upper Burma,
the Land of Golden Palace and Ratana Canal
In the cause of the recognition of Burmese name and character
The donation for the foreign mission was great,
Now I am not disheartened
although Mandalay has already collapsed ...⁶

Thahkin Kodawhmaing, the grandfather of Burmese politics, not only encouraged the Ledi Sayadaw and viewed his teaching as re-establishing freedom from the British, but also emphasized himself national liberation through mental culture. I have already noted how Thahkin Kodawhmaing was himself deeply involved in politics, in which mental culture played a significant role. He wrote meditation verses [ကမ္မ ဘန်း] on some of the heroes and Burmese icons of the past.⁷

Third, the Ledi was responsible for instructing a number of famous *vipassana* teachers, who themselves went on to set up numerous centres, including Kyaungban (1860–1927), Mohnyin (1873–1964), Theikchadaung Sayadaw (1871–1937), Myat Thein Htun (1896–), and Saya Thet Gyi (1873–1946) – all of these had their own pupils who went on to teach *vipassana* all over the country.

Accountant-General U Ba Khin

Saya Thet Gyi, the pupil of the Ledi Sayadaw, taught U Ba Khin. U Ba Khin, in turn, taught NLD Vice Chair U Kyi Maung (and also Aung Gyi, who resigned from the NLD early on), who used *vipassana* so effectively while in prison. U Ba Khin also taught U Nu, who was responsible for introducing *vipassana* into the prisons of Burma. And he taught Goenka, who was responsible for the large-scale introduction of *vipassana* in prisons in India.

U Ba Khin began practice of *samatha* (concentration meditation) on 1 January 1937, and *vipassana* contemplation the following week. This was the year in which Burma was to be separated from India.

¹ Ledi (n.d. b:á).

² Purser (1911:222–23).

³ Myín Hswei (1977:93,145,183–4,299), Tin Htway (1969:55–56).

⁴ For the Burmese of the following translation of Thahkin Kodawhmaing's *Kabya yádana leigyo lat* see Hlá Baing (1967:178–80). See also Kodawhmaing's *Bo tika* (1913:ngá-zá, 139–47)

⁵ Kodawhmaing cited in Tin Htway (1969:55–56).

⁶ Tin Htway (1969:56).

⁷ For example on Thibaw (အရှင်သီပေါမင်းကြီး နတ်ထီးဘုံပျံစံလွန်တော်မူခန်းကမ္မ ဘန်းလေးချိန်ကြီး၊ ဒဂုန်မဂ္ဂဇင်း၊ တွဲ ငှ၊ မှတ်ငှာ၊ January 1924, p. 117) and on U Wisara (အသျှင်ဝိစာရကမ္မ ဘန်းဂါထာ၊ ရွှေတူဂျာနယ်၊ မှတ် ၁၃၊ (၃၀ ရက်၊ စက်တင်ဘာ၊ ၁၉၆၉) စာ ၁၅။)။

Vipassana played a role in his attempt to transform the accountancy office from an ‘Indian office’ populated almost entirely by Indians into a Burman office.

During the war, Ba Khin's responsibilities in government increased as the British and Indians were leaving the accountancy department.¹ It was during this period that he taught various government ministers *vipassana*, including Myanmá Alin Û Tin, Prime Minister U Nu and Minister of Education U Hlá Mìn. They all could only reach the level of breathing as the object of meditation (*anapaná kamahtàn*). Ba Khin arranged for these ministers to practise with his teacher Hsaya Thet Gyi, but government responsibilities prevented them from travelling. It thus fell upon Ba Khin to assist them with their difficulties. Saya Thet Gyi impressed upon the ministers that Ba Khin was like a doctor taking care of the sick. They should listen to the teaching (*tayà*) given by Ba Khin, and his morality, concentration and wisdom should be accepted. The British returned after the war, and Ba Khin was promoted on 16 May 1945 to the rank of Deputy Accountant General. After independence he was further promoted to Accountant General.

