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**Democratization in Burma/Myanmar**

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## **Abstract**

Burma/Myanmar held its first elections in 2010, twenty years after the last controversial elections in 1990. Democratic political institutions were absent since 1962 when the parliamentary government was dissolved as a result of the military coup led by General Ne Win. The nation never had an opportunity to practice a stable, democratic government system since its independence. However, recent elections, regardless of the military influence, was seen by the people, as well as the international community as the nation taking its first step towards change. Since Burma/Myanmar is a developing country with complex internal ethnic issues, learning from the experiences of nearby countries would be beneficial for its future. Therefore, factors contributing to the democratization process in developing countries were used to analyze the transition process of India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Based on their experiences, the same factors were applied to Burma/Myanmar in order to establish the conditions required for a successful transition.

## **Introduction**

Democratization was a concept popular amongst scholars of international politics towards the end of 1980s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many Eastern European countries went through this transition process. Samuel Huntington (1991) described the period as the third wave of democratization throughout political history. Although many nations were successfully transformed, few countries in the world still remain under the control of authoritarian regimes. Burma/Myanmar is a nation in South East Asia going through the process of democratization, years after its neighboring countries. It was governed by a military regime until recent elections were held in 2010. Although the international community deemed the elections as illegitimate, some do believe that the country is eventually taking its first step towards becoming a democratic state. Therefore, it is important to once again review the literature of democratization, as well as the experiences of three different countries in the region, in order to determine the pre-requisite conditions required for Burma/Myanmar for a successful transition.

The thesis is structured into three different sections with the first section focusing on the literature of democracy. The factors contributing to the democratization process as defined by various scholars in the field are listed. An in-depth definition of categories such as wealth, political leadership, political culture, civil society, international factors, political institutions and political systems were mentioned. These factors are considered as pre-requisites for successful transition process in third world countries.

The second section of the thesis, lay out the experiences of democratic transitions in three different countries (India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia) from the period prior to independence up until its successful transformation or its breakdown of democracy. These countries were chosen

because of its geographical region as well as possessing a common characteristic of being colonized by the British. The factors listed in the literature review as pre-requisites to successful transitions were applied to each nation in this section. By doing so, it was clear to see that each factor affects each nation differently and the presence and absence of certain factors determines the success or failure of the countries transitions.

Experiences of the three nations showed that in certain pre-conditions such as national unity, political culture, civil society and the establishment of strong political institutions are required for Burma/Myanmar to successfully transform into a democratic nation. Since the country is still in its beginning stages of transition after being controlled by repressive regimes, it does not possess any democratic political infrastructure. People of the nation as well as the international community are still skeptical towards the current government as the elected officials are ex-military personnel operating under the control of the military government. However, it is undeniable but that development regardless of how slow it is can be seen in Burma/Myanmar after the elections of 2010. The ability of the newly establishment parliamentary government to lead the country into a democratic future is yet to be determined.

## **Chapter (1): Literature Review**

Democratization is the process of a political transition of any nation towards an open and free political system. This process comes in various forms including transition from an authoritarian regime to a partial democracy, partial democracy to a full democracy, or a direct transition from authoritarian to full democracy. Samuel Huntington (1993) pointed out that the democratization process can be broken down into three big waves throughout history. The third wave, or what he called democratization in the late twentieth century, was a significant occurrence which involved over 60 countries throughout Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. The third wave is most relevant to this research, because it focuses on democratization in developing countries, post-communist countries and nations with authoritarian regimes. According to Huntington, the causes of the third wave can be attributed to the loss of legitimacy in authoritarian regimes as well as rapid economic growth resulting from increased trade between nations. In addition, Huntington cited regional factors such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the creation of the European Union. Finally, he argued that democratization has been promoted by the international pressure imposed by democratic nations whether it be through economic interdependence, foreign aid or through non-governmental organizations.

For countries transitioning directly from an authoritarian regime to a full democracy, it is important for their citizens to understand democracy and the conditions that are required to achieve a democratic state. Robert Dahl (1998: 37-38) defines democracy with five criteria, namely: effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising final control over the agenda and inclusion of adults. He explained that each criterion is necessary if members of a society are to be politically equal in determining the policies of their country. Effective participation and voting equality are required so that all citizens are given the

equal and effective opportunity to express their opinions in the decision making process. Enlightened understanding means that each person is given the opportunity to learn about policies, alternatives and their consequences. Citizens of a democratic country must also possess the ability to control the agenda so they can choose what matters are most important for them. Lastly, inclusion of adults means that all adult citizens must have the full rights mentioned above for the country to be considered democratic.

Dahl (1998: 147) also defined conditions that favor democratic institutions. These conditions include: 1) control of military and police by elected officials; 2) democratic beliefs and political culture; 3) no strong foreign control hostile to democracy; 4) a modern market economy and society; and 5) a weak subcultural pluralism. Dahl believed that the most dangerous internal threat to democracy is leaders having access to major means of coercion such as military and the police. An ambitious leader who would prefer to remain in power can easily use the military to suppress any kind of opposition, taking the country back into its authoritarian state. Democratic beliefs and political culture are required because they help sustain the democratic state during internal or external ideological crises. If the democratic political culture can be maintained and passed on from one generation to another, citizens can learn to protect their democratic state and tolerate the ideological differences amongst them. Foreign control hostile to democracy mentioned by Dahl is rare to see in this decade. However, for former colonial countries this criterion is more common as these countries experienced foreign intervention, sometimes by more than one nation that prevented them from achieving independence. Dahl's definition of a modern market economy includes open economic policies which favor private enterprises that compete freely in the market, as well as allowing foreign direct investments. The market economy can raise the standard living conditions of a country



through economic development. Lastly, Dahl pointed out that democracy flourishes better in countries which are culturally homogeneous. When there are fewer cultural differences, there is less likelihood that groups will differentiate between “us” against “them”. To sustain a stable democratic system, cultural conflicts must be avoided or minimized (Dahl 1998: 147-158).

Dankwart Rustow (1970: 350-361) developed a model to show that nations must go through different phases during their democratization process. His model includes background conditions, the preparatory phase, the decision phase and the habitual phase. Rustow argued that before the democratization process could occur, national unity must exist as a background condition for any nation. He ignored economic development and focused on national unity instead because there are several countries across the world where economic development did not bring about democratization. Once national unity exists, a nation can then move towards the preparatory phase where a prolonged political struggle occurs. Rustow never denied the fact that democratization takes several years to achieve. Instead, he argued that during the preparatory phase, many political leaders will come and go until one emerges who possess the capability of representing the interests of the public in order to bring about change. He also pointed out that this political struggle can also be led by the elite.

After the political struggle, the nation then move on towards decision phase where deliberation occurs between political leaders through compromises and acceptance of certain conditions in order to develop a more democratic nation. Once the decision has been made, the nation can then move towards the habituation phase where democratic values are practiced over and over again until they become entrenched (Rustow 1970: 356-358).

Other scholars have also cited various factors as contributing to the process of democratization. However, since this thesis focuses on the transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy, factors which are most relevant to an authoritarian regime will be analyzed in the literature review section. These include wealth (GDP per capital), political leadership, political culture, civil society, international influences, political institutions and political systems.

### **1.1 Wealth (GDP per capital)**

The most important factor many authors cite in explaining democratization is wealth or GDP per capital of a nation. Seymour Lipset (1994) pointed out that there is a positive correlation between the level of economic development and the chances for a stable democracy. The development of a nation's economy produces greater economic security, widespread education and lowers economic inequality with the emergence of a middle class. As the country develops, opportunities to interact with other nations open up doors for the exchange of capital, goods, services and technology. With the knowledge of how other nations operate, people will begin to demand an accountable system of government which in turn leads to authoritarian regimes losing their legitimacy.

Such economic development also fosters entrepreneurs and small businesses. These organizations create job opportunities for many of the citizens, thus challenging the state control over the job market. As Larry Diamond (1995: 22) pointed out, when economic development occurs, countries such as Turkey, Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan have felt the pressure to democratize from their Western trade partners, as well as from elites within their nations who more often than not trained in the West. As much as Lipset's thesis applies to many nations, there are certain exceptions where higher economic development did not necessarily lead to

democracy. History has shown examples where the middle class or the bourgeoisie occasionally prefers authoritarian rule as it tends to benefit from state contracts and established relationships with the ruling elites.

Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi (1997: 157) criticized Lipset's argument that economic development is a pre-requisite for democratization. By differentiating countries into endogenous (democracies emerging in countries that are economically developed) and exogenous (democracies established independently from economic development) groups, they explained that the process of democratization in some countries was entirely unrelated to economic development. Within the endogenous group, a nation undergoes a series of steps including industrialization, urbanization, education, communication, mobilization and political incorporation before proceeding to democratization. Przeworski and Limongi argued that modernization alone does not lead to democracy. There were many other reasons why dictatorships fell and democracy emerged. This could be due to a death of an authoritarian leader, foreign pressures or even economic crises. When countries move toward a democratic state without any major changes in their economy, these countries fall in the exogenous category. The authors do not argue against the importance of economic development in fostering democracy. However, they pointed out that the emergence of democracy is not necessarily a by-product of economic development. Only once democracy was established would the economic variables play a vital role in the chances of a country maintaining its democratic status (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997: 177)

For example, oil-rich states in the Gulf have enjoyed a high level of economic development. Despite that, this did not lead their nations to becoming more democratic. Obviously other factors such as religion, and the resource curse theory, come into play. Resource

curse theory states that countries with an abundance of natural resources tend to experience economic distortion and challenging conditions in their democratization process. India is also an exception where economic development did not diminish the income inequality. Yet, India benefits from a fairly democratic constitutional system compared to its neighboring nations. Thus, although economic development is not a prerequisite to democracy, it enhances the prospects for the transition to democracy by contributing to other variables such as changes in values and beliefs, growth of independent and non-governmental organizations, growth of civil society, slowly eliminating corruption, and lowering income inequality by creating a more equitable class structure.

## **1.2 Political Leadership**

The next important factor affecting the process of democratization in the developing countries is political leadership. Although many people would agree that a good leader is needed during the transition period, many fail to give sufficient credit to the contributions of a good political leader. Especially when a nation is transitioning from an authoritarian state to full democracy, the political leader is responsible for influencing the changes in the political culture, attitudes of the people towards the government, and also building political systems through democratic means. Especially when the country possesses a weak political infrastructure skillful, innovative and courageous leadership is required.

Skillful leaders are dedicated and committed to democratic values throughout the transition period. This commitment, according to Linz (1995) is called “loyalty” to the democratic system. Linz explained that such leaders reject the selfish pursuit of power as well as unconstitutional or antidemocratic actions to take back control from the people during times of

hardship. For example, in the case of India, Gandhi was a flexible, accommodative and consensual leader who achieved his country's independence from the British. In Chile, during the transition period, its presidents had to approach the past human rights violations of the military carefully, slowly incorporating democratic institutions while trying to narrow the scope of military involvement. In South Korea, President Kim Young Sam had to lead the country through political and financial reforms in order to bring about national stability while lowering the involvement of the military. Unsuccessful transitions also exist where the actions of democratic leaders had authoritarian consequences, particularly if the political culture of the nation was accustomed to an authoritarian regime.

### **1.3 Political Culture**

Under the topic of democratization, the concept of political culture is unavoidable. Political culture refers to the beliefs and values concerning politics that the people of a nation possess. These values include belief in the legitimacy of democracy; willingness to compromise with political opponents; tolerance for opposing parties; moderation in partisan identification; trust in political environment and cooperation amongst competitors; political participation, civility of political discourse; and the belief in political equality (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1995: 18). Especially in developing countries, these beliefs and values are highly dependent upon the country's history and its culture. As Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) pointed out, for many of the previously colonized nations, their political cultures exhibited a British colonial legacy. Although these values were initially transmitted only to the local elite, in order for it be accepted by the mass public, the elites had to reach out and educate them in democratic practices.

Christian Welzel (2006: 874) argued that the democratization process could not have happened without the participation of the mass public. He pointed out that none of the structural theorists, elite choice theorists, or political culture theorists gave enough attention to the liberty aspirations of the mass public which to him was one of the most important political culture factors for democratization. He believed that a widespread consensus amongst the mass public acknowledging the importance of democratic values was required for transition to take place. He also argued that the so-called “third” wave defined by Huntington was not elite-driven. Rather, it emerged from the ground up, based on campaigns for civil and political freedom involving mass public mobilizations. In cases such as South Korea and Czechoslovakia widespread mass demonstrations gave way to regime change.

For developing countries and nations with authoritarian regimes, in order for the people to acquire a democratic culture, human development processes must occur first. Since the mass public might be accustomed to the abusive nature of a military regime, the public needs to be educated about their civil and political freedoms. Welzel argued that civil and political freedoms are at the heart of any pro-democracy movement. Democracy empowers people by giving them the choice to elect leaders to represent their needs. This empowerment, according to him, is an emancipative process. Therefore, when we discuss political culture, the importance of the liberty aspirations of the mass public cannot be ignored.

During its transition process, the political culture of such a nation is also constantly changing. Through quantitative research, Welzel measured the level of freedom in countries transitioning to democracy and how much of their successes can be attributed to the liberty aspirations of the mass public. By dividing the democratization process into an initial phase, intermediate phase and the final phase, his research shows that mass liberty aspirations have a

positive effect on the level of freedom that can be achieved (Welzel, 2006: 890). Therefore he concluded that, political culture is one of the most important factors in the process of democratization. This culture could change over time especially in nations going through the transition process. However, without the attitudes of the mass public adapting to democratic political culture, the transition process would not be completed with the country achieving partial democracy or, worse, the freedom achieved would be short-lived with the nation falling back into chaos.

Especially in developing countries, one can argue that some form political culture exists amongst the mass public as this triggered the nation to rebel against the colonizing country. The time period after a country's independence is crucial as the political participation of the mass public is at its highest. This could either lead to the building of a strong democratic governmental structure or it could take the country down into political turmoil, causing internal conflicts and the subsequent breakdown of democracy.

