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The democracy-multicultural society paradox in Myanmar: An analysis

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Abstract

Myanmar (Pre-1989 Burma) is a potpourri of diverse people joined artificially by history and politics resulting in a complex multi-ethnic, multi-religious society with ethnic divisions coinciding with geographical divisions and resultant core-periphery dynamics. Divisions existed in the pre-colonial state but the colonial rule magnified and politicized the ethnic divisions. The majority-minority division and its associated politics of assimilation and domination is thus an entrenched feature of the country. The paper will try to causally locate the failure of democratic experiments of the country in its complex plurality. It will also try to explore consociational democracy as a model for democratic governance in plural societies and whether the features associated with such model can be applied to solve the democratic dilemma of Myanmar.

Keywords: Democracy, ethnicity, plural society, consociationalism

Introduction

“Democracy can be achieved with a government elected by the people and works for the benefit of the people. The opposite could not be called a democracy, it would be a sham. The content of a state constitution based on democracy should empower the people to be the real authority of the country, by giving administrative power, power of the Government, from the bottom to the top, to the representatives elected by the people” (National League for Democracy, 2008).

-Aung San¹

These were the words regarding democracy which General Aung San, national leader as well as architect of independence and father of the military (*Tatmadaw*), said in the Preliminary Preparation Conference of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)² on May 19, 1947. The political system of the Burma/Myanmar³ however has never been in liaison with

¹ Burmese nationalist leader, leader of Burma Independence Army and founder of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League who was instrumental in securing independence from Great Britain. His daughter Aung San Suu Kyi, also abbreviated as Suu Kyi, is the founder of the National League for Democracy and has been the lead champion of democratic transition in Myanmar since late 1980s.

² The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) evolved out of anti-Japanese resistance organization named Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO) founded in August 1944 during Japanese occupation by the Communist Party of Burma, the Burma National Army and the socialist People's Revolutionary Party. AFO was renamed AFPFL in March 1945 and led by Aung San was the primary negotiator during independence talks with the British.

³ Both Burma and Myanmar have been used to refer to the country in the paper-Myanmar for the period since 1989 and Burma for all previous periods and Burma/ Myanmar for introductory references. Also, the term 'Burman' has been used to refer to the members of the majority ethnic group and 'Burmese' has been employed as a designation for all citizens of that country of whatever ethnicity or linguistic group and also used to refer to the official language of the country. The country's armed forces have been referred all throughout the paper as the Tatmadaw.

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This basic principle of democracy as reflected in his words. The country had trodden the path of negotiations to independence with an aspiration for a stable democratic country which ultimately did not translate into reality. In the age of democracy, Myanmar became an exception languishing under military control. Even in the period from 1948 till 1962 which is romanticized as the democratic period of the country, major parameters that are universally considered democratic were absent. The complication was compounded by the complex plurality of the multi-ethnic society, lack of respect for it and absence of accommodative policies regarding it.

Plurality has been an age-old feature of the country but the colonial period administration had problematized this basic issue. The administrative set up from the pre-colonial times had maintained a separation between core, inhabited by the majority Bamar ethnic group and periphery areas inhabited by the different ethnic groups.⁴ The existence of plurality was customarily managed. It was the British who brought the modern rational notions of state and laws with them which they mainly imposed and there was no organic nation building attempt. Colonial rule was extended over Burma piecemeal in three stages 1826, 1852 and 1886. In 1826 the British East India Company acquired two maritime Provinces-Arakan and Tenasserim and these were linked together by acquisition of Pegu in 1852. These possessions of the Company were passed on to the Crown in 1858. Each province was governed separately under Government of India until all three were amalgamated in 1862 as one province-British Burma. In 1886 the annexation of upper Burma completed the conquest of the whole country including the vast expanses of tribal hills all-round the frontier. Partial autonomy was provided to this colony in 1923, was separated from India in 1937 and was finally granted independence in 1948. The British, after gaining total control developed an administrative pattern that was alien to this traditional society. They treated governance and ethnic relations in a cavalier manner, imposed a dual rule and for their own policy convenience pursued other policies that proved catastrophic to ethnic relations.

