

MAUNG YU PY

Poems

A Noble Day in My Little Town:
A Tribute to Daw Aung San Su Kyi's Visit

The shining sun in the sky above our town was brighter than usual when I got up.
 As I looked at the road in front of the house, I saw people waiting for something.
 Will it be "hope," or an image to admire, or a portrait of a famous person,
 or a pop icon, or a son or a daughter, a comrade who come back home from front alive,
 or a honorable mother fighting for?
 Will it be a mother a mother a mother.....?
 (When was a mother born for a person, a group of people, a tribe, a town, a nation?)
 They were waiting for their "hope" by sticking "it" on their cheeks,
 wearing it on their heads and bodies, holding it like an umbrella hovering over them.
 Eventually,
 they were posting and raising their "hope" like a flag, as if their ultimate flag.
 Wandering on my motorbike in town,
 I saw their "hope" blooming like a red flower, an enormous outbreak about to happen in a
 nanosecond, even in the slum under the sun.
 During the recent years even a single flower would be hunted down from its root, seen as
 poison ivy.
 No assassins showed off their selves.
 Else they might have given up, the red jungle tremendously boosted for a split second.
 Or have they been converted into red flowers?
 Or from my vantage point couldn't I see the puppeteers behind the red curtain of flowers?
 (Perhaps we were micro matter in the weaving threads of the mega-magician puppeteer.)
 It was said that our town saw today as a festival day, and danced hand in hand with red flowers
 in keeping with the "dj" of the Honda culture, revving up their engines with unmuffled exhaust
 pipes.
 Seemed like our town got back its own rules and birth rights,. People who had not dared to
 reveal their will for twenty five years (fifty for some) until yesterday, were hollering their
 ancient desire through loudspeakers.
 Above the town peacocks were flying in groups in the clear sky--as luck would have it, the sky
 was clear and bright.
 Under flags that represented their peaceful blue lives, against the background colour of their
 blood and with shining stars of equal size depicting the equality of their lives, people were
 seeking out their old lives, posting them as flags, and wandering around.
 What was it that enchanted thousands of people of diverse religions, colours, ages, wealthy or
 poor, intellectuals or nonintellectuals, wearing the same t-shirt, together and gathered in the
 huge area without organized meeting up, or without force.
 That was not the super natural preacher who talked about practice for a good life, in this
 moment or life after death.
 It was not the performance of friendly faces from TV screen and media.
 And, I also hoped, it was not like Hitler who said "For our German people,"
 Or like Saddam Hussein, who said "For our Iraq people,"
 Or Idi Ahmin, who said "For our Ugandan people",
 Osama Bin Laden who said," For our Islamic people,"
 Or Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi who said, "For our Libyan people."

I had hoped it would be like Martin Luther King who said,
"We are not here to perform a terrorist attack.
The only weapon we have is to reveal our wishes."
"This is not the time to revenge. It is time to reconstruct our nation.
We need to know how to use every single brick effectively.
You have chosen me as your leader and I am leading you now. Who is with me?"
said Nelson Mandela. (Who got no applause from anyone at the time of this speech.)
"I am asking you to oppose, but not to fight. That opposition is to confront their anger, not to
make them angry," said Mohandas Gandhi.
"We do not raise our hands, but they will be hit and hurt by our attack. We must manifest their
illegality and unlawfulness through our pain."
"Sir, please give me one year. You can tell me what you want if I do not get to independence,"
said General Aung San (to Thakin Kodaw Hmine who shouted at him)
The thing that I hoped might be the same for the citizens of my town, I expected.
At ten thirty, I saw "the one" who brings "hope."
Parking my motorbike on the pavement and climbing on a wall beside the road,
I was waiting for "the one" with a camera in my hand.
(I wanted to record the history left by the one on our road.)
Eventually, I saw a woman who owns a rare face mixing intelligence with compassion (I've
never seen one like that before).
Her face itself was the symbol, a scar revealing the wounds of a terrible life.
I was shocked when I was looking at her graceful face.
She was standing up, through the roof of the car.
We could see the upper half of her body.
Greeting the people, waving her hand and smiling at them, she was moving down along the road
toward me.
Without blowing a whistle, or turning on the traffic lights, people crowded on the road and
closed the motorway, silently and automatically moved aside and opened the road peacefully.
The red flowers I'd mentioned before were everywhere, on both sides of the road, on the walls,
and on the hillsides.
Without discriminating she was smiling and waving her hands to the monks and the students,
the employers and employees, the workers and citizens who were waiting for her in the hills as
well as in the plain.
The people who were waiting for her felt a strange blend of sadness and happiness that blocked
their throats, like what one feels when they meet someone they loved, or a teacher they fully
admired, or a trustworthy friend, or mother, who always took care of them and provided the
things they wanted, or a person who represented all of those, after being long separated.