Slightly different from Welzel's mass based emancipation process, Lijphart (1969: 216) introduced the concept of consociational democracy to describe highly fragmented political cultures. In this type of democracy, the government by elite cartel is responsible for turning a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy. He argued that the following steps should be taken for a consociational democracy to be successful. Firstly, the elites must have the capability to accommodate the diverse interest of the subcultures. Secondly, they must be compromising enough to work with the elites of other subcultures. Thirdly, their commitment to the maintenance of a stable democracy is crucial. Finally, the elite must understand the perils of political fragmentation. When examining the relationship between the elites of the subcultures, Lijphart pointed out that external pressures affect the kind of relationships the elites have with

one another. When faced with external threats, groups tend to work together to bring about unity and nationalism. The survival of consociational democracy also depends on the existence of multiple balances of power amongst subcultures. When there is a dominating culture or two equally powerful subcultures, it is easier for the elites to give up their compromising values and attempt to dominate one another.

The interaction between the people of different subcultures also plays a crucial role in Lijphart's consociational democracy. When two cultures with different ideals are forced to interact with one another with little mediation, this could lead to the breakdown rather than development of democracy. Here, the elites have to learn to step in when necessary and forge compromises while representing the interests of each culture (Lijphart, 1969: 219-220). He also pointed out that because of the compromising tasks given to these elites, it is crucial for them to not lose track of the interests of the cultures they are representing. As long as a cohesive relationship exists between the elite and its mass public, the support they will gain from the cultures they represent will grow.

#### **1.4 Civil Society**

Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995: 27) define civil society as follows: civil societies are organized social institutions that are formed voluntarily, that are autonomous from the state, and that are based on a set of shared rules. These societies can consist of formal or informal organizations, interest groups, cultural and religion related groups, developmental associations, issue-oriented groups, media related and research and educational oriented associations. Although they focus on the state, their main concern lies primarily with the public and their



interest. In relation to democratization, civil society plays an important role in promoting further democratization advancement.

Lipset explained that the presence of a strong civil society institution is favorable because they mediate between individual and the state (Lipset, 1994: 12). They are used by the mass public to communicate interests to the elected officials. Political institutions also take advantage of these organizations to pass on information to the citizens, allowing a smoother flow of information. He also pointed out that the establishment of voluntary organizations promotes democratic values as these groups compete with one another and the state for popular attention while encouraging the rights and the freedom of other groups to oppose them (Lipset, 1994: 13).

As Linz pointed out, the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines was brought down in 1985 by the coalition of students, professionals, businessmen, working class, priests, teachers and housewives. The existence of civil society in the Philippines created an opportunity for people with various backgrounds to get together and work for similar goals (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1995: 30). Similarly, in South Korea, students and workers' protests led to democratic demonstrations in 1987. The importance of civil society can clearly be seen in India where democracy is invigorated by organizations working in areas of language reforms, civic rights, women's rights and educational modernization.

As important as these organizations are during the transition period, they are also equally important in well-established democracies. In developed democratic countries, their purpose is to monitor and limit state power and to hold elected representatives accountable for their actions. In some situations, they consider themselves as interest groups vocalizing the interests of a certain group of people and supporting a representative who would communicate their goals in the

policy making process. In today's world, such organizations have grown from a domestic level to an international level where they are now influencing the behaviors of nation states in the international political arena. By advocating their ideals, these associations are aiding the process of democratization, and the protection of civic and human rights in the developing world.

### **1.5 International Factors**

Although the effects may vary depending on the state and circumstances, international factors affect the process of democratization. These international factors include colonial rule, intervention, cultural diffusion and demonstration affects from abroad. The demonstration affects can be seen in the recent events occurring in the Middle East. The exhibitions against regimes which started in Tunisia have spread to countries such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) called such demonstration effects a "contagion" that could potentially exert a powerful external influence. However, they also pointed out that these external influences are most effective in countries which are geographically proximate and culturally similar. Huntington (1993) also perceived demonstration affects as having a snowballing effect beginning in the 1970s, which contributed to the democratic transitions in Latin America and the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989.

As authoritarian regimes fell, opposition groups in neighboring countries became inspired and the ruling elites began to lose confidence. Additional external pressures and foreign aid can also contribute to the strengthening of these democratic movements. Powerful international actors could also exert more pressure against remaining authoritarian regimes, leading to their further isolation. Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995: 48) also pointed out that colonization also had affected the democratic transition process of its colonies. In countries such as India and Sri

Lanka, political norms, liberal and democratic values were communicated by the colonizer giving these countries the pre-independence experience of self-governance, an idea of a democratic state and tradition of pluralist expression.

Unlike Schmitter and Huntington, Diamond, Linz and Lipset believed that internal structures and actions contributed more to the democratic transition than international influence. Although they also acknowledged the fact that in recent years, governmental and non-governmental organizations based in the developed countries such as the United States, Canada, Sweden and Switzerland had helped in the development of democratic organizations, creating a democratic civic culture and assisting in the development of infrastructures in developing countries. This brought up the topic of whether foreign aid or the lack of it and economic sanctions foster democratic transition. Those who argue against foreign aid pointed out that aid given to undemocratic countries only helped support the regimes in power by giving them an opportunity to exploit the aid to their own benefit rather than distributing to the areas that are most in need. Joseph Wright (2009: 552) argued that foreign aid can help in democratic transitions if given to leaders who are most likely to remain in power after democracy has been achieved.

International factors do not always come in the form of foreign aid. Colonization itself can also be considered an international factor contributing to the development of democratization in an indirect way. Developing countries tend to learn their democratic practices from the colonized country. The effects British rule had on their colonies such as India can clearly be seen in the trajectory of its democratization process after independence. For example, the building of communication structures and bureaucratic infrastructures helped establish the Indian National Congress with local autonomy given to local leaders in different regions.

## **1.6 Political Institutions**

Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) argued that a stable democracy is highly dependent upon institutionalization of a nation's political system, and also on the party system they choose to adopt. Four distinct points were made by the authors in supporting their argument. First, institutionalized democracies were less volatile because the structure binds behavior into stable, predictable and recurrent patterns. Uncertainty is also reduced because people feel secure in the knowledge that interaction, moderation, bargaining and accommodation processes took place under specific rules and guidelines established by the institutions.

Second, democracies with well-established political institutions could maintain political order through upholding the rule of law, protecting the civil liberties of its citizens, checking the abuses of power by its government, providing meaningful representation, assuring fair competition, and providing opportunities of choice and accountability. Third, well-institutionalized democracies could produce effective policies because their stable structures enabled them to represent vast interests of their citizens and allowed them to engage in negotiations and coalition building which can produce effective policies. Lastly, democracies with proper institutions could limit military involvement and provide civilian control over the military (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1995: 35).

Once the proper institutional structures have been established, political parties are then needed to represent the people and create competition. Political parties are the most important mediating buffer between citizens and the state. They are needed for forming governments and representing different interests of the people. Parties can convert different opinions, cleavages and interests into policies, laws and regulations. Without effective parties with a strong support

base from the public, an effective functioning government is unlikely. The authors argued that two-party systems would be most likely to bring about accommodation, negotiation and moderation because they allow each party to represent broad political appeals. Small multi-party systems in their opinion are less likely to create effective policies because of the narrow interests each party could represent.

Through a case study of twenty nine democracies over time, G. Bingham Powell Jr. (1984: 206) argued counter to Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995: 36) that a proportional representation system works better than a two-party system as it allows each party to connect directly with its supporters, thus representing their interests more accurately than would a broad based two-party system. Although Diamond, Linz and Lipset did not contradict the views expressed by Powell, they did however argue that the case studies supported the proposition that a system of two or a few parties with broad ideological bases promote a less volatile democracy than a system with several different parties. They used Thailand as an example to show linkage between extreme party fractionalization and institutional weakness. With fifty different parties representing different interests in parliament, the Thai government was unable to build strong popular support and to achieve cooperation to transform these interests into effective policies (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1995: 36).

## **1.7 Political Systems: Presidential Vs. Parliamentary**

In regards to the constitutional structure of a democratic nation, many democracies adopt either a presidential or a parliamentary system. In this section, Juan Linz's (1994) literature on

presidentialism and parliamentarism will be used to compare the pros and cons of both structures. A presidential system is associated with the oldest and most successful democratic experience of the United States. However, apart from a selected few nations in the developing world, the parliamentary system seems to fit the newly developed democracies better than the presidential system. Juan Linz argued that the stability of democratic nations was best fostered by adopting a parliamentary system governed by legislative majorities. For nations with deep political cleavages and numerous political parties, a parliamentary system offers better stability in preserving democracy.

Juan Linz also pointed out two important aspects of presidential system: 1) the President's strong claim to democratic legitimacy and 2) the fixed term in office. Since the President is elected as an executive with a considerable constitutional power, this gives the office opportunities to adopt policies campaigned for. However, Linz argued that this can only be done if the legislatures' political opinion is in line with that of the President. If the legislatures support an opposite point of view, it could create political deadlock where policies the President promised voters could not be adopted. Secondly, because the term in office is limited, the political process could become discontinuous and rigid especially if the political views of the successive Presidents are completely opposite of his or her predecessor.

Linz pointed out that the presidential system gives the incumbent the title of "ceremonial" head of state along with the functions of a chief executive. This title could possibly lead to unrealistic expectations from the public. These expectations cannot be found in nations with a parliamentary system regardless of how popular the Prime Minister may become. The knowledge that the office possesses an independent authority and veto power emboldens presidents even if the position was obtained through a minor difference in the winning votes.

Parliamentary systems on the other hand, can produce absolute majorities for a single party although coalition forming and power sharing are fairly common. This constantly reminds the Prime Minister of his or her role as a representative of the party and the voters whereby the policies that he or she tries to achieve will more often be those that the party campaigned for (Linz, 1994: 55).

Another unfavorable feature of presidential systems is that because of the limited fixed term of the president in office, unity becomes a problem when the legislatures and presidents are from different political parties. Expansion of the government's support base is thus difficult and the oppositions would have to wait out the pre-set limited number of years before any changes they preferred to see could be made. This in itself creates rigidity, tensions and polarization of political parties. Another valid argument Linz made in opposition to the presidential system is that a President can face conflicting roles as chief executive of state as well as representing the party's core voters. As the chief executive, the president is required to symbolize the nation as well as be the partisan leader fighting to promote the political views of his or her party. If the President were to act more as the head of the state and less as a partisan leader, he or she could lose the support base, whereas if the president were to solely communicate the party's views he or she would not be properly representing the citizens as a whole. A Prime Minister on the other hand can seldom be put into such conflicted situations. As most parliaments are prone to be constructed from the coalitions of various parties, the Prime Minister is constantly attached to the parties' views as well as the coalition party's political views. This creates opportunities for the Prime Minister to represent the policies of a larger voter base.

The biggest concern Linz (1994) had in applying the presidential system to developing countries is because of its dual legitimacy issue. Because the relationship between the executive

and the legislatures could get complex, this could create a potential problem in developing countries where democratic practices and values were new to the people. These institutional tensions can be peacefully resolved in well-established democratic nations. However, in developing countries these conflicts can lead to revolutions and the overthrow of the existing government through military coups.

When it comes to the issue of stability, Juan Linz once again argued that a simple government crisis in a parliamentary system could lead to a full blown regime crisis in a presidential system. A Prime Minister who had been involved in a scandal or who had lost his party's support can be easily removed from office. The parliament can elect a new Prime Minister to form a new government. In a presidential system, because of its fixed term rule, removing a President is a more difficult to extreme undertaking. Even when polarization has reached a point of violence, a stubborn incumbent may remain in office until impeachment. In the case of a president's impeachment, death or resignation, not many nations have the strong institutional vice-president succession system such as the United States. Some nations practice the split ticket presidential system where the vice president could be from a different political party. In such situations, when the vice president takes over the country this creates the risk of reversing all the policies that were made by the predecessor thus damaging the government's legitimacy.

Linz (1994: 65) ended his comparison of the two systems with a reminder that although parliamentary systems provide more flexible institutional structures, this flexibility and strength could not be achieved without strong political parties, strong civil society, good leadership and a free and fair party competition representing various interests of the people. Each country has its own unique history and culture that shares how a government is formed. Based on these



variables, no one can guarantee that a parliamentary system will not experience a break down. Interestingly enough, in the next section the three developing countries in South and South East Asia practice a mixture of presidential and parliamentary systems with the existence of both the President and the Prime Minister. Because of the differences in historical context, cultural experiences and the democratization process that these countries have experienced, their political systems are structured in unique ways to satisfy the needs of each country. Their political structures might not be perceived as fully democratic by Western standards.

For countries going through the transition process, the factors mentioned above are important in various ways. Especially in developing countries, wealth, civic culture, voluntary associations and international factors contribute greatly to the pace of the conversion. Keeping these factors in mind, the next section will examine the democratization processes of three former British colonies, India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. An examination of the experiences of these nations may yield similarities which can be applied to the case of Burma/Myanmar. Any lessons that were learnt by these nations can be used as examples in the hopes that the democratic leaders of Burma will pave a pathway for a successful legitimate transition process.

## **Chapter (2): Democratization in South East Asian Countries**

The literature review section of this thesis has reviewed factors which could contribute to the democratization process in developing countries. In this section, this process as it occurred in three South Asian countries will be analyzed using the factors reviewed in the previous chapter. India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia were chosen based on common characteristics shared by them such as: being in the same demographic region, being colonies of the British and each nation experiencing internal struggles with different ethnic groups within their countries.

For each country, the time period examined will be the period towards the end of British colonization to determine the different effects British rule had on the development of political systems in each nation. Therefore, the timeframe of the analysis will begin with the period prior to each country's independence. This section will also look at how positively or negatively other factors such as economic growth, wealth, leadership skills, political participation and political systems have affected the sustainability of a democratic state after a country's independence. Based on these comparisons and the end results of these countries, the theoretical factors as well as lessons learnt from these nations will be applied to Burma/Myanmar in the next chapter.

### **2.1 India**

Beginning in the eighteenth century, India was slowly colonized by the British through its relationship with the British East India Company. During its colonial years, basic infrastructures such as railroads and telegraph lines were built to facilitate national communication. For the British, India served as a foothold for them to expand their empire into the rest of Asia. Educational opportunities, however, were controlled as widespread education was seen as threatening British security. The British used the strategy of selective preference to decide which

ethnic group received education, which group was recruited to serve in their army and which group received land to manage the peasants. Knowing the diversified nature of Indian's ethnic groups, the British encouraged religious exclusivism in order for these groups to remain in constant conflict with one another. Internal divisions based on ethnicity and religion increased the security of the rulers (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1995).