In the pre-independence negotiations towards creating an independent democratic Burma, attempts were made to bring the majority and minority to an agreement about the future political set up of the country. The historic Panglong Agreement of 1947 spawned diverse interpretations and did not promote ethnic accord. The ethnic groups (Chin, Kachin and Shan) that signed the Panglong Agreement of 1947 sought to found a state or a Union which is an administrative and legal unit but they sought to keep their

⁴ The majority-minority dimension of the population even today is clear. The majority group, who had always displayed a natural tendency to dominate which the others desisted, are the Burmans/Bamar. Around 87.9% of Myanmar's residents are Buddhist, and the country's most populous ethnic group, known as the Bamar (also as Burman), comprises almost three-quarters of the country's 50 million residents (Myanmar Information Management Unit 2014) ^[19]. The ruling class had always been Bamar/Burman dominated and had always sought to ignore and suppress the basic demands of the minorities and had tended to follow policy of cultural assimilation. The state in Myanmar has always been the agency of the dominant ethnic community.

'nation'-something that belongs to the sphere of values like culture, language, religion, ethnicity, homeland, shared memories and history, a sentiment of solidarity differentiating them from other groups or people-intact. The term 'Union' translates into Burmese as '*Pyidaungsu*'. *Pyidaung* in Burmese means a "Nation" or "Country", and *Su* means "Together" or "Combining". A combination of the two terms: *Pyi-daungsu* means the nations coming together to build a state or a Union with the purpose of sharing and ruling the Union together i.e. a combination of 'shared-rule' and 'Self-Rule'; 'Shared Rule' for all ethnic nationalities who are the member of the Union, and internal 'self-rule' for their respective homelands. (Sakhong, 2012, p.3) ^[17].

The difference between the Constitution of 1947 as it was originally conceived and the one that was actually put into practice shattered all hopes of the ethnic minorities for a political system with an equal share in the governance of the country. With the betrayal of trust, began the period of ethnic insurgencies and to prevent the disintegration of the country the army and the security apparatus was brought in. In this context the nationalist Burman army, founded during wartime struggles against the British and Japanese, arose as a critical institution within the state. Democracy ceased to exist after 1962 and a military and assimilatory solution was sought to the ethnic problem. All the subsequent developments-military led proxy civilian BSPP⁵ government, the 1974 constitution, the economic mismanagement and political repression of the regime, the pro-democracy uprising, 1990 elections, national convention and 2008 constitution-saw a perpetuation rather than a solution to the problem. From 2010 onwards situations saw some progressive changes but are nowhere near the requirement of granting the demands that have been made by the minorities for decades. Suu Kyi's ascent to government in 2015 was a ray of hope for change which was shattered in 2020 with the military assuming control over the government again. Solution to the problem requires addressing basic issues related to political autonomy, distribution of power and federalism, equality of treatment, respect and guarantee of ethnic rights like right to promote their own cultural aspects and religion and respect for basic human rights especially by the army. The continuing marginalization and alienation is best reflected in the Rohingya issue, which has become an international humanitarian crisis today.

Democracy in Plural Societies: The paradox

Starting from the Greek city state of Athens and passing through centuries, characterized by a timeline of waxing and waning prospects, democracy as an ideal as well as a practicing form of governance has become the dominant political aspiration in the world today. From a perverted form of government under Aristotle's classification to the most acceptable and popular form, the journey of democracy has been a dynamic one. By mid 1990s more countries were democratic than ever before in history and the percentage of all independent states with democratic forms of government was also the highest in history. By the beginning of 21st century (2000), Freedom House counted 120 electoral democracies i.e. 63% of all states in the world.

⁵ Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was the ruling party from 1962 to 1988 and remained the sole legal party for the entire period.

Also, the number of countries approaching the ‘fatter’ architecture of liberal democracy with effective protections for civil liberties and constraints on executive powers was also at a historic high with 85 countries rated as free. (Diamond and Plattner, 2009, p. xi) [6].

Democracy today has achieved the status of a ‘universal value’ as noted by Amartya Sen. the term democracy has come to be associated with legitimacy and hence even governments which do not follow general standards associated with democracy tend to use the term democracy in various forms to legitimize their claim to power. The view of Robert Dahl can be quoted here:

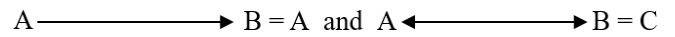
Today the idea of democracy is universally popular. Most regimes stake out some sort of claim to the title of ‘democracy’; and those that do not often insist that their particular instance of non-democratic rule is a necessary stage along the road to ultimate ‘democracy’. In our times, even dictators appear to believe that an indispensable ingredient for their legitimacy is a dash or two of the language of democracy. (Dahl, 1989, p.2) [5].

