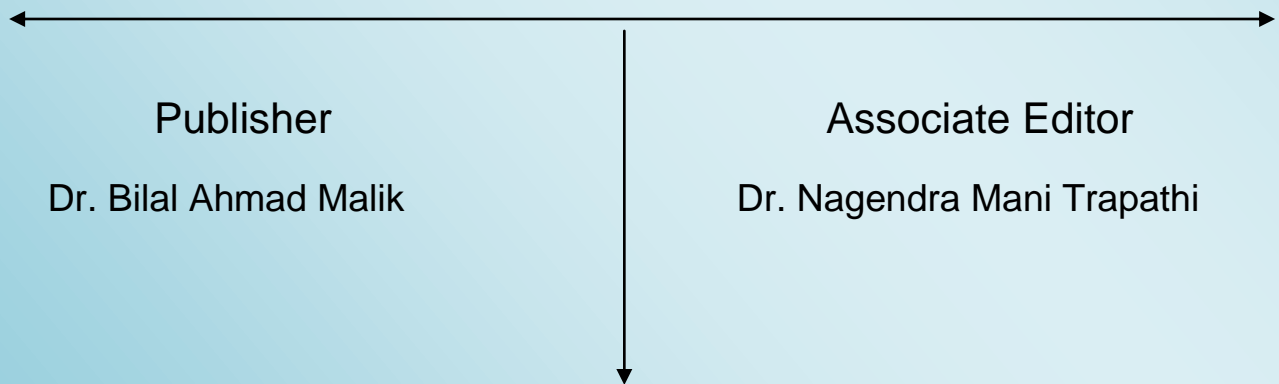


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ALAUNGPHAYA AND THE THIRD BURMESE EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

The territory and the sovereignty is the most important element for every country in the history of the world. Myanmar (then, Burma) had its kings and enjoyed its territory. From the time of immemorial up to the present day Myanmar stands in its land proudly and it had its emperor uniting the whole nation and territory in the past. Throughout the history of Myanmar many heroes appeared in the land and among the mighty kings, Alaungpaya, the founder of Konbaung Dynasty, was the last one who united and extended the country. We traced his nationalism and patriotism for the country, Myanmar.

Key Words: Konbaung Dynasty, Alaungpaya, Nationalism, Patriotism.

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar founded its three successive emperors: the First Emperor (Bagan Dynasty), the Second Emperor (Taung U Dynasty) and the Third Emperor (Konbaung Dynasty) from eleven century up to eighteen century. Throughout the history, the kings and their subjects enjoyed privileges. Among the emperor, the one who founded Konbaung dynasty was Alaungpaya and he tried to re-unite the entire Burmese under his control and he succeeded his aim and extended his territory even to Manipur (now belong to India) to the north and Chain Mai (now belong to Thailand) to the south. We focused his nationalism and patriotism for the nation.

ALAUNGPAYA (1714-1760), THE FOUNDER OF THE 3RD BURMESE EMPEROR

Alaungphaya (1752-1760) was a king who founded the Third Burmese Emperor known as Konbaung Dynasty. He claimed his decent from Moniyin-mintaya of Ava (1427-1440). He was born on 24 August 1714 in a village called Moksobo. Later the name of the village was changed to Shwebo where it became the capital of Konbaung dynasty. He was a tall man, almost six feet in height, physically powerful. He was intensely proud of his achievements and boastful of his triumphs.

Alaungphaya (which means the Buddha-to-be in Burmese) was the hero that Burma produced at the right moment, 'the man for the hour'. He may safely be called the savior of the Burmese race and a maker of Burma. The Burmese, held a predominant position in the country for many centuries and later they were, in the middle of the 18th century, in danger of passing under Mon control. In 1752, the Mons broke into Upper Burma; right up to Ava they came carrying everything before them. Among other causes, Burmese declined was due to misgovernment, decay of the royal house, and want of leadership. Under these circumstances of stress and danger, a mighty leader arose, not belonging to the blue blood, but of humble origin (Mahayazawingyi, 1965).

At the age of 38, Alaungphya was made a hereditary lord of Shwebo and surrounding places. Soon after the Mon captured Ava, he made Shwebo, his birthplace, the center of resistance. His father in despair was willing to pay homage to the victorious Mons, but Alaungpya said 'No' when fighting for our country it matters little whether you are few or many. What does matter is that your comrades have true hearts and strong arms.' His resistance bore fruit and the Burmese in various parts of the Mon dominion rose up in arms with the war-cry 'Shwebotha' (son of shwebo) on their lips. From that time onwards, Alaungpaya took the initiative and started an offensive war. He became more and more popular and his followers were increased in number (Tun, 2010)

Alaungpaya was highly ambitious, but at the same time he was a staunch Burmese nationalist. He took the opportunity of uniting the scattered Burmese fleeing before the triumphant Mons. He prevailed upon rival leaders to join hands with him, and speedily overthrew those who resisted him. His movement was stronger day by day and the Mons failed to understand how he could have such followers. By October 1752, the Mons abandoned all offensives and the whole of Upper Burma came under the control of Alaungpaya in 1754 (Tun, 2010).

Alaungpaya's ancestors had for generations been petty Myothugyis, the head of the village, and he himself was one such humble functionary. As is usual, when he came to the fore and aspired to kingship, he claimed royal descent which was readily secured for him by astrologers and chroniclers. Kingship and royal blood have always appealed to the Burmese mind, so that such a position publicly established and recognized would easily make him the center of attraction (Konbaung Dynasty Great Chronicle, 1960).