According to Das Gupta (1995: 264), the first person to recognize the problems of Indian nationalism was Ram Mohum Roy who believed that Indians should re-examine the foundations of their organizations such as religion, society and education before opposing their colonial rulers. Roy welcomed British rule as he appreciated the power of rational thought brought in by the West. He believed this was an opportunity for the Indians to challenge and reconstruct their superstitious beliefs into rational thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, he sought to create voluntary associations which advocated language reforms, education reforms, freedom of the press and the rights of women. However, due to the strategy of selective preferences adopted by the British, his associations lacked popular appeal. The lack of education within the mass public made it easier for the conservative nationalists to promote their ideologies of traditional solidarity. It also made it easier for religious leaders to recruit their members on a sectarian basis. Regardless of his failures Ram Mohum Roy tried to create a civil society in India before fighting for the country's independence. Seymour Lipset (1994: 12) argued that the presence of voluntary associations were important in the democratization process of a country as they act as mediators between the state and the people. Therefore, in the case of India, these associations were present from the beginning contributing to the democratization process of the country.

Although Roy had failed in his attempts to reform India's nationalism, due to the pleas, petitions and protest actions from various other groups, associations from different regions such

as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay got together to form the Indian National Congress in 1885. Das Gupta (1995: 267) also explained that the National Congress was the first step towards India's democratic development, as it was established to perform political functions such as the creation of political goals and demands, resolving conflicting ideas in different regions of the country, and establishing a medium for communication and coordination. Although it was created to represent complaints of the people, the British felt secure enough in their position and their military power to ignore their demands. As a consequence, the Congress was not as effective during the first few years of its establishment but because it required participation of various associations from different regions of the country, direct political participation was introduced to the public at an early stage. Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) argued that in order to maintain a stable democracy, strong, dependable political institutions are necessary. When such institutions are present, the structure binds the political process into stable, predictable patterns, maintains the rule of law, produces effective policies and controls military power under civilian rule. The most important part of India's political institution, its National Congress, was established in 1885, giving the citizens of the country an opportunity to participate in elections and form a democratic government.

Mahatma Gandhi was a well-known political leader in India who achieved what his predecessor failed to establish by socially deepening the base of the national movement. India's extreme ethnic and religious diversity posed a major challenge to Gandhi. Furthermore, when targeting for example Urdu language speaking Muslims, the Bengalis and Punjabi language speaking Muslims were left out of the movement. Gandhi understood the complex divisions of his people and mobilized his support based on economic rather than a religious or ethnic base. He communicated with the peasants, laborers and land owners from both urban and rural areas

across the country, regardless of their religion or what languages they spoke. By focusing on economic factors, he was able to create a larger support base which cut across regions, languages, religions and ethnicities. Gandhi stressed tolerance amongst various groups rather than an exclusionary ideology. The inclusion of people with various backgrounds under his leadership promoted the values and practices of consensus formation in the National Congress.

By having a strong political leader to guide the people through the movement, India learned the importance of a consensus decision making process even before its independence. Rustow (1970: 350-361) in his transition to democracy model explained that the background condition of national unity must be in place before the transition to democracy can occur. This national unity entails that the vast majority of the citizens acknowledge that they belong to a nation. There may be sub-divisions of citizens belonging to different ethnic, religious or other communities. However, all these people must accept that they are the same citizens of a nation. What Gandhi did was to forge this national unity in order to gain independence from the British. By doing so, India was able to satisfy the background condition required for democratic transition as pointed out in Rustow's democratic transition model.

India was fortunate in the fact that skillful leaders such as Gandhi (from 1915 to 1945) and Jawaharla Nehru (from 1947 to 1964) created a political culture involving mass participation by organizing voluntary associations in both urban and rural areas. Nehru helped form urban groups that adopted Western idioms of society and industrial development. Leaders were elected at different levels to deal with the problems facing different regions of India. Despite British opposition, institutions were developed at the local and provincial levels to deal with issues such as education, health and public works. In 1937, before its independence, the Indian National Congress expanded its elections at the provincial level, creating ministries in seven of its eleven

provinces. Commitment to democratic practices such as competitive elections created a political culture ready for a future democratic state. It also helped the Congress gain valuable experience in politics to run the country after its independence. Robert Dahl (1998: 147) cited democratic beliefs and political culture as one of the conditions favorable for the establishment of democratic institutions. Looking at the case of India, and the commitment its leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru had in forming a participatory political culture, their actions portrayed their democratic beliefs. Therefore, it is safe to say that India satisfied one of Dahl's preconditions for the establishment of democratic institutions.

Das Gupta (1995: 274) pointed out that sustaining democracy in developing countries involves difficult tasks such as simultaneously achieving rapid developments in the political systems, economy, and civil society. The initial decisions of the new leaders were also crucial in building a democratic nation. India was fortunate enough to sustain its democratic practices due to the peaceful transfer of power between the British government and the Indian leaders. This created a continuity of leadership and institutional structures. Existing ministries with their local officers in seven different provinces were also available for immediate use and expansion. The well-established Congress was able to expand to incorporate new political constituencies with diverse ethnicities, religions and occupations even more so than before. Dukalaski's (2009: 948) argument towards barriers to democratization in Burma/Myanmar was that the country always had a stateness problem. Building on Linz and Stephen's argument of achieving democracy by overcoming the problem of stateness, Dukalaski defined Burma's problem as having profound differences about the territorial boundaries of the state as well as differences over who had the rights of citizenship. According to him, state building comes before democracy. Therefore, governments can link state building with nation building to incorporate all the different ethnic

groups, culture, religion and races into one nation. As mentioned earlier, national unity was established in India prior to the country's independence. Therefore, one can argue that stateness problem does not exist in India which only bolstered its democratization process.

However, this does not mean that India's transition was all smooth sailing. During the Indira Gandhi's emergency period from 1975-1977 the democratic system was abused through measures involving mass arrests, suppression of civil rights and liberties, and censorship of the media sector. However, because of the well-established civic culture and the history of mass political participation, the opposition Janata (People's) party was able to win a landslide over Indira Gandhi's party in the March 1977 elections (Das Gupta, 1995: 282). This showed India's capability to restore its democratic system through mass mobilization during a crisis.

Democratization in the developing world is more challenging because the governments have had to manage extensive pressures within their institutions to both create change and continue development at the same time. The countries require rapid development in their economies and societies using the existing resources throughout the transition period. In a large diversified country such as India, unequal economic developments in urban and rural areas posed a difficult challenge for the government. Prior to independence, the nationalist leaders had centralization in mind, with bureaucratic management promoting large scale industrialization and other development programs. However, because of the way in which the Indian Congress was structured, the reforms were carried out at the state level administration depending on the popular support of each region and the preference of each state leader. Therefore, India experienced improvements in the agriculture sectors, as well as development of industrialization and expansion of educated personnel in some areas of the country. Yet, at the same time, poverty, inequality and corruption still prevailed in some regions.

Occasionally, India also faced food security problems as the productivity rates of certain states were substantially lower than that of others. In such cases, the federal government stepped in to assist with the procurement and distribution of food from surplus areas to deficit regions. When it came to industrialization, the country once again was led into the process by the state. Under the assumption that rapid and comprehensive industrial growth can only be achieved by giving priority to the production of capital goods, the people accepted that such expansion was only achievable with the help of the state. The middle class welcomed the role of the state in production, controlling supplies, providing financial support, administering prices and becoming the largest employer in the nation.

Like many other state controlled economies, government instability in the late 1980s and early 1990s caused India's economy to plummet resulting in its borrowing money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991. The country's economic problems came from policies adopted by the government in the 1980s. The decision makers during these years became less conservative with their spending which was well above their revenue stream. The deficit increased from 6.3 percent in the early 1980s to 8.4 percent in the early 1990s. In order to cover the deficit, the country borrowed rapidly which increased its national debt as well as the interest rates India paid on its debts. This deficit accumulated over decades and, along with the decision of the government to resort to the printing press, led to persistent inflation. The developing economic crises coincided with India's major election period in 1989. Unable to form a coalition, a small minority group took over the government and launched policies which drove India's economy further into turmoil. With the decrease in foreign investment along with the falling of India's credit ratings in the world financial markets, the country borrowed \$660 million from IMF in early 1990 (Nayar 1998, 343). However, this borrowing coincided with the Gulf



crisis and the ballooning of oil prices which only worsened the deficit situation. Moreover, the crisis had also affected Indian export market in the Gulf area. Due to the failure of the existing government, the Congress Party regained its power during the economic crisis with P.V Narasimha Rao as the Prime Minister (Nayar 1998: 345).

The loans from IMF came with conditions for industrial reforms which included removing barriers and allowing private firms to enter different markets, relaxing policies on firm acquisitions, flexible regulations in regards to foreign investors, and issuing policies to promote greater efficiency in security markets (Das Gupta, 1995: 302). Baldev Naj Nayar (1998: 337-338) explained that most reforms undertaken by India during this period altered the internal and external dimensions of its economy. Externally, these reforms included the devaluation of the Rupee, abolishing import licensing and increasing the allowable percentage of foreign direct investment up to 51 percent in a wide range of industries. Internally, industrial licensing regulations were lowered, legislation was amended to facilitate expansion, taxes were lowered and reforms were introduced in the banking sectors. Nayar also explained that India's economic reform process can be divided into economic stabilization approach and structural adjustment approach. Economic stabilization reforms targeted problematic areas such as high inflation, high deficits, and a severe balance of payment problem. Structural adjustment reforms targeted the entire structure of the economy in order to prevent future economic crises (Nayar 1998: 339).

The new government began its economic reforms by devaluating the Rupee. It then set out its commitments to the IMF by a letter of intent and tried to bring down the deficit back to five percent by the end of 1993. The loan from IMF was used to build up foreign exchange reserves, and expenditure cuts were enforced in social sectors and capital expenditures. As foreign exchange reserves were restored, confidence amongst foreign investors was restored and

investment once again began to flow back in the country. As a result of the reforms, the government faced harsh criticisms from other parties for being dictated to by the IMF as a price for the loans to bail India out. Nayar (1998: 348-351) pointed out that the new government of India felt the economic stabilization reforms would not be sustainable unless they were accompanied by structural changes. Therefore, the Congress declared in its election manifesto a policy framework which involved: encouragement of entrepreneurship, development of capital markets, simplification of the regulatory system and importation of new technology. Since some of the public sector companies had been inefficient and expensive, the government abolished monopolies in certain industries and opened up the market for competition.

Therefore, the international influence (in this case adopting market liberalization policies recommended by the IMF) helped India recover from its declining economy. Sorensen (2008) mentioned that in the 1980s, international donors were focusing their policies around liberal democracies which promoted economies guided by market principles according to which the state played a limited role. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were developed by international institutions consisting of various donors. These programs were developed to minimize the role of the state, to liberalize markets, and to privatize public enterprises. He argued that this adjustment programs had positive improvements in the conditions for agricultural production (Sorensen, 2008: 89). Sorensen's argument applies directly to the case of India. By adopting market liberalization policies, India made its economy competitive and promoted industrial development.

The new liberalization policies helped turn the country's economy in a positive direction. Overall, the federalized political system in India created a national framework to serve the disadvantaged population. Public investment in the agriculture sector reduced poverty in certain

regions of the country. Radical land reforms together with promoting the education of lower classes alleviated the standard of living of the general public in some areas. Liberalization of the economy and promoting capitalism had generally helped increase the standard of living. India's economic development can be looked at under Przeworski and Limongi's (1997) argument against the modernization theory. The authors argued that modernization alone did not lead to democracy. Therefore, it is not a pre-requisite to the democratization process. The democratization processes of some countries were entirely unrelated to their economic development. In the case of India, the nation's economy was still developing during its transition process. Most of the sectors were state controlled and all policies were made by the central government. However, because of its well established democratic institutions and practices, the country was able to adopt market liberalization policies to save its declining economy and maintain its democratic status. Thus the case of India supports Przeworski's and Limongi's argument that economic development plays a vital role sustaining and consolidating democracy in India.

However, India is made up of different states with a relevant amount of autonomy given to local elected leaders. When the economic reforms mentioned above were enforced by the federal government, this resulted in conflicting situations between the states and the federal government. Rob Jenkins (2003: 607) pointed out the issues India faced with its state level governments in regard to the 1991 economic reforms. He explained that the agreements made between the IMF, WTO and the Indian central government under the Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, were perceived as constraining the rights state level governments were given in making policies set out by India's Constitution. Some states have even taken India's central government to court requesting for reinstatement of the divisions of power when issuing reforms.

WTO's involvements in India's economic policies were more visible mainly because each state contributes differently to the total economic output of the country. Since certain sectors were concentrated in certain states representing a large percentage of those state's economies, the involvement of IMF and WTO directly affected the well-being of particular states. Jenkins pointed out that due to this reason, shifting policy blame has occurred often in India's internal politics for various negative economic outcomes (Jenkins, 2003: 609-610). Many state level politicians objected to IMF-WTO policies because they felt that such policies had adverse impact on the share of political burdens that states had to shoulder.

The change of India's economy from a centralized system to a market-oriented system reflected the failed government policies prior to the economic crisis. The Congress party played a major role in India's development after its independence up until Prime Minister Nehru's death in 1964. The party lost its influence over the people after his death and it broke off into several smaller parties in 1969. In order to form a majority in Congress, the smaller parties had to form a coalition government which produced inefficient policies throughout the years. Nayar (1998) pointed out that because of the failed policies practiced by the coalition governments over an extended period of time popular discontent increased. People understood that the declining economic situation was because of internal factors which fueled their desire for change. Therefore, when change was eventually implemented in the form of market liberalization policies, it was widely accepted by people from across the regions.

The leaders of India's government were also pragmatic enough to follow a slow reform path rather than the shock therapy suggested by international financial institutions. They were aware of their political culture and focused on consensus building by setting goals, budget guidelines and forming committees consisting of various regional leaders to make

recommendations for implementing new policies. Because of the approach taken by Indian political leaders as well as the desire of the people for change, India managed a smooth transition of its economy from a centralized system to a market oriented system.

