



AUNG SAN SUU KYI BIOGRAPHY

Synopsis

Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma in 1988, after years of living and studying abroad, only to find widespread slaughter of protesters rallying against the brutal rule of dictator U Ne Win. She spoke out against him and initiated a nonviolent movement toward achieving democracy and human rights. In 1989, the government placed Suu Kyi under house arrest, and she spent 15 of the next 21 years in custody. In 1991, her ongoing efforts won her the Nobel Prize for Peace, and she was finally released from house arrest in November 2010. She has since gained a parliamentary seat with the National League for Democracy party.

Early Years

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945 in Yangon, Myanmar, a country traditionally known as Burma. Her father, formerly the de facto prime minister of British Burma, was assassinated in 1947. Her mother, Khin Kyi, was appointed ambassador to India in 1960. Suu Kyi obtained a bachelor's degree from the University of Oxford in 1969, and in 1972, she married Michael Aris, a scholar in Bhutanese studies. She had two children—in 1973 and 1977—and the family spent the 1970s and '80s in England, the United States and India.

In 1988, Suu Kyi returned to Burma to care for her dying mother, and her life took a dramatic turn.

Return to Burma

In 1962, dictator U Ne Win staged and carried out a coup d'état in Burma, which spurred intermittent protests over his policies for the subsequent decades. By 1988, he had resigned his post of party chairman, essentially leaving the country in the hands of a military junta, but stayed behind the scenes to orchestrate various violent responses to the continuing protests and other events.

Suu Kyi returned to Burma from abroad in 1988, amidst the slaughter of protesters rallying against U Ne Win and his iron-fisted rule. She began speaking out against him, with democracy and human rights at the fore of her struggle. It did not take long for the junta to notice her efforts, and in July of 1989, the military government of Burma—which was renamed the "Union of Myanmar" in 1989—placed Suu Kyi under house arrest and cut off any communication she might have with the outside world.

Though the Union military told Suu Kyi that if she agreed to leave the country, they would free her, she refused to do so, insisting that her struggle would continue until the junta released the country to civilian government and political prisoners were freed. In 1990, an election was held, and the party with which Suu Kyi was now affiliated—the National League for Democracy—won more than 80 percent of the parliamentary seats. The election results, though, were predictably ignored by the junta. Twenty years later, they formally annulled the results.

Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in July 1995, and the next year she attended the NLD party congress, under the continual harassment of the military. Three years later, she founded a representative committee and declared it as the country's legitimate ruling body, and in response, in September 2000, the junta once again placed her under house arrest. She was released in May of 2002.

In 2003, the NLD clashed in the streets with pro-government demonstrators, and Suu Kyi was yet again arrested and placed under house arrest. Her sentence was then renewed yearly, and the

international community came to her aid each time, calling continually for her release (to no avail).

Arrest and Elections

In May of 2009, just before she was set to be released from house arrest, Suu Kyi was arrested yet again, this time charged with an actual crime-allowing an intruder to spend two nights at her home, a violation of her terms of house arrest. The intruder, an American named John Yettaw, had swum to her house to warn her allegedly after having a vision of an attempt on her life. He was also subsequently imprisoned, returning to the United States in August 2009.

That same year, the United Nations declared that Suu Kyi's detention was illegal, under Myanmar law. In August, however, Suu Kyi went to trial, and was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison. The sentence was reduced to 18 months, however, and she was allowed to serve it as a continuation of her house arrest. Those within Myanmar and the concerned international community believed that the ruling was simply brought down to prevent Suu Kyi from participating in the multiparty parliamentary elections scheduled for the following year (the first since 1990). These fears were realized when a series of new election laws were put in place in March 2010: One law prohibited convicted criminals from participating in elections, and another barred anyone married to a foreign national from running for office. (Suu Kyi's husband was English.)

In support of Suu Kyi, the NLD refused to re-register the party under these new laws and was disbanded. The government parties ran virtually unopposed in the 2010 election and easily won a vast majority of legislative seats, with charges of fraud following in their wake. Suu Kyi was released from house arrest six days after the election.

In November 2011, the NLD announced that it would re-register as a political party, and in January 2012, Suu Kyi formally registered to run for a seat in parliament. On April 1, 2012, following a grueling and exhausting campaign, the NLD announced that Suu Kyi had won her election. A news broadcast on state-run MRTV confirmed her victory, and on May 2, 2012, Suu Kyi took her oath and took office.

With Suu Kyi having won reelection as leader of her party in 2013, the country again held parliamentary elections on November 8, 2015, in what has been viewed as the most open voting process in decades. Less than a week later, on November 13, the NLD was officially able to declare victory, winning 378 seats so far in a 664-seat parliament. The party will thus be able to select the next president and one of two vice presidents. Outside observers are cautiously optimistic, citing the military's ability to still be a major influence on the country's politics due to constitutional stipulations.

Awards and Recognition

In 1991, Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. She has also received the Rafto prize (1990), the International Simón Bolívar Prize (1992) and the Jawaharlal Nehru Award (1993), among other accolades.

In December 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 400-0 to award Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal, and in May 2008, U.S. President George W. Bush signed the vote into law, making Suu Kyi the first person in American history to receive the prize while imprisoned.