In 1951, while Burma's pride was heightened in their Buddhism after national independence with the celebration of the Sangayana, the institutionalization of his methods truly began. On 18 July 1951, Ba Khin set up the Accountant-General Vipassana Research Association. The more substantive Accountant-General Vipassana Association was launched on 24 April 1952, and teaching began at the centre in a temporary hut early May. On 8 May, construction of the Damáyaungchi Pagoda began which was completed on 9 November 1952, when its umbrella was hoisted. The International Meditation Centre came into being.²

What matters to us, is that Ba Khin responded to national political events with *vipassana*. Ba Khin's response to separation from India and to oppression by foreigners was by means of *vipassana*. Furthermore, the World War II experience motivated him to teach future ministers of cabinet, including U Nu. *Vipassana* became institutionalised as part of the glorious feeling that national independence gave. Furthermore, he advocated the elimination of corruption from government departments through the practice of *vipassana*.

Prime Minister U Nu

Inspired by his practice of *vipassana* during World-War II initially under U Ba Khin and later the Mahasi Sayadaw, U Nu incorporated mental culture into his programme for national independence from the British. In a sense, he would appear to have answered Hpo Hlaing's call to involve *vipassana* in a reformed government. Through teachers perpetuating the techniques taught within the U Nu initiated Mahasi empire, NLD Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi came to practice *vipassana*.

First, I have already drawn attention to how U Nu went on a nine-day pilgrimage retreat straight after signing the Nu-Attlee national independence agreement. He went to the pagodas around Keilatha Hill from 28 October 1947 where he practised asceticism and is reputed to have encountered numerous yogi and ascetics.³ It is no surprise that the new Prime Minister of a newly independent country should look towards new beginnings, and the significance of this region is that the Buddhism King Anawratha instituted in Pagan originated here in Mon country. Here, many saintly and enlightened yogi had, to paraphrase a complex verse, ‘put fright in the supernatural forces by the achievements of their *jhana*’.⁴ In this text, a conjunction is made between the original efforts of Buddhist missionaries and Nu's objective in government. Nu's visit, subsequent to the national independence negotiations he had just concluded, is juxtaposed with the story of Sona's and Uttara's enlightenment in this region during the reign of Thiridhamma-thawka. Through their missionary efforts, Buddhism spread across the country.

Second, a week after his return from pilgrimage, Nu founded the Buddha Thathana Nuggaha Association (BTNA) at a meeting in his house on 13 November 1947, together with eight other persons: two other cabinet ministers, two high-ranking functionaries,⁵ and four rich traders and industrialists.⁶ This

¹ During the period of Japanese occupation (1942–45) Ba Khin was Director of the Accountants and Auditors Department (Ko Lei 1980:592).

² Apyi-byi hsaing-ya Padípattí lokngàn Htaná (Ko Lei 1980:100).

³ *Sangayana Monthly Bulletin*, 1, no 6 (Oct 1953:10); *BTNA* (1958:10–15); Mendelson (1975:265–66).

⁴ *BTNA* (1958:11)

⁵ Other ministers: Minister of National Planning, Commerce and Industry; Minister for Finance and Revenue. Other functionaries: Accountant General of Burma, Commissioner of Income Tax.

⁶ Mendelson (1975:297) says about the founders that they were ‘men whom one could describe as British-educated, right-wing gentlemen of the old school, members of important families which had assumed or received office under the British regime and had been to a large extent dispossessed of office by the younger Thakins who led the 1936 university strike’.

initiated important Buddhist projects and structures later taken over by national government organizations.

The most enduring project to emerge from BTNA was the support of *vipassana*. It set up what is still the most powerful Burmese *vipassana* centre, nationally and internationally – that ‘mansion of science’ (*theikpan beikman*), the Thathaná Yeiktha (TY) in Rangoon, or, as it is also referred to after its former head teacher, the Mahasi Yeiktha, and it became the headquarters of the BTNA.

The Mahasi Sayadaw was a forest monk who had already been carefully investigated in August 1947, two months before U Nu signed the Nu-Attlee agreement. He was investigated by Sir U Thwin, later to become President of the BTNA. The Mahasi Sayadaw began to teach *vipassana* in 1938 in Hseithkun village, and later in Moulmein. However, U Nu did not invite the Mahasi to teach *vipassana* until after another forest *vipassana* monk had been investigated, namely the Sunlun Sayadaw. The Mahasi was appointed in November 1949, almost a year after independence. Nu favoured the Mahasi since he was renowned not only for his fine scholarly learning and his mental culture, but in particular for his ordination, regional affiliation and practice lineage within the pure forest tradition of the Thilon Sayadaw so favoured by King Mindon and his successor King Thibaw.

