

Abu Salah Md. Yousuf
D. Purushothaman

STATE, NATIONALITY AND POLITICAL ELITES: THE POLITICS OF NATIONALISM IN MYANMAR

Abstract

The unresolved tension between the state and nationality prevented resolution of nationalism debate in Myanmar since its independence and it embroiled the country into a long-term conflict between the dominant Bamar people and ethnic minorities. Theoretically, the state identity is based on a geographical boundary whereas national identity is a conscience of commonness on certain issues among the inhabitants of a state. Historically, in the post-colonial countries, political elites play a pivotal role to resolve the tension between these two identities for the formation of nationalism. In the context of Myanmar, as a multi-ethnic country, it was a challenge for political elites to accommodate all ethnic communities in same national identity, because the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British colonials instigated tension between different races. However, under the leadership of General Aung San, almost all the ethnic communities signed the Panglong Agreement in 1947, where the right of ethnic minorities was recognised. But, following the assassination of Aung San, the initiative to accommodate minorities was reversed and the military takeover of 1962 led the country towards a long-term ethnic conflict. In this backdrop, present paper argues that instead of resolving tension between the state and nationality, the power elites of Myanmar have instigated tension between the two for securing dominant position in the country in different phases of the political history of independent Myanmar. The policies of power elites affected the formation of nationalism of Myanmar and still remains a challenge for the integration of the country.

Keywords: Myanmar, The State, Nationality, Power Elites, Nationalism

1. Introduction

The tension between the state and nationality is intrinsically connected with the formation of nationalism of a country. The state is a sovereign identity within a geographical territory and nationality is membership of an individual in a state. The nationality is developed based on a feeling of commonness among the people

Abu Salah Md. Yousuf is Senior Research Fellow at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS). His e-mail address is: yousuf@biiss.org; **D. Purushothaman, PhD** is Associate Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, Pondicherry University, India. His e-mail address is: purushothaman.sas@pondiuni.edu.in

of a state. The formation of nationalism is inherently coupled with the convergence of identity between the state and nationality. If a state cannot accommodate all the inhabitants of its territory within the same nationality, the identity of the state will be threatened. The state has legitimacy to apply coercive power to eliminate actors who challenge its authority within a defined territory and nationality accommodates different communities and cultural values by a feeling of commonality to determine the future of the people of a state. On the other hand, when the state and nationality fail to accommodate them within a defined territorial identity, conflict escalates and the formation of nationalism becomes difficult. In the context of post-colonial countries, political territory of many states was defined by the colonial rulers who were not always sensitive about the nuances of nationality of the people of a state. In such cases, political elites were the main architect of the formation of nationalism of these states and many post-colonial countries failed to resolve the tension between the state and nationality within its territory. Such tensions escalated conflicts in the formation of nationalism of many countries.

Like many other post-colonial countries of Asia, the tension between the state and nationality of Myanmar remains unresolved. The British started occupying Burma in 1824 and included it as part of India. The territorial identity of Burman state was first defined by the British colonial rulers in the Government of Burma Act 1935.¹ But, when the independence movement of Myanmar began, the Bamar people promulgated an idea of Burmese state and ethnic minorities were finding it as a threat to their identity. Because the relations between Bamar people and ethnic minorities were not peaceful during the British rule. In fact, the colonial rulers instigated tension between them to prevent any united movement against colonialism. Burma's unanimous leader, General Aung San dreamed of an integrated Burma and took initiatives for negotiation with ethnic minorities to accommodate them in the state of Burma by giving space for their ethnic identity. Under his leadership, the ethnic communities agreed on an integrated Burma by signing the Panglong Agreement of 1947. The assassination of General Aung San in 1948 and subsequent military coup of 1962 reversed the trajectory of the country. The military rulers promoted supremacy of Burman identity over other ethnic groups and adopted different laws to marginalise minority communities. There are puzzles why military took the initiative to marginalise other ethnic communities. Some scholars argue that the "inventions of traditions" instigated military to initiate a nationalism process which was to regain the supremacy of Buddhist nationality.² Others claim that the religious factors were always dominant in the formation of nationalism in Myanmar.³ Therefore, there was always an urge to ensure supremacy

¹ Robert H. Tylor, *The State of Myanmar*, Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009, p. 124.

² Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 130.

³ Matthew J. Walton, *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

of Buddhism. It is also argued that control over resources determined the destiny of the nationalism in Myanmar.⁴ As such, since 1948 the nationality issue of Myanmar remained unresolved. The state promoted identities were never accepted by the ethnic minorities and nationality of all the inhabitants of the country was not accommodated in the process of nationalism in Myanmar.

In this backdrop, this paper argues that the politics of nationalism of Myanmar is embedded with the interest of the political elites of Myanmar. The political elites of the country could not initiate necessary steps to accommodate ethnic minorities in the formation of nationalism and instigated ethnic division in the country to acquire legitimacy from the majoritarian Burmans by declaring the supremacy of Burman nationalism. By using Paul Brass's elite theory⁵, the paper will highlight that how the interest of power elites polarised the state and nationalist identity of the country and how such policies escalated the tension between the state and nationality in different phases of the political history of independent Myanmar. The paper is divided into four sections including introduction and conclusion. Section two develops a theoretical framework to understand that how political elites contribute in the process of formation of nationalism of a country by resolving tensions between the state and nationality. Section three divides the political history of independent Myanmar in five phases to evaluate that how the political elites manufactured the nationality of the people of Myanmar and ethnic communities of the country to attain their political objectives. In every phase, the narratives of nationality promoted by the political elites are discussed and focused on how such narratives polarised the country along the line of ethnic identity and how it contributed to the escalation of conflict. Nevertheless, the new government of Myanmar under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi started a new negotiation with the ethnic communities. In the relevant section, the challenges for the ongoing negotiations are also highlighted.