For democracy to survive in a nation such as India, the cultivation of democratic ideas through a civil society and democratic institutions played a crucial role in the formation of a well-developed democratic system. This meant simultaneous developments in social, economic and political resources were required. In order to achieve this, elite commitment to democratic values must emerge during the transition period. As mentioned earlier, India benefited from the establishment of a political system prior to its independence. Mass political participation and the support of the general public helped create a democratic civic culture. India's transition was smoother relative to other neighboring countries because of the state controlled economy, wide spread education, communications and government structures. The dominant economic classes found the system profitable through the liberalization process and new entrants to these economic classes were encouraged by the government through public sector financing. The case of India also supports Przeworski and Limongi's (1997) argument of democracy having a higher chance of survival in economically developed countries. Successful political leaders who were committed to democratic values turned the country around during the times of crises and focused on reforms in order to bring India's economy closer to its development potential.

From the very beginning, the Indian National Congress learned to incorporate regional interest into the federalized system. The existence of voluntary associations to promote religion, ethnicity, language and civil rights had also helped the emergence of leaders committed to a democratic system. These voluntary associations assisted in educating the public on the best practices of a democratic system. They also kept the country's institutions accountable by

ensuring that citizen's concerns and needs were addressed. Political participation was also at its peak during the years after the country's independence. This was enhanced by regular elections held at the lowest level such as villages and districts where capable leaders were elected to solve the issues facing the people. Overall, India's democracy falls under Robert Dahl's (1998: 37-38) definition of democracy: effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened participation, exercising final control over the agenda and the inclusion of adults. This does not mean that India did not go through political turmoil. Its complex relationship with Pakistan, as well as conflict over the Kashmir region continues up to this day. However, with its democratic civic culture, India was able to sustain its democratic system after its independence.

## **2.2 Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka was colonized by the Portuguese and the Dutch before being controlled by the British in 1815. When the British took over the entire island, a centralized authority structure was formed that included its administrative functions, its judicial functions, as well as its communication systems. Expanding its colony from India, the British brought in laborers as well as capital investments to serve all the plantation economies including coffee, tea, rubber and coconuts. With the importation of laborers from southern India, a class of landless laborers emerged in Sri Lanka tied to the landowners through the wages they earned from working in the plantations. From then on, the country began to rely on an export economy.

Phadnis (1989: 145) pointed out that British rule helped establish an English-educated middle class in Sri Lanka consisting of Jaffna Tamils and upper caste families from the coastal regions of the island. The members of these educated middle classes also dominated the plantation sector. Not only did they work closely as a unit to further their interests, they also

competed amongst each other based on regions. By looking at the governance system adopted by the British, it can be seen that favoritisms was shown to the Tamils, a minority group in Sri Lanka. Therefore, these groups of people were able to hold important positions in the political arena of the country as well as dominating the economic sector. This later on created resentment amongst the Sinhalese majority. The effects of international influence for Sri Lanka as mentioned in the literature review section can be seen in its colonial era. Because of the way the British governed the country, divisions occurred between the two main ethnic groups.

After Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the minority Tamils held important positions in the bureaucracy, as well as in professions such as law and medicine. Slight resentment existed amongst the majority because the Tamil minority were in a position to make important decisions. Therefore, despite the homogeneity of the ruling elite, the potential for ethnic conflicts existed in Sri Lanka. In regards to the democratic structure of Sri Lanka prior to its independence, universal adult suffrage was introduced into its constitution in 1931, making Sri Lanka the first country in the colonial world to have universal suffrage. By the time independence was obtained in 1948, three general elections had already been held. Prior to its independence, the political elite worked in close collaboration with the colonial authorities in legislative, executive, bureaucratic and economic sectors gaining democratic experiences and practices.

Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) argued that to sustain a country's democracy, stable political institutions must exist. In the case of Sri Lanka, such institutions were established prior to its independence as they were in India. Political participation was also introduced to the general public with three elections being held. Looking at Sri Lanka's democratization process up to the period after its independence, it followed the footsteps of India with pre-established political institutions as well as participation from the general public. Interpreting Sri Lanka's

process in terms of Dahl's (1998) criteria of democracy, the country possessed effective participation as well as inclusion of adults. It looked as though Sri Lanka was following the path to its democratization process except for the existence of a strong subcultural pluralism. According to Dahl, this hinders the democratization process as cultural pluralism could lead to ethnic conflicts which were indeed in the case of Sri Lanka.

When it comes to the political culture of Sri Lanka, universal suffrage along with educational reforms in 1945 created a different class of Sinhalese to emerge. The educational reform provided compulsory education until the age of 14 along with free tuition up to the university level (Phadnis, 1989: 147). The lower middle class from the rural areas, who earned their living from non-agricultural sources and who owned a small portion of land, began to benefit from this educational system. An increasing number of school teachers specializing in their own languages such as Sinhalese and Tamil emerged creating a different educated Sinhalese middle class. This social class played an important role in changing the political culture of the rural public.

Sri Lanka's democratic process started out smoothly with the colonizers providing the basic framework for the local elites to gain experiences and practices with the democratic system. Even during the post-independence period, the parliamentary system was applied with the usual checks and balances of a democratic country. A party system was introduced to represent the diverse needs of the population, and the political participation of the mass public was at its highest. Prior to the educational reforms, although economic and socioeconomic inequalities did exist, the two main ethnic groups were not in direct conflict with one another. The English educated Tamils, although being a minority of the Sri Lankan population, held



highly influential positions in the government as well as in professions such as medicine, engineering and law.

The Western oriented political style of the controlling United National Party (UNP) no longer suited the needs of the quickly emerging Sinhalese middle class. The predominance of the English-educated elite in education as well as employment was now seen as a problem by the Sinhalese educated locals. Phadnis (1989: 148) pointed out that this led to the formation of Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) promoting the Sinhalese-Buddhist cause trying to make Sinhalese the national language and Buddhism the national religion. From this point onwards, ethnic divisions emerged with the followers of SLFP communicating their anticolonial, anti-foreign ideologies with an emphasis on indigenous values, norms, and institutions. They also represented the Sinhalese speaking Buddhist majority who had suffered from past discrimination.

One can say that the educational reform played a large role in creating the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. With mandatory education up to the age of 14 and free tuition fees introduced up to the university level, the literacy rate in Sri Lanka grew to 85 percent. Due to the improvement of health services, the infant mortality rate declined creating a population growth of persons below the age of twenty five. This highly educated youth population mostly coming from the Sinhalese background became frustrated with the government due to the lack of opportunities in the employment sector. As a result, their political views became more extreme, expressing the feeling that they should be compensated for the discrimination the Sinhalese population had to endure during the colonial years. Gradually, Sri Lanka became politicized with this youth population demanding for a higher share of power and control. These segments of the youth from the lower middle income strata began to realize that they were now the emerging elite and as such they had the power to mobilize the public. This is where the ethnic conflict began with the

Sinhalese majority wanting its language to be the national language, wanting Buddhism to be the national religion, and to have greater employment opportunities in the government sector.

Seymour Lipset (1994) explained that a civil society is required for the process of democratization as well as sustaining democracy in a country. In the case of Sri Lanka, the emergence of voluntary associations only enhanced the existing ethnic divide between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The establishment of Sinhalese associations made the public aware of their power as well as the influence they could potentially possess as the majority ethnic group. Instead of forming organizations to represent interests of both groups, the Sinhalese tried to regain their dominance in the political arena by establishing parties to further their influence. The different effects of voluntary organizations can be seen when comparing the experiences of India with that of Sri Lanka. In India, associations established by Ram Mohan Roy created national unity cutting across different religious, cultural and languages. In Sri Lanka, the same organizations established by one group of people created resentment towards the minority ruling elite.

With the emergence of various parties appealing to the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority, the Tamils now felt alienated from the political system. During the revision of the Sri Lankan constitution in the late 1970s, there were major disagreements between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in regards to religion, language, fundamental rights and regional autonomy. The Tamil members of parliament requested the Tamil language to be used as a national language alongside the Sinhalese language. They also wanted their language to be incorporated into the constitution and requested greater autonomy to be given to the local leaders in the Tamil populated area. All these requests were rejected by the UNP and SLFP which led to the formation of the Tamil United Front (TUF). The TUF announced to the government that in the event of noncompliance

of its requests by the government, a nonviolent direct action against the existing government would be put into effect (Phadnis, 1989: 156).

There were valid reasons behind the feelings of alienation felt by the Tamils. The new constitution would restrict them in the employment market especially in the public sector where they had done well during and after the colonial years. With the state being the biggest employer and the party in charge being Sinhalese dominated, the Tamils feared that partisan considerations might prevail over merit. Their feeling of alienation became a reality when the government introduced the standardization of marks and the quota system for the university entrance exams. With the marks set at a higher level for Tamil students, and the quotas favoring students from backward districts (mostly dominated by the Sinhalese population), the number of Tamil students in science and engineering faculties declined drastically. Therefore, in 1976, the Tamil demands shifted from a struggle for their fundamental rights in a pluralistic society to creating a new corporate entity, a separate Tamil state, *eelam* (Phadnis, 1989).

Sri Lanka's political culture, did not contribute positively to democratization. One of the values of political culture defined by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) is the willingness to compromise with political opponents as well as to show tolerance for opposing parties. These values were not present in the case of Sri Lanka with the ruling party unwilling to incorporate the demands of the Tamils in the policy making process. The leaders of the nation failed to reconcile the divisions of different political parties because of their unwillingness to compromise. In the case of India, their political culture existed prior to independence with Gandhi being able to mobilize the mass public to form national unity. The Indian National Congress provided autonomy at the state level, which allowed the country to sustain its people's democratic beliefs and values by incorporating the interests of various groups in its government structure.

With the tensions growing between different ethnic groups, the UNP came into power again in 1977. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister Jayewardene, revisions to the existing constitution were made with the hopes of producing political stability and implementing rapid economic modernization. The innovations to the constitution included introducing the presidential system, providing safeguards to minorities, provisions for a referendum on certain pressing issues, and changing the electoral system. The changeover from the parliamentary system to the presidential system was justified on the grounds that the new system could create a strong and stable government which was seen as a requirement for economic development as well as to foster reconciliations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. However, in reality, the presidential system in Sri Lanka led to centralization of power by the executive branch resulting in the devaluation of power in other branches of the government. This diminished the overall objective of creating a stable democratic governmental system as the Prime Minister envisioned (Phadnis, 1995: 163-167).

Arend Lijphart (1969: 216) argued that for democracy to survive in highly fragmented cultures, consociational democracy should be adopted. Lijphart's definition of consociational democracy includes having the capability to accommodate and compromise with the diverse interests of subcultures as well as, a commitment to maintaining a stable democracy. During the years where parliamentary democracy was used in Sri Lanka, consociational democracy was not adopted by the government. Therefore, even when the political system was transformed into a presidential form of governance, this did not help create unity between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Perhaps if Sri Lanka adopted the type of governance India had where autonomy was given to different regions of the country, with local leaders elected to address the grievances of the local population, the ethnic conflicts which occurred in Sri Lanka could have been avoided.

However, with the gradual decline of the employment of Tamils in government services and other major professions which they used to dominate, their sense of discrimination turned them towards violence over the years. Instead of creating political stability, under the UNP regime, violence by the Tamil groups increased as well as violence by the military and the police, along with communal violence. With the lack of a bilingual educational system, the communication gap between the northern Tamils and the rest of the country continued to grow. With each ethnic group teaching its own version of history in its own language (Sinhalese or Tamil), cultural prejudice and distrust were reinforced.

On the economic front, the UNP government tried to liberalize markets by allowing market forces and the private sectors to play a major role. Foreign exchange controls were relaxed with incentives to encourage investments and exports. Several river projects were initiated to increase irrigation capabilities, to generate hydro-electric power, and also to sustain a constant food supply. These new policies, along with massive foreign aid and loans, helped the economy to prosper in the initial years. However as Phadnis (1989: 171) argued, the sustainability of such prosperity is difficult in a country where political instability prevails and where scarce resources were diverted to security related expenditures. The ethnic conflict also affected the rate of production in the plantation areas which in turn reduced the export of tea and rubber. This was a huge blow for a country that was and still is heavily reliant upon its export industry. Other industries such as investment, tourism, fisheries and transportation were also affected by the ethnic conflict. Therefore, regardless of the economic reforms introduced by the UNP government, the Sri Lanka fell short in its economic growth, employment rates, and the living standards of its citizens.

Juan Linz (1994) pointed out that there is a positive correlation between economic development and the chances for a stable democracy. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) argued that the chances of sustaining democracy are higher if there is development in the country's economy. In the case of Sri Lanka, even though market liberalization policies were adopted, because of the existing ethnic conflicts, it affected the export sector which hindered the economic development process. India was able to sustain its democracy through the market liberalization policies in the early 1990s because the country had strong political institutions committed to the democratic values. Sri Lanka on the other hand, tried to adopt similar liberalization policies amidst an unstable political environment. Therefore, in this case, it is important to see that the establishment of a strong democratic political infrastructure played an crucial role in the sustainability of democracy in two different developing countries.