He describes how he established the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha in Rangoon for observance of morality, concentration and insight, and how he himself regularly visited it.

Soon its instructors were able to report that the results were astonishing. With the attainment of *Thawtapatti Megga*, the primary plane of spiritual experience, the minds of the devotees seemed to undergo a change. U Nu, wishing to experiment, sent a friend to the centre. This was a notorious person of whom the people went in dread, because he drank, lied, stole, fornicated, and would not have stopped at murder. On completion of the retreat at the centre, he emerged a reformed character. He himself was so impressed by the religious experience that he brought his wife to share in the experience.¹

Elsewhere, Nu describes how he went with his rebellious daughter to the insight centre, who ‘came out loving and obedient to her parents’. She no longer begrudged her father for giving her a beating and ‘was no longer capable of being rude to her mother’.²

And, ‘with this evidence before him, the prime minister felt encouraged to erect meditation centres throughout the country’. Though advised by colleagues and friends not to get too involved in religious matters, he saw government as concerned with helping Burmese citizens in the attainment of *nibbana*.

U Nu's contention was that the people had voted the government into office so that it might bring them benefits. Religion was a beneficial institution and those who would gainsay it were wrong. If the government could provide for a life of one hundred years on earth, why should it feel deterred from providing for countless existences afterwards? He would not deviate even slightly from his path.³

Expansion in the number of Mahasi insight centres under U Nu's patronage was rapid. Before such patronage, the Mahasi opened only one centre every three years in different parts of the country. Once invited to teach under the umbrella of the BTNA in 1947. However, growth accelerated, culminating in a total of 293 centres by 1981 in Burma alone; additional centres were opened abroad in Thailand,⁴ India, Sri Lanka, Britain, the United States, Japan, France and other countries. Between 1947–95 the Mahasi *stipatthana vipassana* method is proclaimed to have been taught to 1,174,255 yogis in over 358 centres spread across thirteen states of Burma. This includes the ethnic minority regions – including eight centres in the Kachin State, five in the Karen State and one in the Kaya State.⁵

The majority of Burmese Buddhist monasteries established abroad draw their monks from the Mahasi tradition and at the same time offer *vipassana* lessons to foreigners. Some of the centres in Burma take in substantial numbers of foreigners to practise *vipassana*. In 1995, the Thathana Yeiktha alone counted 152 foreign yogi from twenty-seven different countries.

Around 1954, Nu sought to co-opt some of the many other independent teachers of insight through a government subsidy programme. Though by 1957 there were 207 ‘Government Aided Centres’, the attempt to impose total control over these other centres proved difficult.⁶ The implication is therefore that not all

¹ Nu (1975:198–99).

² Nu (1975:299).

³ U Nu (1975:199). U Nu writes of himself as ‘U Nu’ in this auto-biography in time-honoured Burmese fashion. ‘I’ (*kyun-daw*, [the holy king's slave]) is rarely used in Burmese writing for oneself.

⁴ Mahasi TY (1974:18) has it that the Thai Sangharaja supported the introduction of *vipassana* in Thailand and that no less than 300 Thai centres were teaching the Mahasi methodology.

⁵ This involves counting, I think, entries of yogis into the centre for purposes of meditation. Since one person may enter more than once, it does not quite mean the total number of individuals who meditated.

⁶ Nu (1957:113).

methods of liberation could be brought under the roof of one government, and under today's standoff between the regime and the NLD we see divisions in patronage across different traditions of *vipassana* practice.

