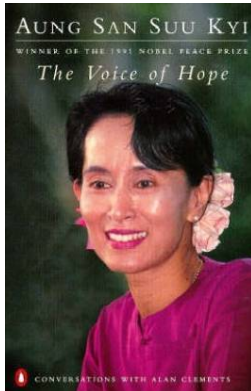


Book Review

The Voice of Hope: Aung San Suu Kyi Conversations with Alan Clements



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The Voice of Hope: Aung San Suu Kyi is the series of 13 interviews with Aung San Suu Kyi who is the leader of the struggle for human rights and democracy in Burma. She is the daughter of Aung San, who led the fight against Japan and England until Burma gained independence. He was later assassinated in 1947 and is regarded as Burma's independence hero.

After Aung San Suu Kyi graduated from St Hugh's College, Oxford University then she worked at the United Nations in New York and Bhutan. She got married to Michael Aris and was occupied raising a family in England for 20 years. In 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma to tend to her ailing mother. Her return coincided the outbreak of a spontaneous revolt against 26 years of political repression and economic decline. She quickly emerged as the most effective and articulate leader of movement, and the party she founded went on to win a colossal electoral victory in May 1990. In 1989 she was put under house arrest and the military junta that rules Burma refuse for six years either to free her or to transfer power to a civilian government as it had promised. Upon she was released in July 1995 she immediately resumed the struggle for political freedom in her country. Her husband visit in Christmas 1995 was the last time that he and Aung San Suu

Kyi met, as she remained in Burma and the Burmese dictatorship denied him any further entry visas. Michael Aris was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 which was later found to be terminal and died in 1999.

In this book, there are 13 interview topics such as “Truth is a powerful weapon”, “I never learned to hate my captors”, “The people of Burma want democracy” and etc. All of these topics was interviewed by Alan Clements who is a journalist, a writer and a worldwide lecturer on Buddhist psychology, human right and spiritual social activism. Alan Clement was considered to be one of the world’s foremost experts on Burma’s democracy movement. Aung San Suu Kyi answered questions on many topics including reconciliation, revolution, and forgiveness, and one gets a very strong sense of her personality and values that let us understand why did she get the Noble Peace Prize and numerous other prestigious international awards for her courageous leadership in a non – violent struggle to bring justice, freedom and democracy to the people of Burma. From the interviews in this book reflect her ideas, attitudes and ways of fighting for democracy, for example;

Aung San Suu Kyi believes in the truth. Even in negotiations with SLORC (the State Law and Order Restoration Council), she showed sincerity and goodwill. In one interview, she said;

“Sincerity and goodwill. I think they can carry us very far along the path of dialogue. People who are full of sincerity and goodwill tend not to be afraid of facing others. And I can say with confidence that I’ve always been sincere in my dealing with SLORC. There have been times when I have been very angry at things they’ve done, but I have never lost my goodwill towards them. I don’t say that I am always in the right and I am prepared to be convinced by them that I have been wrong in certain ways. But I’m not afraid of facing them, at any time.

Also, I don't think any of them can say that I have ever deceived them in any way. There are those who have said to me 'You can't afford to be honest with SLORC – they are not honest people. You've got to play by their rules.' But I have always refused that line of reasoning. If they're deceiving me and I retaliate by deceiving them, how can we ever get to a position of trust? If they are deceiving me, it's all the more important that I don't deceive them.” (From the topics “Truth is a powerful weapon” p.34)

The interesting point of the book is Aung San Suu Kyi's way of thinking often references Buddhist principles. She practiced herself as a Buddhist and was not felt hated by the oppressors of her country. She just criticizes their actions but never personally attacks them. She tried to understand and view them as human beings with Metta (kindness). Aung San Suu Kyi described the feeling of being released from the prison as saying she didn't feel anything. She just live in the present and think about what to do. She said; *“I felt nothing at all. I had vague idea that I should feel something, but my real concern was what should I do now?”* and *“My Buddhist background which make me feel that everything will pass away (Anicca), but my deeds and their effects will stay with me. So while all the trappings of wealth and power will pass, the effects of my actions will remain with me until they have been fully work out”* She explained that she and her colleagues were not interested in taking revenge on their captors but focusing on driving democracy in Burma on the basis of non-violence (Ahimsa) because the violence is not the right way but it brings pain to all parties. Moreover, she adheres to the principle of forgiveness and believes that anyone can repent. She gave the example of Angulimala, who killed many people. After listening to the Buddha's preaching, he was ordained as a monk and behaved in the right way. Therefore, she is sure that one day the authorities will understand what is the right path for the country.

Aung San Suu Kyi said that all Burmese want democracy, security and well-being. On this point, she compared it to the Buddhist idea that everyone seeks enlightenment and liberation. Even if she can't do it like the Buddha but she will do his duty to help the Burmese people out of suffering. As she mentioned in part of the interview *“As a Buddhist, if you really want to consider what we, as human beings, are here for it's quite simple: we are trying to achieve enlightenment and to use the wisdom that is gained to serve others so that they too might be free from suffering. While we can't all be Buddha, I feel a responsibility to do as much as I can and use it to relieve the suffering of others.”*

The conversations in “Aung San Suu Kyi: The voice of hope” is her own story compiled over the course of nine months (from October 1995 to June 1996) while she was detained at her house. There are many things in this book that are thought-provoking, but something that stands out more is after being detained, Aung San Suu Kyi continued to rally for democracy. She conducted combat using the media and social media as a tool by writing letters, writing books and recording video tapes to pass her claim continuously come out to the world community in every possible way to put international pressure on the Burmese government. Even after she was detained several times, she continued to go forward with her goal which tries to get democracy in Burma.

“I have not promise that I will bring democracy. I have said, I will always work and do my best to bring democracy and will go on working for it as long as I'm alive or until we get it.” Aung San Suu Kyi

Reference

Clements, A. & Aung, S.S.K. (1997). *Aung San Suu Kyi The Voice of Hope*. London: Penguin Group.