In May 1755, Alaungpaya captured Dagon in Lower Burma and it was renamed Yangon which means the end of strife but English people pronounced it as Rangoon in colonial period. His conquest of lower Burma proved to be of the greatest significance in the history of Yangon and of Burma. At his command Yangon began to develop as a major port of Burma. After the capture of Dagon, Alaungpaya returned north because Manipuris

had invaded Burma. He sent Minhla Mingaung Kyaw, the captain of musketeers to subdue the Manipuri. By the end of the year after restoring law and order in northern Burma, Alaungpaya returned to the Delta and attacked Syriam (now known as Thanlyin), the center of Mon resistance. He carried out his resolve most thoroughly. His object was to have a great port which would be Burmese in character. For this purpose he chose Dagon and re-named it Yangon. A riverside village soon developed into an important port of Burma (Aung, 1969)

Then, he advanced to Hanthawady (now Bago) ruled by Mon kings. Bago was taken in May 1757 and king Byinnadala and his family were captured and buildings were set to fire. May fled to Chang Mai in Thailand. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives during the fighting. Alaungpaya was lavish in his praise and rewards but he was merciless to failure. Unsuccessful officers were executed. He was the best leader for guerilla warfare. He got no time to train his men in pitched battle tactics. But they showed their worth in stockade fighting and ambushes. A Burmese soldier was individually very brave and skilful in the use of his sword. In spite of having no proper military training they fought well (Aung, 1969)

Alaungpaya's successes stimulated the national spirit of the Burmese race. A national dynasty was established which lasted for nearly a century and a half. At the beginning of his public career Alaungpaya found his people in danger of passing under Mon control; on his death, he left a Burma extending from Manipur in the north to Mergui towards the south. It was the ambition of every great Burmese monarch to pose as a divine incarnation on the way to Buddha hood. This would entitle him to the proud position of promoter of truth and justice, with mercy for all. It was in principle nothing but the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. The religious sentiment of the people was closely associated with the national mind. Alaungpaya fully exploited this sentiment towards the consolidation of his royal position. Buddhist tradition stands for a royal protector. Anawratha was the first champion of Buddhism in Burma and Alaungpaya lost no time in taking this much coveted place for himself; although at the capture of Bago he had 3,000 Mon Buddhist monks trampled by elephants. He held a solemn investiture at Ava and worshipped at pagodas wherever he went. He prohibited the use of intoxicants and the slaughter of cattle (Desai, 1961).

The importance of the rise of Alaungpaya is also evident in Burma's relations with European traders. Alaungpaya came into first contact with Europeans when he took Dagon. He seized three English ships and took their guns and ammunitions but Captain Jackson protected under International Law that they were neutrals and therefore the guns should be returned. Alaungpaya was in need of powerful weapons and he hoped to get them

from the English. French agent Bourno was living at Thanlyin and he openly assisted the Mons with his three ships. When Jackson was given back his guns he went over to Thanlyin and joined the Mons (Desai, 1961)

As in India, so also in Burma there was a breakdown of central authority early in the 18th century. The result was that French under Dupleix made an attempt to create an empire in South India. This produced a long-out struggle for political supremacy between the English and the French trading companies, ending in victory for the British. In 1757, the English also won the Battle of Plessey and made themselves the masters of Bengal. The English and French traders were operating in lower Burma at the same time. In the absence of a stronger ruler, it is quite possible European rivalries might have found fertile soil for the seeds of foreign imperialism in Burma too. The rise of Alaungpaya eliminated such a contingency at least for a century and more (Konbaungzet Mahayazawindawgyi, 1948)

After the Mons had been subdued, other states, such as Martaban, Tavoy, Chieng Mai, etc. readily submitted to Alaungpaya and rendered tribute. Early in 1760, Alaungpaya invaded Siam; but here he met with failure. He appeared before the walls of Ayuthia, but soon discovered that it was hopeless to attempt a siege. The city was well defended and the rainy season was at hand. He struck camp and began this retreat, but he was destined not to reach his capital. He re-entered his own kingdom, but he died at Kinywa, a village in Thaton district, being only 46 years of age (1760). His body was taken up the River Irrawaddy. At Kyauk-Myaung all his ministers, officers, and a vast multitude came to receive the dead king. The body was solemnly carried into Shwebo, and he was buried, mourned and admired by a whole nation (Konbaungzet Mahayazawindawgyi 1948).

CONCLUSION

Burmese historian, Dr.Than Tun states that Alaungpaya was militarily successful but he failed as a statesman and none of his successors were able to give the people good administration. We discussed his extended emperor in this article. Although he reigned for only eight years, Alaungpaya succeeded in establishing a new national Burmese dynasty. Unfortunately, it was just a repetition of what had been in the past, namely, a round of despotism, wars, rebellions, decay and disintegration. The New Age which was drawing upon the world required a new outlook. The new dynasty did not wake up to the requirements of the times. There was no development towards the rule of law. Nationalism failed to find an anchor of a permanent nature as expressed in representative institutions. An influential middle class failed to develop, a class which could express public opinion, a class which the king would learn to respect and trust, a class which would provide the needed leaders

for the country and act as the backbone of the nation. An organized and a well-oiled machine of government did not grow up to function automatically irrespective of the death or presence or absence of the king. The people in general did not show a desire for civil liberty which did not exist. No conscious attempts were made to keep in touch with world affairs. This was the soil which produced an Alaungpaya. The task of the new despot was in a sense accomplished it was the responsibility of the people to see that national development did not begin and end with autocracy.

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