As mentioned earlier, due to the feeling of alienation felt by the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed in 1976 with the aim to oppose the Sinhalese government and to represent the Tamil minority. DeVotta (2009: 1027) pointed out that with the liberalization movements in South Asia, the Tamil youth believe that Ealam (a free state) for the Tamils was an achievable goal. However, soon afterwards, LTTE turned violent and began to rob banks to buy weaponry, as well as to assassinate police personnel and politicians whom they considered to be pro-government. DeVotta also argued that had LTTE not pursued the path of violence, its quest for Ealam could have succeeded since the Tamils had sympathy from other nations, due to the discriminatory behavior of the Sri Lankan government. Instead, the group began to practice extreme measures such as assassinating anyone thought to undermine the organization, and ruthlessly taxing the civilian population in the northern area to support the expenses of the war. When the group was short of cadres, children and multiple

family members were forced to join the fighting units (DeVotta, 2009: 1031-1032). Over time, LTTE's actions resulted in the international community labeling the group as a terrorist organization. Foreign governments believed that the group was the biggest impediment in resolving Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

The LTTE tried to establish its own governmental system in the northern area to differentiate itself from the Sinhalese government. As part of the state building procedures, the Tamil language was used to promote patriotism and its ethnicity. Tamil Law and procedures were also enforced to promote a separate culture different from that of the Sinhalese dominated community. However, as DeVotta pointed out, one of the shortcomings of the LTTE was the continued division between the northern and eastern Tamils. The upper caste northern Tamils had treated their eastern counterparts as inferior over the years and the LTTE continued to encourage this behavior (DeVotta 2009: 1037). The leaders of the group were selected only from the northern region although most cadres were from the east. They also taxed eastern Tamils ruthlessly, which created resentment and the encouraged the emergence of an eastern Tamil leader independent from the LTTE group. DeVotta provided three reasons for the the downfall of LTTE. First, the group made a major mistake in assassinating Rajiv Gandhi in May of 1991. This resulted in the withdrawal of India's support for a separate Tamil state and instantly placed the LTTE as its nemesis. Second, the separation between northern and eastern Tamil groups weakened LTTE as the eastern Tamil leader, Colonel Karuna, decided to join pro government forces. Third, the LTTE underestimated President Mahinda Rajapaksa's use of aggressive military means to suppress in insurgency (DeVotta, 2009: 1041).

When Rajapaksa was elected as president, the first thing he did was to promote his brother as the head of the military. Thus the military was able to carry out its operations with the

backing of the government. The Sri Lankan military refused to differentiate between the fighters and civilians and was accused of indiscriminate bombing of all Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas. This policy also extended to other Tamil-populated areas throughout the country. According to the United Nation's Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, more people disappeared in Sri Lanka between 2006 and 2007 than in any other country (DeVotta, 2009: 1042). The military personnel were also given special permission to act ruthlessly against potential Tamil leaders as well as civilians who were suspected of joining the rebellious forces. The government also used state-owned media to conduct propaganda, such as inflating LTTE battle deaths and under reporting military casualties. International media and United Nations envoys were barred from the conflict region preventing them from reporting actual incidents during the war. Rajapaksa's government refused investigations on human rights violations during the war claiming that such probes infringed on the country's sovereignty. Such aggressive measures by the government resulted in the LTTE's defeat on May 17, 1999 when its leader's (Vellupillai Prabhakaran) bullet-ridden body was displayed in the media (DeVotta, 2009: 1042-1046).

As a result of President Rajapaksa's policies towards LTTE's suppressions, tensions began to form between the Sri Lankan government, United Nations, United States and the European Union. A special session of United Nations Human Rights Council was held in May of 2009 in regards to the accusation on human rights violations by the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE during the civil war. The U.S Department of State also issued a report citing the international humanitarian law violations during the last phase of the war. Uyangoda (2009: 107) pointed out in his article that as a result of tensions with the West, Rajapaksa focused instead on the Sri Lanka's relationship between other Asian countries and the Middle East. Sri Lanka turned



towards Iran, Pakistan and China for direct military assistance, and Libya, Iran, China, Japan and Russia for economic assistance.

When it comes to political reforms, the government focused on political reconciliation rather than ethnic reconciliation. Elections were held in early 2010, with General Fonseka running in opposition to President Rajapaksa. Fonseka promised to abolish the existing presidential system, restore democratic rights, and ensure the resettlement of Tamil refugees due to the civil war (Uyangoda 2009: 111). The election resulted with President Rajapaksa being the winner and the country continued on with his policies of political and economic reintegration. He believed that constitutional reform for ethnic conflict resolution and democratization were no longer necessary as the LTTE had been defeated. Instead, he focused on economic and infrastructure development. Although devolution of political power from the center to the provincial and local levels was well received by various political parties, the government had removed constitutional reform from its political agenda. Regional autonomy was seen by the government as being counterproductive to the country's development process (Uyangoda 2011: 132-136)

Unlike India, Sri Lanka lacked political leaders who were committed to the democratic values throughout the transition period. Juan Linz (1995) pointed out that leaders who were loyal to democratic values rejected the pursuit of power, as well as unconstitutional or antidemocratic actions to take back control of the people during times of hardship. Sri Lanka did not possess influential leaders such as Gandhi. No one person emerged who was capable of mobilizing the mass public across the different ethnic cleavages. President Rajapaksa was more concerned with suppressing the Tamil insurgency than maintaining the democratic values of his nation. The lack

of a strong leader committed to democratic values, the unstable political infrastructure as well as the ethnic conflicts turned Sri Lanka into a failed democratic state.

Phadnis (1995: 176) explained that in contrast to India, Sri Lanka experienced an ethnically centralized system. This means that the country consisted of few groups which were large enough to make their agenda or their conflict become a constant theme of politics in the country. Even when sharing power, each group felt that compromising meant that one group received all it wanted at the expense of the other group. In a dispersed system such as India, because of its cross cutting cleavages in terms of religion, ethnicity and languages, negotiations were possible through mediators, facilitating agreements which could be beneficial for all parties involved. However in Sri Lanka, due to the competitive nature of the electoral system as well as each group fighting for a tyrannical majority, the possibilities of Sinhalese-Tamil reconciliation were diminished (Phadnis, 1995: 176).

Sorensen (2008) defined countries that were unable to consolidate their democracies as weak states. Weak states according to him are deficient in three basic respects. Firstly, the economies of these states are defective. This means that it lacks the type of economy which is capable of sustaining a basic level of welfare. As mentioned above, Sri Lanka's economy falls under this category because of its ethnic conflicts. Secondly, weak states lack coherent national communities. This directly applies to the case of Sri Lanka because of its ethnic conflicts between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Lastly, Sorensen argued that weak states lack effective and responsive institutions. Sri Lanka's parliamentary system was unable to resolve the ethnic conflict which is why Prime Minister Jayewardene converted the government into a presidential system. As mentioned earlier, the presidential system led to the centralization of power contradicting the overall objective of creating a stable democratic governance system. By

applying Sorensen's characteristics of weak states to Sri Lanka, it is obvious to see that the country falls under this category.

When comparing the two nations, India and Sri Lanka, both countries inherited their democratic structures and practices from the British prior to their independence. However, India was able to sustain its democracy without breaking down into ethnic conflicts as Sri Lanka did. This can be partly contributed to the type of governance British exercised on both Sri Lanka and India. Because of the favoritism shown by the British to the Tamil minority, resentment amongst different ethnic groups grew. India was able to overcome such divisions because of the ideologies communicated by the nation's leaders in promoting nationalism before fighting off their colonizers. In order to promote Indian nationalism, Gandhi focused on the economic condition of the mass public to cut through the differences of various ethnic groups, religions and languages present in India. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, was unable to achieve this mainly because the minority groups of Tamils were in a better economic position than the majority Sinhalese population prior to independence. Therefore, cutting through these different cleavages by using economic issues was not practical. The British bringing in labor from India to work in the plantations had also alienated these laborers from the local Sinhalese and the Tamils. Moreover, the existence of two main groups fighting for power made the country more polarized than India with its various ethnic groups and cross cutting cleavages.

Understanding its diversity, India's National Congress gave local districts the authority to manage their own regions with their locally elected representatives. This created an atmosphere of tolerance for different opinions and it also gave the flexibility for each region to respond to its regional needs effectively and efficiently. Unlike India's political structure, the Sri Lankan government was much more centralized with the ruling government making decisions for all

parts of the country. With the majority of the population being Sinhalese and with the government trying to fulfill the needs of the Sinhalese population, the Tamils felt alienated which led to their demands for a free Tamil state. By comparing the experiences of India and Sri Lanka based on factors such as their political culture, civil society, strong leadership skills, international influences and the establishment of political institutions, it is very interesting to see that India with multiple ethnicities was able to sustain its democracy whereas Sri Lanka with its two main different ethnic groups fell into the chaos and political instability as a result of its ethnic conflict.

Sri Lanka enjoyed a developing economic sector as well as a democratic political system after the country's independence from the British in 1948. As a part of its development, educational reforms were introduced to raise the standard of living of its people. However, this resulted in the majority population (Sinhalese) to realize their potential power and their grievances of being controlled by the minority Tamil population grew. Parties were created and elected to represent the interests of the majority creating a feeling of alienation amongst the Tamil minorities. When the demands of the minorities were not met, the country broke out into civil war resulting in the breakdown of Sri Lanka's political, economic and society's basic infrastructures. With leaders being elected to suppress the insurgencies at any cost, democratic values were ignored and the country drifted into inter-ethnic strife.

### **2.3 Malaysia**

Democracy in Malaysia is a unique kind of democracy, tailored to suit its geography and ethnic composition. The country cannot be characterized as non-democratic as popular choice of government was a primary index of democratic performance. However, a strong government

enforcing strong laws was also present in order for Malaysia to deal with its competing demands of an ethnically divided society. Scholars such as Haji Ahmed have defined Malaysia's democracy as "quasi-democracy", whereas its second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak defines it as keeping the basic elements of a democratic political system yet, changing the substance to suit the conditions of the country (Haji Ahmed, 1989: 349). Looking at Malaysia's democracy under Robert Dahl's (1998: 38) definition, it meets all the criteria listed by Dahl. The reason why it was considered as quasi-democracy was because of its favorable treatment towards the original inhabitants of Malaysia known as the Bumiputras and the prohibition of any organizations capable of political mobilization for the Non-Malays (Chinese and Indians). The Malaysian constitution permits freedom of speech, the right to assemble peacefully as well as the rights to form associations for every Malaysian citizen. However, this freedom was not absolute as the parliament was given the permission prohibit any activities in the interest of the security of the federation.

In order to fully understand Malaysia's democracy, the country's geography and ethnic makeup need to be taken into consideration. Malaysia is divided into two different portions by the South China Sea. The peninsula, formerly known as "West Malaysia", consists of the former Federation of Malaya with various states, whereas the other portion known as "East Malaysia" consists of two major states Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Therefore, integration became a challenge not only because of geographical differences but also because of the powers each region was accustomed to possessing. Power sharing between the federal and the state governments became a challenge for the democratic system of Malaysia. When it comes to ethnicity, the country was divided into Malays and Non-Malays. The Malays consisted of 47 to 48 percent of the population and they were the indigenous groups (Bumiputras). The Non-

Malays consist of Chinese and Indian immigrants who settled in the country as citizens of Malaysia. According to Ahmed, the origins of the tensions between the two ethnic groups began from the power each group possessed in the political and economic sectors. Malaysian politics was dominated by the Malays, whereas the Non-Malays controlled its economy. With the Non-Malays fighting for a share of power in the political arena and the Malays fighting for opportunities in the economic sector, Malaysia faced a breakdown of its democratic political system in 1969 (Haji Ahmed, 1989: 350).

Here, a pattern similar to the ethnic conflicts of Malaysia and Sri Lanka can be seen. The minority Tamils in Sri Lanka held high ranking government positions and dominated the economic sector prior to the Sinhalese uprisings. In Malaysia, the minority Non-Malay population dominated the economic sector resulting in grievances from the Malays as to the opportunities lacking for their economic advancement. The main difference between Malaysia and Sri Lanka was that because of the favoritism given to the Sinhalese, the Tamils wanted a separate state for themselves whereas in Malaysia, the Non-Malays did not orchestrate a rebellion demanding for a separate state. In countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia consisting of two major ethnic groups, tensions tended to escalate, disrupting the development of the country whereas India with its various ethnic groups was able to avoid such problems. Therefore, the case of Sri Lanka and Malaysia supports Phadnis (1995) argument of ethnically centralized systems facing a higher chance of democracy breaking down compared to the ethnically dispersed system found in India.

Haji Ahmed (1989: 352) described the democratization process of Malaysia as having three different phases. The first period constituted the period after the country's independence from the British up until the breakdown of the democratic system in 1969. The second period

was the 1969 breakdown of democracy, and the third period consisted of the post 1969 period when democracy was re-established with certain privileges given to the Malays. Like all other colonized countries, the people of Malaysia had to prove that they wanted independence as a united nation from the British. However, when the British introduced a Malayan Union Scheme (MUS) in 1945 providing the rights of citizenship to both Malays and the Non-Malays, the protests from the Malays were so overwhelming that the Federation of Malaya Agreement was reached in 1948. Under this agreement, a strong centralized federal government was created with the authority to impose its will on all levels of government. The bureaucracy, the police and the armed forces were under the direct control of a highly centralized government. Although the states were given a certain amount of authority, the government had the ultimate control over all the decisions. The control of this government was dominated by the Malays.

However, in order to gain independence from the British as one nation, an alliance had to be formed consisting of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). This cohesive political front was a crucial component in gaining independence from the British. In the struggle for independence, the alliance had to show unity putting aside the differences of each group. Therefore, quite a number of critical ethnic demands were pushed aside to be addressed at a later time. One major compromise involved accepting a new nation state with special rights given to the Malays in return for citizenship rights for the Non-Malays. Haji Ahmed pointed out that the creation of Malaysia was a process of racial balancing, ensuring dominance for the Malays and a balance between the indigenous groups in Sarawak and Sabah and the large Chinese Singapore population (Haji Ahmed, 1989: 355).

After a few years of its independence, on 16 September 1963, Malaysia incorporated Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak into its territory forming the Federation of Malaysia. The Singaporean government, People's Action Party (PAP), initially believed that since the country lacked natural resources along with the growing population which required jobs, the merger would benefit Singapore's economy by creating a common free market, eliminating trade tariffs and solving unemployment issues. Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdul Rahman was initially skeptical about the merger as he feared the large Chinese Singaporean population would upset the racial balance on which UMNO's political dominance was based. However, with the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak, Rahman believed that the Malay population on the islands could offset the Chinese Singaporean population and decided to move ahead with the merging plans. What Singapore failed to realize was the potential problem it could face due to the federal policies of affirmative actions adopted by Malaysia. The Chinese Singaporeans disdained the special privileges enjoyed by the Malays, and Lee Kuan Yew and other political leaders began to advocate equal treatments for all races in Malaysia. The political and racial tensions between PAP and UMNO escalated over the years to a point where UMNO leaders felt insecurity towards Singapore's economic dominance. Despite earlier agreements, Singapore also faced restrictions in trading with the rest of Malaysia. In order to avoid escalated tensions and further bloodshed, Malaysia Prime Minister Rahman decided to expel Singapore from the federation on 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1965, thus leading to the creation of the Republic of Singapore (Siddiqui and Suryadinata, 1981).

