

DR. BA MAW

(A STUDY OF THE NAINGGANDAW ADIPADI AS A MAN)

By U HTIN FATT

A PICTURE of süavity swathed in silks—the flowing *gaungbaung* set at an odd angle across the right side of the forehead, the silk jacket with a peculiar, but immaculate cut, the massive silk *paso* ornate without being gaudy; a symbiosis of Burmese culture renovated not on western lines, but on Burmese traditions; a rehabilitation of typical Burmese of the Alaungpaya days—these are the outstanding features of a personality that goes to make our Adipadi, Dr. Ba Maw, a great constructive force in the Burma of to-morrow.

Twenty years ago, few people ever realized that behind that rustling silk *paso* and fluttering *gaungbaung* of a debonair gentleman fresh from Bordeaux, there lurked a dynamic power that will one day shape the destiny of the Burmese nation with an inflexible iron-will. That affable smile which plays hide and seek round the corners of the closely compressed lips is not a smile of self-complacency over the lot of lotus-eaters steeped in luxury under foreign domination, but a smile of grim determination to set an oppressed nation free to recapture the virility of the old Burmese race. A careful observer might have noticed behind that twinkle of his powerful eyes the flashes of a rebellious spirit asserting itself in moments of ideological

conflicts with British imperialists. That biting sarcasm shot at a British pedagogue to run the school in accordance with his (Dr. Ba Maw's) own time is a rebuff made with the whole force of an oppressed nation which can hold no longer the display of British superiority complex. Within that half an hour of embroilment, the rebellious hostility towards the British lying dormant in his surging breast broke loose in full vigour, and out walked Saya Ba Maw from the uncongenial environments which were salubrious only to the growth of slavish mentality. That seed of hatred sown in the days of his father's sufferings in the hands of the British had thereafter germinated to spring into life at the first opportunity. Later in life, that pedagogue of a slave-manufacturing school learnt with much mortification that in Burma the British chancery was no longer valued as in the days of old. It kept time with unusual precision to the march of British Imperialism, getting awry the moment the question of Burma's Independence was brought forward. Perhaps that psychological moment had afforded Dr. Ba Maw an opportunity to discover that Burma's freedom could only be wrested from the hands of the British by using Burmese methods and tactics. In fact he had been holding in restraint his desire to shout out to the whole Burmese race to resort to Burmese methods in the struggle for independence; but his righteous indignation gave the slip when, to Sir Strafford Cripps' gibe as to how he would fight for Burma's freedom, he (Dr. Ba Maw) retorted with unabating force that he would fight for it on Burmese methods.

Living in an atmosphere of western culture, Dr. Ba Maw is, paradoxical though it may seem, essentially Burmese, obtrusively asserting things that are Burmese. Imbibing western education and culture since his most impressive years of childhood, brought up strictly on western lines, and drinking deep the fountains of occidental wisdom in a French University, touring extensively in England and

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Europe, it was to be expected that the young Doctor would return to his native soil westernized. Time was when the people simply gloated over western culture. The Oxford accent was a melody while the unintonated Burmese articulation was a staccato chatter. The smooth sheen of the Burmese mat was an ostentation of lack of manners. The respectful Burmese bow lacked the grace of a handshake. The impact of western civilization was thus dealing a fatal blow to Burmese culture. Naturally, therefore, people expected Dr. Ba Maw to be Parisian in outlook, at the least. But in 1924, Dr. Ba Maw returned to Burma to become a fully-fledged Burmese. The racial pride predominant in his character came into full bloom in his flowing *gaungbaung*. Once in Burma, he shuddered from the insipid taste of cold beef, delighting in his reunion with *chinbaung* soup and *ngatigyaw* which were not only relishing to his palate but also to his racial consciousness. *Monlon-yebaw*, *mon-letsaung*, *ngabaung-gyaw* and *buthigyaw* occupied an exalted position once more on his tea-table. Dr. Ba Maw once remarked that, of all his innovations and new cults, which the people either accepted or rejected, one has given him complete satisfaction, and that is the introduction of Burmese dishes at the dinner table which has been popularly accepted in even the most westernized Burmese homes. It was at a time when the western appellatives of Doris, Nellie, Rosie and Catharine were regarded as the quintessence of western civilization, that Dr. Ba Maw revived the old Burmese names, and consequently, Tinsa, Mala, Thita, Zali and Binnya were born out of his creative mind.

