

A Study on Dynamics of Indo-Myanmar Relationships

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Abstract

The relationship between India and Myanmar has its peaks and valleys. This article explains how Myanmar transitioned from democracy to military and dictatorship to a constitutional republic at present. Therefore, there have been moments when the relationship has been excellent, when it has been terrible, and when it has once again been fantastic. It was widely acknowledged that China had an important influence on the relations between India and Myanmar. They saw the northeastern region of India as a contentious region. Several insurgent organizations are harming the relationship between India and Myanmar. India and Myanmar have joined forces to put a stop to terrorist groups' operations in their respective countries. There are some positive outcomes from their relationships, particularly in commerce, military alliances, bridge building, and the management of Covid-19.

Keywords: *Bilateral relations, Strategic significance, India, Myanmar, North-East India.*

1. Introduction:

“Burma, formally known as Myanmar on June 18, 1989, is the sole land bridge that leads to Southeast Asia, and the length of the border between India and Burma is around 1,600 kilometers.”^[1] It is of utmost significance for India’s policy of acting eastward. The following is a list of the Indian states that border Myanmar, with an emphasis on the North-Eastern Indian states:

Table-1: The Indian States and their distance from Myanmar

Sl. No	Name of the Indian State	Distance from Myanmar
1	Arunachal Pradesh	520km
2	Nagaland	215km
3	Manipur	398km
4	Mizoram	510km

Since British colonial rule, ties between India and Myanmar have been prone to ups and downs. The relationship between India and Myanmar before and after the British colonial rule is quite intriguing. This was especially true after the British left. Therefore, the relationship between India and Myanmar is vital for India on both a geopolitical and an economic level (especially in pipeline diplomacy). China was a source of contention in the relationship between India and Myanmar. Someone once complimented China and Myanmar by saying they were “Alternating between ‘Brother’ and ‘Cousins.’” The differences between Brahmanism and Buddhism, which emerged exclusively after Goadama, gave rise to the differences in methodological discourse found in Indian and Chinese texts. Even though these three nations share a common past, their current relationship is not very strong.^[2] The history of Myanmar is full of fascinating events and topics, such as the 8888 movements, the Saffron revolution, and many others.

2. The Study’s Background:

Over the past several decades, the world has undergone several major and significant changes. “The end of the cold war, the overthrow of communist regimes in East Europe, and, most importantly, the fact that disintegration has taken the role of conciliation are all concerns that have global repercussions.” It has been demonstrated that the potential for both speed and safety is higher than it was in the past. The scenario is not particularly promising at the moment due to the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar system and the fact that certain countries have military training organizations that help each other modernize and share weaponry.

No matter how minor, India’s foreign policy had an effect, either directly or indirectly, on the rest of the globe. Burma’s shared border with “the People’s Republic of China” and its connections to China and Pakistan pose a significant risk to Indian national security and other problems. India is surrounded by 11 other countries, making it an almost impossible challenge for the nation to keep cordial relations with all of them.^[3] The friendship between India and Myanmar dates back more than a thousand years. The state of Myanmar is known as a hermit kingdom, and up until 1937, it was a part of British India.

As a consequence of this, the educational systems, political systems, and administrative systems are very comparable, which was instrumental in developing cordial ties between the two nations. "Relations between India and Myanmar developed a certain fruitiness and a certain spiciness during the times of parliamentary democracy, during the military of Ne Win, as a result of the collapse of the democracy restoration movement, and other issues."^[4] During those times, the military of Ne Win was in control.

3. Objectives of the Study:

- ✚ To get an understanding of the democratic process now taking place in Myanmar.
- ✚ To get an understanding of the role that Myanmar plays in interactions with Indo-China.
- ✚ Looking into it reveals more about the impact Myanmar has had on the citizens of Northeast India.

4. Methodology:

The research is primarily descriptive, and a historical-analytical approach is utilized. The research investigates a specific historical development in the interactions between India and Myanmar and analyses it in the context of border work. The relationship between India and Myanmar was examined in this study from both a regional and an international standpoint. This is a qualitative study that uses secondary sources to gather information. This study utilized various resources, including books, papers, websites, and online journals. The report investigates the major issues affecting India's and Myanmar's relationship and potential solutions.

5. The Phase of Democracy (1948-62):

Before its independence in 1948, Myanmar was under the jurisdiction of two great imperial powers from other parts of the world. From 1942 until 1945 A.D., Japan occupied the territory.^[5] In Myanmar, the level of consciousness regarding nationalism and democracy was opened up as a result of the invasion by Japan. In the following, we will discuss many nations and the types of governments they have.

