

# **A History of Arakan (Past & Present)**

by

**Dr. Mohammed Yunus**

**First Edition Published in 1994**

A History of Arakan: Past and Present, by Dr. Mohammad Yunus, President of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), Arakan, is a welcome addition to the present stock of our knowledge about the history of Arakan and her interrelation with neighbouring lands of Burma and Bengal.

It deals mainly with the advent of Islam in Arakan about 800 C.E. and the eventual growth of Muslim community through thick and thin into a major Rohingya community of the country.

One can say unhasitatingly that for the first time Dr. Yunus has been able to offer, even if in a skeleton form, a connected and continuous history of the Rohingya community of Arakan from the earliest down to the present time. He has explored an enormously wide field in digging up a great variety of new materials drawn from an impressive number of references. Specially commendable in this work is the forging of all the material under his command towards a new direction of studying the history of the Rohingya Muslim community in the perspective of the impact of Islamic civilization on Southeast Asia, not merely considering it as a part of the national or political history of Burma or Myanmar.

Indeed, when we turn our gaze to the whole situation of Southeast Asia and find, to our amazement, the statistic of the Muslims exceeding 50% (fifty percent) of the total population of the region, we can easily realize the importance of the community history of the Muslims of different areas of the region. Because, even though the Muslims of Arakan, like as those of Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam, are suppressed and repressed from time to time out of sheer communal enmity of sister-groups, yet we realize that the grand islamic civilizing impact on the region has come to stay.

Apart from the history of the Muslim community of Arakan, Dr. Yunus has shown this extraordinarily rich and fertile land as falling into a bone of contention between geographically adjacent Bengal and religiously homogenous Burma since time immemorial, which unwittingly, unnecessarily and unjustly preved upon the Rohingya Muslim community with beastly ferocity, breaking thereby the hearth and home of the once majority community of the Arakan region and driving a sizeable number of them out of the land.

In this study the author has also raised a few moot points inviting the interest of the researchers as to the real cause of the fleeing of King Naramekhla from Arakan to Bengal in 1404 C.E. Was it due to communal discord or owing to mere political aggression of the King of Burma? Another moot point attracting the attention of the

researchers relate to ascertaining the real intention of the eleven Arakanese Kings from 1430 to 1531 behind adopting Muslim names alongwith their Arakani names. Was it due to their adoption of Islam as a religion or just for political expediency.

A third point calling for close investigation lies in finding out the causes of the political failure of the Muslim community of Arakan and Burma or Myanmar in spite of the enormous growth of the Muslim population in the region along with Muslim cultural and administrative influence in Arakan: whether it lay in the field of education, intellectual failure or greed of wealth?

Such a full-dressed investigation alone canhelp the Muslim community of Arakan and Myanmar to determine and delineate a realisitc attitude towards living peaceful and cherishable lives within and outside of the country adopting a befitting useful point of view towards the politics of the country like s the Muslims of Ceylone, those of France. West Bengal or Bangladesh. In the meantime, we may expectantly look forward towards wider and deeper research, investigation and integration of data and facts in these fields.

In spite of some minor compositional weaknesses of the work as a book of history, it deserves wide popularity as "Arakan: Past and Present" and I am sure, it will prove its mettle amongst specialists as well as general readers throughout the world.



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### **In my opinion by Sufi A.M. Waheed**

This is the first time that we are having a history of Arakan in a consolidated and comprehensive form. Dr. Mohammed Yunus must have taken a long and deep search to compile the glorious past of Arakan, where the two sister communities, the Rohingyas and the Rakhines lived in peace and harmony.

In my opinion, this book will be a milestone in the freedom movement of the people of Arakan, as the lesson from the history inspires a nation for independence and for achieving fruits of independence. As much all the freedom loving Rohingyas must go through it and should possess a copy of it as a precious belonging.