Finally the feeling sprang out of their throats and caused an indistinct roar,
sound like "hay" or "a nay" (which means Mother in Myanmar).
The acceleration of their emotion was increasing.
People were revving their engines, changing their gears,
turning up their speakers and raising their flags up into the sky.
Even though I was the observer who constantly watched local people from all sectors and
classes, I could not keep up with them this time.
They were the people not interested in anything except their own affairs,
until yesterday.
They were the people who counted their income and expenditure, locked the door and slept
well at night.
They were the people who believed in a self centered, "I must work and I get something for it."
They were the people who sat in small cafés and criticized the world's affairs.

They were the people who criticized politics with friends that could be counted on one hand's fingers.

They worked in their fields and were proud of losing.

They sat at the football matches, on line and in the global world.

They sat at their never-ending TV soaps.

They were the Lottery.

They were the Gamble.

They were Gamblers.

They were the Restaurants, the massage, karaoke, and the beauty parlors.

They surely were like jerk-off calendar, tore off today's page,

but never a glance n tomorrows' and lived in a life bravely or stupidly.

As they lived their deadly unchangeable lives, they considered living happily in their lives, or never had the option to change their lives.

But suddenly today their lives changed. Though it was not a public holiday, a festival, or a donation that could get something for them, they closed their kitchens, homes and office doors and marched on the road.

When they knew their "hope" could not come to their island village, they marched toward their "hope," moving the island village.

Nothing had been able to attract so many people to The Road since 1988.

Although there was a mistake in that thing, it showed us that we had to start with that thing right now and today.

If it was unreasonable, I wanted to see something that was more perfect and could take its place.

I wandered around the town and stored some scenes in my memory.

Today, the prohibition on the limit of knowledge, the border of culture and the territory of concept faded out, vanished into thin air.

The apprehension of person toward a person, a group to a group, became clearer. A motorbike accident turned into a kind of greeting.

A road devil turned into a clown.

A capitalist villain turned into a hero.

Walking in the burning sun made one alert and active.

Performing a duty became light as a feather.

Taking photographs with an amateurish camera got one a classic historic photograph.

Rumors turned into reality.

Something that was certain was that people were really happy today.

Their happiness was based on independence and equality, I believe.

I always wanted them to be happy in this way.

If there were some who were unhappy in this happiness, I was please to forgive and comprehend them.

I solemnly apologized standing here.

A great expectation and a deep elation was left in town after she stepped on the plane.

The images and audio recording of "hope," to protect it from vanishing, were animating the screen of TVs in the homes.

The historical event of our town today was getting the town's citizens to participate.

It will be a distinct day with a red mark among the days of our town.

I bundled people, their lives, and this date in my memory, and headed back home.

It was raining on my way.

The crowd on the road became thin and skimpy.

I was looking for the radiance of hope at the end of the rainbow that appeared in the sky above the town.

An open letter to my Muslim friend Bi Fereed

Bi Fereed – How are you doing? How are things? You're not the only one who'd like to be in touch, I also wish to speak to.

The radiance of the full moon is spreading out toward the town, to shine.

There's no discrimination--your yard or mine.

It's spreading on your mosques as well as our pagodas.

The stinking smell of foul fish in the air is spreading.

Not only for you to breathe but also for us to inhale deeply.

If a road is damaged.

Not only your bikes are in trouble; our bikes too have to ride over the puddles.

We are not the VIPs blissing out in the twilight over "Pa Htaw – Pa Htet."

You are also free to feel feel freely.

When Man - U made shit and tricks,

We were not the only ones dissatisfied; you were also the ones annoyed.

When the VIPs' siren cars turn on their headlights and pass through,

We are stopped on the pavement as you are, though.

When Myeik used to have one sole power plant,

Your father was not the only one to pass the nights under lights going off and on, like in hell,

My father had to as well.

While trying to liberate our town for decades, your grandfather and mine might have been good comrades.

When people protested on the roads in 1988, your mothers who wore shawls might have participated, and just like our mothers, housewives, been violated.

I hope the way we value your ancient mosques tenderly, you admire our pagodas sympathetically.

So, if we abuse you or you insult us, it will be an embarrassment for both of us.

If we throw stones at your mosques or you destroy our monasteries in revenge,

Both of us are sure to be crushed.

If we burn your wards or if you flare up our wards thoughtlessly,

We both will run homeless, hopelessly.

Whether you hit us or whether we beat you down,

Our blood will flow out like streams in storms.

Whether you start a riot or we start a chaos,

All of us are certain to be smashed under the iron heel again.

Actually, the effort we try to oppose is that

We are as likely to refuse our own philosophy and ethics.

And the suggestion that you try to perform terrorist attacks is odd,

You are likely to insult your own god.