For democracy to succeed certain conditions are considered essential. Three such conditions relevant to context can be noted here. They are:

- Absence of reserved domains of power for military and other actors who are not directly or indirectly accountable to the public i.e. in other words, military and police should remain under civilian control and not the other way round
- Presence of cultural homogeneity and low sub-cultural pluralism i.e. democratic political institutions are less likely to develop and, in a country, where sharp differences and cleavages along lines of ethnicity, race, language, religion exist.
- Presence of strong social norms of trust, reciprocity and cooperation, norms of civic virtue and a dense network of social relations and organizations which are the foundation stones of peaceful politics, democratic government and effective public institutions.

The first condition is beyond any dispute as a necessary condition of democracy and is of special relevance to the country under study in this paper. The second condition, expressed across widespread scholarship constitutes a major source of debate over decades in democratic theory-the relation between democracy and pluralism. Questions have been frequently posed that what will be the fate of democracy in countries which are composed of a fragmented society along different lines (mainly socio-cultural) and where a prominent majority-minority cleavage exists and whether democracy by majority principle can bring any solution to the problem of stability in such a polity. The third condition is inevitably linked to the second as such norms are generally absent or are very weak in heterogeneous societies.

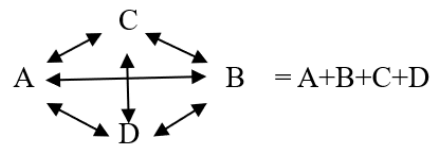
If differences are a hindrance to democracy, the question that has been raised is that whether differences can be reduced or eliminated to make democracy work. Among different available options, many countries like the one under study here, sought to use the popular tool of cultural assimilation with the objective of nation building. Taking up a hypothetical situation of a country with two groups (for instance ethnic), A, and B, two forms of assimilation can be identified.



The first case is a one-way process where the subordinate group B in interaction with dominant group A is incorporated completely into A such that it becomes A with no significant changes in the structure and culture of A. The second case is a two-way process where the subordinate group B interacts with the dominant group A in such a way that both groups are changed by interaction and the result is a homogeneous amalgam of both groups C. (Hutnik, 1991, p. 26) [8] The first case is objectionable and create resistance movements while the second case is not completely possible as identities of any type are deep rooted and complete moulding is not possible.

The desirable answer perhaps is maintenance of cultural pluralism is a way that attributes dignity and equality to people of all cultures, recognizes the persistence and co-existence of various cultures and attempt to devise a governmental system that respects this approach.

If we consider a hypothetical situation of four groups A, B, C and D, the situation may be somewhat as follows:



Thus, in a situation of cultural pluralism, all the groups interact maintaining their own identity without any cultural domination on one or more by another.

From the 1960s onwards a new line of scholarship emerged that sought to devise a model for stable democracy while respecting cultural pluralism. They challenged the predominant pluralist and social deterministic accounts of the relationship between cleavages in society and democratic stability. This school of democratic theory over time displayed three broad approaches. The first approach was exemplified by Val Lorwin who suggested that the immobilist or destabilizing potential of mutually hostile subcultures can be effectively countered by segmented pluralism, a degree of vertical sub-cultural encapsulation and autonomy sufficient to minimize the opportunity for conflict between the subcultures. The second approach is associated with Hans Daalder, Gerhard LehmBuch and Jurg Steiner who argued that stable democracy is possible in such countries by principles of amicable agreement and proportionality. The third approach is widely associated with Arend Lijphart who talked about making the cleavages in plural societies the building blocks of a stable democracy by following the features of an innovative model of democracy which he termed Consociational Democracy and later as Consensus Democracy (Luther, 2001, p.92) [12]. Before us into such models, the nature of plurality in Myanmar needs to be highlighted.

Myanmar: An Epitome of Ethnic Pluralism

As far as political geography of the Southeast Asia is concerned, it is composed of states that inherited national borders from former colonial masters in post Second World War period of decolonization. In these independent states with dispersed ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic minority groups, a process of comfortable assimilation and

creation of a common national identity has not been possible. The result has been fragmented polities in the region where prospects of democracy have faltered a number of times. Populated by an ethnic Bamar majority population of the plains along with a host of ethnic minorities⁶ inhabiting the hills, the nature of fragmentation is most complicated in Burma/Myanmar making it the most diverse society in Southeast Asia and hence difficult to govern.