Barely three, Dr. Ba Maw had experienced the utter helplessness of a race battered by foreign domination. He shared with his father the mortifications of subjugation by the strong over the weak, and the bitterness of this experience accounted for his racial pride and the spirit of

revolt which sustained him in all his struggles. As a Premier, he sent the British Capitalists to entire frustration of their greedy schemes. The ideological conflicts with the British taught him the philosophy of racial dynamism which he emphasized in his speech on the occasion of the opening of the Vacation Course for teachers on the 26th October 1942, and subsequently in a radio broadcast to the Burmese people on the 30th November 1942. To the Burmese, the study of History has been a study of the private lives of Kings aiming at an accurate enumeration of the number of Queens they used to keep, and at an accurate interpretation of such phenomena as ogres' laughs and lions' red eyes. He taught the Burmese to view History from an entirely different angle. He showed that History is the story of races struggling for supremacy, and that the birth-right of the Asiatics is to put into practice the ideological conception of Asia for the Asiatics.

Actually, Dr. Ba Maw is the first to look to the East for the construction of a free and renascent Burma. While all eyes were turned to the West for succour that was never to come, he pointed out the East to his fellow countrymen. He imbued the Burmese with East Asiatic consciousness, foreseeing that Burma's fate must invariably be welded into one with the fate of the whole of East Asia. Being a man of deeds, he actually put his ideas into practice, and this resulted in his scheme while acting as a Premier under the British regime, to send State scholars to Japan much to the chagrin of the British Imperialists. This was, indeed, a decided departure from the usual procedure of idolizing the West. The veil of mystery over the Far East was lifted up.

Dr. Ba Maw is a leader who is invariably called upon to control the situation in times of difficulties. He is, generally speaking, the man who appears on the scene at the right moment. He used to liken himself to a general who is

always called upon to reconstruct a disintegrated army (တပ်မှန်-ဖန်တီးရန်). It was while conducting Saya San's case, after the rebellion of 1930, that his spirit of revolt sought for a complete self-expression, and he, therefore, plunged headlong into Burma's politics, while the whole nation was torn between two causes—Separation or Federation. Previous to this, his career had been purely legal ; and it was a sudden change from holding a man's brief to representing a nation's cause. His courage of conviction regardless of consequences soon brought him astounding success. Soon people began to realize that spark of genius in him that flashes aglow with incessant friction. His rise is not simply meteoric, for, it is progressive and continuous. As the burning question of the day was to wreck the constitution from within or from without, he tried his hands at it from within. He wanted to do the best for Burma, but that ruthless power behind all things—the British influence—thwarted many of his good intentions. The public, of course, could not feel the existence of that power and so he had to face the strongest opposition. He took the blame all to himself, on purpose, in order that it might in the long run serve as an eye-opener to his countrymen to the sheer futility of relying upon the benign will of the British, forever expecting the award of self-determination in mathematical progression, while the entire Burmese nation was holding out its hands like a beggar asking for alms. Artfully and subtly, he awakened the national consciousness. Then seeing that Burma's fate would be drifting along in a sea of uncertainty, he availed himself of the opportunity offered by the war clouds overhanging the British Isles, in forming a Freedom Bloc which was the People's Front. It was a first step forward in the task of solidifying Burma—an aim on which he set his eyes since then, and which he has been carrying out up to date. The formation of the Bloc was in fact an identification of himself with the causes of all parties, including, chiefly,

the Thakins. The first signal for action was given to be followed in the wake by his subsequent actions of importance, such as quitting the Legislature altogether. Then came the promulgation of his seven points, a counteraction to Churchill's Atlantic Charter—a definitely offensive counteraction of clarity against ambiguity. The Defence of Burma Rules was then looming large, and he had that intrepid courage to thwart the British War efforts, measure for measure. He virtually stepped out of the Legislature to walk into the dingy cells at Mogòk.