In fact, not knowing what kind of Muslims in the world tend to practice Jihad,

I believe: Nobody preaches to act out that kind of ethics in the mosques of our town.

And also, I want you to believe that, to number the prestige.....

To discriminate by naming I, we, you, they, men, women, Chinese, and Indian,

To kill others' lives or to ruin others' properties,

Which show the manners of unwise, are prohibited in Buddha's sermons.

My friend, Bi Fereed! Why do we can't be friends, although our colors are different?
Are we going to be enemies because our beliefs contrast? I won't forget that you always present me sweets and meat on Eid. And also, don't forget that I always pick you up during our water festival.

Photos of General Aung San and Aung San Su Kyi ,
who have always protected truth, freedom and equality by sacrificing their lives,
are hung on the walls of our house as well as yours. I see it.
So Bi Fereed, why do they cruelly accuse you of a being an unfriendly stranger? Who does?
Bad guests neither you nor we are. They are the ones who have arrived recently and smoked us
out with their hatred and discrimination. Theirs are the pessimistic ideas, laws, isms, and
beliefs. Got that?

You will be disgusted the rapists like we hate them. We dislike the murders like you abominate
them. So, just because of different beliefs, colors, and sex, we shouldn't hate each other.
We all are human, same.

It can't be a real honorable monk who just shaves and wears robes, no?
It can't be a real Muslim preacher who just wears a beard and long robes, no?
They are the same whatever their -ism is named.
Our humanist ethics is.....
To harm others' business is an evil. To kill and ruin life and property of others' is terrorist work.
Try to abolish the religion of others' is an extremist ideology.
Whatever an -ism is called, unfair is not fair.

Religions that came from different gods can be different in teachings.
Whatever it might be called and taught, all I know is,
There is only one motto, "Sympathy."

I am not one to change colors for the sake of votes.
I don't want you to be a fool who trust in beliefs cemented by the extremist ideas.

We must resist the extending isms--likely to be a lethal virus-- with our antibodies,
which are ethics, strong will and wisdom.
And also we must show we aren't brainless and anxious idiots.
Let them know we aren't the foolish blood hungerers ready to fight as soon as we're abetted.

I'm tired of saying this, Bi Fereed. After twenty years under the Juntas' rules,
people were entirely brainwashed. Believe it or not, it's true.

The monsoon is coming soon, Bi Fereed. The ultraviolet rays heating up people without
discriminating by nationality or religion are slowly fading out. I hope.
May all citizens, there is no discrimination in it, live peacefully in the future.
I'm spreading my love.

Your friend, all your friend *Maung Yu Paing*

Western/Eastern Movie/Moving

Breed the dinosaurs or some other kind of monster, then kill them eventually.

Invent robots, then destroy them eventually.

Create a philosopher's stone, then ruin it eventually.

Set up gangs and devastate them, eventually.

Invent new weapons and destroy them, eventually.

Invade other nations, occupy their inherited natural resources, then pay them back eventually.

Organize extremist gangs, then oppose them--eventually.

Search for immortal medicine in ancient legends, defy them eventually.

Watching, in the world's developing countries, the great science fiction movies, people wish they would have turned back to their interest in the spiritual idealism.

They start realizing that family is the most valuable thing, and that they have to sacrifice for their loved ones, even with their lives.

If a dog is the only friend they have left, they have to look after it and protect it.

They have to worship nature and the small tribes of the nation.

To provide human rights and survival capacity for their tribes, they have to give their lives.

They have to protect their land and its natural resources.

They have to extend their love, compassion, sympathy and ignorance to others.
The westerns' movies with special eastern affect.

Although it has not yet been determined whether it is a developed, developing or non-developing country, the vast systems of Asia, which used to be famous and idealized for its wisdom of philosophy, ethics, and its practice for reaching enlightenment, have begun breeding monsters, trying to invent robots, looking for the philosopher's stone and for immortality medicine.

They have begun animating devils, organizing gang stars and setting up the gangs, collecting devastating weapons, invading others and robbing the inherited natural resources. Extremist organizations have appeared and started chasing super powers that might make them immortal.

Has a city bus full of rapists been driving along the Gandhi Road?

Has Confucianism's scroll been chewed up by termites?

Have the statues of Buddha been covered by those weird religious flags marked up by numbers?

Give us science, technology, heavy machines, weapons, vehicles, and oil well.

You can take the meditation, the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, Yoga, Tao, the Ten Precepts, the fifty-five hundred dramas, the Single Married System, the traditional ethics of protecting

virginity until marriage, the Twelve Signs Season Festivals, the traditional folk songs, and the green fields.

“If we want the world more peaceful, let’s just change places, why not?” shouted a shrew; a pickpocket poetic nerd jumped out from under the lid of a waste drain and ran away.

Translated from the Burmese by Than Aye