

# Burma or Myanmar? Burmese or Burman? Rangoon or Yangon?

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## I. Introduction:

In May 1989 the present ruling military junta called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) reintroduced back the indigenous name "Myanmar" for Burma and requested the United Nations and other World Bodies to call their country "Myanmar". Because of that some people became confused, some raised the following complaints:

- (1) The military junta changed the name of the country from her original name "Burma" to the new name "Myanmar".
- (2) The name "Myanmar" does not represent the whole territory of Burma.
- (3) It is a Burmanized word and therefore it is a violation of the rights of the indigenous minorities by Burmanization.
- (4) The term "Myanmar" cannot represent all ethnic groups in Burma.
- (5) The word "Burmese" represents all citizens of Burma, and the word "Burman" is only for the *Bamas*, the biggest ethnic group in Burma.
- (6) The government is burmanizing the whole union by changing cities' names.

These complaints were often discussed in the newspapers, internet discussion groups, e-mails, journals and books. In this paper the present author will try to find out whether these complaints will meet all available authentic historical facts or not and will carefully scrutinize the roots of the evolution of these complaints.

## II. Burmese or Burman?

Actually the words "Burmese" and "Burman" are the same. It represents only the most dominant ethnic group, the *Bamas*, about 65% to 70% of the total population of Burma. The present author sincerely believes that the names "Burmese" and "Burman" evolved because of the "Divide and Rule" policy of the British. After the British annexation of Burma, the British authorities divided the territories of Burma into two major parts and invented the two different names by calling "Burma Proper" and "Frontier Hill Areas of Burma". In the mean time they invented the two different names for the people of Burma. Instead of calling them the

Burmese, the Karens, the Shans, the Chins etc., they introduced the term "the Burmans" for the *Bamas*, the majority ethnic group and named all other ethnic groups "the Burmese". However, some American Baptists who stayed in Burma, especially in the "Frontier Hill Areas of Burma" for the Christianization of ethnic minorities, did not follow this definition. Instead they reversed the definition by 180 degrees by naming the *Bamas*, the ethnic majority, "the Burmese", and their term "the Burmans" was for the people of Burma. From that time on the problem of "the Burmese" and "the Burman" evolved.

In fact, these British Colonial Authorities' and American Baptist Missions' definitions of "the Burmese" and "the Burman" were and are never accepted by the people of Burma. If one was to ask a Karen or a Shan or Chin or even a Tavoyan (an ethnic group in southern Burma speaking a Burmese dialect), "Are you a Burmese or a Burman?" his or her answer will no doubt be, "I'm neither a Burmese nor a Burman. I'm a Karen/Shan/Chin/Tavoyan, but I'm a citizen of Burma" etc. Even under colonial rule as well as in post-independent era these definitions were neither popular nor accepted by the people of Burma. But, anyway, because of those above mentioned fabricated definitions some people<sup>1</sup> still confuse between those two words although they were and are identical.

### III. Burma or Myanmar?

Actually, the words "Myanmar" and "Burma" are like "Deutschland" and "Germany", "Suomi" and "Finland" or "España" and "Spain". Throughout the successive periods of the pre-colonial era and even under the colonial rule the Burmese called their country, themselves and their language *Myanmar*. It is like the way the Japanese call themselves *Nippon* and the Hungarians call themselves *Magyar*.

The holiest River for the Hindus was and is Ganges. In the ancient times, the Hindu people of the Subcontinent named the place at the east of their another big river as "Brahma Desa" meaning "the Land of Brahma" and that big river was named as 'Brahma Puttra" meaning

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<sup>1</sup> See and compare Maung Win Shein, *Economic, Social and Political Changes in Burma (1886-1940)*, Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw, 1987, p. 13, where it was written: "Burmese" or "Burmans" were used for the citizens of Burma. Before independence, generally the term "Burmese" was used in referring to the dominant ethnic group and "Burman" was used in referring to all citizens of Burma, but after independence, the practice was reversed. Therefore at present, officially the term "Burmese" is used in referring to all citizens of Burma and the term "Burman" is used in referring to the ethnic group".

The present author does not share this view because Sir James George Scott *alias* Shway Yoe used the term "Burman" in referring only to the largest ethnic group the *Bamas* in his famous book with the title "The Burman"(first published in 1882).

'The son of Brahma'. That Brahma Desa was the place which is now Burma. Going far to the east inside Brahma Desa, there is another river even bigger than 'Brahma Putra'. It is the biggest river of Burma, Irrawaddy. The name is the corruption of the Pali or Sanskrit word 'Indra Vati' which can roughly be translated as 'the Ruling Place of God Indra.'

That Hindi word "Brahma Desa" was adapted by the Portuguese later in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D and called that country "Birmania". It was adopted by the French as "Birmanie" and became the German word 'Birma'. The British called 'Brahma' with their own pronunciation 'Burma'. On the other hand, the first ever recorded European who visited Burma, Marco Polo, mentioned the country as 'the kingdom of Mien'. Marco Polo was in China before he visited Burma. The Burmese called their own land Myanmar and the Chinese named this country "Mien Tien" and the people 'Mien'.

The Burmese (Myanmars) traditionally believed that they were the descendants of the four superior gods, the four "*Brahmas*" who came down from the abode of "*Brahmas*". Two of whom became women and the other two became men, and settled in the basin of the Irrawaddy River. Because of that traditional belief they themselves pronounced *Bama* in colloquial, the corruption of *Brahma*.

These *Myanmars* or *Bamas* established their empire with the capital city of Pagan (Bagan in Burmese pronunciation) in the central Burma plains. The word Pagan is believed to be corrupted form of the Pali word "Pyugarma" meaning the village of the Pyus. Some historians believe the word Pagan is deviated from "Pyugarma-- Pugarma-- Pugam-- Pagan". This theory is very possible because the Burmese spelling of Pagan is ပုဂံ (PUGAM). When the Burmese king Aniruda (Anawrahta) conquered the rival Mon kingdoms of Suvanna Bhummi (Thaton) and Hamsawadi (Pegu), almost all of the modern territories of Burma belonged to the Pagan (Bagan) Empire which was named "the first Burmese Empire" by some of the modern historians.