2. Theoretical Framework

The inherent tension between “the state” – a political organisation of a sovereign political authority over a defined territory and “nation” – a community of people conscious of sharing common future determines the formation of nationalism of a state.⁶ There are two dissimilar arguments to understand how

⁴ Li Chenyang, Chaw Chaw Sein, Zhu Xianghui, *Myanmar: Reintegration in the International Community*, New Jersey: World Scientific, 2016, p. 371.

⁵ Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991.

⁶ Richard Mansbach and Edward Rhodes, “The National The state and Identity Politics: The state Institutionalization and “Markers” of National Identity”, *Geopolitics*, Issue. 3, Vol. 12, 2007, pp. 426-458.

the state and nation are connected with the formation of nationalism.⁷ The first trajectory is that the existence of the state comes first and then the state takes the responsibility of “nation building”, where multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identities are accommodated. The formation of French nationalism after French Revolution of 1789 is referred to understand this type of nationalism, where the revolutionaries first established French state and then they developed nationality on the basis of “liberty, equality and fraternity”. On the other hand, some nations first occupy a territory and start the process of “the state building” and it promotes nationalism of the respective state. Such notions of nationalism are mostly relevant in the context of European nation states. From the perspective of these two trajectories, the notion of nationalism is divided into two categories: civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism refers to the formation of such nationalism which accommodates multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identities within a defined state territory. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism is based on similar ethnic and religious identity where the inhabitants of the state articulate their nationalism basing on same religious, ethnic and cultural identity.

How do the state and nationality non-violently get accommodated in the formation of nationalism? David Miller identified four questions which need to be addressed for resolving the tension between the state and nationality in the process of the formation of nationalism.⁸ First question is about the boundaries of the state and nationality. If a state can accommodate multi-nationals, the formation of nationalism is peaceful. But, if different nationality demands separate state, the tension between the state and nationality is inevitable. Second question is linked with the national sovereignty. If the right to self-determination is valued, every nationality should have the right to enjoy political autonomy, which means every nationality will get the opportunity for the formation of governing body. On the other hand, the state will never compromise its sovereignty. Therefore, the formation of nationalism should not confront the state sovereignty. Third question relates to internal policy of a the state. Many states promulgate nationality to protect and promote particular culture and identity. Liberal democracies may accept multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identity. But, when some authoritarian states enforce a particular culture and identity, many nationalities cannot accept it. Therefore, the settlement between the state and nationality depends on how the respective nationalities respond to the state policies. Fourth question is about the ethics of an individual regarding nationality. In a state, every individual should accept the co-nationals as part of the state. When the ethical value weakens and some of the groups cannot accept other groups as same national, it

⁷ Jan Penrose and Richard C. M. Mole, “Nation-The states and National Identity”, in Kevin R. Cox, Murray Low and Jennifer Robinson (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Political Geography*, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008, pp. 271-83.

⁸ David Miller, *On Nationality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, pp. 2-3.

creates tension between the state and nationality and in turn, it ultimately challenges the formation of nationalism.

Richard Mansbach and Edward Rhodes identified three factors to determine the peaceful amalgamation between the state and nationality: historical timing, regime type and basis of national legitimacy.⁹ Historical timing refers the time when institutional networks evolved before the formation of nationality. In such states, institutions, norms and aspirations of the people grown in a way that all the inhabitants naturally accept commonality of their nationality and they determine their destination without any intervention. The state finds a legitimacy for ensuring co-existence of all inhabitants of a particular territory. The notion of nationality is developed on the basis of historical and emotional ties, the state institutions and symbols. For example, in the case of the United Kingdom, the dynasty still remains as a symbol of English nationality. The formation of nationalism evolved on the basis of historic ties and symbols. The second factor impacting the relations between the state and nationality is regime type. In the Western liberal democracies, society and the state institutions are framed in a way that the state accommodates different ethnic and religious groups where all of them feel secured and develop a common nationality to ensure their progress and development. Modern democratic states are based on the idea that the state should accommodate all the inhabitants of the country by protecting their racial and religious identity. They form a nationality desiring progress and development of all people. In liberal democracies, constitutional provisions and legal frameworks define the responsibility and right of every individual. The third factor which harmonise the tension between the state and nationality is institutional legitimacy. In such cases, the state does not politicise nationality. By depoliticising nationality, it integrates people with a particular ideological motivation. The racial and ethnic identity are not relevant in this case and state manufactured nationality is accepted by everyone in a legitimate way. The former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was considered as an example of such kind of state.

In all the three cases, political elites play important role in the formation of nationalism. Political elites are “individuals and small, relatively cohesive, and stable group with disproportionate power to affect national and supranational political outcomes on a continuing basis.”¹⁰ They hold the upper position in the policy making process and participate in the political institutions and social movements. They include the familiar “power elite”¹¹ including top business people, government executive, and military leaders along with persons and groups holding key strategic

⁹ Richard Mansbach and Edward Rhodes, op. cit.

¹⁰ Heinrich Best and John Higley, “The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites: Introduction”, in Heinrich Best and John Higley (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 3.

¹¹ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.

positions within the political parties and parliaments, major interest organisations and professional associations, important media enterprises and trade unions, and religious and other hierarchically structured institutions powerful enough to affect political decisions.¹² Thus, the narratives developed by the political elites influence the people of a state to determine their nationality. In all cases, when political elites cannot develop a narrative where all the inhabitants can feel secured in terms of their nationality, the formation of nationalism is challenged. In the context of post-colonial countries, the role of political elites is vital to form a nationalist identity.

A number of scholars elaborated that how political elites contribute in the formation of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm argues that the political elites develop nationality by “invention of traditions”.¹³ This “invented traditions” mean “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly and tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms or behaviours by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.”¹⁴ By memorising such traditions, political elites motivate people to develop a nationality and influence the process of the formation of nationalism.