It is erroneous to measure a man's greatness by the dimensions of the company he keeps. A man's true worth cannot be assessed by a majority of following. The apt saying of Prince Saionji is truly descriptive of the kind of political friendship that could be met with in the Burma of "Divide-and-Rule" days. "Friendship on all sides" warns the Prince, "may easily mean enmity on all sides." As we have seen, throughout his political career, Dr. Ba Maw has been trying to achieve national solidarity to get into line with East Asiatic solidarity. Friends who know no fair-weather will be valuable assets to him than tepid amity on all sides. To him lack of opposition means *tedium vite*, the strongest one giving him an added impetus to forge his way ahead. But friendship is never lost on that account. To him his opponents are valuable assets, just as his supporters are, in the achievement of this solidification. His far-sightedness and generosity, coupled with a quality to forgive, above vindictive feelings, his iron will and intrepid courage, to crown them above all, will surely draw friends, sincere and true, around him for the realization of the conceptual idea of One-Blood, One-Voice and One-Command.

Parallel with his predominating personality is his creative genius and aestheticism. It was said of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that if he had chosen to devote himself wholly to

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literary activities, he could have certainly become a master artist. The same may be said of Dr. Ba Maw. He is essentially an artist. His wave of the hand, his lifting of the eye-brows, his way of handling the *khaborza*, his mode of delivery of speech are the very expressions of the artist in him. It was the artistic urge that made him set up a style in men's clothes. Anyone visiting his residence will be familiar with the quality of his æsthetic taste that lives in the arrangement of the drawing room suite and the flowers, the happy control of light and shade and the harmonious blend of colours. The text of the New Order Plan reflects the literary man in him, at once virile and forceful. There is a photograph of Dr. Ba Maw in a reclining posture on a couch, in right royal Burmese fashion, his right arm on his right bent knee. A Po-wa-yoke Doll peered out on his right, breathing life into the portrait, accentuating the artistic atmosphere that surrounds the man.

The concensus of opinion points out that, of late, Dr. Ba Maw has been straining himself too much with the affairs of the State, and some of his friends warned him of the dangers of an overstrain. At this rate, would he be able to continue to strain himself for another six months? Had it not been for his enduring spirit fortified by the tender care of Daw Kin Ma Ma Maw, the severe stress of a jail-life at Mogôk might have unnerved him. The schemes for an escapade were none too easy, and yet he did manage to escape. His ramblings through the Palaung Hills in the guise of a Shan Police Constable up to Menglon, for a distance of nearly a hundred miles, almost to the point of sheer physical exhaustion, aggravated by mental anxieties of falling at any moment into General Weng's hands, are a feat of endurance. Once breathing the air of freedom, it was not his lot to enjoy peace and rest; but, as usual, once more, he was called upon to handle a very difficult situation. He acted as the President of the Preparatory Committee.

When the Government was set up, he became Premier. Later on, he had to preside over the Independence Preparatory Committee. To crown all, he is at present steering the course of a free Burma as Adipadi through the din of battle. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. But he meets every situation with confidence and courage surmounting all difficulties. He has in fact been preserved to withstand this strain by his strong and sincere conviction that the Western Imperialist-Capitalist domination can be uprooted only by an East Asiatic solidarity. This belief has always renovated and sustained his untiring energy. The vitality of the man is simply marvellous. He emerged more virile than ever out of any difficulty, looking radiant with triumph, his imperceptible smile round the corner of his lips glinting a hint at his unflinching determination to stand up head and shoulders above others in any predicament, growing greater when the opposition is great.