Starting from the 11th. Century the Burmese (Burman) who called themselves *Myanmar* became the most dominant ethnic group in Burma. Their predecessors in the Irrawaddy basin, the Pyus have already been assimilated into the Burmese society. That was the reason why old *Myanmars* were often named as "Pyus" by their cousins.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Till now, the Karens called the Burmese "Pio". In the early days the Arakanese used to call the Burmese "Pru" (Pyu). Later they named the Burmese "Ashay-tha" meaning the Easterners. The Arakanese Chronicles stated "The king of Prus (Pyus) came together with 90000 Pru (Pyu) soldiers ". In that way they recorded the Burmese king Aniruda's (Anawrahta's) invasion of the Northern Arakan. See also U Ba Than, History of Burma (in

The Chinese called their southern neighbors, these *Myanmars* (Burmese or Burman) "*Mien*" and their country "*Mien Tien*". These *Myanmars* from Pagan area were called *Pangatha* (*Bagantha*) meaning the people of Pagan (Bagan) by the other Myanmar-dialect speaking people like Tavoyans (Daweitha) and Merguian (Beiktha). The Mons called these *Myanmars* *Mirma*. Later, these *Myanmars* in the central plains were named the "*Bamas*" by their cousins

That's why the country and people are called "Phama" by the Thais and "Barama" by the Indians (the people from the Subcontinent). When the Portuguese came to Burma via India they called it in their own pronunciation "Birmania", hence the French word "Birmanie", the German word "Birma" and the English word "Burma", all are derivations of that Indo-Portuguese version. The first European who wrote about Burma, Marco Polo, who came via China and not via India, on the other hand, recorded the country as "Mien".

Here I would like to cite some sources:

(1) Yule, Henry , Colonel and Burnell, A. C., Hobson-Jobson, (First published 1886), Calcutta, reprinted 1990, p. 131.

**Burma, Burmah** (with **Burmese** &c.) n.p. The name by which we designate the ancient kingdom and nation occupying the central basin of the Irawaddi River. "British Burma" is constituted of the provinces conquered from that kingdom in the two wars of 1824-26 and 1852-53, viz. (in the first Arakan, Martaban and Tenasserim, and (in the second) Pegu. [ Upper Burma and the Shan States were annexed after the third war of 1885.]

The name is taken from Mran-ma, the national name of the Burmese People, which they themselves generally pronounce *Bam-ma*, unless when speaking formally and emphatically. Sir Arthur Phayre considers that this name was in all probability adopted by the Mongoloid tribes of the Upper Irrawadi, on the conversion to Buddhism by missionaries from Gangetic India, and is identical with that (*Bram-ma*) by which the first and holy inhabitants of the world are styled in the (Pali) Buddhist Scriptures. *Brama-desa* was the term applied to the country by a Singhalese monk returning thence to Ceylon, in conversation with one of the present writers. It is however the view of Bishop Bigandet and of Prof. Forchhammer, supported by considerable arguments, that *Mran*, *Myan*, or *Myen* was the original name of the Burmese people, and is traceable in the names given to them by their neighbors; e.g. by the Chinese

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Burmese), reprinted 1966, p. 57.

*Mien* and (in Marco Polo); by the Kakhyens<sup>3</sup> , *Myen* or *Mren* ; by Shans, *Man* ; by Sgaw Karens, *Payo* ; by Pgaw<sup>4</sup> Karens, *Payan* ; by Paloungs, *Paran*, &c. (Forchhammer argues further that the original name was *Ran* or *Yan*, with *m'*, *ma*, or *pa* as a pronominal accent). Prof. Forchhammer considers that *Mran-ma* (with this honorific suffix) does not date beyond the 14<sup>th</sup> century. [In J. R. A. Soc. 1894, p. 152 *seqq.*], Mr. St. John suggests that the word *Myamma* is derived from *myan*, 'swift', and *ma*, 'strong', and was taken as a soubriquet by the people at some early date, perhaps in the time of Anawrahta, A.D. 1150.]

(2) သိပ္ပံစိုးရင်၊ မြန်မာ့ယဉ်ကျေးမှုသမိုင်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၆၈၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၅၆-၅၉ (Theippan Soe Yin, History of the Burmese Culture, Rangoon, 1968, pp. 56-59)

မြန်မာဟူသော ဝေါဟာရကို ပထမဦးစွာ အစောဆုံး သက္ကရာဇ် ၄၅၂ (အေဒီ ၁၁၉၀) ပုဂံမြို့ တောင်ဂူနီကျောက်စာတွင်စတင်တွေ့ရပါသည်။ ထိုသက္ကရာဇ်ထက်အနှစ် ၉၀ ခန့် စောသော ကျန်စစ်မင်းကြီး၏ နန်းတည်မွန်ကျောက်စာ (၁၁၀၂အေဒီ)တွင် မြန်မာကို မိရမာဟူ၍ ရေးထိုးထားသည်ကို တွေ့ရ၏။ အေဒီ၁၃၄၂ ခုနှစ်တွင်ရေးထိုးသည့် မြန်မာကျောက်စာတွင် မြမာ ဟူ၍ ရေးထိုးထားသည်ကို အစောဆုံးတွေ့ရ၏။ ထိုနောက်ကျောက်စာများနှင့်မင်စာများတွင် မြန်မာ၊ မြမာ၊ သို့မဟုတ် မြမ္မာ ဟူ၍ရေးထိုးလာကြသည်ကိုတွေ့ရှိရပြန်သည်။

**Translation:** "The Tounguni Inscription finished in B.E. 492 (A.D. 1190) in Pagan (Bagan) was the earliest inscription in which the word *Myanmar* was found. In Kyansittha's Palace Inscription, which was approximately 90 years older than the above mentioned inscription and written in the Mon language (1102 A.D) the word *Mirma* was used. The orthography "*Myamar*" could be found in one stone inscription from A.D 1342 written in the Burmese language. In later inscriptions in the Burmese Language all three orthographic forms *Myanmar*, *Myamar* and *Myammar* were applied.