Sufi A. M. Waheed

SUFI A.M. WAHEED  
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**Opinion by Dr. Ali Ahmad**

I feel great pleasure to know that 'A History of Arakan: Past and Present', containing all sorts of information of the Arakanese (Rohingya) Muslim is going to be published. This attempt of Dr. Mohammed Yunus, President of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and an undisputed leader of the Arakanese Muslims, is a timely contribution to the on-going national movement of their independence.

I wish for a peaceful publication and wide circulation of the book and pray for a long and happy life of the author.

Ali Ahmad

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**Preface**

After a little over two centuries under colonial rule Arakan --- the once flourishing maritime Muslim Sultanat extending from Dhaka and Sandarbans to Moulmein, a coastal strip of a thousand miles in length and varying from 150 to 20 miles in depth -- has now become almost a forgotten land. The irony is that a full, comprehensive history of Arakan has not yet been compiled by any unbiased historian.

Whatever sofar have been written about the events that took place in Arakan by modern historians are found either as a separate chapter in the books of history or as titbits here and there in other subjects written with relevance to the history of Arakan. The old

Arakanese chronicles, and books and articles written in Burmese language on Arakan by different authors are controversial and some time derailed far away from truth. There are concrete evidences of distortion of the history and heritage of the Arakanese people by vested interest of prejudiced and powerful groups. The world is still, more or less, in the dark as to the realities that governed once the lives of the people of Arakan. one cannot draw the right conclusion in the matter of socio-culture, political and religious life of the people of Arakan without in depth studies of the contemporary histories of India, Bengal, Tripura, Burma and South-east Asia in particular and the Islamic world in general which had, in the course of a long period, close interrelation and interaction with Arakan. To fathom the truth it is important also to study various chronicles written about the region, coins and other archeological findings, monuments and shrines, language and scripts and names of places, rivers and mountains etc. etc. that bear considerable reflections on the history of Arakan.

There is not the slightest doubt that those who occupied Arakan and wished to colonise it forever are deliberately distorting the historical facts to fulfil their sinister design. They use all weapons ---racial, religious, political, economic and propaganda --- to mislead and divide the two sister communities of Arakan. Today they shamelessly claim that " there is no such thing like Rohang and Rohingya in Myanmar (Burma); it is invention of certain insurgent groups." It is hoped that as the pages of this treatise are unfurled, all the misunderstandings, delusions, false notions and misleading interpretations shall be removed from the minds of unbiased readers.

The colonisers of Arakan and their fanatic collaborators have done much wrong to our nation by misleading innocent people. Much water had flowed down the Kaladan. It is time that the two sister communities should be able to learn a good lesson from the bitter past, recognise the machination of the enemy, amend their wrong attitude and join hands for the restoration of their glorious past. I wish that this humble work may serve as an eye-opener to our sister community whose appreciation of the realities of Arakan is inevitable for a peaceful and prosperous future. The urge to write this short history on Arakan has been intensified in the backdrop of our enemy's attempt to completely erase the truth of our past and legacy as an indigenous ethnic community of Arakan. It is to be noted that I am not a professional historian; only the prevalent circumstances had compelled me to take up this job. In spite of various shortcomings and handicapped by dearth of source material this task has been undertaken with hope that it may serve as a harbinger of truth in Arakan.

Research into the history of a nation is not one man's job; it is a collective and continuous responsibility of its people. I shall consider myself fortunate enough if this humble work would serve at least as a book of reference for future researchers of the history of Arakan. As an acknowledgement of thanks to those who had a part in making this work possible, I would like to register the name of my colleague Br. Mohammed Ali, first, who had very kindly collected various source materials for me. I offer my grateful thanks also to Br. Prof. Mohd Zakaria and Br. Sayedur Rahman who continuously encouraged me to undertake this work and provided me with most valuable advice time to time. My sincere thanks are also due to Brother Rashid Ahmend who has ungrudgingly carried out

repeated typings of the manuscript amid various preoccupations. I would like also to convey my thanks to those who had gone through the manuscript and made valuable suggestions. May Allah Almighty shower His bountiful blessing upon them.

Above all and everything all praises and thanks are due to Allah Subhanahu Wa Taala without whose infinite mercy and blessings, I could not have mustered enough courage to undertake this work.