Lowell W. Barrington identified three approaches for the formation of nationalism: primordial, constructive and instrumental.¹⁵ Primordial approach holds that nationality is “deep rooted features such as race, language, religion, and other cultural features”.¹⁶ Such features lead towards formation of national boundary. On the other hand, constructivist approach “like other social identities, including those that primordialists point to as markers of national identity - is a social construction.”¹⁷ Comaroff developed several strands of constructivism like cultural constructivism and political constructivism and he summarises that all are based on the social identities that “product of human agency.”¹⁸ The instrumentalism implies that nationality is an instrument and manipulated by elites. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that primordialism and instrumentalism are connected. Young argues that primordialism “completed instrumentalism by explaining the power of the ‘affective

¹² Heinrich Best and John Higley, op. cit.

¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lowell W. Barrington, “Nationalism and Independence”, in Lowell W. Barrington (ed.), *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John L. Comaroff, “Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution”, in Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister (eds.), *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996, p. 165.

elite' through which interest is pursued"¹⁹. Comaroff claims that primordialism and instrumentalism can be linked as hybrid neoprimalism.²⁰ On the other hand, many experts argue that instrumentalism is more connected with constructivism and even some use the terms interchangeably.²¹ However, Barrington argues that power elites contribute in the formation of nationality by "inducing...political mobilisation in the name of a particular nationalist 'cause' or against a particular 'other' that threatens the nations"²².

Paul Brass, a leading scholar of the instrumentalist approach for nationalism, in the context of post-colonial countries argues that "whether or not the culture of the group is ancient or is newly -fashioned, the study of ethnicity and nationality is...the study of the process by which elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilise the group, to defend its interests, and to compete with other groups".²³ Brass holds the argument that ethnic identities are constructed and manipulated by elite competition. For Brass, there are four types of competition between elites that can lay the base of national consciousness to be emerged as a national identity: local aristocracy versus alien conqueror, inter-ethnic competition between religious elites, intra-ethnic competition between native aristocracies and religious elites, and finally competition between indigenous religious elites and alien aristocracies.²⁴ The first type of competition starts in a preindustrial society where foreign intruders come and take the control of lands. When industrialisation starts, the local aristocracy strives to create a new consciousness of ethnic identity and promulgates the idea of nationality. The second type of competition starts when foreign intruders try to restrict local religious practices and impose or facilitate foreign religion on the local people. In such cases, local religious leaders encourage ethnic consciousness among the people that promotes the feeling of nationality among the locals. The third type of competition occurs when local ruling class embraces foreign invaders and accepts supporting foreign culture, then local religious groups start competition with local ruling class and local religious class creates consciousness among the people about their religious and ethnic identity. The fourth type of competition occurs between local religious elites and foreign aristocracies. The local religious leaders try to protect their culture from the 'invasion' of foreign aristocrats. The theory of Paul Brass suggests that in the post-colonial countries, the role of

¹⁹ Crawford Young, "Evolving Modes of Consciousness and Ideology: Nationalism and Ethnicity", David E. Apter and Carl G. Rosberg (eds.), *Political Development and the New Realism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994, p. 79.

²⁰ John L. Comaroff, op. cit.

²¹ Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 163.

²² Lowell W. Barrington, op. cit. p. 13.

²³ Paul R. Brass, op. cit., p. 75.

²⁴ Ibid.

elites is vital in the formation of nationalism. When colonialism started at the time of pre-industrialisation, the ideas of the state and nationality were not strong enough in these countries. The industrialisation under colonial rule started the formation of the state. The competition between elites and the state authority formulates the nationality of the post-colonial countries.

Before British occupation, Myanmar was divided into different autonomous kingdoms. As a feudalist society, the idea of the state was not developed within the country. The religious monks were very much influential in the society and the monarchs always tried to maintain a good relation with religious elites. British occupation started to unite the country under a central rule and it led the country towards formation of a state. During the independence movement of Myanmar, the formation of political elites was visible and the competition among the elites developed different narratives of the nationality in Myanmar. However, since independence, political elites of the country developed different motivations of nationality and it has affected the nationalism of Myanmar. The state of Myanmar was developed under the British rule, but the nationality debate was yet to be resolved. In this respect, this paper focuses that how political elites tried to resolve the tension between the state and nationality of Myanmar and how it affects the politics of nationalism.

3. Power Elites and the Politics of Nationalism in Myanmar

Before British colonialism in Myanmar, the country was loosely affiliated with kingdoms and there was no existence of the idea of Burmese nation or Burma the state. British occupation was a shock for Burma, both politically and economically. The main motivation of British rule in Burma was profit making. They were not concerned about the social developments in the country. In the pre-colonial Burma, the monarchs were always maintained good relations with monks. But colonial rulers withdrew all kinds of support for monasteries and rural economies. The British did not consider Burma as a separate the state, rather took it as part of the British India. Therefore, many of the government positions were filled up by the Indians. British rule instigated grievances in Burma and the people of Burma felt that their lives and religion were under threat. Moreover, the increasing immigration from India developed a fear among the Burmese that their country would soon be swamped by an alien group.²⁵ British policies increased uncertainty in the society and it had rooted contradictions between British rulers and majority Bamar population of Myanmar.

²⁵ Robert H. Taylor, "Perception of Ethnicity in the Politics of Burma", *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1982.

The growing mistrust between Bamar people and British rulers led the colonial rulers to adopt divide and rule policy. British recruited non-Burman ethnic minorities in the military and classified army battalions depending on ethnicity. Approximately, 87 per cent of the Burman Army in the colonial period was from non-Bamars.²⁶ When the First World War ended, anti-colonial leaders of Burma formed *Wunthanu* (patriotic) organisations all over the country to mobilise people against the British rule.²⁷ In 1919, a women movement organisation was formed with around 300 members, which had raised concern among the colonial rulers, because it had accelerated nationalist movements in Burma.²⁸ By 1930s, the patriotic intellectuals, mostly student leaders started nationalist movements in the country. These movements can be divided into two groups: one group emphasised on the racial and religious integrity of Bamar people and another group focused on a multi-racial nationhood. These two lines of divisions continued till the independence of the country in 1948. Though the division was not so visible, because all of them were fighting against the British rule, but such divisions came into light after independence. The political elites were divided on the issue of nationalism in Myanmar. Though all the ethnic regions were included in the state of Burma, nationalist identity emerged as a major challenge for the country and the politics of nationalism started after independence.

