



James Scott's 'ZOMIA' talks about the indigenous communities from the Yunnan in China to India's North Eastern region to down south in Thailand or Phillipines. Scott argues that these communities remain away from modernization and are the lost remnants of the "untouched" communities. Various communities that Scott talks about, some of whom are also a part of Burma's social fabric. These are animists or late Christian converts and they form a part of the majoritarian Buddhist Burmese nation. Some of these communities include the Karens, Merens, Arakans, Kachins etc. Apparently Scott associates 'ZOMIA', the region with anarchist tendencies and that the modern nation state is actually an imposition.[1] [2]

Apparently the last fifty years have witnessed the emergence of several insurgency movements within Burma. The 'Karens' have been demanding Greater Autonomy ever since. Some of the other tribal groups have had their own flags-a symbol of their independent cultural and political identity.

"New Democratic change in Burma"

The new democratic change in Burma is wholly welcomed by world leaders across the globe[3]. Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest is seen as the sudden resurgence of the democratic ideals in the Burmese polity. But as the world centers its attention on Aung Sany Suu Kyi and her march towards securing a democratic mandate in the new Burmese Polity, the Civil War in Kachin

[4]
continues to gain greater volatility. The imprisonment of the Karen leader is another emerging situation.

[5]

At this juncture when the global fraternity watches Burma embracing its new democratic attire, the question that remains unanswered is the status of Burma's indigenous people.[6] What future holds for them? Will the new Burmese government look into the genuine demands of these groups or at least an effort will be made to study how much genuine they are..? Will they face the dubbing of being banished as 'insurgents'? The problem of these communities is also borne out of the lack of democratic space that Burma has been facing since past five decades.

"KAWTHOLEI"[7][8]

The Burmese regime over the past five decades has faced serious issues with the indigenous Karen people. Historically too the Burmese state has had conflict with the Karens ever since.[9] There has been continued conflict between successive Burmese governments, first against the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League

[10]

and then between the Military Junta led by General Than Shwe

[11]

. The Karen National Union

[12]

was formed in 1947 as a supra organization representing the interests of the Karen community and even today it continues to negotiate with the Burmese government for greater autonomy and a conclusive resolution to the aspirations of the Karen people which they feel are unmet at the hands of the present Burmese government

[13]

.

"SHAN" [14]

The Shan state in Burma, borders Thailand, Laos and China. Overtime there has also been civil conflict in the Shan state with the Burmese government. The Shan movement is more insurgency prone than the KNU. Karen movement is more organized with a scope for negotiation whereas as far as the Shan state is concerned it is more violence prone and at times the Burmese army has been accused of serious violations of the Shan community's Human Rights.

The Shan State Army[15] has been in constant conflict with the Burmese Army overtime. The geographical location of the Shan region makes the situation all the more critical as there remain various stakeholders to the conflict.

“KACHIN”

Bordering the Peoples Republic of China in the North East lies the Kachin State. Kachin too is home to a five decade long conflict, the major entity to the conflict being the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). KIO was established in 1961 and remains as one of the most resolutely armed group to have challenged the Burmese military Junta. KIO essentially represents the Kachin community, the indigenous resident of the area and claims vast territory across the border with India and China. The major breakthrough in stabilizing the conflict came on 24th February 1994 when a ceasefire agreement was signed between the KIO and the Burmese government but since then the situation has worsened as KIO claims its demands to have been vindicated by the Burmese government.

Certain areas within the Kachin state are controlled by the KIO and it has a full fledged administrative structure in place.

Permanent Ceasefire:-

The Burmese government has recently announced a permanent ceasefire with all the warring groups. Ceasefires have been signed in the past too but the problem has always been that of an improper federalism. Burma's federal character has been for the namesake and that has been the major obstacle to establishing a peaceful Burma. Though ceasefire announcement by the Burmese government is a welcoming sign but what is indeed needed required for now is a proactive approach towards establishing a more tolerant union that stands true towards the ideal of granting genuine federal autonomy.

The new democratic wave that continues to fascinate the Burmese imagination should live unto its commitment of being a democracy that is porous to the genuine grievances of the aggrieved parties. Burma can take lessons in federalism from its western neighbor India. India is a strong

Burma's New Tryst

Written by Arnav ANJARIA

Tuesday, 27 December 2011 09:51

federation with vibrant diversity and even though there are differences of opinion within the federal units in the Indian union, a democratic mechanism has been set in place that remains the hope for the grieving parties.

What Aung San Suu Kyi can do and should be doing is to make the Karens, Shans, Mon, and Arakans and the Kachins believe in the democratic process. For decades these communities have lived under insurgency prone establishments and even though they have striving for greater autonomy they still have lacked a democratic space to live in.

The upcoming General elections in Burma and the character of these elections should be rather judged by how committed the contending parties are towards a stronger union where diversity and rights of people are respected.

The Burmese Junta on the other hand should seek towards a reconciliation process, seeking inspiration from Nelson Mandela's South Africa. Burma probably cannot usher in the new era until and unless the wounds of the past are not healed. Thus it is only in this moment of change that various should be embraced in the 'vibgyor' of democratization.

Arnav ANJARIA

University of Hyderabad

[1] "The Battle Over Zomia" <http://anarchistnews.org/node/21197>

[2] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/903>

[3] "Burma releases pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi"- 13 November 2010 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11749661>

[4] <http://asiancorrespondent.com/67492/burma-is-civil-war-in-kachin-state-a-policy-divergence/>

[5] 'Burma 'jails' Karen rebel leader Mahn Nyein Maung'- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16227766>

[6] CHAPTER 11 **A State of Strife: The Indigenous Peoples of Burma** MARTIN SMITH- **Association for Asian Studies, 1995**

-
[Social Science](#)

-
539 pages

[7] Kawthoolei: a report on the un-charted states of Burma and the documents of the national movement which seeks independence from Burma - Dōjidaisha, 1982 - 155 pages

[8] Nations without states: a historical dictionary of contemporary national movements- [James Minahan](#)

,
Greenwood Press, 1996

[9] Burma and the Karens- Dr. San C. Po C.B.E.- Elliott Stock (Publisher)- 1928

Burma's New Tryst

Written by Arnav ANJARIA

Tuesday, 27 December 2011 09:51

[10] Marxism in Burma". In Trager, Frank N. *Marxism in South East Asia*. Stanford University Press. p. 34. [ISBN 978-0804705929](#)

[11] **"Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant"**- [Benedict Rogers](#) , [Václav Havel](#) - Silk Worm Books, -2010 - 256 pages

[12] **Official Website of the Karen National Union** <http://www.karennationalunion.net/>

[13] **"Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States-Devolution, Occupation and Co-existence"**-Mary Callahan- [East-West Center](#) [Washington](#) - 2007 - 94 pages

[14] [Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan states : Volume 2, Part 2](#) - [Sir James George Scott](#) - 1983

[15] [Ethnic politics in Burma: states of conflict](#) - [Ashley South](#) - 2008 - 277 pages -