The attempt to institutionalize *vipassana* was accompanied by an attempt to bring *vipassana* as a reformist influence into government institutions. Jail conditions are so suited to *vipassana* practice that in 1957 U Nu introduced insight programmes into Burma's prisons. 'Prisoners from 22 jails have expressed their desire to practise *vipassana-bhavana* on their holidays' and classes were opened in 13 jails in October 1957.¹ The practice of *vipassana* also became a precondition for promotion in government office.² He ordered government departments to dismiss civil servants half an hour early if they wished to meditate, and he commuted the sentences of prisoners who studied Buddhism.³

These developments prompted characterisation of the U Nu government as seemingly 'convinced of the practical utility of meditation, since it supports meditation centres, grants leave for meditation purposes in some cases, and utilises the services of notable meditators for teaching its personnel.' His critics point out that the danger seems to be 'that the modern enthusiast may think to find in the meditation centre the answer to all his nation's problems, and dangerously undervalue the other factors in social progress.'⁴ This did not deter U Nu from leaving the country after the 1962 coup, first to fight the Ne Win regime from the Thai border, and later spending seven years in Buddhist contemplation in India before returning to Burma under an amnesty in 1980.⁵

The Mahasi tradition was of significance, as we have seen, in the way Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi coped with their political confinement. *Vipassana* is not partial to any one culture because it is 'a-cultural', and it therefore reaches out beyond all boundaries. With the British Empire crumbled, it culminated in the end of a permanent British navy presence in South East Asia. In a melancholic mood Rear Admiral Shattock, the last retiring Rear Admiral of the South East Asian fleet, returned home via Burma specifically to practise at the Mahasi centre. He ended up writing several books on meditation in his retirement.⁶ There is irony here, for King Mindon had taken to finding solace with forest monks, including the Thilon Sayadaw under the aggression of British colonials. To him the Mahasi traces back his lineage of practice. In other words, the laws of impermanence suggest that all political domains also initiate their eventual dissolution. All that remains for all actors in this mundane play – whether Burmese or British, whether military or civilian – is to come to terms with the laws of impermanence through the practice of *vipassana*.

Furthermore, the theme of imprisonment is also evoked in *Prisoners of karma*, a story by Sinhalese Suvimalee Karunaratna, who practised *vipassana* under the Mahasi Sayadaw.⁷ This story focuses on the encounter between an elephant, a peacock and a tortoise engaged in the discussion of the nature of *karma*. All three reflect on mental culture as a way to free themselves from the self-made prison of past deeds, not least the turtle, confined as he is to his shell.

The Mahasi and his pupils have written an enormous library of books – in the many hundreds of books – and there is really no point listing these here. There are also numerous biographies of the Mahasi Sayadaw. I have analysed some of this material in my thesis. Suffice to say here that this tradition is highly influential in Burma.

Phra Phimontham (1901–?)

Phra Phimontham (sometimes also referred to as Phimolatham) was the Thai Minister of the Interior in the Sangha. He practised *vipassana* under the Mahasi Sayadaw. A member of the Mahanikay monastic sect

¹ NBT (1958:9).

² Brohm (1957:350–51).

³ Butwell (1969:65).

⁴ King (1964:218).

⁵ Smith (1991:291). U Nu published a great deal on *vipassana* practice while in India during the years 1978 and 1979.

⁶ Shattock, EH (Rear-Admiral). *An experiment in mindfulness*. London: Rider & Co., 1958; *Meditation: seven steps towards understanding*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1988.

⁷ Bodhi Leaves No. 125. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991. Suvimalee Karunaratna was born in Sri Lanka in 1939 and received her early education in Washington, D.C. and in Colombo. While living in Rangoon, where her father was posted as the Sri Lankan ambassador to Burma from 1957–61, she received meditation instructions from the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw and the Ven. Webu Sayadaw. Her first volume of short stories was published in 1973, and several of her short stories have appeared in anthologies of modern writing from Sri Lanka as well as in literary journals. She is the author of *The walking meditation* (Bodhi Leaves No. 113) and *Prisoners of karma* (Bodhi Leaves No. 125).

and abbot of the Bangkok Mahathat Monastery, which historically lost out for the king's favours to the Thammayut monastic sect, he incurred the wrath of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat for his independent views on Sangha reforms. In 1960, he was stripped of his titles on trumped up charges of sexual misbehaviour. In 1962, he was arrested on charges of supporting communism and as posing a threat to national security, disrobed and jailed.¹

The underlying reason for this treatment was that he refused to be co-opted by the secular political authorities. Under pressure from reformist monks, the Thai government released him from prison in 1966, three years after Sarit's death, and cleared him of all charges. He became a rallying point for reformist monks who continued to exert pressure on the establishment. In 1975, this ensued in the reinstatement of his titles and finally in 1981, he was reappointed to his former position as abbot at Wat Mahathat. In 1985, he was reluctantly awarded one of the coveted six Somdet titles.