I expect nothing but the sweet pleasure of Allah Almighty only in carrying out this work. He is the best of seers.

Dr. Mohammad Yunus

### **Introduction**

The present rulers of Burma claim that it's overall indigenous ethnic population - comprising eight major ethnic communities viz Burman, Shan, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Chin, and Rakhaing (Arakanese Buddhist), subdivided into 135 ethnic races--are descendants of Mongolian races only. They categorically deny that Burma has any indigenous ethnic race belonging to Arian stock including Rohingya (Arakanese Muslim). Every people in present - day Burma having Indian features are being treated as either foreigners or descendants of foreigners, Kala, no matter how long one might have been established there. Being ignorant of the real history, most of the casual observers confuse people with Indian features with descendants of the Indian immigrants who entered Burma in thousands during British colonial era as in other countries of Southeast Asia. A strong mispropaganda against Rohingya from the part of the Burmans as well as our sister community of Arakan, the Magh, also blurs the truth to some extent.

But who are the real foreigners in Arakan? Is Arakan purely a state belonging to the people of Mongolian stock? Efforts have been made to give appropriate answers to the above questions in this work.

In historical perspective Arakan is more a frontier province of Eastern India than a province of Burma. From very early days till the arrival of the Mongolian and Tibeto - Burmans in the tenth century Arakan was an Indian land with a population similar to Bengal. The spread of Islam in Arakan during those early times and the impact of Islamic civilisation on Arakan particularly after Bengal became Muslim in 1203 is well known. The Arakanese Buddhists (Rakhaing) who are counted among the Mongolian stock, by the Burmans, are in fact descendants of Arian Maghada Buddhists migrated from Bihar in India around 8th century C.E. who were later assimilated by the invading Mongolians. But the Arakan with both Muslim and Buddhist population had always maintained an independent status although before the establishment of Mrauk-U dynasty by Solaiman

Shah (Narameikhla) in 1430, there was from time to time Burman and Mon interference.

From 1430 to 1638 except a few usurpers all rulers of Arakan had been the descendants of converted Muslim King Solaiman Shah (Narameikhla) who was reinstated to the throne of Arakan by Bengal King Sultan Jalaluddin Mohammad Shah. For hundred years from 1430 to 1530 Arakan had extremely cordial relationship with Bengal to the extent of calling it by historians as feudatory to Bengal. It's boundary never extended beyond what was during the conquest of Arakan by Bengal Sultan. But with the change of hands in power in Bengal in 1538 the Arakanese King Zabuk Shah occupied part of south eastern Bengal including Chittagong for the first time in 1540. But it lapsed back again to Bengal Sultans. For almost a century, from 1582 to 1666, Chittagong remained under the affective rule of the Arakanese.

With close relation with Bengal, which includes Chittagong, since 1430 and the territories of present - day Chittagong and Arakan falling under the same jurisdiction of erstwhile Arakan for about one century, how can one perceive that Arakan could not have pre - British Muslim settlements with the people of Chittagong? The long establishment of Muslim community in Arakan, tracing to the remote past, can not be denied by any unbiased historian. But the fact is that their number and power grew substantially since the establishment of Mrauk-U dynasty by Solaiman Shah.

After the occupation of Chittagong in 1582, the Arakanese kings had to rely on the cooperation of the Portuguese to counter the Moghuls, now in control of Bengal. However, after 1638 change over, the weakened Buddhist kings of Arakan depended on them so much so that the frontier province of Chittagong became a haunt of Firingi (Portuguese) pirates. A traveller of 1650 writes: "In Chittagong, the Portuguese set up a kind of sovereignty and associating with pirates and bandits of all nations...committed daily robberies by sea and by land." They ravaged the whole of Lower Bengal, depopulated it and turned it into wilderness. These obnoxious activities of Portuguese accompanied by Maghs earned the Maghs the ignoble name of 'Pirate' which is the only reason why the Buddhists of Arakan disown this name today.