တရုတ်ရာဇဝင်မှတ်တမ်းများအလိုအားဖြင့် ရှေးလွန်လေပြီးသောအခါက မြန်မာနိုင်ငံကို စောပိုး ဟူ၍ ခေါ်ဆိုကြ၍ တရုတ်ဟန်မင်းများလက်ထက် (ဘီစီ ၂၀၂-အေဒီ ၂၆၃)တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံကို ဘန် ဟုခေါ်ဆိုလျက် တရုတ်တန်မင်းများလက်ထက် (အေဒီ ၆၁၈-၉၀၇)တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံကို ပိယော (ပျူ) ဟုခေါ်ဆိုကြသည်။ ဆွန်မင်းများလက်ထက်(အေဒီ ၉၆၀-)တွင် မိယင် ဟုခေါ်ဆိုသည်ဟု သိရှိရပါသည်။ ထိုမင်းတို့လက်ထက်မှ မိယင် တို့သည် တရုတ်တို့နှင့် ဆက်ဆံသွားလာမှုများ စတင်ပြုလုပ်ကြသည်ဟုဆို၏။ မိယင် ဆိုသောအမည်မှာ မြန်မာ ဆိုသော အမည်ကို အဖျားဆွတ်၍

<sup>3</sup> Kachins?  
<sup>4</sup> Po-Karens? Pegu-Karens?

ခေါ်ဆိုရေးမှတ်ခြင်းဖြစ်လိမ့်မည်ဟု သုတေသီများက ယူဆကြသည်။ တနည်းအားဖြင့်ဆိုသော် တရုတ်မင်းတို့က အေဒီ ၆၁၈-၉၀၇ ခုနှစ်အထိ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတွင် ပျူ ဟူ၍သာ အသိအမှတ်ပြု ခဲ့သည်။ မြန်မာဟူ၍ ထင်ပေါ်ခြင်းရှိဟန်မတူသေးပေ။ မြန်မာတို့ကို အသိအမှတ်ပြုလာသည်မှာ အေဒီ ၉၆၀ ခုနှစ်ခန့်မှ အစပြုသည်ဟု ယူဆရပါသည်။ မြန်မာ့ ရှေးဟောင်းသမိုင်းအဆိုအရလည်း ပုဂံကို သက္ကရာဇ် ၂၁၁ (အေဒီ ၈၄၉) ခုနှစ်တွင် တည်သည်ဆိုထားသဖြင့် ယုတ္တိရှိသည်ဟုဆိုရပေမည်။

**Translation:** According to the Chinese Chronicles, in the ancient times they used the term *Chao Po* for the country which is now Burma. During the "Han Dynasty" (B.C.202-A.D. 263) the name used for "Burma" was *Ban*. "Burma" was mentioned as *Piao* (Pyu) during the "Tang Dynasty" (A.D. 618-907) . In the "Sung Dynasty" (established A.D 960) they applied the term *Mien*. According to those records the *Miens* had very good trade and other relationships with the Chinese. Some scholars believed that the word *Mien* must be the short form of *Myanmar*. In other words, the Chinese recorded only Pyus in Burma until A.D 907 which meant that the Myanmars or Burmese were unknown to them until that date. Only starting from A.D 960 the Chinese began recognizing the Myanmars or the Burmese. The Burmese Chronicles also stated that Pagan (Bagan) was established in B.E 211 (849 A.D.). Therefore, the statement of the Chinese Chronicles was very reasonable.

ပုဂံခေတ်၊ အင်းဝခေတ်၊ ကုန်းဘောင်ခေတ်၌ ရေးထိုးကြသည့်ကျောက်စာအားလုံး၌ပင် မြန်မာ ဟူသောအရေးအသားကို တွေ့ရပြီး အင်းဝခေတ်နှင့်ကုန်းဘောင်ခေတ်တွင် ရေးထိုးကြသည့် အနည်းငယ်မျှသော ကျောက်စာများ၌သာ မြဲမာ၊ မြွမာဟူသော အရေးအသားများကိုတွေ့ရှိရပါ သည်။ သို့ဖြစ်သောကြောင့် မြန်မာဟူသောအခေါ်အဝေါ်သည်သာ ပုဒ်ရင်းဖြစ်ပေသည်။

**Translation:** In most of the stone inscriptions written during the Pagan, Ava and Konbaung Eras, the orthography *Myanmar* was mainly used. The application of the other orthographic versions of *Myamar* and *Myammar* was very rare and could be found only in very few inscriptions written during the Ava and Konbaung Dynasties. Therefore the orthographic form *Myanmar* is the original and correct one.

အချို့ပညာရှင်များက မြန်မာဆိုသည်တွင် မြန် ပုဒ်ကို လျင်မြန်၊ မြန်ဆန်သည်ဟူသော အနက်ကို ယူပြီး၊ မာ ပုဒ်ကို လွန်ကဲ၊ ကြီးမားဟူသောအနက်ကိုကောက်၍ မြန်မာဟူသည် လွန်စွာလျင်မြန်သူ ဟူ၍ အဓိပ္ပါယ်ပေးလေသည်။ ရှေးကမြန်မာတို့သည် အလွန်လျင်မြန်စွာ လှုပ်ရှားသွားလာ

လုပ်ကိုင်ပြုကျင့်သူတွေ ဖြစ်ကြသည်။ ထိုနောက် အလွန်လျင်မြန်စွာပင် တိုးတက်ကြီးပွားခဲ့သည်ဟု အနက်အဓိပ္ပါယ် ဖွင့်ဆိုကြပါသည်။

**Translation:** Some scholars interpreted that the word "Myanmar" came from the words "Myan" meaning: quick, fast and "Mar" meaning: extreme, huge, gigantic and therefore the word "Myanmar" means the extreme quick person. They verified their explanation by saying that the old "Myanmars" (Burmese) were fast and energetic. As a result, they became very quickly the most dominant ethnic group in the country which is now Burma .