- ✚ Totalitarian (communist) ---China, Cuba, Germany, Hungary, North Korea, Vietnam, etc.
- ✚ Totalitarian (Fascist) ---Italy (Mussolini), Nazi Germany (Adolf Hitler)
- ✚ Military--- Algeria, Bolivia, Burma, Burundi, Sudan, Thailand, Syria, and Ghana.
- ✚ Guided Democracy---Egypt (during Colonel Nasser's rule), Guinea (during Secom Toure's rule), Indonesia (during Sukarno's rule), Pakistan (during Ayub Khan's rule), etc.

It is critical to have an understanding of Myanmar's first democratic election. Myanmar's culture owes a debt of gratitude to India for its heritage. In 1824 A.D., General Maha Bandula invaded Assam, turning Britain into an enemy of India. The first Anglo-Burmese war broke out in 1824 after the Common Era, while the third Anglo-Burmese war occurred in 1885 after the Common Era. The British government knew that Myanmar was a relatively small country that should have been conquered as it could have provided a covert route for trade with China.^[6] In the 1920s, several students in Myanmar, including Aung Sun and W. Nu, participated in demonstrations against the British. In 1939, when World Struggle II broke out, "Myanmar did not ally with Britain but with communist China. This was because Myanmar believed Japan should assist it in its war against Britain. After Japan invaded Burma in 1942, the country's leaders chose to align themselves with the British." Following several movements, including student movements, etc., India attained independence in 1947.

Following their respective victories for independence, Burma and India both moved toward parliamentary democracies. Their relationships were made clear by their shared pleasant warmth and relaxed atmosphere. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was confident that Myanmar would take India's side in resolving various political and economic issues. After achieving its independence, Burma was confronted with several significant challenges, including an uprising on the part of residents, a political uprising led by dissidents, and an armed uprising—a precarious situation for any sovereign state. During his political career, U Nu delivered remarks to members of parliament in which he stated that "..... Because of the long-standing connection between our two countries, we know we can always turn to India for assistance if we are in a bind."^[7]

Myanmar looked to India as an example in terms of its foreign policy. Nehru and U Nu, the leader of Myanmar, followed identical political policies. When India and Burma were a single government, Indians lived in Myanmar in various roles, including civil servants, landlords, money lenders, etc. This led to several issues for India. Indians used to call Myanmar home after the country gained its freedom, but the locals were never treated with contempt. In this predicament, the objective of Indian foreign policy was to retain positive relations with Myanmar while also providing assistance to the Indian minority residing there. These people are known as the Indian Diaspora and played an important role in the subsequent efforts to strengthen political ties between New Delhi and Naypyidaw. Following their independence, the India and Burma trade regulation order of 1937 was implemented to govern the trading between the two countries. The value of their commerce with one another stayed stable at thirty million dollars each year for several years. Many people voiced their concern that Burma's income was being diverted to fund projects in other countries, such as Pakistan and Afghanistan.^[8]

The people of Burma believed that trade tariffs established by the government of India were stifling their country's economic growth. A new commercial agreement was signed between them on April 3rd, 1941, putting an end to the free commerce that had previously existed between India and Myanmar. As part of the new arrangement, commodities from India have been given a preference of 15% over those from countries outside of

the empire and a preference of 10% over those from the United Kingdom. In further development, India's government was able to impose taxes and tariffs on goods imported from Burma. Following their respective declarations of independence, there was a noticeable shift in the commercial exchange pattern "between the two independent republics of India and Burma."

6. The Phase of Military Dictatorship (1962-1988):

A brief period of democratic government existed in Myanmar. The year 1962 marked the beginning of Bagan's military dictatorship. After the democratic government was overthrown in March of 1962 A.D., the military took control of the country. "No matter what type of idealism or form of government" a nation chooses to implement, the Indian government's foreign policy will never shift, and India will always prioritize fostering and preserving positive diplomatic relations with other nations. 1962 was the year that China declared war for two reasons:

- The idea was that there was a need to punish and stop what was thought to be Indian attempts to weaken Tibet under the influence of China, which were seen as attempts to restore the status quo ante that existed there before 1949.
- A sense that there is a pressing need to punish and put an end to what is believed to be Indian violence along the border with Chinese territory.