His decline and subsequent rehabilitation reflects national political developments. These developments were marked by the 1941 and the 1963 Sangha Acts, leading to democratisation, and the converse, hierarchization of the Sangha respectively. Thai politics had taken a dictatorial turn after a brief period of democratic reform in the 1940s and 1950s, largely initiated by the military in opposition to royalty, which came to power under Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn in the 1960s and early 1970s, which had come to arrangements with the monarchy and with the Thai middle class. However, rapid economic growth in the 1970s contributed to the diversification of the middle class, which had by then outgrown the old patronage relationships. These became increasingly influential in their own right, resulting in an increased pressure for the diversification of power.

In the open climate, as the result of the 1941 Sangha Act, Phimontham rapidly ascended in rank and in 1947 was appointed abbot of the influential Wat Mahathat – he was even regarded a contender for the highest position, namely of Sangharaja. However, he earned the label of being a communist supporter when he refused, on doctrinal grounds, to implement a directive to forbid ordination of Communists issued by the regime that came to power in the 1947 coup. He was a critic of the new regime's appointments in the Sangha hierarchy. This contributed to the final denouement unfolding of events, as the appointees schemed with the regime to have him disrobed.

Phimontham developed his interest in *vipassana* around 1955 as the result of connections with the Mahasi, and from around this time Wat Mahathat became the centre of the dissemination of *vipassana*. A programme was conceived that involved the setting up of many urban and village meditation centres country-wide for nuns and pious laymen 'to find relief from worldly cares and burdens' instead of forest hermitages, populated by monks. It was in particular this lay participation that Tambiah isolates as the major threat the Sarit regime perceived in Phimontham.

We can now surmise why this popular program and the influence wielded by the monk sponsoring it might have been construed as a political threat by Sarit and his military colleagues. It is clear that the program served as a basis for marshaling the support and loyalty of several monks and laymen. Most importantly, that *political* power was grounded theoretically in a monk's *spiritual* excellence and *religious* achievement. This source and basis of power were inaccessible to lay politicians and soldiers whose power rested on the control of physical force. Insofar as there exist mechanisms within the sangha for generating a collective support in society that can be claimed to be independent of and immune to naked political power, the political authority will seek to curb them. This is indeed why Sarit would and did try to taint Pimolatham's activities as 'politically subversive'; and this is indeed why a seemingly religious project for the revitalization of religion could be branded as a 'political' attempt to amass power dangerous to the regime.²

This, what would appear to be the original Mahasi-Nu Burmese model of the BTNA plan to distribute *vipassana* centres across the country, was later also emulated by the rival Sangha sect Thammayut oriented around the royal sponsored Wat Bovonniwet, a competitor to the Pimontham's Wat Mahathat. Tambiah records this tension in the words of an anonymous commentator, Mr X:

Seeing the success of Phra Pimolatham's [the abbot of Wat Mahathat] program of popularising *Vipassana* meditation throughout the country Wat Bovonniwet engaged in the counter-campaign of popularising and celebrating the achievements of the provincial forest meditation teachers like Acharn Mun, Acharn Fun, Luang Pu Waen, and Acharn Maha Boowa, who are all of the Thammayut sect's sponsorship of these so-called provincial 'saints'.³

Phimontham was thus imprisoned *after* his practice of *vipassana*. Like the Burmese Interior Minister Hpo Hlaing, he was 'at the centre of efforts to democratically reform the administration of the Thai Sangha in the

¹ See in particular Jackson (1989:94–112). See also Tambiah (1976:258–61).

² Tambiah (1976:258–60).

