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The volume is a presentation of Myanmar in different perspectives covering the myriad issues from the days of British colonial era to the first civilian government and then the political transition from decades of military rule to a quasi-civilian government. It also highlights how the colonial rule has an impact on the present-day Myanmar society, including the demand for self-determination by ethnic minorities.

One focused issue is the political change under the Thein Sein administration which began in 2011. It predicted that even if the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy won the 2015 general election, it would still largely be a cosmetic change bereft of genuine democracy because of the fundamental flaws in the 2008 Constitution along a similar line of electoral authoritarianism in Russia and Cambodia.

Significant media freedom began in 2012 when newspaper editors were no longer required to submit materials to the prepublication censorship board. The liberalisation of media was even considered to be relatively better than in some ASEAN member states. However, despite the tangible development in press freedom, which was considered to be on the right track, the flow of information was still largely controlled by the authorities.

The role of some actors or personalities was crucial in shaping the political process of the country. The focus has often been a struggle between the military and the Lady, but a group of elites, including President Thein Sein, parliamentary Speaker Shwe Mann and former military leader Than Shwe were all crucial in the peaceful power transition from decades of military rule to a quasi-civilian government.

Women have played important role in the country's political history. While women made several important contributions under successive governments or among the democratic forces, their status arguably became much more evident and prominent with the emergence of Aung San Suu Kyi into Myanmar politics. The election of women candidates in the country's legislative bodies—national parliament, state and regional assemblies—has also brought women into the political limelight.

Since the military caretaker government in 1958, especially after the coup in 1962, the government began to extend its control over the previously autonomous bodies, either by curtailing or eliminating the role of independent civil society. Since the 1990s, civil society groups gradually reemerged but were mostly concentrated in ethnic areas where the central government had no
complete control. The role of civil society dramatically expanded since mid-2011 with the end of direct military rule.

Several international actors played varying roles in the country’s political process. Though with different priorities, China, India, Japan, Thailand, United States, ASEAN, the European Union and the United Nations played differing roles. As its closest ally, China has been the most influential international actor since the country’s independence. Despite the increased in Western engagement and the suspension of the US$ 3.6 billion Myitsone dam project in 2011, China’s influence is likely to continue.

The healthcare system was largely neglected during the era of military regime, accounting for roughly only 2% of its GDP. The two most common diseases were malaria and tuberculosis, whose average prevalence rate was three times higher than the global average and one of the highest in Asia. The spread of HIV/AIDS was another largely neglected area under the military era but received greater attention when Aung San Suu Kyi was made the ambassador of UNAIDS in 2012. The education sector was also largely neglected until the quasi-civilian government came to power in 2011 when the government increased its annual budget from 1–2% to 5%.

Though Bamar or Burman group forms the majority, there are several other ethnic groups that are officially recognised by the government. There are also some other groups that are not listed among the officially recognised 135 ethnic races, such as Rohingya, Chinese and Indians.

Ethnic diversity also means multiple grievances and conflicts. The non-Burman ethnic groups have been engaging in armed conflicts with the central government demanding federalism or self-determination. In their efforts to strengthen their unity and to put greater pressure on the ethnic Burman-led government, the ethnic minorities have formed organisations such as the Democratic Alliance of Burma, National Democratic Front, Ethnic Nationalities Council and the United Nationalities Federal Council.

The decades-old struggle of ethnic armed groups is not just about a campaign for political and cultural autonomy, but also for the control of local resources and trade in their own territories. The study suggests that to achieve a lasting solution to the decades-old conflicts, negotiations between the government and ethnic armed groups is not enough. Civil organisations should be involved in the peace process, while also addressing inter- and intra-conflicts among the different ethnic armed groups.

The volume also covers casualties of war both inside the country, as well as along the Myanmar-Thailand border. Many fled as refugees across the border or became internally displaced people inside the country. The study suggests that some 150,000 refugees have lived along the border, with support from non-