3.1 *The Formation Phase and Promulgation of Secular Nationalism*

From 1930 onwards, the formation of nation state was visible encompassing Burma proper and the frontier areas. But, the process of uniting between the two areas was not clear. The Government of Burma Act, passed in 1935, came into effect on 1 April 1937 and Burma at last enjoyed a political identity separated from that of India.²⁹ The formation of political elites in the period was also evident. Under the leadership of Aung San, a strong elite comprised by leftists and students agreed that British colony Burma would be a union where all the communities will get equal rights.³⁰ On the other hand, religious groups subscribed to the idea that Burma would be a Buddhist state. There was always a fear among the ethnic minorities of the frontier areas that if Burma becomes as a nation state what would be their status in the country.

²⁶ David I. Steinberg, *Burma: The state of Myanmar*, Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001, p. 183.

²⁷ R. H. Taylor, "Wunthanu Athin", in Ooi Keat Gin (ed.), *Southeast Asia: A Historical Encyclopaedia from Angko Wat to East Timor*, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004, p. 1429.

²⁸ Mya Sein, "Towards Independence Burma: The Role of Women", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1972, p. 294.

²⁹ Ian Brown, *Burma's Economy in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 68.

³⁰ Cecil Hobbs, "Nationalism in British Colonial Burma", *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 2, February 1947, pp. 113-121.

However, the nationalist movement in Burma was first started by the Buddhist monks.³¹ Throughout the Burman history, Buddhism acted as a force of integration. Historically, the Burman kings always took pride in promoting Buddhism by offering alms to the monks, building shrines, pagodas, temples and by protecting the purity of faith. The *Sangha*, an institution was formed to maintain relations between the king and the monks. When the first Burman dynasty was formed in 1044 AD, Buddhism was made as the state religion.³² The occupation by British destroyed established institutions of Burma. Moreover, public role of Buddhism was swiftly taken over by the missionaries and government schools. The function of monks declined. Instead of recruiting Barmars, British colonials appointed ethnic minorities in vital government posts.

Since Buddhism was always an important component of Burmese politics and society, therefore, when Buddhism came under threat, the resistance also first started by Buddhist monks. By citing H. Thirkell White, Secretary of upper Burma in 1886, Ni Ni Myint, a renowned Burman historian, recorded, “Wherever there was an appearance of organised resistance, Buddhist monks were among the chiefs. No political movement of importance has been without a monk as the leading spirit”.³³ Therefore, the national independence movement was first started under the leadership of Buddhist monks. The *Sangha*, named Young Men’s Buddhist Association in 1920, started the first anti-colonial movement in Burma.³⁴ Later, a number of renowned monks led nationalist movement named *U Ottama* and *U Wisara*. Resisting the British rule, Saya San, also mobilised his followers and faced down the British police with homemade shotguns, crossbows and sword of spears.³⁵ In the formation phase of Myanmar’s nationalism, Buddhism was always an important factor. Therefore, Buddhist elites wanted to see Buddhism at the heart of the state and nationalism of Myanmar.

British rulers were suppressive towards religion based nationalist movements in Myanmar. Moreover, in the time, a western educated elite class was developed in Myanmar who was leading a secular nationalist movement in the country. General Aung San was the leading figure in the formation of multi-ethnic and multi-religious nationalism in Myanmar. In fact, this secularist and multi-ethnic group emerged as a

³¹ Pum Za Mang, “Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Burma”, *Journal of Church and The state*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 2016, pp. 626-648.

³² Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 380.

³³ Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 205.

³⁴ Paul Kratosk and Ben Batson, “Nationalism and Modernist Reform”, in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 286.

³⁵ Pum Za Mang, “Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism in Burma”, op. cit., p. 635.

political elite in the formation phase of nationalism of the country. General Aung San emerged as a unanimous leader of this movement. He wanted separation between the state and religion. In his words, “We must draw a clear line between politics and religion, because the two are not one and the same thing. If we mix religion and politics, then we offend the religion itself.”³⁶ In a speech in 1946, Aung San again declared, “You are inheritors of a great religion. Purify it and broadcast it to all the world...of love and brotherhood, freedom of religious worship, freedom from fear, ignorance.”³⁷ Aung San was a strong supporter to include ethnic minorities in the united Burma, even if it was in a framework of positive discrimination. General Aung San defined national identity, “a nation is collective term applied to a people irrespective of their ethnic origin, living in close contact with one another and having common interests and sharing joys and sorrows together for such historic periods as to have acquired a sense of oneness.”³⁸ Aung San understood that without accommodating the concerns of the ethnic minorities, it would be difficult to form a united Myanmar. Therefore, he started negotiations with ethnic minorities.

But, the problem of nationality formation started when ethnic minority groups of Myanmar became vocal about their position in the independent Myanmar. While the Buddhist nationalists wanted to form the state of Burma as Buddhist state, the ethnic minorities were afraid of suppression and marginalisation. In such a milieu, General Aung San wanted to establish an integrated Myanmar. His vision was that Burma would be a state where nationality would be based on inclusive ideals without difference of race and ethnicity. To achieve this objective, Aung San reached in an agreement with major ethnic minorities, known as Panglong Agreement 1947, where he agreed to ensure and protect the identity of all the ethnic minorities without division of race and religion. The agreement is still referred as a basis of multi-ethnic nationality in Myanmar. The agreement proposed a federal state in the country, where all the frontier areas would enjoy autonomy and they would be able to ensure their self-determination. Though the agreement was appreciated by the majority of people, but the Buddhist nationalists did not agree with the agreement. They were dreaming of a Buddhist state in Burma.