The granting of shelter to ill-fated Moghul prince Shah Shuja by the Buddhist king of Arakan, Sanda Thudamma, and his subsequent murder there resulted in further deterioration of the already sour relationship prevalent between Moghuls and the Arakanese leading ultimately to the loss of Chittagong forever. After the massacre of Shah Shuja and his followers till final occupation of Arakan by Burma, there had been internecine feud between the two sister communities enabling the Burmans could be able to legitimise their occupation of Arakan in the process of gaining independence of Burma from British, history is replete with irrefutable facts that they had always been foreign aggressors and occupation forces in Arakan.

The Burman mind is consistently haunted by the apprehension that one day the history of Arakan might be repeated and they have to wash their hands off Arakan. To preclude this, they have resorted to wiping out, the potential danger in their eyes, the Muslims of

Arakan. The ethnic cleansing operations being launched off and on against Rohingyas is the result of this deep - seated fear the Burmans are harbouring secretly in their heart.

## **Chapter I - The land and the people**

### **Geography**

Arakan – now a western province of Burma – had been an independent country till 1784 C.E. As with other countries, the geography of Arakan has had important influences on the course of its history. That Arakan managed to maintain itself as an independent kingdom until almost the end of the eighteenth century was mainly due to its geographical position.

The total area of Arakan during the British period was approximately 20,000 sq. miles. It is a narrow mountainous strip of land along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal. It stretches north and south; wider in the north and tapering down to the south. It touches Bangladesh in the northwest, India in the north and Chin Hills in the northeast. It is cut off from Burma by a long range of near-impassable mountains, of Arakan Yoma, in the east making it a natural physiographic unit. It has 176 miles long maritime and land boundary with Bangladesh which traditionally serves as ‘Gate Way to the Far East’ Its 360 miles long coastal belt in the west makes Arakan esy for sea communication. This rendered Arakan possible that Buddhism reached there earlier than Burma. Islam’s arrival to Arakan and adjacent coastal regions of what is now Chittagong five centuries earlier than mainland Bengal also attributes to its geography.

In all, there seven rivers in Arakan: the Naf, Mayu, Kaladan, Lemro, Ann, Tangup and Sandoway; the Naf serving as the boundary line between Arakan and Bangladesh. The Kaladan is the longest one; it rises from beyond the Arakan Hill Tracts and flows into the turbulent Bay of Bengal at Akyab, the seaport and capital city of Arakan. Like Kaladan the rest of the rivers also flow into the Bay with some variations. All of these rivers are tidal and easily navigable all the year round. None of its rivers rises in Burma, and throughout its history its water communications with Bengal were much easier than its overland communications with Burma. Therefore the flourishing of certain religion in certain period in Bengal – Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam – has had strong influence on the religious predominance over Arakan during the same period. Arakan is in fact a continuation of Chittagong plain. Because of north Arakan’s close overland ties with East-Bengal it is found that after Bengal became Muslim in 1203, the resulting cultural and political influence of the Muslims was of great significance in the history of Arakan. The spread of Islam by land further into Burma after the Muslim conquest of Arakan in 1430 was prevented by the difficult mountain barrier existing between the two countries.

Arakan is a land of mountains, thick forests, rivers and creeks. Bulk of the total land surface area is covered with forests. Northern part of Arakan is wider with alluvial deltaic

plains where as the southern portion is narrow and rocky. There are a number of off-shore islands in the Arakan coast of which the Ramree and the Cheduba are the largest. There is a deep water natural harbour in the coast off the Ramree island a few miles northeast of Kyaukpyu township. This deep sea natural harbour can accommodate large ships like U.S. 7th fleet. The alluvial soil of the Mayu, Kaladan and Lemro valleys in north Arakan is so fertile that once the area was popularly called Dhanavati or granary of rice. The growing of rice in Arakan became so extensive and successful that the surplus product till the beginning of the Second World War, was used to be exported in huge quantities to Chittagong, Calcutta, Madaras, Colombo and Kochin. In 1950s Akyab alone had 50 rice mills most of which remained working round the clock the whole year.