အချို့သုတေသီများကမူမြန်မာတို့သည် ရှေးအခါက အလွန်လျင်မြန်စွာ လှုပ်ရှားသွားလာလုပ်ကိုင် ဆောင်ရွက်လေ့ရှိသည်မှာ မြင်းကိုစီးလေ့ရှိခြင်း၊ မြင်းစီးအတတ်၌ ကျွမ်းကျင်ခြင်း၊ မြင်းစီး၍ လှုပ်ရှား သွားလာတိုက်ခိုက်လေ့ရှိခြင်းကြောင့် မြန်မာဟုခေါ်သည်ဟု ယူဆကြပါသည်။ မြန်မာတွင် မြန် ပုဒ်ကို မြင်း ဟူ၍ အနက်ယူဆလိုကြ၏။ မာ ပုဒ်ကို ကြီးမားလွန်ကဲသော ဟု ယူဆလျက် မြန်မာ၏အနက်သည် မြင်းစီးကြီး ဟု ပေါ်ထွက်လာလေသည်။

**Translation:** Some scholars considered that the reason for the quick mobilizing of the old "Myanmars" was because of their expertise in horse riding and they were always together with their horses. In their opinion the origin of the word "Myan" was "Myin" meaning: horse, and "Ma" means "extreme" and therefore the term "Myanmar" should be interpreted as "good horse rider".

(3) Myo Min, Old Burma, Rangoon, 1948, p. 2.

In writing about the Kingdom of Mien (i.e., Myan-ma) Marco Polo made no claim to have visited the country itself, though he seemed to have got as far south as the western part of Yun-nan. His description of the battle of Nga-Saung-gyan, which marked the beginning of the disruption of the Pagan Empire in the reign of King Narathihapate is wonderfully vivid and accurate. Marco Polo called it a memorable battle by which the Grand (Kublai) Khan effected the conquest of the Kingdom of **Mien** and Bengala, apparently because some outlying eastern parts of Bengal were parts of the Burmese Empire then.

Therefore, the statement of the present military government that the word "Myanmar" was the original name for "Burma" is correct. At the same time it is also not wrong when one accuses that it is an act of Burmanization.

#### IV. Does *Myanmar* represent all ethnic groups in Burma?

The definition or Statement: "Myanmar represents all citizens of Burma" is a new concept. The earliest sources I found was during the Burmese Socialists Programme Party's Era (1974-88). The following are some sources:

(1) ပြည်ထောင်စုဆိုရှယ်လစ်သမ္မတမြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်၊ ပညာရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန၊ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့၊ မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်အကျဉ်းချုပ်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၇၉၊ အတွဲ ၃၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၁၉၈၊ (The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, the Ministry of Education, the Burmese Language Commission, the Burmese-Burmese Dictionary, Rangoon, 1979, vol. III, p.198.

မြန်မာ - န / မျန်မာ / မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတွင်နှစ်ကာလကြာရှည်စွာအစဉ်အဆက်ပျံ့နှံ့စွာ အတူတကွ အခြေစိုက်နေထိုင်သောတိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုး။ (Rough translation: Myanmar -n /mjanmar/ All ethnic groups who were the natives of Burma.)

As a contradiction one can see also in page 99 of the same book, same volume:

ဗမာ -န / ဗမာ / မြန်မာဟူသောစကားလုံးကို ရွတ်ဆိုခေါ်ဝေါ်ရာ၌ ထွက်သောအသံ။ မြန်မာ -န၊ လည်းရှိ။ (Rough translation: Bamar -n /Bama/ The colloquial usage of the word Myanmar. See also Myanmar n.)

(2) The Myanmar-English Dictionary, the Department of Myanmar Language Commission, Yangon,1993 , page 311

ဗမာ /*bamar*/ **n 1** Bamar: Burmese; Burman. **2** Same as မြန်မာ .....etc.

But in page 373 of that dictionary the new definition of "Myanmar" can also be seen: မြန်မာ / mjanma / **n 1** the people of Myanmar. **2 (a)** Same as ဗမာ **n**; Bamar; **(b)** (no longer current) Burmese; Burman.

Apart of the above mentioned sources I failed to find any standard literature which provides an explanation of the word "Myanmar" as "People of Burma (Myanmar)". On the other hand, there are enough literature and sources which state that the word *Myanmar* means the ethnic group, the *Bama*, or the "Burmese" and their language only. The following are some sources:



(1) ဗိုလ်မှူးဘရှင်၊ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်သမိုင်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၅၀၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၆၈။ (Major Ba Shin, History of Burma, Rangoon, 1950, p. 68)

ကျန်စစ်သား၏စည်းလုံးရေးဝါဒ၊ ထိုအခါက မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတွင် အရေးပါအရာရောက်ဆုံးသော အဓိကလူမျိုးကြီး ၂မျိုးမှာ မြန်မာနှင့်မွန်လူမျိုးတို့ဖြစ်ကြသည်။

**Rough translation: The Organization Policy of King Kyansittha:** At that time there were two most dominant ethnic groups in Burma namely the **Myanmars** and the **Mons**.

It was also written in page 49:

မြန်မာတို့နေထိုင်ရာဒေသ၏ မြောက်ယွန်းတွင် တကောင်းမြို့ကို ဗဟိုပြုသော သက်လူမျိုးတို့၏ နယ်ရှိ၏။ မြန်မာဒေသ၏တောင်ဘက်၌ စကော(ကရင်)တို့ ကြီးစိုးလျက်ရှိ၏။ စစ်တောင်း မြစ်ဝှမ်း၌ကား မွန်လူမျိုးများ၊ ၎င်းတို့နှင့်အနွယ်တူသူများ နေထိုင် လျက်ရှိ၏။

**Rough translation:** At the north of the place where **Myanmars** lived there was the city of Tagaung, the centre of the **Thets (Saks)**. At the south of the area of **Myanmars** it was overwhelmingly resided by the **Sgaw (Karens)**. In the Sittaung River basin there were **Mons** and other ethnic groups related to them.

(2) ဦးဖေမောင်တင်၊ မြန်မာစာပေသမိုင်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၆၅၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၁။ (U Pe Maung Tin, History of Burmese Literature, Rangoon, 1965, p. 1.)

ထို့ကြောင့် ထိုခေတ်က ပျူဘာသာ၊ ပါဠိဘာသာနှင့် မွန်ဘာသာတို့ကို မြန်မာဘာသာနှင့်အတူ သုံးခဲ့သည်မှာထင်ရှားပေသည်။

**Rough translation:** Therefore it is probably safe to say that at that time (during the Pagan Dynasty) the **Pyu** language, the Pali language and **Mon** languages were also used simultaneously with the **Myanmar** (Burmese) language.