³ Tambiah (1984:154–55).

twentieth century'.¹ He also wanted to set up *vipassana* centres all over Thailand, but accused of being a Communist and for disrupting the cosy Sangha hierarchy sponsored by the State, he was disrobed and discredited. This bears out the characterisation of both Hpo Hlaing and the Ledi Sayadaw as revolutionaries. The revolutionary nature of *vipassana* is that it questions inherited tradition and only pays attention to the moment. This means that *vipassana* is not just tailor-made to the culture of imprisonment, for in a prison one is intentionally cut off from one's habits, customs and traditions. *Vipassana* is also a technique adopted in protest and transformation, which ironically leads to imprisonment and repression *because* of the liberal ideals it fosters in intolerant political environments.

Goenka

As already indicated, *vipassana* is an 'a-political' technique because of its 'a-cultural' approach. As such it had no problems proliferating abroad. The technique came to be used in the broadest sense of coping with imprisonment spread beyond Burma. This was so, in particular through the influence of S.R. Goenka.

Goenka was one of U Ba Khin's Indian pupils while engaged in transforming the 'Indian office' into a Burmese one. In 1969, Goenka took it upon himself to missionise the Ledi *anapana* method in India, the homeland of Buddhism. Of particular interest to us is his introduction of this method into the Indian prisons of Rajasthan.

The first course of Vipassana in an Indian prison was conducted by Mr. S.N. Goenka at the Jaipur Central Jail in October, 1975, as was arranged by Mr. Ram Singh, who was at that time the Home Secretary of the State of Rajasthan (similar to a Governor of a state in America). The following are comments of Mr. Ram Singh about that first course.

Another big problem came when the course was just about to start. At that time leg irons and handcuffs were used for hardened criminals. Four such prisoners were brought into the meditation hall locked in these fetters. Mr. Goenka was walking nearby and when he saw this, he was amazed. He asked me what was going on, and I told him that these were very hardened criminals. He exclaimed: 'How can people in chains be put before me to meditate? This cannot happen. Remove the chains!'

But the Inspector General of Prisons (IG) said that this could not be allowed; the security in the jail was his responsibility; he could not remove the leg irons or the handcuffs. However, Mr Goenka was firm. He said he could not teach Dhamma with people sitting before him in chains. He was giving Dhamma; he had come to remove the chains. The IG told him he could remove the chains from within, but not the outside chains! Mr. Goenka insisted that those who were meditating must not be in chains. This was a big dilemma, a big problem!

The IG was a very experienced officer. He asked me not to force him to relax security requirements for those prisoners. He said any one of them might try to be a hero, and strangle Mr. Goenka or me to death in the snap of a finger. We discussed the problem and finally came to an agreement to remove the chains and fetters. An armed guard would be posted at a strategic point to shoot any prisoner who started to advance much turmoil changed and their faces beamed. Tears streamed down their cheeks. Tears also rolled down my face; it was a rare moment filled with joy after such high tension.

The introduction of this particular tradition to Tihar Central Prison (New Delhi) in December 1993 has been documented by Tarsem Kumar in his *Freedom from behind bars*.² Indeed, a film has been made about how Kiran Bedi introduced *vipassana* in Tihar jail entitled *Doing time, doing vipassana*.³ When it won the Golden Spire Award in San Francisco the judges found that they were 'moved by this insightful and poignant exposition of Vipassana. The teaching of this meditation as a transformation device has many implications for people everywhere, providing the cultural, social and political institutions can embrace and support its liberating possibility'. Its successful application led to the spread of this methodology into British prisons under Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation which has been introducing prison courses to much acclaim.

Other prison experiences

So far I have noted that the NLD are not facing a unique experience, either in Buddhist terms or in terms of general Burmese history – all are imprisoned in *samsara*, but some are more aware of it than others.

I have noted that Burmese concepts of imprisonment range from the conditions of confinement in the individual to the general condition of confinement in the country as a whole. In this tradition, there is a blurring between personal and national concepts of imprisonment, and its converse, the political struggle for freedom. It is through the Buddhist idea of imprisonment that political prisoners find an ultimate sense of freedom and find the inspiration to maintain the momentum of their struggle. However, national politics, as we have seen from Aung San's view of national independence as *loki nibbana*, and national unity as based on *samatha* practices, and the nationalist struggle as conceived by Thahkin Kodawhmaing, are also closely

¹ Jackson (1989:94).

² Delhi: Saurabh Publishers, 1995.

³ Produced and directed by Ayelet Menahemi & Eilona Ariel by Karuna Films Ltd, 1997, for Vipassana Research Publications.

related to mental culture.