The remaining alliance with the parties from the existing ethnic groups worked well in Malaysia up until 1969. Because of the special rights given to the Malays, tensions and conflicts amongst the other ethnic groups began to build up after the country's independence. At the same



time, the economic dominance of the Non-Malays was also seen as a potential threat by the Malays. However, parliamentary democracy was sustainable during this period only because law and order, as well as the national security, were largely controlled by the Malays ensuring against the non-Malay seizure of power. Rustow (1970) pointed out in his model of phases during the democratization process that a background condition consisting of national unity must exist in a nation for democracy to survive. Dahl (1995) also argued that survival of democracy is higher in countries with weak cultural pluralism. In the case of Malaysia, a superficial form of national unity was presented to the British in order to gain independence. The grievances of each ethnic group were pushed aside to be addressed at a later time. From the time of its independence in 1957, these conflicts escalated reaching a point where the breakdown of democracy occurred in 1969.

Based on Rustow and Dahl's arguments and comparing the experiences of Malaysia to those of India and Sri Lanka, it is clear that national unity existed in India which contributed its successful democratization process. Sri Lanka lacked national unity as did Malaysia. Because the Sinhalese government was unable to accommodate the demands of the Tamils, the idea of creating a separate Tamil state emerged eliminating any hopes of forming national unity. Comparing the various forms of government structure, India's National Congress was established with regional autonomy given to elect leaders in different states. Malaysia on the other hand, under the Federation of Malaya Agreement established a strong centralized government eliminating opportunities for regional control.

As a result, Malaysia faced a breakdown of its democracy when the riots broke out on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, and spread across the country. The cause of the riots was the racial favoritism since the country's independence. Up until this period, the Malays had greater

control over the country through the Alliance party mentioned earlier. However in 1969, the party was quickly losing its support and this threatened the political dominance of the Malays who felt as though they were no longer in control of the country, and would be pushed back into the villages by the Non-Malays. In order to combat the unstable situation, Tun Ismail, the retired leader of Alliance party during the independence years, came back into the political arena to announce emergency rule, declaring democracy dead in Malaysia (Haji Ahmed, 1989: 361). By suspending parliamentary democracy, he helped create the National Operations Council (NOC) to administer the functions of the government and restore stability.

Malaysia was lucky in a sense that the leaders of NOC were more interested in restoring law and order and bringing back the democratic system than exploiting its power to control the country. Although there were debates amongst the members as to whether the future of Malaysia should be under a democratic government or an authoritarian one, the leaders eventually decided to choose the former once order had been restored. However, certain tough regulations which have led the Western scholars to define Malaysia as “quasi-democracy” had to be put into place in order for the country to move forward. In this sense, political leadership in Malaysia determined its future by bringing democracy back in the country. As mentioned in the literature review section, the commitment to the democratic values of a nation’s leadership determines whether democracy can survive in a newly developed nation. In the case of Malaysia, although democracy was suspended for a period of time, because of the commitment the leaders towards democracy, they were able to bring back the parliamentary form of government. Factors contributing to the democratization process affect countries at different stages of their transition period. For example, in India, political leadership helped build the foundations of a democratic

government infrastructure prior to the country's independence whereas in Malaysia, the same factor helped the country steer its way back to the path of democracy well after its independence.

Haji Ahmed explained that reforms introduced by the NOC can be seen in three different areas. Firstly, the national ideology of Malaysia was introduced with preferences given to the Malay society. Secondly, education and economic reforms were introduced to solve the complaints of non-Malay dominance in the economic sector. A New Economic and Education Policy (NEP) was introduced to eliminate poverty, urbanize the Malay population, and assist them in gaining access to modern sectors of the economy. More importantly, regulations were put into place to increase the Malay share of equity in the corporate sector up to 30 percent from less than one percent prior to 1969. Legislation was also introduced to reserve a certain percentage of posts in the business sector for the Malays creating job opportunities for them.

Milne (1976: 239-240), in his article explained that the NEP was a two-pronged approach. One prong was directed at reducing poverty of all Malaysians regardless of their race. The other prong was to restructure Malaysian society in order to correct economic imbalances and to eliminate the association of race with economic stratification. This process involved modernization of rural life, accelerating growth of urban activities, creation of Malay commercial and industrial communities, and allowing indigenous Malays to become full partners in all aspects of economic life. The initial target was for the increase in ownership wealth by the Bumiputras from 2.4% to 30%. The economic growth plan was also established to increase the wealth of Bumiputras, in the meantime, not affecting the overall wealth of Non-Bumiputras. This would involve a substantial growth of the economy to a point where the Non-Malays would not feel any decrease in the size of their wealth.

Milne also pointed out that NEP faced several criticisms over the years due to its racially discriminatory policies. Bumiputra ownership quotas in public company stock and housing sold only to Bumiputras are examples of these discriminatory policies. NEP only focused on the equality of results than equality of opportunity. The goal was to increase the ownership equity of the Bumiputras to 30%. However, when equal opportunities were not given to all, this increase in ownership could be in the proportion of a few rich Bumiputras owning 28% of wealth and the rest of sharing the remaining two percent. There were also criticisms of the lack of assistance provided by the policies to the Malay Chinese and Indian races in order to maintain their share of the economy (Milne, 1976: 245-250).

Lastly, new legislation was passed in Parliament prohibiting any public challenges to the part of the constitution where entrenched rights were given to the Malays along with making Malay the national language (Haji Ahmed, 1989: 362-364). Because of the power NOC had, it was able to prohibit any open political activity, taking strong actions against paramilitary groups capable of waging organized violence and also briefly prohibiting freedom of press. These actions by the NOC prompted many democratic scholars to downgrade Malaysia's democracy to a quasi-democracy. However, these bold regulations of the NOC were readily accepted by the Malaysian public as they were yearning for a return to normalcy. Looking at the way the new political system of Malaysia was structured, it seems as though political culture and civil society do not exist in the country. Although the Malaysian constitution does not prohibit the formation of organizations, the Parliament has the power to prohibit them if they are deemed as a threat to the security of the nation.

In effect, Malaysia practices a form of corporatism or limited pluralism. Howard Wiarda (2007) defined corporatism as a system of social and political organizations where major

societies or groups are integrated into the governmental system (Wiarda 2007: 84). Corporatism can be found in countries where a strong direct state exists to control and structure interest groups to form limited pluralism. The state tries to incorporate these groups into its decision making process. However, the groups are in turn structured or controlled by the state. Wiarda argued that in the community-oriented societies of East and Southeast Asia, corporatist societies can develop based on group-oriented organizations. In the case of Malaysia since the state controls what kind of groups can be formed as long as they do not threaten the nation's security, it can be said that corporatism exists in the country.

After the reforms introduced by the NOC, the country seemed to revert back to a stable democratic system regardless of a few undemocratic rules in place. The leaders of Malaysia believed that their type of democracy was best suited for their country's unique multi-racial society. Although they wanted a fully democratic political system, they understood that each nation must develop its own political and economic systems to suit its needs and problems, especially in the developing world. They believed that the country needed a native-based system with cooperation amongst different ethnic groups. After democracy was restored in Malaysia, the ruling party worked on creating a better coalition amongst the various groups. With the focus on coalition building, Malaysia enjoyed a more stable government compared to the period before 1969. Based on its experiences with racial conflicts, the country ensured that there was a cooperative atmosphere amongst various groups. External factors also contributed to greater unity and harmony in Malaysia. With the resurgence of communist terrorist activities, and also with the creation of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), there was a greater need for a greater consensus amongst different parties. With the exception of restrictions placed by Dr. Mahathir during his years as the prime minister (from 1981-2003), Malaysia enjoyed regular

elections in the area of political contestation. Uniquely enough, democracy in Malaysia was sustained because of impositions placed on the extent of politicking. The leaders feared that too much politicking in an ethnically divided society such as Malaysia could inflame passions and result in political violence.

When Mahathir became Prime Minister in 1981, he inherited the NEP from his predecessors. He actively pursued the privatization of government industries as he believed that liberal economic policies combined with the affirmative action for the Bumiputra could provide various opportunities for businesses. His government privatized airlines, utilities and telecommunication firms at the rate of 50 privatizations a year by the 1990s (Beesom, 2000: 335-340). The only criticism his government received was that these processes were done without the open tendering process which resulted in more opportunities given to the Malays who supported his party. Mahathir also combated the resurgence of extreme Islam amongst the Malays by appealing to religious voters, establishing religious institutions and educational systems, while using repressive techniques for the extremists.

On the political front, Mahatir used Malaysia's Internal Security Act vigorously to limit the power of the High Court and to suppress oppositions and riots through detentions and arrests. When the NEP expired in 1990, he developed a New Development Policy (NDP) whereby some government programs designed to benefit the Bumiputras exclusively under the NEP were opened to other ethnicities. NDP achieved poverty reduction by 1995, where less than nine percent of the Malaysian population lived under the poverty line and income inequality had been narrowed. Malaysia's economy grew dramatically in the 1990s until the Asian financial crisis threatened to devastate its economy. The value of the Malaysian currency (Ringgit) plummeted, foreign investment fled and the stock exchange index fell over 75 percent. Based on the

suggestion of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government cut spending and increased interest rates which only worsened the economic situation (Beeson, 2000: 341-351). Thus, in 1998 Mahathir reversed his economic policies by defying the IMF and increasing government spending, lowering interest rates and fixing the Ringgit to the U.S dollar. Although there were several outcries from the international community, Malaysia recovered from the economic crisis faster than its South East Asian neighbors.

The democratization process of Malaysia is different from that of India and Sri Lanka mainly because its leaders were bold enough to change the Western democratic idea to suit the unique needs of their country. Although racial conflicts existed in Malaysia, just like the conflicts between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, the leaders of Malaysia were able to take control of the situation and turn the country around so as not to suffer civil war. Strong leaders were present to maintain the democratic system regardless of the temporary suspension of democracy during the 1969 riots. External factors such as trying to gain independence from the British as well as the possible threats of invasion by Vietnam in the later years taught the people of Malaysia to put up a united front regardless of the differences between their ethnic groups. On the economic front, Malaysia took a different step under the leadership of Dr. Mahathir by learning from the experiences of Japan and Korea. Modernization and industrialization policies were based more on an East Asian model and culture which blended the private and the public sectors. Therefore, a strong sense of state-controlled political and economic systems can be seen in Malaysia. Even with the presence of certain restrictions on basic rights, Malaysia had somehow managed to maintain its democracy throughout the years and enjoy developments in its economic sector throughout the years.

Malaysia, with its geographical divisions as well as the tensions between the Malays and Non-Malays, gained independence from the British in 1957. From the moment of its independence, the country practiced parliamentary democracy with elections being held regularly. However, the unresolved tensions between the two main ethnic groups resulted in the riots of 1969 and the temporary suspension of democracy. Through leaders who were committed to restoring democratic political system for the country, Malaysia was able to recover from its temporary breakdown and resume its path of democratization. Along with the market liberalization and privatization policies introduced by Mahathir in the 1980s, the country was able to increase its rate of economic development.



### **Chapter (3) : Burma (Myanmar)**

Burma, officially known as Myanmar, is situated in South East Asia bordered by China in the north, Laos and Thailand in the East and Bangladesh and India in the West. The country consists of multiple ethnic groups with different cultures speaking different languages. Like many of its neighboring countries, Burma was a British colony for almost a century. The British took over Burma through three Anglo-Burmese wars over a time period of sixty years from 1824 to 1886 (Walton, 2008: 892). The Southern parts of the country were taken over initially with the British gradually expanding their control into central and northern regions of the country. The direct and indirect management methods employed by the British to rule the country played an important role in understanding the current ethnic conflicts of Burma.

The central and southern regions of Burma were under direct control of the British employing officials imported from India to rule the country directly from the previous capital city, Rangoon. These regions were also labeled as “Ministerial Burma” and consisted of the majority ethnic group known as the Burmans. The Northern regions known as the “Frontier Areas”, consisted of Shan, Kachin and Chin states. These were controlled indirectly by the British, with a certain amount of autonomy given to the existing ethnic leaders in each region. The Karen state however, was left out from both Ministerial and Frontier regions forming a buffer state ruled indirectly through local chiefs (Lena & Horn 2009: 145-146).

The existing ethnic divisions of the country prior to the colonial rule were exacerbated not only by the territorial divisions but by the military recruitment policies adopted by the British which fueled the resentment between the Burmans and the ethnic groups. Chin, Kachin and Karen races were given preferences in recruitment to the British Army, and those ethnic

minorities came to be associated with British rule. The use of Karen troops to suppress the Burman rebellion in the 1930s only deepened the resentment between the Burmans and the Karens. Becoming accustomed to the indirect rule administered by the British, the Frontier Areas began to consider themselves as independent states, possessing an independent economy, political leaders, as well as military troops. A group of Burmans led by General Aung San (father of Aung San Suu Kyi) formed the Burmese Independence Army (BIA) in an attempt to gain independence from the British. They collaborated with the Japanese invasion in 1941, driving the British out of the country. This created a role reversal where the Burmans were now seen as colonial powers in the eyes of the ethnic minorities.

However, soon afterwards, it was apparent that instead of gaining independence from the British, Burma was colonized by the Japanese. The British, realizing the independence of Burma was an inevitable event, reluctantly decided to assist BIA in fighting off the Japanese using the ethnic military troops. During the Japanese governance, their authority never extended to the Frontier Areas which were still controlled by the British. The autonomy given to the ethnic groups to rule their own regions was never taken away from them regardless of which country colonized Burma.

Therefore, when the British agreed to work with General Aung San and his party Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) for Burma's independence, the most pressing issue was how to include the Frontier Areas in forming a new nation. Thus the famous Panglong Agreement signed by the British, General Aung San and the leaders of different ethnic groups on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1947 played a crucial role in explaining the current ethnic conflicts between the military government and various ethnic groups. Therefore, it is important to explain the steps by which the Panglong Agreement was made to fully understand the role of each party included in

the agreement, as well as the vision of the future the leaders had perceived when signing this agreement.