(3) မေမြို့မိုးကြည်၊ မြန်မာစာပေသမိုင်းသစ်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၆၈၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၁၈။ (Maymyo Moe Kyi, A New History of the Burmese Literature, Rangoon, 1968, p. 18)

မြန်မာသည် မြန်မာစာကိုထွင်ပြီးသည့် ၁၁ရာစုမတိုင်မီက မှတ်တမ်းတင်စရာရှိခဲ့လျှင် ပါဠိဘာသာ၊ မွန်ဘာသာ တို့ဖြင့် ရေးသည်ဟုမှတ်ယူရမည်။

**Rough translation:** Before they have invented their own scripts in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the **Myanmars** had recorded their inscriptions either in Pali or in **Mon**.

(4) ဦးသိန်းဟန်၊ ပြည်ထောင်စုသမိုင်းမှတ်တိုင်များ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၅၇၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၃၅။ (U Thein Han, A Brief History of the Union, Rangoon, 1957, p. 35

နန်ချောင်စစ်သည်တို့ကြောင့် ပျူနှင့်မွန်တို့ ကစဉ့်ကလျားဖြစ်နေကြသောအခိုက်တွင် မြန်မာဟုခေါ်သောလူမျိုးများနှင့် မြန်မာအနွယ်ဝင်တို့သည် သံလွင်မြစ်ကြောင်းကိုလိုက်၍ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံနယ်မြေအတွင်းသို့ ဝင်လာကြသည်။

**Rough translation:** While the **Mons** and the **Pyus** became weak because of the invasion of the soldiers from the kingdom of Nan Chao, the ethnic group of **Myanmars** and the other ethnic groups related to the **Myanmars** emmigrated to Burma along the Salween River.

(5) မောင်ထင်၏အမှာစာ၊ ဦးတင်မြင့်တည်းဖြတ်သော ဦးပုည၏လက်ရွေးစဉ်စာများ (ကျောဖုံး)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၆၈။ (Remarks of Maung Htin, "Selected Works of U Ponnya" (back cover), edited by U Tin Myint, Rangoon 1968)

ဦးပုည၏စာတို့သည် လူ့ဘဝကို မှန်ထောင်ပြသကဲ့သို့ပြနိုင်ခြင်းကြောင့်၊ ဦးပုည၏စာသည် မြန်မာတို့ နှင့်သာဆိုင်သည်မဟုတ်။ ချင်း၊ ကချင်၊ ကရင်၊ ကယား၊ ရှမ်း၊ မွန်၊ ရခိုင်တို့နှင့်သာ ဆိုင်သည်မဟုတ်၊ လူ့လောကတစ်လုံးနှင့်လည်း ဆိုင်ပေသည်။

**Rough translation:** Since U Ponnya's works are like the mirror of the life of human beings, his works do not belong only to the **Myanmars, Chins, Kachins, Karens, Kayahs, Shans, Mons, Rakhines (Arakanese)**<sup>5</sup> etc. but also for all human beings.

In any case, the present author does not share the view of the definition "*Myanmar* represents all ethnic groups of Burma". Here I am obligated to stress three important points:

<sup>5</sup> There are two variations of the spelling, namely Rakhaing or Rakhine. The Arakanese favour the spelling Rakhaing, however, the official spelling use by the Burmese Government is Rakhine. Therefore both terms are used in this paper.

(1) The traditional Burmese saying of the division of the 101 races or ethnic groups on the world stated မြန်မာသတ္တ၊ မွန်လေးဝ၊ ကုလား ၆ဝ၊ ရှမ်း ၃ဝ၊ which can be roughly translated as "there are seven groups of *Myanmars*, four groups of Mons, 60 groups of Indians (or Westerners) and 30 groups of Shans". So only the seven Myanmar-dialect speaking peoples like the Arakanese (Rakhines), the Tavoyans (Daweithas), Merguians (Beikthas), Inthas, Danus, Yaws etc., and not the other ethnic groups like the Karens, Shans, Mons, Kachins, Chins etc. belong to the main ethnic group of "Myanmar".

(2) Not only the Burmese, but also the other Myanmar(Burmese)-dialects speaking peoples used the word "Myanmar or Mranmar" for themselves too. The Arakanese (Rakhines) used to call themselves "Mramar" until the "Mrauk-U Dynasty (A.D. 1430-1784). Under these "Mramars" they are subdivided into (a) "Rakhaing-tha" meaning the people of "Rakhaing" who were the people living in the capital city "Rakhaing-Mro" or *Dhanyawadi* (Mrauk-U), (b) "Rambree-tha" meaning the people of Ramree Island or *Rammarwadi*, (c) "Thandwe-tha" meaning people of Thandwe (Sandoway) or *Dwarawadi*, the second city then and it's province, (d) "Man-Aung-tha meaning the people of "Man-Aung" (Cheduba) Island, or *Megawadi* (e) "Anauk-tha" literal meaning Westerners or "our compatriots in the west" in which they mentioned the Rakhines (Arakanese) who lived in the western part of the Arakanese Kingdom which now became Chittagong District in Bangladesh,<sup>6</sup> (f) Ashay-tha meaning the Easterners or "our compatriots in the east" which included the *Bama* or the Burmese and Dawei-tha (literally: the people of Tavoy, but here they mean for all people of Tenasserim Province). The *Bama* were sub-divided into Pagan-tha (the people of Pagan), Awa-tha (the people of Ava), Pre-tha (the people of Prome or Pyay), Toungoo-tha (the people of Toungoo). Here are some sources:

(a) ရခိုင်ဆရာတော်၊ ခညဝတီအရေးတော်ပုံ၊ မြန်မာမင်းများအရေးတော်ပုံ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၆၇ စာမျက်နှာ ၇၆။

(Rakhaing Sayadaw, *Dhanyawadi A-yedaw-bon*, in *Myanmar-Minmyar A-yedaw-bon*, (Original writing in 18<sup>th</sup> century), Rangoon (reprinted 1967, p. 76)

အရှင်မင်းမြတ်၊ မရမာ နှင့်ကုလားသည်လူခြင်းသာတူသည်။ စိတ်ခြင်းမတူပါ။ မရမာ တို့မိရိုးဖလာ အယူအကျင့်မှာ ဘုရားတရားသံဃာဤသုံးပါးရတနာမြတ်ကိုစောင့်ထိမ်းမှသာ သာသနာတည်သည်။ ယင်းသို့သောတရားနှင့်ကုလားအယူမတူချေ။ ရုပ်ပွားဆင်းတု၊ ဓာတ်တော်မွေတော်များကို အဉ္ဇလီ

<sup>6</sup> Till now the Arakanese or Rakhines living in Chittagong District in Bangladesh and Tripura in India are named Anauk-tha by the Arakanese or Rakhines living in the Rakhine State (Arakan) of Burma.