In the formation phase, the idea of nationalism was viewed differently by three different groups. Buddhist nationalists wanted to see the supremacy of Buddhism in the independent Myanmar. Secularists envisioned Myanmar as an integrated one where all the religious and ethnic groups would enjoy the right to self-determination. On the other hand, ethnic groups were focusing on safety, security and position of dignity in

³⁶ Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 118.

³⁷ Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on Historical Practice of Power*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993, p. 41.

³⁸ Donald Eugene Smith, op. cit., p. 115.

the state. General Aung San's initiative for an integrated Myanmar convinced most of the people of the country that a secular nationality would help everyone to secure their position in the state. Accordingly, after independence in 1948, Aung San proposed a secular constitution for the country. Due to his uncontested popularity, the secular political elites established their stronghold in the political sphere of Myanmar. Their main vision was to protect the country from any kind of division.

3.2 *The Induction of Polarisation and Buddhist Nationalism*

The assassination of General Aung San in 1948 diluted the process of national integration in Myanmar. The first prime minister of the country U Nu turned the trajectory of the country from secular nationalism to Buddhist nationalism. His government took initiative to promote Buddhist nationality with democratic values in order to avoid external interference of communism and internal unrest of different ethnic groups.³⁹ The first initiative he took was to change the original constitution which was developed by General Aung San. The idea of a secular constitution was altered to promote the supremacy of Buddhism. During 1954 to 1956, U Nu government organised the Sixth Great Buddhist council and decided to close non-Buddhist religious schools.⁴⁰ Later, U Nu changed his policy due to resistance from non-Bamar groups.⁴¹ The Islamic council and the Burman Christian council demanded separation of religion and the state in Myanmar.⁴² However, the Catholic Christians remained silent on the issue.⁴³ The resistance of minorities was challenged by the monks. They were asking for “only Buddhism” to be taught in the schools of Myanmar. Nevertheless, U Nu's policies undermined the secularist principles of Aung San and instigated a conflict between Buddhist supremacy and secular ideals.

In 1950, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established to monitor religious laws and a bill naming, “The Buddha Sasana Council” was passed in the parliament for promoting Buddhist education in the country.⁴⁴ The Buddhist days were designed and many Pagodas were constructed in the country. A constitutional process was going on, where a clause was included, “the state recognises the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizen of the

³⁹ Fred Von Der Mehden, “Buddhism and Politics in Burma”, *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1961, pp. 166-175.

⁴⁰ Niklas Foxeus, “Contemporary Burmese Buddhism”, in Michael Jerryson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 216.

⁴¹ Donald Eugene Smith, op. cit., p. 117.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 247-249.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ David I. Steinberg, *Burma: A Socialist Nation of Southeast Asia*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1982, p. 63.

Union.”⁴⁵ Prime Minister U Nu confirmed a landslide victory in 1960 declaring to recognise Buddhism as the state religion. After the election, the same article of the constitution proposed for amendment, “Buddhism being the religion professed by the great majority of the citizen of the union shall be the state religion.”⁴⁶ However, U Nu did not go for amending the constitution fearing that it would create tension between Buddhist and non-Buddhist people of Myanmar.⁴⁷ In fact, there were riots in different places during U Nu regime.

U Nu’s policy of changing the principles of Panglong agreement aggravated ethnic tension in the country. In 1961, when U Nu promulgated Buddhism as the state religion, which was a sharp violation of Panglong agreement, generated ethnic tension in Myanmar. There were two types of reaction in the country. First, the ethnic groups vehemently negated this initiative and claimed that it is the evidence of Burmanisation of the country. Second reaction came from more moderate groups, who claimed that such kind of change is against the spirit of independence movement. The group was led by the first president of the Union of Burma, Sao Shew Thaik. He invited leaders of not only the Chen, Kachin and Shan, but also other non-Burmese nationalities-the Karen, Kayan, Mon and Rakhine. He organised Taunggyi Conference where all the delegates argued, “we must set up a union with properly regulated provisions to safeguard the right of national minorities”⁴⁸. But the attempt failed due to military coup of General Ne Win.

Under the U Nu’s leadership, the debate on nationalism resurfaced again. While the ruling class wanted to transform Burma into a Buddhist state, the secular political elites found it a threat to national integration. U Nu’s policy was popularised in the country. The instigation of religious supremacy and the ‘invention of traditions’ helped U Nu to expand his influence and to reorganise religious groups in the political sphere of Myanmar. However, the protest from the secular and minority forces influenced U Nu to rethink his policies. At the end, the military coup of General Ne Win ended the era of U Nu and the country entered in a new era where the tension between the state and nationality deepened and led the country towards a long-term conflict.

3.3 *The Socialist Wave and Linguistic Nationalism*

The military takeover of 1962 by General Ne Win changed the pathway of Myanmar towards a long-term military rule. While U Nu wanted to mix nationalism

⁴⁵ Saittawut Yuthaworakool, “The Politics of Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar: History, Legitimacy and Democratic Transitions”, *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2017, pp. 137.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Donald Eugene Smith, op. cit., p. 117.

⁴⁸ Shelby Tucker, *Burma: Curse of Independence*, London: Pluto Press, 2001, p. 152.

and Buddhism, General Ne Win took the initiative to mix Burmanisation and socialism. For both of them nationalism was simply based on “one ethnicity, one language and one religion”⁴⁹. But their approaches to ethnicity and religion were different. Both of them were promoting “forced assimilation” of ethnic minorities. The difference was that U Nu opted for cultural and religious assimilation into Buddhism and Ne Win’s policies were to promote Burmanisation and socialism by eradicating ethnic and religious diversity. Ne Win adopted a single language policy to assimilate the whole country.