Apart from rice Arakan is famous for its naturally grown teak. The Arab traders of early times who established small trading colonies in Arakan were particularly attracted by the rich natural resources of the land and a courteous people. They used to build and repair ships with Arakanese iron wood known as Pyinkadow during their short stay before continuing their onward journey. Besides Pyinkadow Arakan's forests produce naturally grown teak and good quality timber. Bamboo is plentiful. Arakan is also ideal for rubber and tea plantation. It's long coastal belt is rich in fish and produces high quality shrimps in the dams built along the estuaries of tidal creeks and rivers. Arakan is also rich in mineral resources. There are confirmed reservoirs of petroleum and other mineral resources but until now totally untapped.

There are, in total, 17 townships in Arakan. Akyab, situated at the mouth of Kaladan river in the northern Arakan, is the capital city which also serves as the main seaport of Arakan. Communication within Arakan is done mainly by water routes. The inland road communication is very poorly developed. There is no railway. Communication with proper Burma is done mainly by air and by sea. There are also Three overland connections with proper Burma through mountain passes across Arakan hill range. The Ann and Tongup passes are now in a much better position than before when it could be used only in dry season. The climate is moderate. There are three distinct seasons: winter, summer and rainy with annual rainfall of approximately 200 inches.

### **Etymology of Arakan**

The term Arakan is definitely of Arabic or Persian origin having the same meaning in both these languages. It is the corruption of the word Arakan plural of the word Rukn meaning a pillar. The fundamental tenets of Islam are called 'five pillars of Islam'. Thus the word Arakan signifies the land of Islam or peace. It is difficult to ascertain since when the application of this term to the region now known as Arakan began. But almost certain is the fact that the name Arakan became popular after the Muslim conquest of the country in 1430 C.E. Since Persian was the court language of the then independent Bengal Sultans who conquered Arakan and which continued to be the official language of Arakan up to 1845, the Arakan kings who maintained excellent relation with the Bengal Sultans might have given it its name of Arakan. The Arakan kings were well versed in Persian. "It took a hundred years for the kings (Arakan kings) to learn the doctrine of Islam. When it was well understood they founded what was known as the Arakanese

Empire".<sup>1</sup>

The authors of the *Ain-i-Akbar*, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* and *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* write it as Arkhang, which appears also with a slight change in *Alamgirnama* and *Fathya-i-ibria* is close to the name Arakan. Medieval Portuguese and other European travellers mentioned it Arracan, Arracoo, Orrakan, Arrakan and Van Liscoten writes it Arakan which is nearest to the modern name.<sup>2</sup>

One of the coins found in Arakan and preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, minted by Sultan Bahadur Shah dated 965 A.H. (1557-58 C.E.) is inscribed in Persian with Kalimah on the obverse side and mint name Arakan on the reverse side. Similar coins minted by his predecessor Sultan Muhammad Shah 962 A.H. (1554-55 C.E.) with inscriptions of mint name Arakan was preserved in Indian Museum, Calcutta. Muhammad Shah's coins with the same reading are also found to be preserved in the British Museum. A historian commented: "It is true that in Persian source books the name is written as Arkhank and its slight variations. It might be that the term either as Europeanised form or as pluralised form of Arabic term -piller was more familiar to the mint master than any other forms of name of the country and in this form he probably engraved the word as mint name".<sup>3</sup>

From the above inscriptions of the coins it can be concluded that the name Arakan was in use since at least mid 16th century.