လက်အုပ်ချီမိအံ့၊ လက်ကိုဖြတ်ပစ်စေ၊ ယင်းသို့ ကုလားဘုရားအမှာကျမ်းဂံရှိသည်ဆို၍ အယူနှင့် နေသူများဖြစ်ပါသည်။

**Rough translation:** "Your Majesty, we, the *Mramars*<sup>7</sup> and they, the *Kalas* (here Bengali Muslims) are same only in one fact that both races are human beings but we are very different in mentality. We, *Mramars* traditionally believe in "the three gems" namely Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, but they don't have this kind of faith. They said: It was written in their scriptures that if one worshiped the statues and relics, his (or her) hand should be cut off. It were the wish of their god".

(b) မဟာပညာကျော်လျှောက်ထုံး၊ ဟံသာဝတီပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၆၄၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၅၄။  
(Maha Pyinyagyaw Shaukhton, Hanthawaddy Press, Rangoon, 1964, p. 54.)

ရုံမင်းကိုယ်တိုင် လက်ဆောင်ပဏာအများ သင်္ဘော ၁၀၀ နှင့်လာရောက်ဆက်သပြီးသော် မရမာ ဘာသာစာများကိုသင်၍ ခြေတော်ရင်းတွင် ကျွန်တော်ခံပါမည်လျှောက်ပြီး ရုံမင်းသားအလတ် ရှာအလင်ကို စေသုံးရန်ကျွန် ၁၀၀၀ ပေးအပ်ထားခဲ့ပြီးမှ ရုံမင်း ပြန်လေသည်။ ပြည့်ရှင်မင်းကြီး ကလည်း ရုံမင်းသားရှာအလင်ကို စားကျေးကုလားရွာဂေါတော်ပလင်ကိုပေးတော်မူပြီးမှ အမတ်ကြီး သို့ အပ်တော်မူ၍ မရမာ ဘာသာအက်ခရာများကို သင်ပေးစေသည်။

**Translation:** The Sultan of Roang came personally with 100 ships, presented the tributes and promised to be loyal and to become a tributary state (of Arakan). He left his second son, Prince Shah Ali together with 1000 subjects to study *Mramar* language and its literature. The royal monarch (King Min Phalaung of Arakan) rewarded the Roang prince, Shah Ali with the *Kala* (Bengali) village called Gaw-taw-palin. The minister (Maha Pyinyagyaw) was assigned to teach them *Mramar* language.

(3) In the past the Mons, the Shans, the Karens etc. never used to mention themselves as "Myanmars" and one can't make an illusion that they will mention it in the future. The Mons call the Burmese "Mirma" and the Shans (Tais) call the Burmese "Man" which are their versions of "Myanmar". In other words, in the understanding of the other ethnic groups in Burma who do not use Myanmar-dialects, the terminology "Myanmar" means only for the "Burmese" and not even for the Rakhines and Tavoyans.

I believe that the former BSPP government as well as the present military government (SLORC) wanted to invent a new political definition, in imitation of the terms either "Thai" for

<sup>7</sup> Here the word "Mramars" means mainly the Arakanese (Rakhines).

all citizens of Thailand or "Indian" for all citizens of India regardless of their ethnic groups, and in this way they hoped to replace the terms "Myanmar" and "Bamar" for the confused terms the "Burmese" and the "Burmans". It is too early to say whether this desire will be successful or not, we have to wait and see. In the past, the Burmese government during the Japanese occupation, the so-called independent government headed by Dr. Ba Maw, attempted to introduce the term "Maha-Bama" (Greater Burmese) for all ethnic groups of Burma but their attempt failed.

## V. Rangoon or Yangon?

According to the pagoda legend of the famous Shwe Dagon Pagoda the town was called "Okkalapa" during the time of lord Buddha. Since lower Burma was traditionally subjected to the Mon kings the town was, no doubt, a Mon town. The Mons called it "Tigum" and the Karens called it "Tergu". The Burmese called the town with their own pronunciation "Dagon" until the conquest of the town by the Burmese king Alaung Phaya alias U Aung Zeya in 1754. Alaung Phaya changed the name to ရန်ကုန် "Yangon" meaning "all enemies are gone". Since that time that harbour town was known as "Yangon". Though the literal pronunciation of the Burmese script (ရ) is "Ra" the Burmese normally do not enunciate the "Ra" (ရ) but only the sound "Ya", same as in the preceding script (ယ) "ya", unless the script was written in the original Pali texts where they do have to pronounce (ရ) "Ra". Therefore the town is always pronounced "Yangon" although it is written as "Rangon". The Rakhines or Rakhaings (Arakanese) who really enunciate the script (ရ) "Ra", on the other hand, always call the city "Ran-gon". The British in India who used to have contact only with the Arakanese as "native speakers" of the Burmese language called the city "Rangoon" in their own version of the Arakanese pronunciation "Ran-gon". Later when Burma was annexed by the British they made "Rangoon" the capital of Burma.

It is very funny that the Burmese (including the present author though he is an Arakanese) always pronounce their city "Yangon" whenever they speak in Burmese, however, they automatically switch to "Rangoon" whenever they speak in English.