General Ne Win’s first initiative was the adoption of the 1962 Printers and Publishers Regulation Law and 1965 Censor Law. These laws were imposed on the other non-Bamar minorities to compel everyone to learn Burmese language. The promotion of Burmese language reached in a peak when the 1974 constitution declared Burmese language as official language. He also adopted “four cuts” strategies: to cut food supply to the insurgents; to cut protection money from villagers to the insurgents; to cut contacts between people and the insurgents; and to make the people cut off the insurgent’s head. He declared “peoples war doctrine” with the motto of “one voice, one blood and one nation”. Though General Ne Win wanted to establish a homogenous country, but his draconian rule intensified the division between the state and society.

By the time, a number of ethnic insurgent groups grew in the country, most notably, the Karen National Union (KNU), the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO), the Shan State Army (SSA), the New Mon The state Party (NMSP), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and the Chin Democracy Party (CDP). As a reaction to the 1974 constitution, the non-Bamar ethnic communities formed Federal Democratic Front in 1975. It was latter transformed into the National Democratic Front (NDF) in 1976. Though the four-cut strategy of General Ne Win was successful against communist insurgency, but the NDF members of the ethnic communities were capable of controlling vast areas in the respective regions as “liberated areas”. Martin Smith observes, “they were well armed and trained and capable of out-fighting the Tatmadaw in the conventional and guerrilla warfare”, and “each could put several hundred troops into battle, if occasion demanded, before they retreating back into safe mounting strongholds.”⁵⁰ He continues,

“Buoyed by the booming black market and anti-government dissatisfaction, many ethnic forces grew markedly in strength. Armed opposition controlled virtually the entire eastern borders of Burma, from the Tenasserim division

⁴⁹ Lian H. Sakhang, “Ethnic Conflicts: Burma”, in V. R. Raghavan (ed.), *Internal Conflicts-A Four State Analysis: India-Nepal-Sri Lanka-Myanmar*, New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2013, p. 250.

⁵⁰ Martin Smith, *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Washington, D. C.: The East-West Center, 2007, p. 36.

in the South of Kachin state in the north. The three strongest ethnic forces, the KNU, KIO, and SSA, each maintained over 5,000 troops in the field and, like the CPB's People's Army, were capable of fighting the Tatmadaw in the fixed positions of conventional war, which was vital for the defence of border strongholds and trading posts."⁵¹

Due to rising insurgency in the country, General Ne Win took initiative to reform the constitution of the country in 1974. The new constitution proposed for the first time under Ne Win to accommodate ethnic equality for all the major ethnic minorities. It demarcated seven divisions where most of the Burman majority live and seven ethnic states: Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. But the draconian laws and ruthless military operations failed to develop a constitutional rule in the country. Moreover, in 1982, General Ne Win adopted a new citizenship law, where he categorised citizens of the country in three classes: full citizen, associate citizen and naturalised citizen. This law again instigated the debate between the state and nationality in the country. However, General Ne Win built an army state and eradicated divisions among the state, army and the party. Military emerged as part of the state and policy of forced assimilation divided the country severely. A long-term conflict between the military and ethnic resurgent groups weakened the state and the Buddhist nationality was challenged by the ethnic minorities.

Under the General Ne Win's military rule, the national integration of Myanmar was affected severely. The military emerged as parallel to the state. Military elites consolidated all the power and imposition of Burman language deeply undermined the identity of ethnic minorities. Military rulers thought that forceful integration of language and religion would strengthen their position in the power. But, ultimately, the ethnic minorities found no other option without resistance. General Ne Win's policy of force assimilation intensified the tension between the state and nationality and the nationalism in the country became more debated and controversial.

3.4 *The Violent 'Pacification', Purification and Harmonisation*

General Ne Win's draconian counter-insurgency measures affected rural areas of Myanmar and collapsed the economic condition. Therefore, people's uprising started and a military coup occurred in 1988. The military announced four immediate goals of the coup: (a) restoring law and order, peace and tranquillity; (b) provide secure and smooth transportation; (b) easing the people's food, clothing and shelter needs; and (c) holding multi-party democratic elections.⁵² The military

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² James F. Guyot, "Myanmar in 1990: The Unconsummated Election", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, February, 1991, p. 205.

abolished the state institutions and created The state Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The army dropped existing ethnic names of its military, which erased original federal structure of the country. Moreover, military suspended the constitution of 1974 and abolished the Presidency, The State Council, Council of Ministers and People's Assembly. However, though military claimed that they were making change in the country, but in practice they were following the principles of General Ne Win, which was maintaining the supremacy of the military. The identity between military and the state was amalgamated and the hope of national integration became more blurred.

On the other hand, political and economic changes in the country enhanced the popularity of the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Since General Aung San was a unanimous leader of the country, her daughter Aung San Suu Kyi became more popular leader considering that she might lead the country towards integration and development. Her leadership transcended the line of religion, race, ethnicity, class and even military of the country. Her vision, charisma, and leadership led her party to win the general election of 1990.⁵³ After long period of military rule, the people were expecting a leader who can change pathways of the country and stop the long-standing ethnic conflict between the military and ethnic insurgent groups. But military crackdown in the country destroyed the hope for the country's transition towards democracy. The vision of the formation of an integrated and secular nationality by General Aung San and his daughter again found a setback and the conflict between ethnic groups and military remained unresolved. A new era of ethnic conflict escalated in the country and military also took strong measures against armed groups.

The military responded to the emerging conflicts in the ethnic areas in two ways.⁵⁴ First, military took an initiative to modernise its capacity and started collecting new weapons to face new challenges. Second, military wedged a drive against National League for Democracy (NLD) in the proper Burma and in the frontier areas. The military tried to achieve a violent 'pacification' process in the country.⁵⁵ Therefore, the military urged all the ethnic communities for a cease-fire agreement with SLORC. These cease-fire agreements allowed some groups to keep arms in their hand to police their own territory. But, in reality, the trust between military and ethnic groups were not in a level where military and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) can reach

⁵³ Mary P. Callahan, "Language Policy in Modern Burma", in Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds.), *Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia*, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003, p. 165.