Matthew Walton (2008, 895-896) explained the steps involved in signing the Panglong Agreement to eradicate what he called the “myths” of the agreement perceived by the government, the people of Burma and its ethnic minorities. The purpose of the first Panglong conference held between the leaders of the Frontier Areas and the British was to establish a new nation called the United Frontier Union consisting of Chin, Kachin, Shan and Karen states. Although many of the minority leaders supported the idea, the Burmans were strongly against this suggestion. Thus it was decided that these areas will be placed under a special regime controlled by an assigned Governor before a decision could be made for the future the country.

The second conference was held on February of 1947 with AFPFP and the leaders from Chin, Shan and Kachin states present. After several meetings and negotiations about revenue sharing, internal autonomy within each state, as well as the possibility of an independent Kachin state, the leaders agreed to sign the Panglong Agreement to show unity in becoming independent from the British rule as one nation. This does not mean that the ethnic leaders were agreeing to permanently become a part of the Union of Burma as perceived by the AFPFP, but to instead be free from British rule along with Ministerial Burma. Before further negotiations could be made, General Aung San was assassinated on July 19<sup>th</sup> 1947 leaving the ethnic issues unattended. It is also very important to note that the Karens, although present during the Panglong conferences, were there only as observers and never signed the agreement as they had different intentions for their state.

However, as far as the British were concerned, the leaders of the Frontier Regions had agreed to join forces with Ministerial Burma to be included in the independence of the country. Therefore on July 4, 1948, Burma became an independent nation with AFPFL as the main party forming a new parliamentary government for the nation. A bicameral parliament was formed consisting of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Nationalities, with U Nu becoming the first Prime Minister. However, because of the unresolved ethnic issues prior to the country's independence, the first few years were spent suppressing rebellions from various ethnic groups as well as fighting off the Kuomintang armies which had established military bases in the northern regions of Burma. Due to these political instabilities, the development of the economy as well as other political structures crucial for a newly independent nation to successfully follow the path of democracy were pushed aside for the first decade after the country's independence. Subsequently, in 1962, U Nu was overthrown in a coup d'état led by General Ne Win.

General Ne Win founded the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) and practiced the so called "Burmese way to Socialism" from 1962-1988. Joseph Silverstein (1966: 96) pointed out that General Ne Win's vision of a socialist Burma had four major objectives. The first objective was to reform the country's economy from semi-private to socialist. Major corporations as well as oil fields were nationalized. In the agricultural sector, tenancy rent for peasants using land for farming was abolished. Farmers became the owner of their products and the government encouraged them to cooperate and share their labor, animals and produce. This involved the farmers and peasants travelling great distances to designated buying stations in order to trade in their produce for a set market price established by the government. Since the market price was set, it also did not take into consideration seasonal produces or the quality of the products due to unforeseeable natural disasters. The produce were sold and traded at the buying stations where

young officers appointed by the government acted as grain buyers without having any particular agricultural expertise. As a result, most of the trade occurred in black markets and prices of agricultural products rose drastically.

The second objective of the General was to eliminate foreign influences from economic, political and social life. In the economic sector, foreign joint ventures were eliminated. In the education and social sectors, private schools and foreign run libraries were prohibited. The English language was to be introduced to students at the age of ten (Grade Five), instead of incorporating it as a second language from a young age as the British had done prior to the country's independence. Foreign films and official visits from other nations were reduced. Silverstein (1966: 98) pointed out that although Ne Win rejected foreign influences, he did not hesitate to let China and Russia trade with Burma thus opening the country to communist influence.

The third objective was to change the values and attitudes of the people towards the military regime. For this reason, various propaganda speeches were communicated through the media informing the people that socialism was the people's revolution and the military and BSPP led by Ne Win were merely present to facilitate the revolution until peasants and workers were ready to assume responsibility for electing a legitimate government. Once the people could show such strength, the military was willing to hand over its power to the people and retreat back to its main task of defending the country. In reality, no concrete plans were followed to empower the people. The government argued that the people needed to be educated with the correct values before strong leaders could emerge. Their interpretation of education by the public involved reshaping the people's values and attitudes to favor the socialist system adopted by the government (Silverstein 1966: 106).

The last objective was to unite the diverse people and form a cohesive nation. In order to show a pretense of unity, BSPP celebrated ethnic national days, published folklores, and established a department in Rangoon University focusing on the study of different ethnic groups. However, the actual grievances expressed by ethnic groups were ignored. Security and administrative duties were still controlled by the central government, instead of giving autonomy to the leaders of the state. The government also argued that until power could be transferred to workers and peasants, autonomy could not be relinquished to local ethnic leaders (Silverstein 1966: 100-102). During Ne Win's BSPP years, several protests emerged within Burma in response to the declining economic conditions of the country. These protests were led by university students as well as factory workers. The government suppressed the protests by shooting the demonstrators and shutting down universities to prevent college students from gathering. The most famous pro-democracy '8888' uprising occurred throughout the country on 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1988 over economic mismanagement and political oppression. Ne Win finally resigned from his post but made threats to the demonstrators that if the protests persisted, the army would be called upon to viciously suppress the uprising. As promised, on 18<sup>th</sup> of September 1988, General Saw Maung orchestrated a second coup d'état and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The military promised to hold free and fair elections once order was restored. With its promises of elections, SLORC changed the name of the country from "Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma" to "Union of Myanmar". The elections were held in May 1990, and the National League for Democracy (NLD) party led by Aung San Suu Kyi won 392 seats out of a total of 489 seats. However, the election results were annulled by SLORC and military rule continued. After its coup d'état in 1988, SLORC announced that the military forces had taken

over power and the structures of government formed under Ne Win's era were abolished. SLORC also changed its name to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and governed the country until military-led elections were held in 2010. During the years of the SPDC, the government gave similar speeches to those that were given by Ne Win, stating that the military government was merely present to provide peace and to commit to the development of the country. They were willing to lead the path to democracy as long as the people's definition of democracy fell in line with that of the government. More ceasefire agreements were reached with ethnic groups, although the Karens remained the main opposition of the government.

The constitution of Burma has been suspended and revised on several occasions since its independence. The first constitution was established in 1947, a year prior to the country's independence from the British. This was suspended when Ne Win took over the country in 1962. He then revised it in 1974 which gave him the opportunity to step down from the position of a General and take the role of a civilian President leading the BSPP party. This constitution was once again suspended in 1988 and several conventions were called for to draft a new constitution but no agreements were made until 2008. This agreement was described as a roadmap to democracy by the military regime but the international community perceived it as a tool adopted by the government to secure its power while declaring to the public that the country was working its way to becoming more democratic. Therefore, it is important to note that no lasting framework for the establishment of democratic institutions was ever formed in Burma. Without the establishment of a constitution empowering its people with the right to elect legislatures who they can hold accountable, the people of Burma had never truly experienced the opportunities of a genuine democracy.

Democracy defined by Robert Dahl (1998) includes five criteria which cannot be applied to Burma at any point in time from the moment of the country's independence. During the recent elections held in 2010, opportunities for effective participation and equality in voting were not available to the people. Regulations were established so that NLD party could not participate in the recent elections. As a result, many of the ethnic parties that were initially eager to participate decided to boycott the elections as being illegitimate. International critics also claimed that parties participated in the elections were those that were willing to support the existing government if coalitions became necessary.

Comparing Burma with the three countries mentioned in the previous chapter, it can clearly be seen that Burma was not fortunate enough to establish well-developed democratic structures such as India did prior to its independence. The India National Congress was established in 1885 because of the strong political culture the country possessed. Therefore, even though crises occurred which threatened its democratic values, the country was able to steer its way back on the correct path based on the democratic practices established in its constitution. Much like India, Sri Lanka also had the opportunity to develop its constitution prior to its independence, introducing universal adult suffrage and holding three general elections by the time of its independence. The establishment of democratic political structures and practices allowed smoother transitions to take place for these developing nations. Unfortunately, in the case of Burma, the establishment of a constitution, as well as holding general elections for the public to participate was introduced a year prior to the country's independence, giving the people a short period of time to understand and adjust to the newly developed democratic country. This lack of preparation for democracy, combined with the unresolved ethnic issues drove the country into political turmoil after its independence.



In the literature review section, factors contributing to the democratization process of developing nations were discussed. These factors include wealth (GDP per capital), political leadership, political culture, civil society, international influences and political institutions. In this section, these factors will be applied to the case of Burma to determine its current democratization prospects.

### **3.1 Wealth**

The first topic described in the literature review section was the correlation between economic development of a nation and its democratization process. Seymour Lipset (1994) argued that as a nation's economy develops, it produces greater economic security, widespread education and lower economic inequality. Trade with other nations can provide the country with opportunities to interact with investors of capital, goods, services and technology. With the development of an economy, people will begin to demand an accountable system of government which will slowly erode the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes.

The economy of Burma was well developed during the British colony period with the country becoming the largest exporter of rice and teak. However, after the parliamentary government was formed in 1948, Prime Minister U Nu tried to turn the country into a self-sufficient state. This involved placing restrictions on the import and export sectors, nationalizing foreign enterprises and establishing new enterprises under the control of the state. J.S. Furnivall (1949) pointed out that due to the lack of education and public administrative experiences of the new government, they unintentionally drove the country's economy from the development stage into a rapid decline. This was a result of the management style adopted by the British during the colonial period. The administrative positions were held either by the British nationals or were

appointed to the Indian administrators brought over from India. Therefore, the new inexperienced government, focused on promoting nationalism right after the country's independence, decided to adopt policies that stressed self-sufficiency.

After the military coup in 1962, the economy of the country went from bad to worse with the introduction of an economic scheme called the "Burmese way to Socialism". A closed door policy was practiced by Ne Win eliminating all the foreign investors and restricting trade relations with foreign countries. Inflation rose steadily and the sanctions placed by the European Union and the United States only worsened the country's economic situation. Being an agricultural oriented country much like Burma, India also faced economic problems after the country's independence. However, the federal government was willing to step in and develop procurement and distributive structures in order to transport food from surplus areas to deficit areas. A state controlled economy worked in India for a few decades up until the 1980s when growing difficulties resulted in borrowing money from the IMF. In order to bring its economy back on track, the Indian government did not hesitate to adopt market liberalization policies recommended by that institution. Therefore, India was able to turn the country around and became a rival to the regional power such as China whereas the Burmese economy deteriorated steadily.

Sri Lanka's economic situation after the country's independence was similar to that of Burma. The ruling United National Party (UNP) in Sri Lanka tried to liberalize its economy by allowing market forces and private sectors to play a major role. Investments were made for infrastructure development and incentives were given to exporters. Being an export-oriented country, ethnic conflicts which affected the rate of production and growth pushed Sri Lanka's economy into decline despite the liberalization policies adopted by its administration. As for

Malaysia, the country was able to establish the New Economic Policy (NEP) in order to bring about development in the country. Having an ambitious leader such as Mahathir also helped in its development process. Adopting East Asian development policies from Japan, Mahathir privatized several industries within Malaysia to reduce poverty of different races and to restructure the country's society. By not possessing a strong, experienced leader committed to liberalizing markets for economic development, Burma instead headed in the opposite direction by adopting socialist policies. As a result, the country went from being on a fast track to development during the colonized years to becoming the most impoverished country amongst its ASEAN members.

### **3.2 Political Leadership**

Political leadership also plays a crucial role in the democratization process of a country. Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) argued that, especially for nations going through the transition from a colonial state, having strong, experienced leaders committed to democratic values, possessing leadership qualities to lead the nation could determine the success or failure of a democratization process. It was pointed out in the literature review section that skillful political leaders dedicated and committed to democratic values are needed during this period. In the case of Burma, after the assassination of General Aung San in July 1947, his successors failed to influence and unite the people as he did. With the lack of an influential leader along with unresolved ethnic issues, the country was driven into a fragile, instable nation.

For a short period of time, Burma was able to establish a democratic parliamentary government consisting of Chambers of Deputies and Chambers of Nationalities. Elections were held with multiple party leaders running for a seat in the parliament. However, this Democratic

Republic Union of Burma ended when a military coup occurred in 1962. Since then, Burma has been governed by military leaders up to the present. Although designated positions such as “President” Ne Win or “Prime Minister” Thein Sein were given to the political leaders, all the important decision makers of the country were Generals in the military prior to their political career. Therefore, one could say that the leaders emerging out of Burma were not leaders who were committed to democratic values as their ideologies were highly influenced by the military regime. Those who were committed to democratic values such as Aung San Suu Kyi, were never given the opportunity to govern the country.

Looking at the effects political leadership had on the democratization process of India, its success in transitioning to a democratic state can be contributed to the country possessing strong leaders. Mahatma Gandhi was able to cut across the deeply divided Indian society to form the base of independence movement against the British. Subsequently, the first president of India, Jawaharlar Nehru was also committed to transitioning the country into a democratic state. He helped establish a parliamentary government as well as creating involuntary associations in both urban and rural areas in order to promote mass political participation throughout India. These leaders helped build strong foundations for India’s democratic political infrastructure. Therefore, even though there were momentary lapse of democratic governance in the country, India was able to sustain its democracy.

Sri Lanka’s political leadership was somewhat similar to that of Burma. With the ethnic conflicts between Sinhalese and the Tamils, the government was unable to create unity amongst its people. When leaders emerged in Sri Lanka, they either showed favoritism towards the Sinhalese population or they were Tamil leaders fighting for a free state. This only deepened the ethnic divisions causing the country to enter into a civil war. The lack of a strong political leader

capable of uniting the people of Sri Lanka resulted in the breakdown of its democratization process. Malaysia's experience lies in between that of India and Sri Lanka. It possessed an ethnic divide between its Malay and the Non-Malay population which led to the riots of 1969. The members of the National Operation Council (NOC) who took over the functions of government while democracy was suspended in Malaysia were leaders who were committed to bringing democracy back into Malaysia. As a result, the country was able to establish what the Western scholars define as quasi-democracy to suit the specific needs of its nation.