Colonel Henry Yule wrote in "Hobson-Jobson" (first published 1886):

**Rangoon**, n.p. Burm. *Ran-gun*<sup>8</sup>, said to mean 'War-end'; the chief town and port of Pegu. The great Pagoda in its immediate neighbourhood had long been famous under the name of **Dagon** (q.v.), but there was no town in modern times till Rangoon was founded by Alompra<sup>9</sup> during his conquest of Pegu, in 1755. The name probably had some kind of international assonance to *Da-gun*, whilst it "proclaimed his forecast of the immediate destruction of his enemies". Occupied by the British forces in May 1824, and again, taken by storm, in 1852, Rangoon has since the latter date been the capital, first of the British province of Pegu, and latterly of British Burma. It is now a flourishing port with a population of 134,176 (1881); [in 1891 180,324].

In the light of the above explanations we can see clearly that "Yangon" is not the Burmanization of "Rangoon" instead "Rangoon" was the Anglicized term based on the Arakanese pronunciation of the correct word "Yangon".

Similarly, the transcription of the Anglicized pronunciation of name of other towns are changed back to their original pronunciation. The following are some examples:

Original name	Former transcription	New transcription
ညောင်တုံး (Nyaungdon)	Yandoon	Nyaungdon
ထားဝယ် (Dawei)	Tavoy	Dawei
သံတွဲ (Thandwe)	Sandoway	Thandwe
မော်လမြိုင် (Mawlamyaing)	Moulmein	Mawlamyaing
သာယာဝတီ (Thayawadi)	Tharrawaddy	Thayawadi
ပြည် (Pye)	Prome	Pye

In fact, not only the SLORC but also U Nu's Government and even the "Independent Government" headed by Dr. Ba Maw either changed or renamed back to the original name of some cities and streets which were either in foreign names or their original names were changed by the British Colonial Government to honour some British Aristocrats and Colonial Officers. The only difference between the act of U Nu's Government and the SLORC is: Although U Nu's Government changed or renamed the cities and streets formally, that government was never strict in the usage either in colloquial or even in official media, so it was not so noticeable like the changes done by the SLORC because the SLORC strictly reinforced

<sup>8</sup> Either Arakanese (Rakhine) pronunciation or literal pronunciation in Burmese.

<sup>9</sup> Either Arakanese (Rakhine) pronunciation or literal pronunciation in Burmese of King Alaungphaya.

the new names. Apart of that, U Nu's Government was a democratically free-elected government, hence, nobody raised complaints. The following are two types of examples of the names which were changed or renamed under U Nu's Era. Type A; the new names were totally accepted both in colloquial and official usages and type B; the names were officially changed, unfortunately, however, the Colonial Name remained either in colloquial usage or in the English language used in Burma.

**Type A:**

<b>Original name</b>	<b>Name under British Rule</b>	<b>Post-Independence Era</b>
ကျိုက္ခမီ (Kyaikhami) <i>Mon</i>	Amherst	Kyaikkhami
မြေထဲ (Mye-hte) <i>Burmese</i>	Alan	Aunglan
ကျော့သောင် (Kho Song) <i>Thai</i>	Victoria Point	Kaw Thaug
ပူတာအို (Put-a-o) <i>Kachin</i>	Fort Hertz	Pu Ta O
ပြင်ဦးလွင် (Pyin-u-lwin) <i>Shan</i>	May Myo (May City)	Pyin U Lwin
ပန်းဆိုးတန်းလမ်း (Pansodan Street) <i>Burmese</i>	Phayre Street	Pansodan Street
	B.A.A Stadium	Aung San Stadium
	U.B.A.A Stadium	Ba Htoo Stadium
	Queen Victoria Park	Maha Bandoola Park
	Dufferin Hospital	Central Women Hospital
	Dalhousie Street	Maha Bandoola Street
	Montgomery Street	General Aung San Street
	Fraser Street	Anawratha Street
	Sparks Street	Bo Aung Gyaw Street

**Type B:**

<b>Colonial Name</b>	<b>New Name</b>	<b>Colloquial/Foreigners Slang</b>
Scott Market	Bogyoke Aung San Market	Bogyoke Market/Scott Market
Godwin Road	Lanmadaw Road	Gawdwin-Lan/Godwin Road
Campbell Road	Ngatatkya Pagoda Road	Kinbai-lan/Campbell Rd.
Moguhl Street	Shwebontha Street	Mago-lan/Moguhl Street

**Names changed by Dr. Ba Maw's Govt: during Second World War:**

(Source: Ludu U Hla သတင်းစာများပြောပြတဲ့စစ်အတွင်းဗမာပြည်။ "Burma during the War, as written in news papers", vol: 3, Mandalay, 1968 pp.290-293)

**Group A. (Names also accepted by U Nu's Govt: in 1948)**

Original name	Name under British Rule	New Name
ကျိုက္ခမီ (Kyaikhami) <i>Mon</i>	Amherst	Kyaikkhami
မြေထဲ (Mye-hte) <i>Burmese</i>	Alan	Mye-hte/Aunglan
ကျော့သောင် (Kho Song) <i>Thai</i>	Victoria Point	Kaw Thaug
သံတွဲ (Thandwe) <i>Arakan:</i>	Sandoway	Thandwe
ပြင်ဦးလွင် (Pyin-u-lwin) <i>Shan</i>	May Myo (May City)	Pyin U Lwin
ပန်းဆိုးတန်းလမ်း (Pansodan Street) <i>Burmese</i>	Phayre Street	Pansodan Street
	Stockade Road	Theinbyu Road
	Morton Road	Lanthit Street
	Godwin Road	Lanmadaw
	Campbell Road	Ngahtatkyi Pagoda Rd.
	Dalhousie Street	Maha Bandoola Street
	Thompson Road	Botahtaung Pagoda Rd.
	Fraser Street	Anawratha Street
	Golden Valley Road	Shwe-taung-gyar Rd.