Minorities have existed in Myanmar for centuries and the administrative structure had maintained their separation from the majority. The Bamar majority had generally occupied the plains while the ethnic minorities lived in the surrounding hills and the system of rule that continued from the pre-colonial till independence had been a combination of direct rule over the plains and indirect rule over the hills. As noted earlier, in course of hurried negotiations to independence, a sort of agreement was reached with the minorities, though not all of them, to create a political union with guarantees for the minority autonomy and rights. The real picture turned out to be different in the post-independence set up.

A 'plural society', can be defined as a society composed of at least three separate segments that do not have a common social life. In such society, 'each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. It is in the strictest sense a medley [of peoples], for they mix but do not combine. (Furnivall, 1948, p.304) [7]. Plural societies, fragmented societies, divided societies, severely fractured societies and similar terminology has been interchangeably used by different authors across the spectrum of literature available on this theme. Benjamin Reilley, defines severely fractured societies as to "refer to those societies that are both ethnically diverse and where ethnicity is a politically salient cleavage around which interests are organized for political purposes such as elections". (Reilley, 2001, p.4). Adeno Addis point out four defining features of severely fractured societies-

- They are fragmented along ethnic (or other) lines
- These divisions inform competing visions of the state as a whole and thus competing visions of national identity
- As a result of these deep and thick identities competing to define the nature of the state itself, majoritarian or aggregative democracy is often a problem rather than a solution
- Though fair distribution of resources might certainly ease the fractures in these deeply divided societies, it will not be an entire answer because issues at stake here are not merely or even primarily distribution of resources but rather issues of identity. (Addis, 2009, p.64) [1].

To sum up, a plural/divided/fragmented/fractured/vertically segmented society is by nature such a society that is characterized by deep divisions among different segments of the population which may be of religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial, or ethnic nature and

⁶ A minority is generally defined as a group of people distinguished by physical or cultural characteristics subject to differential and unequal treatment by the society in which they live and regard themselves as victims of collective discrimination.

hence will lack a spirit of cooperation, compromise and consensus-a spirit of toleration and deliberation on issues facing such societies necessary to run a democratic set up.

Very few states are mono-ethnic in the real sense of the term. Governing multi ethnic societies is in itself a complex problem and the question of establishing multi-ethnic democracy amplifies problems. Ethnic community or 'ETHNIE' can be defined as "a named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity" (Smith, 1996, p.447) [18]. Ethnicity has a deep-seated psychological dimension. It is linked to the individual's need for a sense of unique identity, the need for some kind of emotional security, natural needs for love and communal affiliation, a sense of relatedness, rootedness and finally the need for authority. So deep rooted is the appeal that to defend that community death will be considered as a sacrifice and the person a martyr. This private psychological is linked to the public political by the politics of nationalism. It is nationalism which translates the feelings of dependent attachment to a cultural group to mobilization of individuals into ethnic nationalist political movements with distinct claims. The subjective sense of nationhood combined with objective group attributes generates the strongest claim to nationhood. This gives the ideological base followed by assertions about their history and their destiny. Along with these come the territorial claims and demands for political autonomy. (Brown, 1994) [3].

The aforesaid account shows that divisions in society due to group affiliations especially in cases where groups different from each other exist side by side and in many cases antagonistic to each other can create obvious problems of stability due to lack of consensus creating hurdles in the path of democracy. To quote J.S Mill's gloomy prediction. Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among people without fellow feeling especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist. (Mill, 1958, p.230) [14]. The question that can be posed here is how to make democracy work in cleavage ridden society and to be more specific-society with ethnic cleavages. Various models exist to play out the politics of accommodation. Accommodation stands at the opposite spectrum of integration as far as options available to leaders who want to manage diversity within their borders are concerned. Integration seeks to create a polity which has one overarching language, culture and identity dismissing the idea that diverse minority ethnic and linguistic groups should have some degree of privileged political status that distinguishes them from the majority. Accommodation on the other hand will aim to deal with the diversity by establishing institutions which allow minority groups to participate in politics collectively and coexist with the majority group. (Charron, 2009, p.535) [4]. Majoritarian democracy cannot be a model in such cases.