Although India was defeated in "the Indo-China war, it successfully won over the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The relationship between India, China, and Myanmar was impacted due to this war. During the conflict between China and India, Myanmar withdrew into a self-imposed state of isolation to avoid becoming embroiled."^[9]

When the communist movement in China began, the nationalists fled to India for safety. The Burmese Prime Minister, Ne, paid a visit to China on the 28th of January, 1960, and "signed an agreement to address the historical issue. Because it is a relatively small country and because Burma achieved democracy without adopting the communist ideology of China. Although India and Myanmar have never had a physical border, the two countries signed a frontier demarcation agreement in 1967."^[10] Both the Indian and Myanmar borders were officially drawn out in 1967. Arunachal Pradesh has a crucial role in India, but it also plays a significant one in China. The delineation of the border between Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar is therefore fraught with difficulty. Myanmar abdicated responsibility to India and China. On December 23, 1986, in Rangoon, India and Myanmar reached an agreement defining their maritime border in the Coco Channel and the Bay of Bengal, which includes the Andaman Sea. Mrs. Gandhi assured Ne Win that no organisation in his state would engage in anti-India actions during her time in Myanmar. Ne Win travelled to India often over several years of the P.M. After Mrs. Gandhi's term, during his own, Rajiv Gandhi made an effort to get Myanmar into SAARC, but that country showed no inclination to join. Even yet, India and Myanmar have just joined ASEAN to work together on economic, security, & other matters.^[11]

7. The Relationship between India and Burma since the year 1988:

The Indian people were harmed by "Ne Win's play, 'Burmese Way to Socialism'." The year 1963 was when Myanmar passed its nationalization law, which revoked the citizenship status of Indians as citizens of Myanmar and required them to leave the country together with other people without receiving any compensation. 1988 marks a significant turning point in Indo-Burmese interactions, making it an essential year in the history of both India and Myanmar. This is why 1988 is considered an essential year in both countries' histories. The student uprising that took place in 1988 and was known as the 8888 movements in the annals of Myanmar's past.^[12] The reinstatement of democracy in Myanmar was the driving force behind that movement; however, it was sparked by various economic issues, including the removal of "high-denomination currency notes from circulation, rice shortages, and black market activities, amongst others." Students involved in the unrest found safety in Thailand and north-eastern India. The pre-democratic Burmese student movement received assistance from New Delhi in every conceivable way to assist them in opening offices in India for their struggle. During the events that took place on the "black day" of August 8, 1988, the library of the Indian Embassy was transformed into a makeshift hospital. "At that time, Indian Ambassador PMS Malik assisted a student who had entered India through the top embassy wall on Merchant Street. India ensured that refugees from Myanmar would not have any difficulties by making the necessary arrangements. The National League for Democracy, which Aung San Suu Kyi leads, has received vehement and covert support from India. The Research and Analysis wing supported the Kachin Independence Organization and army (KIO and KIA, respectively). They set up their base in Mizoram and provided a small number of weapons and training from India. The Indian army base in Vijayanagar was the source of the arms, ammunition, and other materials made available by the Chin and Arakanese rebels."^[13]

During the movement of the 1980s, Naypyidaw and Beijing kept very good connections with each other by supporting each other for the wrong reasons. Myanmar appeared to comprehend that it was acceptable to maintain such a high level of impartiality between two powerful neighbours, and it was moving toward China. China held significant significance for "Myanmar for various reasons, including historical precedents, geographical constraints, and the dynamics of post-war geopolitics." Although Myanmar enjoyed positive relations with its other neighbours in addition to India, India remained an important country for Myanmar for the same reason. Because of its proximity to Pakistan, Burma posed a significant danger to India. During the

8888 movements in China, the post-democratic student action was bypassed. The actions mentioned above by Myanmar have earned them criticism on an international level, particularly from developed democratic countries. According to the commentary of one analyst, “by the year 1990, Myanmar had become China’s most important political and military ally in the sea. Myanmar was turning into a Chinese client state.” In light of these circumstances, the country’s military government has been taking measures to lessen the impact of the external pressure exerted by the internal national organization. Many efforts were made by the leader of Myanmar at the time, known as P.M. Khin Nyut, to construct a democracy that would defend humanity and human rights in the native country. In 1992, with the assistance of General Than Shwe, he successfully broke General Swa Maung out of jail. He worked harder on constructing the “democratic plan,” but he withdrew after being diagnosed with a major health ailment. “The election of a new Prime Minister in Myanmar and the subsequent implementation of the democratic plan slowed significantly and necessitated reaching a particular point in 2004.”^[14]