⁵⁴ Mary P. Callahan, "Language Policy in Modern Burma", op. cit., p. 166.

⁵⁵ Lee Jones, "Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition: The Periphery is Central", *Democratization*, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 785.

an agreement. The government categorised ethnic minorities in 135 races by reinvigorating colonial categorisation.⁵⁶ The objective of this categorisation was to divide the opposition, but it generated new challenge that all the ethnic groups started demanding autonomy which emerged as a challenge for the military.⁵⁷

On the issue of nationality, SLORC took a policy of purification and homogenisation.⁵⁸ At first, the military renamed the country from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. The name of some major cities was also renamed allegedly to eliminate vestiges of imperialism. English-language books were republished with all references to “Burma” whited out and replaced with “Myanmar”. The government also took initiative to rewrite the history of a singular national race the “Myanmar”. The junta assigned responsibility to government bodies, such as the Committee for the Compilation of Authentic Data of Myanmar history (later succeeded by the Historical Commission) and the office of Strategic Studies. One of the interesting campaigns was the 1997-98 Pondaung Primate Fossil Exploration archaeological project. Without sufficient archaeological knowledge, the army-led dig produced spacious claims that fossils found in the Pondaung region of the country proved that human civilisation began in Myanmar.⁵⁹ They have also claimed the ethnic groups in Burma co-existed harmoniously as far back as the Neolithic period.⁶⁰

The government sponsored a dual process in dealing with ethnic minority issues. In the one hand, it adopted a policy of purification and harmonisation by promoting the idea that ethnic groups and Burmese were living together for thousands of years. On the other hand, it instigated differences among the ethnic groups by categorising them on the basis of racial identity. In the 1990s, science, cultural and local history museums sprang up around the country. Built by various ministries, regional commands, and armed forces directorates, these museums revered the “Myanmar” race as the sacred core of their narrative in history. The government took language issue at the centre of campaign and declared a policy of establishing a monolingual state. It formed Burmese Language Commission and declared three causes of language policy: (a) non-disintegration of the union, (b) non-disintegration of the solidarity, and (c) perpetuation of national sovereignty.⁶¹ At the same time,

⁵⁶ Alan Collins, *Security and Southeast Asia: Domestic, Regional and Global Issues*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Mary P. Callahan, “Language Policy in Modern Burma”, op. cit., p. 166.

⁵⁸ Mary P. Callahan, Making Myanmar's Language, “Territory, and Belonging in Post-Socialist Burma”, in Joel S. Migdal (ed.), *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 99-120.

⁵⁹ Mary P. Callahan, “Language Policy in Modern Burma”, op. cit., p. 167.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mary P. Callahan, “Language Policy in Modern Burma”, op. cit., p. 168.

government adopted a set of assimilationist policies toward minorities. Government invested in the areas of building roads, Burmese language schools, hospitals, power plants, telecommunications relay station, and other institutions and facilities aimed at both modernising and subjugating inhabitants of the former rebel-held territory.⁶²

The policies of the government were not effective to accommodate and counter ethnic insurgency. In 1993, government invited peace talks by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), but the process could not be sustained. Due to increasing criticism from the international community and escalation of violence in Myanmar, the military declared a seven-step road map to democracy in 2003. By this declaration, a new process started in the country, where military offered a new system of governance. The process though declared for a democratic framework, but in reality, it was a process to ensure the dominance of military in a different framework. However, this period of violent ‘pacification’ was a process to purify and harmonise the country. In fact, it was a continuation of General Ne Win’s policies. The military enforced its supremacy and denied ethnic identity for frontier people. The ethnic groups denied to accept this process and the formation of nationality emerged as more problematic.

3.5 *Transition towards Democracy*

The declaration of democratic roadmap in Myanmar indicated that the country is going towards a new transition. A number of issues influenced military to approve such kinds of changes. Firstly, increasing international pressure on the human rights violation was isolating Myanmar from the international community. Due to rising development necessity, military could not remain isolated. Therefore, military took measures to enhance international connections. Secondly, internal economic mismanagement and ethnic conflicts weaken the position of the government. Therefore, military government thought that transition towards democracy would help them to remain protected from the rising movements of the country. Nevertheless, this initiative was appreciated internationally, expecting that at least it would have some changes of the long military rule in the country.

The transition process started by the initiation of 2008 constitution. The constitution was an effort to address some of the demands of ethnic minorities and to start a new democratic process. Since 1948, ethnic communities demanded five-point amendments to the constitution: (a) establishing a state, (b) assignment of equal powers to both chambers of the union parliament, (c) each state shall be represented by an equal number of representatives in the chambers of nationalities, (d) the following departments shall be vested in central union, and all other powers,

⁶² Ibid.

rights and entitlements shall be transferred to the state-foreign relations, union defence, union finance, coinage and currency, post and telecommunication, rail, air and water transport, union judiciary, collection of custom duties and seaports etc., (e) union revenue shall be distributed equally.⁶³ The 2008 constitution partially fulfilled first three demands, but military vehemently denied to fulfil next three demands. However, the question of self-determination of the ethnic minorities remained unresolved. Under 2008 constitution, military arranged an election in 2010. But, the main opposition, NLD boycotted the election. Though it was an elected government, the ultimate control of power remained in the hand of military.

The government again initiated a nation-wide ceasefire agreement in 2011. There were a number of differences between the peace process from 1989 to 2010 and post-2011. Firstly, earlier peace process was negotiated between the military and EAOs, but in 2011, peace process engaged multiple institutions to co-ordinate from decision making level to implementation level. Secondly, there was a lack of coordination among the ethnic groups in the earlier negotiations, but 2011 ethnic groups started coordinating among themselves. Thirdly, earlier military enforced ceasefire, but in 2011, military initiated political dialogue for resolving differences. Fourthly, there was no representation from the international community, but in 2011, the UN and China were engaged as representatives in the negotiation process. However, some days before the elections of 2015, military and ethnic groups reached in a peace deal. Nevertheless, the demands of the ethnic minorities were not fulfilled.