Power Sharing Democracy a panacea to the dilemma of Myanmar

The most discussed and debated amongst all the alternatives available to govern a divided society is the model of consociational democracy, closely associated with the name of Arend Lijphart who conceptually elaborated it through a host of works. The term consociationalism literally means

'association between equals. The term 'consociation' is derived from the word '*consociatio*' that was used by Johannes Althusius in 1603 to denote 'a form of political union'. He conceived politics as the "art of associating men for the purpose of establishing, cultivating and conserving social life among them" (Lakoff, 1995, pp.55-56) ^[9]. M. G Smith, a scholar on Africa, in course of his studies on pre-colonial African societies talked about discovery of a type of plural society which he labelled as consociation defined as 'an association of separately constituted corporate collectivises as equal and internally autonomous partners in a common society.' (Lijphart, 1977, p. 167-168). The basic meaning of this term is that the different divisions in a plural society will act as partners in governing that society. Equal partnership is the best possible one and if not equal, given the relative power differences among different sections, all should have a say in how the country is to be run so that all benefits. According to Lijphart, consociational democracy can be defined in terms of two primary characteristics-grand coalition and segmental autonomy and two secondary characteristics-proportionality and minority veto. (Lijphart, 1985, p.4) ^[10].

The first and foremost element is government by a grand coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the society, cooperating to govern the country. In practice majority rule works well when opinions are distributed unimodally and with relatively little spread, where there is considerable consensus and the majority and minority are not starkly different. But in a political system with clearly separate and potentially hostile populations virtually all decisions will entail high stakes and imposing majority rule will hamper the peace of the system. Grand coalition can take various forms like-grand coalition cabinet in a parliamentary system, a grand council or committee with important advisory functions or a grand coalition of a president and other top office holders in a presidential system. Various examples have been provided like: The seven-member collegial executive (Federal Council) of Switzerland representing the different languages and regions.

Complimentary to the provision of grand coalition is the mutual veto. This has to be provided because participation in a grand coalition set up is not always a guarantee that minority interests will be protected because the popular method of arriving at decisions is generally by majority vote. A minority veto if added can therefore provide additional protection guarantee. It is an instrument which gives a feeling of security. This is a mutual veto means all minority segments possess it and a segment will not use it too frequently because of chances of similar payback. Because each segment has been given a stake in the governance of the country through coalition type participation, securing common interest will be a concern rather than continuous pursuit of a contrary line of action that will hamper the working of the system and the segments itself will not be immune from the results of such disagreements.

This principle of proportionality serves two functions according to Lijphart. First it is a method of allocation of civil service appointments and financial resources in the form of subsidies among the different segments. Proportionality as a neutral and impartial standard of allocation and appointment by prefixing the shares through rules can solve several divisive issues because such

allocation is a huge assurance to groups. Proportionality can be a part of the decision-making process itself with all groups having the power of influencing a decision in proportion to their numerical strength. This is linked to the grand coalition principle. When all groups participate in the ruling coalition, roughly proportional influence in decision making becomes possible. Hence all significant sections should also be represented proportionally. For instance-the Swiss formula of composition of the collegial federal council of 7 members follows this principle. The second aspect of proportionality is the link with the electoral system. Proportional electoral systems⁷ of any type is favoured by consociational democracy proponents as it would translate the voting strength into seats enabling the multiple groups in the plural society to participate in the system, something that will not be guaranteed by a majority plurality system as the latter would lead to the dominance of the majority which in a multi-ethnic society will be one ethnic group and hence jeopardize democracy.

The principle of segmental autonomy and federalism entails rule by minority over itself in area of minority's exclusive concern. On all matters of common interest decisions should be made by all of the segments together with roughly proportional degrees of influence while in other matters decisions and execution can be left to the separate segments. Federalism is one such form of segmental autonomy. The primary federal characteristic is the guaranteed division of power between federal and regional governments. In addition, five secondary attributes are.

- A written constitution that guarantees the aforesaid centre and region power division
- A bicameral legislature in which one chamber represents the people at large and the other represents the component units of the federation
- Overrepresentation of the smaller component units in the federal chamber of the bicameral legislature.
- The right of the component units to be involved in the process of amending the constitution and to unilaterally change their own constitutions.

Decentralized government i.e. the regional government's share of power in the federation is larger compared to that of unitary states (Lijphart, 1985, pp.4-5) ^[10]. Consociational democracy should have all the aforesaid federal features to complement the other features. However, a territorial federal system can be constituted only if the segments of the plural society are geographically concentrated and the segmental cleavages coincide with the regional cleavages. Switzerland is an example in this case. If the ethnic groups are geographically intermixed segmental autonomy can be operationalized in a non-territorial form.