The movement began in 1988; by providing equipment and assistance, China completely isolated Myanmar from the rest of the world. After some time had passed, China and Burma came to an understanding that could be referred to as a trade treaty between the two countries. China is now the fourth largest investor in Myanmar after spending more than one billion dollars on the mineral sector. The two countries’ trade increased, and China made purchases totaling more than 2,63 billion dollars in 2008. To make the hitherto illegal trade between China and Myanmar legitimate. “China allowed Burma to reach the Indian Ocean on its side, allowing oil and gas to be exported from landlocked provinces in the southwestern part of China.” It was essential for China to establish military bases or listening stations in the area. China helped the economy of other countries by providing interest-free loans, occasional loans, and debt reduction, among other forms of support. China established a sizable “crude oil port in Kyaupo, in western Myanmar.” Because of this initiative, China will be able to receive shipments from countries in the Middle East and Africa without having to send them straight to Malacca. This project assisted Myanmar in releasing a significant quantity of natural gas deposits off Myanmar’s western coast. Myanmar will use the money to help bolster its military budget and fund democratic reforms. “Myanmar’s modern security system was built with assistance from China, which included the provision of armoured personnel carriers, tanks, fighter aircraft, a radar system, ammunition, surface-to-surface air missiles, short-range air-to-missile systems, components for the M-11 rocket, artillery guns, communication equipment, lighting and signal equipment, speed boats, and a new edition of aviation and border maps, as well as a maritime survey of Myanmar’s territory.”^[15] These military aids were not sent to kill the people of Myanmar; rather, they were intended to improve ties between two countries whose governments are both run by military leaders. By exercising its veto authority, China used to shelter Myanmar from any accusations brought up by the United Nations Security Council. However, in 2009, China removed Myanmar’s name from the “United Nations Security Council agenda.”

“Myanmar’s oil and gas reserves were of utmost significance to India for its planned energy output in the future. Myanmar’s oil and gas reserves are estimated to be roughly 600 million barrels and 88 trillion cubic feet, respectively. ONGC Vidisha Limited, Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), ESSAR,” and other Indian companies have engaged in the energy sector of Myanmar. Instead, it will begin selling oil and gas to China for the next 30 years starting in 2013, after which it kicked India from the vendor team for oil and gas. In place of the Bangladesh-India-Myanmar pipeline, Myanmar exported oil to Hong Kong, listed on the Petro China exchange. The pipeline project between India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh suffered as a result, but “India had no choice but to keep its relations amicable with Myanmar.” In addition, the relationship between Pakistan and Myanmar impacts Myanmar and India due to Pakistan’s military aid and training in Myanmar. China and Pakistan collaborated on producing JF-17 fighter jets for the Myanmar air force, and both countries assisted Myanmar in establishing an anti-Indian military station. This kind of block is known as a tripartite block.^[16]

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established after the end of the cold war to bring together the countries of the Asian region, and it proved to be a productive organization. The strategic links Beijing maintained with China rendered the ASEAN’s mission moot. While Myanmar and other ASEAN countries were under military rule, China served as a reliable ally and friend to both groups. Therefore, Myanmar was present at various ASEAN meetings as a guest or in some other capacity. Both on land and water, Myanmar’s border with India was shared with that country. China intended to ally itself with India’s eastern and western states, and Myanmar was one such state. The primary objective for China was to maintain control of the Indian Ocean and prevent India from turning it into its ocean. Myanmar and China have had contact throughout history. During the conflict between the “nationalist forces of the Republic of China and the communist people of the People’s Republic of China, Myanmar sided with the communists. The subsequent victory of the communists in Myanmar deepened their relationship with each other, which increased India’s level of concern.” When people from the Kuomintang were stationed along Myanmar’s border, it was tremendously disruptive to Myanmar’s efforts to maintain its security and integrity. Because it was a domestic issue in Myanmar, India did not become involved.^[17] Despite the difficulties, trade continues between India and Myanmar even if some parts

of the boundary between the two countries remain unmarked. It was crucial to look at the overall relations between India and Myanmar.

Table-2: Imports and Exports between India and Myanmar

Country	Imports	Exports
India	Machine, equipment, vehicles, Constructional material, food, etc.	Pulses, beans, fishery items, teak woods, etc.
Myanmar	Crude oil, LNG, Gems, fertilizer, chemicals, etc.	Machine, equipment, Leather, etc

8. Myanmar-India ties, especially as they pertain to India's North-East:

Some North Eastern Indian States, such as "Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura," are connected to Myanmar through its border. North-Eastern India has lagged well behind the rest of India in terms of economic development. Similar to North East India, it was cut off from the rest of the country by land, an alternative channel for commerce opened during colonial times, and the railway system never developed. These are some of the factors that have led to North-East India's growth lagging so far behind the rest of the country ("because people in North East India brought Indian goods at higher prices during colonial periods"). Indian efforts to better Northern & Eastern India were detailed in the findings of the Shulka commission. There are several factories (plywood, chemical) and mills (paper, spinning, jute) in this area (especially in Assam). In 1994, India and Myanmar inked a border trade agreement that included two checkpoints: More Together, the More-Tanu and Zowkhatan-Rhi make up 1664 kilometres of the boundary between the two countries. Since then, bilateral trade has increased from 12.4 million dollars in 1980-1981 to approximately 1.8 billion dollars in 2012-2013. North-East India has played a role in this improvement. Pangsau pass (located in Arunachal Pradesh) and Avangkhang are where these two nations are working to establish new commercial crossings at the border (Nagaland).^[18]