The election of 2015 made a remarkable change in the political history of Myanmar. The triumph of Aung San Suu Kyi raised new hope among the ethnic minorities of the country. The Suu Kyi government initiated a new peace process, known as 21st Century Panglong peace process. Suu Kyi government took initiatives to form new institutions like National Reconciliation and Peace Restoration (NRPC). From 2016, the government organised a number of peace conferences in the country as initiation of new peace process. But the process is challenged by a number of longstanding issues. The deep-rooted mistrust between military and ethnic groups prevents confidence building among the stakeholders of negotiation. The ethnic groups want to uphold the principles of 1947 Panglong agreement by adopting federal structure in the country, but military is committed to maintain a unitary system in the country. The ethnic groups want to preserve their identity within a federal framework. However, the constitution of 2008 is based on a unitary system. Without consent of military, any change of the constitution is not possible, because the military controls 25 per cent of seats in the parliament constitutionally.

⁶³ Sai Aung Tun, *History of the Shan State: From Its Origins to 1962*, Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm, 2009, p. 381.

At present, the debate between the state and nationality is revolving in three ways. The military elites want to maintain supremacy of Burmese identity and consider military as the sole representative of nationality. On the contrary, ethnic minorities think that their national identity should be preserved and they should get right to self-determination. The Aung San Suu Kyi government declared their election manifesto of 2015 that they would uphold the spirit of the Panglong Agreement 1947. Therefore, the debate on the issue of nationalism still remains problematic and there is no indication of the resolution of politics of nationalism in Myanmar.

4. Conclusion

The formation of nationalism depends on the effective harmonisation between the state identity and nationality of a country. When the state can create strong bondage among the people of its boundary by developing a feeling of same nationality, the formation of nationalism becomes easy and strong. In contrary, when the state fails to unite all people of its boundary, the formation of nationalism is difficult and sometimes conflicting. In the post-colonial countries, political elites play significant role in the formation of nationalism of a state. Due to colonial experience, these countries bear a number of divisions in the society, which were mostly instigated by the colonials for consolidating their domination. Such divisions emerged as a challenge for post-colonial political elites, when they dream for an integrated country. In such cases, while political elites take initiative to develop a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society for the formation of nationality, the issue of nationalism becomes settled. On the other hand, when political elites fail to accommodate all groups in the same nationality, it ultimately leads to conflict and violence. Paul Brass argues that the nationalism in the post-colonial countries are evolved in a process of competition between and among different political elites of a country.

In case of Myanmar, in the formation phase of nationalism, secular political elites under the leadership of General Aung San dreamt secular nationality and agreed to recognise all the ethnic communities in the formation of nationalism of Myanmar. They signed Panglong Agreement in 1947 with the frontier communities by recognising unique and separate identity of ethnic communities. They also tried to eradicate the tension between ethnic minorities and Bamar community, which was instigated by British rulers. But, after the assassination of General Aung San in 1948, the Buddhist nationalism emerged rigorously. The political elites in the period focused on Buddhist nationalism, which helped them to continue their dominance in the society. The ethnic minorities felt alienated and launched arms struggle by undermining the state identity of Myanmar. By the time, General Ne Win intervened in the politics of Myanmar. Military emerged as the main political

elite in the country. To ensure military's dominance, Ne Win took an initiative of force assimilation of the language of all the people of Myanmar. Ne Win's policies failed to eradicate tension between the state and nationality, rather the country entered into a long-term conflict and a number of insurgent groups organised them in the frontier areas to challenge the state identity of Myanmar.

Ne Win's regime weakened the country politically and economically. Therefore, he was compelled to leave power to another military regime in 1988. The new regime, known as SLORC, promised for democratic transition. But they adopted two pronged policies to deal with the political uncertainty of the country. In the one hand, they took initiative to recognise ethnic identities. On the other hand, by categorising ethnic communities, they divided the country again on the basis of ethnic lines. Following the election of 1990, they suppressed NLD and retained the supremacy of military. It ultimately prevented to resolve the existing tension between the military and ethnic minorities.

Due to increasing international pressure and internal instability, the military elites declared a road map to democracy in 2003. Accordingly, military formed a constitution in 2008. They also started a negotiation process in 2011, which was different from the earlier negotiations in terms of participation and engagement. They allowed political leaders in the negotiation and engaged the UN and China in the negotiation process. The 2015 election was a landmark event in the political history of Myanmar. The winning of the NLD and arrival of power of Aung San Suu Kyi as the state counsellor of the country raised new hope for reconciliation between the military and ethnic groups. Suu Kyi established new institutions and started 21st Century Panglong negotiation to resolve longstanding violence between the military and ethnic communities. But, the deep-rooted mistrust among the stakeholders and military's dominance in the constitutional process raised concerns about the success of the ongoing negotiation.

The unresolved tension between the state and nationality, which was escalated after the assassination of General Aung San still remains unsettled. During U Nu, General Ne Win and SLORC, the political elites could not accommodate the nationality of frontier areas in the formation of nationalism of Myanmar, rather their policy of force assimilation instigated ethnic insurgent groups to choose violent activities. The failure of force assimilation compelled the political elites to reorganise the necessity of negotiation with the ethnic minorities. Aung San Suu Kyi's government initiated new negotiation and invited all the stakeholders in the process. However, there is a strong demand for the ethnic communities to reform the constitution and citizenship laws of the country, which is very much difficult without the consent from military. The success of present negotiation process

depends on the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. Therefore, it remains a challenge for the present political elites that how far they can accommodate the demands of all the stakeholders of the country to eradicate the longstanding tension between the state and nationality in the process of the formation of nationalism of Myanmar.