Having placed the notion of liberation from *samsara* at the heart of the Buddhist concept of imprisonment, I have also broached the notion that the political struggle for liberation, whether of person or country, has come to be seen as a quest resolvable through personal application in mental culture. Furthermore, given the support which *vipassana* provides to those who are repressed and persecuted, it is no coincidence that the *vipassana* traditions have arisen and have been popularised in response to British colonialism and the repeated political crises since World War II.

This correlation between imprisonment, martyrdom, and the steady popularisation of the practice of mental culture cannot be uncoupled from one another during these conditions of extended political crisis.

U Ottama (1879–1939)

The monk U Ottama went to prison twice in the fight for Burma's national independence. In October 1924, Ottama was arrested seven days after making an inflammatory speech at the Lanmadaw cinema. Apparently, he had made the speech after he had 'decided' to go to prison. The monks present at his trial refused to stand up as the judge entered the courtroom, and so their chairs were pulled from under them by police guards. Ottama was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, but he managed to avoid hard labour with the help of his jailkeeper. Doing light cane work, he spent the rest of his time in meditation. His biographical account concludes by citing a Jataka and noted 'that the imprisonment amounted to little more than throwing a turtle back into its lake'.

Mendelson analyses his biography and writes that Ottama's deeds are compared 'with acts of the Buddha, as embryo Buddhas of the past are always sacrificed self for the benefit of their tribe or country, there being no value in coming into the world if it is for one's own benefit alone.' In addition, 'whenever interrupted by adversity in his labors, Ottama devoted himself – in prison especially – to meditation and religious self-improvement'.¹ Moreover, while imprisoned in Sagaing, Ottama was known to be meditating when the Saya San rebellion broke out at Tharawaddy.²

U Ottama argued that during the time of the Buddha it was possible to work to attain *nibbana*. However, as the Burmese are enslaved to the British, people should not ask for *nibbana* yet. So the techniques that build towards, but do not actually consummate *nibbana*, namely *samatha*, were most relevant to the national liberation struggle. This emphasis is confirmed in Thahkin Kodawhmaing's political writings.

Meditating on the impermanence of the British

In some respects, of course, the entire condition of the country was seen as a form of imprisonment under British colonial rule also. I have already noted U Wisara's equation between meditation, national liberation, and *loka nibbana*. U Wisara's political philosophy was closely related to his episodes in British prisons – indeed, he died fasting in prison. While in prison he was disrobed but retained the monastic rules and practised meditation [ဘာဝနာပျိုးများ].³

At least some other movements sought to deliver Burma from its captors by meditation on impermanence. One monk wrote a pamphlet, outlawed by government in 1927, on how to meditate on the impermanence in relation to the British occupation.⁴ Also during this period, people were prepared for prison by learning the 'story of the Bodhisattva's escape from prison'. And rather than learning British laws, they should 'only worry about the laws or teachings of the Buddha' and keep the Buddhist precepts.⁵

Ludu U Hla

In *Prison and people* [ထောင်နှင့်လူသား]⁶ the prison experience is enriched by mental culture. Ludu U Hla collects twelve contributions by various authors on their prison experience prior to the 1962 military coup.⁷ He describes prisoners who, among various activities, carry out 'duties towards the Buddha' [ဘုရားဝတ်တော်], and partake in 'counting the rosaries' [ပုထိုးစီဝ်] and 'sending loving-kindness' [မေတ္တာပို့].

¹ Mendelson (1975:222).

² Ottama biography, p. 57

³ *Ibid*, p. 131

⁴ See chapter 11. This has also been expressed as 'having all villages and townsmen meditate on the impermanence of the British' [သင်္ခါရတရားကို နေ့လုံးပေါက် စီးဖြန့်ဆောက်တည်ရန်]. See ၁၂၅ တောင်သူလယ်သမားအရေးတော်ပုံ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စာပေဗဟို၊ p. 51.

⁵ Herbert (1982:9).

⁶ Mandalay: Lu-du Newspaper, n.d..

⁷ Possibly translated in 1986 into English as *The caged ones* by Dr. Sein Tu (Callahan 1996:489n106).