The north-eastern Indian insurgent organization considered Myanmar to be heaven. Separation from the rest of "mainland India, New Delhi's empathy and neglectfulness towards North-East India's made estrangement in the psyche of people living in this region, which forced them to be members of an insurgent or rebel group." Training camps have been established in Myanmar for the Indian insurgent organizations known as the Nagas, the Metis, and the Tripuris. Myanmar-based instructors from the ULFA, PREPAK, and PLA also support these groups. The westernmost part of Myanmar is called the "Golden Triangle," with the highest opium production rates. The golden Crescent is the inspiration for the name of the golden triangle ("which is famous for drug trafficking also"). It was created in the world at a rate of 70% amphetamine. The Burmese insurgent organizations, KIA, BCP, and ALP, were building links with the Indian insurgent organizations NSCN and ULFA. Heroin and other drugs are being used to spread throughout Bangladesh. The border between India and Myanmar runs through the state of Tamil Nadu as well as other Indian states. People from Myanmar who moved to India after the country gained its freedom can be divided into the following three categories:

A "Mizo group of such people traveled back to Mizoram, the Chin group," whose language is distinct from that of the Mizo group, and Myanmar's, who refer to members of this group as kawli. During the insurrection on August 8th, such people were slain in the thousands.^[19] The majority of the population came from Myanmar, particularly the Chin highlands. Those Kukis, known as "old Kukis," were among the first to leave their homeland in the Chin Hills. Old Kukis include "the Rangkhoh, Bate, Hallam, Langrong, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Hiroo-Lamgag, Koren, Kom, purum, Hman, and Cha." They can be distinguished from one another by their names. They were the first group to move to Mizoram, but they were eventually driven to Tripura by subsequent waves of Kuki migrants. In 1828 and 1829, the Raja of Cachar used them as an army. After settling there, many moved to "the North Cachar hills in Assam. Another cohort of elderly Kuki people made the journey to Manipur. The new Kuki arrived after the ancient Kuki," who had originally settled in Tripura before moving to Assam and Manipur. The vocabulary of the Tripura Mirawag people who were a part of the Kuki group led them to refer to themselves as Nagas. They can be found in several areas of Nagaland at present. In addition to the Kuki people, other Kuki people live in Nagaland. They identified themselves as Naga and sought additional rights. Therefore, the Naga-Kuki conflict took place.

The High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations was keeping an eye on the challenges and crises refugees face worldwide. Many of its citizens journeyed to India during the time that military-ruled Burma. The UNHCR provided Myanmar's refugees with access to several types of amenities. The border between India and Myanmar is where the Silk Road travels. The frontier between India and Myanmar was a connection point between the western world and Southeast Asians. The border between India and Myanmar was used as a conduit for the trafficking of people coming from Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. At this time, a violent group is harming "India and Myanmar." India has allied itself with Myanmar in the fight against the militant organization, despite all that could have gone wrong.^[20]

As a result of India's assistance in the past, Myanmar has now developed into an independent constitutional republic with a unitary assembly. In Myanmar, the head of state and government is the same person, who is

chosen by the legislature and is immune to the votes of the cabinet members, who may or may not have a seat in the legislature.

The magnificent Corona virus currently threatens the globe. China was the country where this virus was first discovered. As a result of the China-India Skirmishes in the year 2020, relations between India and China took a little turn for the worst.^[21] However, “the ministry has said that China has given India 170,000 personal protective equipment kits for people to safeguard themselves against Covid-19. According to the report published in The Economic Times, Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi gave India assurances that her country will continue to keep peaceful relations with India and that India owes money to be free from the G-20 initiative.”

By working on the development of a vaccine called “Covid-19 to fight the pandemic, India is assisting Myanmar” in its efforts to eradicate the Corona Virus. India is providing financial assistance to Myanmar to facilitate the construction of “the Sittwe port in the Rakhine state.” The Kaladan multimodal transit project, which will connect Kolkata and Myanmar, relies heavily on this aspect. After the Corona virus has passed or even while it is still present, it may affect relations between India and Myanmar; this fact, along with others, is highly fascinating.

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