Following Kenneth D McRae's summarization, the elements of consociational model to be applied according to requirements may be stated as follows-(McRae, 1997, p. 292) ^[13].

- Executive level power sharing.
- Separation of powers.
- Balanced bicameralism.
- Multi-party system.
- Multidimensional party system.

⁷ Party list PR systems, Mixed member proportional (MMP), Single transferable vote (STV)

- Proportional representation in elections.
- Territorial and non-territorial federalism.
- Written constitution with possible minority veto.
- Limited government, charter of rights.
- Special procedures available in legislative process.
- Separate minority electoral register.
- Non official representative bodies.
- Territorial special status.

For the situation in Myanmar, respect for multiculturalism and provisions for ethnically demarcated territories with special powers and guarantee of their rights is necessary if stable democracy is to be established. In a plural society rather than striving for homogeneity, it is better to keep the different segments intact separately and encourage cooperation among them in governance. If the democratic aspirations of this country have to be fulfilled, a political dialogue among all the actors have to be instituted to develop a power sharing arrangement. Though such provisions of power sharing, as noted above, if applied can solve the problem in the country, politics as an activity is far more complex than any theoretical understanding on issues. The intent of the decision-making central actors for positive change is the first prerequisite. The 2008 constitution allowed for some breathing space in regional autonomy with separate governments at the regional levels and elections to constitute them which gave a playing ground for ethnic political parties. Many of the ethnic political parties and Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy had boycotted the 2010 elections because of an uneven playing field but after certain changes in electoral laws and the positive attitude displayed by the government in the 2012 by-elections, many parties re-registered to contest the 2015 elections. Suu Kyi's ascent to government in the 2015 general election in which NLD secured a victory over the government's Union Solidarity and Development Party⁸ brought the hope for positive change but structural constitutional impediments did not provide for much scope for change.

Aung San Suu Kyi in her work 'In Quest of Democracy' pointed out the aspirations of the people of her country regarding democracy,

The people of Burma view democracy not merely as a form of government but as an integrated social and ideological system based on respect for the individual. When asked why they feel so strong a need for democracy, the least political will answer: 'We just want to be able, to go about our own business freely and peacefully, not doing anybody any harm, just earning a decent living without anxiety and fear.' In other words, they want the basic human rights which would guarantee a tranquil, dignified existence free from want and fear. 'Democracy songs' articulated such longings: 'I am not among the rice-eating robots... Everyone but everyone should be entitled to human rights.' 'We are not savage beasts of the jungle, we are all men with reason, it's high time to stop the rule of armed intimidation: if every movement of dissent were settled by the gun, Burma would only be emptied of people' (Suu Kyi, 1991).

Democracy requires a spirit of cooperation, compromise, toleration and deliberation to work. Whatever hopes for change comes with such a leader was shattered again in

⁸ Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is an ultra-nationalist, rightist, conservative, pro-military party founded by Thein Sein ahead 2010 general elections.

2020 when the election results in which the NLD had again emerged victorious were annulled by a military coup removing Suu Kyi from the government. The country has a huge task ahead-the task of reshuffling its entire political system. Given its complicated political scenario, the task will not be an easy one and building a sustainable democracy overnight is also not possible. The Constitution needs amending or needs rewriting entirely, as reservation of seats for the military ensures all progressive steps regarding reconciliation on the ethnic issue turn futile, given their conservatism. The army in itself needs an overhaul in their mindset towards governance needs of the country. Unless these basic requirements are met, conditions will not develop for application of any of the above features mentioned above.

Conclusion

General Aung San's vision of democracy, articulated in 1947, remains unfulfilled in Myanmar. The country's journey from negotiated independence to military rule underscores the challenges of democratization in plural societies. Colonial legacies exacerbated ethnic tensions, complicating efforts to build inclusive governance. The failure to honor agreements such as the Panglong Agreement led to ethnic insurgencies and military control. Myanmar's diverse composition necessitates innovative solutions. Consociational democracy, with power-sharing and minority rights guarantees, offers a path forward. However, genuine commitment to dialogue and reform is essential. Only then can Myanmar realize the democratic aspirations of its people and overcome its tumultuous history.

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