### **3.3 Political culture**

Political culture was also mentioned in the literature review section as one of the important factors affecting the democratization process in a developing nation. Political culture defined by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) refers to the beliefs and values concerning politics that the people of a nation possess. In the case of Burma, a political culture is almost non-existent. In order to believe in the legitimacy of democracy, the people needed to understand the definition of democracy and believe that the country is able to achieve and sustain it. Since the democratic institutions of Burma were suspended since 1962, it has been difficult for the people of the nation to grasp the concept of democracy. This however, does not mean that people were opposed to the idea of a democratic nation. But it is difficult to possess a democratic political culture in a nation where democracy has disappeared decades ago. Alexander Dukalski (2009: 947) took a different approach by dismissing political culture as one of the obstacles to democratization in Burma. According to him, political culture generally applies to consolidation of democracy once it has been established. Since Burma never had an opportunity to make democracy work, he argued that jumping to the stage of consolidating democracy would be premature.

In India, a democratic political culture existed prior to its independence. The Indian National Congress was formed because leaders from different states felt they needed to come together and form a political structure to file complaints and petitions to the British government. Thus the national Congress was formed and elections were held at the state and local level with leaders elected for governing both the urban and rural areas. In Sri Lanka, political culture existed in the country regardless of the ethnic conflicts which dominated the nation. Universal suffrage along with educational reforms helped educate the Sinhalese majority and made them aware of the power they possess against the Tamils. Even throughout the ethnic conflicts, party leaders emerged from both Sinhalese and Tamil sides competing either for the rights of the Sinhalese or for the freedom of the Tamil state. Elections were held regularly which meant the parties needed to align their ideologies to meet the needs of their support base. Although there were violations of human rights in Sri Lanka over the past few years, political culture continued to exist with the majority of the people who are fully aware of their rights and their ability to influence government policies.

It can also be said that a certain form of political culture existed in Malaysia regardless of the quasi-democracy it practices. The parliamentary system was used to govern the different states and the legislative power has been divided between federal and state legislatures. Prior to the 1969 riots, multiple parties participated in the elections and alliances were formed between parties to govern the country. As of today, parliamentary elections are held every five years. Due to this, even with a momentary breakdown of democracy experienced in 1969, political culture exists in Malaysia since its independence. A system of government was formed and their own versions of democratic practices were adopted. Contrary to Burma, the people of Malaysia were familiar with their form of government, because of the regular elections held in the country. As

mentioned by Dukalski, for a political culture to develop in Burma as it did in India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, we need to first establish and maintain a democratic governance system in the country.

### **3.4 Civil Society**

Another important factor contributing to the democratization process of a developing nation is the existence of a civil society in these nations. Civil society consists of institutions formed voluntarily to communicate the ideologies of a group of people to the government (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995: 27). These ideologies could range from commitment to democratic values, educating women's rights in developing countries, or representing the interest of ethnic minority groups. Lipset (1994) argued that the existence of a civil society is favorable because they serve as a mediator between individuals and the state. People can articulate their interests to the government through these organizations, and the elected officials can also take advantage of them to pass on information to the mass public. In developing countries, voluntary associations are mainly used to educate the people by introducing new values and promoting the rights they possess as the people belonging to a nation. The education could vary from promoting political awareness to educating the people to influence the political course of their nation.

In Burma, civil society existed for a short period of time after the country's independence. During the years when parliamentary democracy was practiced, political parties campaigned to win seats in the parliament thus representing the ideologies of their supporters. Student organizations, library clubs and other independent associations existed as literacy was widespread compared to that of its neighboring countries. However, after the military coup in 1962, all independent associations were banned unless they were sponsored by the government

to promote the Burmese Socialist Party's values. When university students protested against the government, military troops were used to suppress the uprisings. Thus voluntary associations died in Burma along with its democracy in 1962.

Amongst the three nations discussed in the previous chapter, India was the top nation promoting the existence of civil society even prior to its independence. This perhaps is one of the reasons why it became a successful democratic country compared to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Ram Mohan Roy formed voluntary associations to advocate language reforms, education reforms, freedom of press and the rights of women. These associations persisted through the country's independence process and they played an important role in building India's constitution as well as advocating ideologies of various races in the national Congress. With the promotion of civil rights through these groups, India was able to produce leaders who were committed to democratic values. The people were also educated enough to be aware of their rights as citizens and to hold elected officials accountable for their actions.

In a report issued by Asia Europe People's Forum in 2010, it was pointed out that after the tragedy of Cyclone Nargis, voluntary associations began to emerge in various rural areas of Burma/Myanmar. Since the international non-governmental organizations were prohibited from entering the country, the people had to form their own independent associations to help those in the disaster regions. Thus the concept of voluntary associations re-emerged amongst the people of Burma/Myanmar. The report also pointed out that although the 2010 elections were neither free or fair, they provided an opportunity for these organizations to educate communities and individuals about their rights and to promote peoples' political awareness especially amongst young people who have never voted in their lives. Aung San Suu Kyi and her disbanded NLD party also helped create political awareness of the population by providing information on



subjects such as defining the meaning of democracy, democratic processes and procedures, people's rights and the power they possess to transform the country into a democratic nation.

### **3.5 International Influences**

International factors also play an important role in the democratization process of developing countries. These international factors include colonial rule, intervention, cultural diffusion, and economic sanctions imposed by the international community. As explained earlier in the chapter, the ethnic conflicts in Burma originated from the colonial era. Because of the way the British governed Ministerial Burma and Frontier Areas, resentments and disconnects existed between the majority ethnic race the Burmans, and all other different ethnicities residing in the country. After the country's independence, international players were unable to influence the political process of Burma as the country practiced a closed door policy under its military government.

Due to the repressive regimes and the actions violating human rights, the United States and the European Union placed economic sanctions. The members of the European Union were unable to provide support or trade with Burma/Myanmar, and the assets and bank accounts situated in the United States and Europe of high ranking military government officials were frozen. The Western community hoped that this would help reduce the legitimacy of the military regime faster and liberate the people. The effects however were just the opposite of their intentions. Because of the economic sanctions, the economy of the country deteriorated. The middle and lower class suffered from inflation and increased prices of oil and other commodity goods. The upper class that supported the military regime remained in power with their

possessions growing steadily throughout the years. Thus income inequality became one of the major problems with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

The effects of the international factors on each developing country were different. For example, in India, trade with other nations as well as the help they received from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) resulted in the market liberalization of the country and their economy grew to become one of the regional powers alongside China. India also enjoyed a close relationship with the United States, which wanted a reliable ally in the region to balance the economic power of China as well as to monitor the situations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Sri Lanka, the effects of international influence are similar to that of Burma, with the British favoring the minority Tamils during their colonial years resulting in the ethnic conflicts between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Before the civil war broke out in Sri Lanka, the country enjoyed foreign aid from various other nations supporting its export industry. Unlike Burma, international organizations have always been present in Sri Lanka helping develop sustainable communities especially after the Tsunami. However, Sri Lanka now faces human rights violations investigations from the United Nations, United States and European Union due to their violent acts in suppressing the LTTE rebels in 2009.

Different international factors affected Malaysia in its democratization process. Much like Burma and Sri Lanka, the tensions between the Malay and Non-Malay existed since the colonized era. However, the leaders of Malaysia were focused on adapting Western democratic forms to suit the needs of its country. It did not promote the closed door policy as General Ne Win did but instead took on certain values of a democratic system which they felt would benefit Malaysia the most. The international factors such as the British's attempt to form a Malay country was met with resistance from the Malay community whereas other threats such as a

possible invasion from Vietnam had helped these same racial groups to unite and proceed towards the road to strengthen their democracy.

### **3.6 Political Institutions**

The last factor mentioned in the literature review section as affecting the process of democratization in developing countries is the establishment of political institutions. Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) pointed out that a stable political structure is required to sustain democracy because it binds behaviors into stable, predictable patterns; it can maintain political order through the rule of law; it can produce effective policies representing vast interests of their citizens; and it can also limit military involvement and reinforce civilian control over the military. Such political institutions existed in Burma but only for a short period of time after the country's independence. Even through the years when parliamentary democracy was practiced, there was no unity amongst different ethnic groups. Therefore, producing effective policies representing the vast interests of its citizens never happened in Burma. Democratic political institutions vanished after the military coup in 1962. Since then, a one party system was used whereby Ne Win led his Burmese Socialist Party (BSP) to govern the country. The uprisings in 1988 and the following general elections in 1990 brought back the essence of a democratic system. However, the results of the elections were never acknowledged by the military government and the country retreated back into an authoritarian state.

The existence of strong political institutions played a major role in the sustainability of India's democracy. The well-established Indian National Congress along with the regular elections held at federal and state levels bound the behaviors of the state to a stable recurring pattern. By incorporating elected officials from various regions of the country into the system of

government, India was also able to make policies which would represent the vast interests of its citizens. Even though the democratic system was abused by Indira Gandhi during her years as Prime Minister, the opposition party was able to take back control of the country because the people believed in their political institutions and their ability to hold the elected officials accountable through mass political participation.

For Sri Lanka and Malaysia, although their political institutions existed after the country's independence, they were unable to effectively represent the different ethnic minorities of the country. The ruling party was either focused on policies which would benefit the majority of the population in the case of Sri Lanka or they were unable to form successful alliances to address the grievances of different ethnic groups. The difference between Burma and India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia is that Burma never had a chance to establish stable democratic political institutions. Legitimate political parties competing against one another to represent the interests of the people are also a strange concept for Burma. Even throughout the elections held in 2010, the majority of the political parties authorized to run for the elections were those that were favored by the military regime. Nonetheless, the elections aroused the political awareness of the people which in time could create mass political participation demanding a more legitimate political institution representing the interests of the people.

## **Conclusion**

In order to assess the democratization process of Burma, factors defined by various scholars as requirements to democratic development were examined in the first chapter of the thesis. The second chapter was dedicated to explaining the democratization process of three different democracies in South and South East Asia: India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Each country represented a certain form of democratization process; India being a successful democracy, Malaysia being a quasi-democracy and Sri Lanka becoming a failed democracy. Based on the experiences of these countries, the factors mentioned in the first chapter were applied to the case of Burma/Myanmar along with the applications and comparisons of the same issues to the three countries analyzed in Chapter II. As a result, we can conclude that although Burma/Myanmar is still not a democratic nation, slow improvements can be seen in the governmental structure which brings hope for the future of the nation.

Looking at Burma/Myanmar's under Robert Dahl's (1998) definition of democracy, the country requires work to be done in regards to the effective participation and equality in voting. The people of the nation need to understand that their participation is crucial in transforming the country into a democratic state. In order to induce effective participation, equality in voting must be given to the citizens of Burma/Myanmar regardless of their race, religion or political preferences. Rustow (1970) argued that national unity is a pre-condition for the democratic development. Dahl's (1998) conditions favorable to democracy also pointed out that a country with weak sub-cultural pluralism is more likely to be successful in its transition process. The leaders of Burma/Myanmar need to focus on establishing national unity by working closely with different ethnic groups and addressing their grievances. This would involve cessation of ethnic

wars as well as the granting of autonomy by the central government to these ethnic regions for self-governance.

Once the government and ethnic groups have found a way to co-exist in this nation, economic development policies need to be addressed to improve the living standards of the people. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) argued that economic development played a crucial role in sustaining democracy. Since its independence, Burma/Myanmar practiced self-sufficient policies as well as socialist ideologies in the economic front. Therefore, the country became one of the poorest nations in the region with income inequality growing every year. Market liberalization policies need to be adopted by the government encouraging local entrepreneurs as well as bringing in capital from foreign investors. By doing so, they could alter the path of the economy from a declining stage to a development stage.

A democratic political culture as well as a strong civil society helps impart democratic values to the people of the nation. Voluntary associations assist groups in addressing their grievances to the government. Based on Lispet's (1994) argument, the political culture and civil society can help accelerate the democratization process of a nation. Therefore, influential leaders in Burma/Myanmar should focus on educating the new generation by explaining the importance of their participation, their voting rights and their ability to influence the government structure by holding elected officials accountable.

The newly established parliamentary government of Burma/Myanmar consists of the House of Nationalities and House of Representatives. Being a country with various ethnic problems, the new government should incorporate elected ethnic officials into the House of Nationalities to create national unity. Since the country never had an opportunity to practice

democratic governance since its independence, Arend Lijphart's (1969) consociational democracy was never before adopted in Burma/Myanmar. The government should look into Lijphart's democratic governance theory to see whether this will bring about national unity amongst different ethnic groups.

Burma/Myanmar is a state which had little experience with democracy since the country's independence from the British. Since the military coup in 1962 the country was governed by military officials who claimed to be leaders of political parties, yet with no true support from the people. Ethnic conflicts which were present prior to the country's independence still exist up to this day. Although cease fire agreements were made between the government and various armed ethnic groups, the border guards between Burma and China in the Northern regions are still overrepresented by ethnic minorities. This presents major security issues for the government and no negotiations were successful in bringing the military troops to govern the borders. The same ethnic groups that were unwilling to give up their autonomy of the state also boycotted the 2010 elections. It is clear to see that there is little trust between the government and the leaders of the ethnic groups. Therefore, Aung San Suu Kyi and her party tried to reach out to the ethnic leaders by calling for peace talks to discuss the points agreed upon by General Aung San in the Panglong Agreement. These points involved giving a certain amount of autonomy to the regional leaders to govern their states, equal opportunities given to ethnic groups in terms of educational opportunities as well as committing to the economic development of the rural regions.

The current government feels that because the parliament was established, parties were set up and the elections were held, Burma/Myanmar is on its way to democracy. Although the country is not entirely a free state, the parties and the elections of 2010 brought hope for a better

future of the country. Voluntary organizations are emerging within Burma with the help of the small number of international organizations present in the country. Although the markets are not completely liberalized, growth can be seen in Myanmar's economy during the last few years. Trading with nations such as China, India and Thailand has also helped its economy by increasing the number of foreign investors. A recent visit from the United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton represents a historic moment for Burma/Myanmar. With the promise of the lifting economic sanctions based on the commitment of the government towards future democratic reforms, the country seemed to have a potential for rapid development. As its relationship with neighboring countries such as China and India strengthens, Burma/Myanmar could accelerate its transition process with the help of the international community as long as the government carries through its promise of transforming the country into a democratic nation.



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