**Group B (Names not accepted by U Nu's Govt: in 1948)**

British name	Changed name
Scott Market	Yan Naing Market
Montgomery Road	Yan Naing Road
Windermere Road	Bodigon Road
Goodliffe Road	Lut-lat-ye Road

**VI. Analysis of the Complaints:**



If we carefully scrutinize all available authentic historical facts we have to admit that "Burma" and "Myanmar" are identical, "Yangon" is the correct word and "Rangoon" is only the anglicized form. Even though some people are still complaining! How come? The answer is clear! This military junta (SLORC) had a very bad image and reputation in the internal as well as in the international media. They came to power through a blood shed "coup" and an image which worsened after the 1990 elections when they refused to surrender power to the winning party. International pressure, too, grew and became harsher and reached its peak because the opposition leader and the winner of 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Burma's national hero Gen. Aung San was put into house arrest since July 1989. The SLORC stubbornly refused to release her from house arrest. Only in July 1995 they released her unexpectedly and unconditionally. It has been accused that there were military abuses and human rights violations of the SLORC against civilians and ethnic minorities. These news were vehemently denied by the SLORC. Anyway, international media maintains that these myths were true. As a result, many people became very antagonistic towards the SLORC. What ever the SLORC does, whether it is correct or not, is wrong for them. This is the destiny of the SLORC.

Had the free elected Burmese government under U Nu changed those names in 1948, just after independence, it would have been no problem for every one. Even the Revolutionary Council could have changed the names in 1962. Nobody would have argued against it because at that time Gen. Ne Win and his followers had a good reputation and were trusted by the people. However, both governments failed to do so. The SLORC changed the names at a very critical moment. No wonder those complaints evolved!!

When one compares between the two neighbors, Thailand and Burma, Thailand never became a colony unlike Burma. Though Thailand too, has many ethnic groups, and both countries share most of the ethnic minorities, in Thailand neither minority problems evolved clearly like in Burma nor those minorities' rights issue was and is amplified and disseminated by the foreigners. Therefore, it can not be ruled out that the main cause of those problems can be either the "side effect" of the colonialism or one of the results of the "Divide and Rule" policy of the British<sup>10</sup> .

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<sup>10</sup> During the era of the Burmese kings, though there weresome minority problems too, these were not as big as after the post-colonial era. Most but not all princes and chieftains of the minorities had no objection to become the subject of the Burmese kings. The only two ethnic groups who were not subjected to the Burmese kings until the middle and at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were the Mons and the Arakanese because they used to have their own kingdoms. Even the British who emphasizes the importance of the minority rights in Burma in the post-colonial era

Another possible reason is: Thailand has a ruling monarch. In Thailand everybody is supposed to be the subject of H. R. M the Thai king and everybody, including the ruling generals, has to obey his royal orders. Burma, unfortunately, has no longer a monarch, and therefore there is nobody "he who has a divine right and he who should be respected and obeyed". Therefore some minor problems can be enlarged by some foreigners.

In the meantime the Burmanization of the SLORC is also going too far and sometimes it really violates the rights of the minorities. Actually, it is nothing wrong if they introduce the transcription for the correct Burmese pronunciation only to the pure Burmese towns. China had done similar action such as Peking to Beijing, India has changed Bombay to Mumbai etc. Unfortunately, however, the SLORC has also changed the transcription not only to the pure Burmese towns, but also for the name of the non-Burmese towns of the ethnic minorities into Burmanized pronunciation. The following are some examples:

Name in Burmese	Former transcription	Original Pronunciation	New transcription
သီပေါ (Thibaw)	Hsipaw	Hsipaw <i>Shan</i>	Thibaw
ပုသိန် (Patheingyi)	Bassein	Pasem/Pasim <i>Mon</i>	Patheingyi
တီးတိန် (Tee Tein)	Tiddim	Tiddim <i>Chin</i>	Tee Dain
ကျိုင်းတုံ (Kyaington)	Kengtung	Kentun <i>Shan</i>	Kyaington
ညောင်ရွှေ (Nyaungshwe)	Yaungmwe	Yaunmwe <i>Shan</i>	Nyaungshwe

In the above mentioned cases the SLORC deserves to get critics.

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and especially in the post-independence era, never thought about the minority rights before they occupied Burma. There were documents that the British viceroy in India wanted to sign a border treaty with the Burmese king of Ava, Bodaw U Waing, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by recognizing all modern territories of Burma plus some tributary states of the then Burmese empire. The British crushed the Arakanese rebels who fought against the Burmese king and stationed on the British soil. The British authorities captured them and surrendered them to the then Burmese Royal Army. All of them were either killed or tortured!!

When the British occupied Burma they totally ignored the rights of the Mons and the Arakanese. Nor they took into consideration that these two peoples used to have their own kingdoms. Ironically, Mon and Arakanese territories were administered under "Burma Proper". However, other territories ruled by princes and chieftains, who were subjected to the Burmese kings were put under "Frontier Areas of Burma".

## VII. Conclusion:

In conclusion I like to point out the main parts of my paper:

- (1) "Burma" and "Myanmar" are identical. It is like Deutschland and Germany. Therefore "Myanmar" represents the entire territory of "Burma".
- (2) The words "the Burmese" and "the Burman" both mean the majority ethnic group, the *Bamas*. Neither the word "the Burmese" nor "the Burman" represents other ethnic groups apart of *Bamas*. The words "the Burmese" and "the Burman" were created by the foreigners unnecessarily.
- (3) The definition "the term Myanmar represents all citizens of Myanmar (Burma)" is a new definition created during the BSPP Era. Most probably it is an attempt to attain national unity. It is too early to say whether this "attempt" will be successful or not. One has to wait and see. However, the present author personally doubts whether this "attempt" will be successful.
- (4) "Yangon" is the real word for the city and is the correct pronunciation in the Burmese language. "Rangoon" is only the British version of "Yangon" by adapting the pronunciation in the Rakhine (Arakanese) dialect. The Arakanese pronunciation of that city is "Ran-gon".
- (5) Any way, in this essay I took the liberty to use the word "Burma" instead of "Myanmar" for the country, the Burmese (Burman) for the *Bamas*, the biggest ethnic group, and "Burmese" for the language though the later ones are the real and correct words in the Burmese language. Also other "anglicized" words like "Rangoon" instead of the correct word "Yangon" are used because these words are internationally known and established.
- (6) The complaints and arguments evolved because the changes were done by the government whose reputation is very bad in the internal and international medias.
- (7) In the meantime the Burmanization of the SLORC is also going too far and sometimes it really violates the rights of the minorities and this kind of act should be condemned.