The name Arakan did not appear as a solidary instance in the above languages. Different important places, rivers and mountains in Arakan also bear names of Persian or Arabic origin. For example: the name of the capital city of Arakan is Akyab (Ek-ab) meaning land of one water in Persian like Punjab (panj-ab) meaning land of five waters. The names of rivers: Kaladan (intellectual), Naf (nerve), Kulapanj (fifty learned men) are also of either Persian or Arabic origin testifying to the fact of Islamic sway over the region now known as Arakan. Thus the terms Arakan and Arakanese are attributed to Muslims. Unfortunately some historians, quite misleadingly, use the term Arakanese synonymous with Magh (Rakhaing) alone although in general sense all the people of Arakan, Muslims as well as Buddhists, should be called Arakanese. The Magh Buddhists of Arakan who call themselves Rakhaings translate the term Arakanese as Rakhaing in Burmese language giving the impression that Rakhaing and Arakanese are synonymous excluding Muslims from the term Arakanese since Muslims are not Rakhaings. But the fact has been elucidated clearly by a famous British Army General who had taken part in the Arakan Campaign during the Second Great War. He wrote: "When we withdrew.... was followed by a bitter internecine struggle for land and power between the Arakanese and the Maughs,<sup>4</sup> two sections of the population attributing Arakanese to the Muslims". Maj. Anthony Irwin, another British officer who served in Arakan front wrote: "At first the Maughs had it all their own way, for they were better organised and better armed, having a fair sprinkling of rifles. But as they pushed north, so they met up stiffer and more organised resistance and were not only held but forced to retreat, for they are, man to man, no match for the Mussulman Arakanese"<sup>5</sup> clearly attributing the term Arakanese to the Muslims.

## **Roang/Rohang/Roshang (old Arakan)**

The term Roang / Rohang / Roshang --- the old name of Arakan --- is of much antiquity. It is probably the corruption of Arabic term Raham (blessing, mercy) meaning the land of God's blessing. The Arab and Persian traders of earliest days attributed this name to the old kingdom of Vesali at least a century prior to the Chandras which country they used to visit.<sup>6</sup> The shipwrecked Arabs having been washed ashore on an Island in the west coast of Arakan called the land Raham Borri in Arabic which means "the land of Allah's blessing".<sup>7</sup> The term is still in vogue with slight corruption in Burmese as Rambre while the English has perverted it to Ramrhee.

The land Jazirat-al-Rahmi or Rahma mentioned by Arab geographers of 9th and 10th centuries may have been referred to the kingdom of Raham corrupted later to Rohang/Roshang/Roang. Ibn Khurdadbih, an Arab geographer, says that Jazirat-al-Rahmi comes after Sarandip (Ceylon) and contains peculiar unicorn animals and little naked people.<sup>8</sup> Al-Mas'udi mentions it as a riparian country after Sarandip and on the Indian Ocean. Yaqut's identification places it as the 'farthest land of India' towards the strait of Malacca (Bahr Salahit).<sup>9</sup> While all these descriptions convey a vague impression that Rahmi or Rahma was situated somewhere off the coast between the Bay of Bengal and the strait of Malacca, it is very difficult to point out its exact location. It may be pointed out that the word jazirah was used not only to denote islands but also riparian lands. Solaiman, the merchant who lived in the middle of 9th century mentions that the king of Rahmi was a powerful ruler with 50,000 elephants and an army of 150,000.<sup>10</sup> Elephants are even nowadays found in large numbers in Arakan jungles and the hilly regions of Chittagong district. On the whole, therefore, it may be assumed that Jazirat-al-Rahmi of the Arab geographers was attributed to the kingdom of Rahmi as a country of the Mogen (Magh), the Buddhist population of Arakan.<sup>11</sup> Sir A.P. Phayre finds etymological relation between Rahmi of the Arab writers with Ramu. In his opinion Ramu, a place in southern Chittagong, is but the remnant of the powerful kingdom which is confused by the Arabs as Rahma, Rahmi or Ruhmi. The view of Sir A.P. Phayre cannot be taken as correct because of the fact that "Ramu was never more than a principality, the existence of which can never be authoritatively put before the 15th century A.D. It was often times under the Arakanese subjugation and practically nothing is known about its independent position in any time of history. Even if it is supposed that the kingdom might have existed in the 9th and 10th centuries A.D, then it may be said with confidence that it was never so a big kingdom as to be a sub continental power. Being a small kingdom it could hardly exercise such military power as to contest with some principal northern Indian powers. In fact, the descriptions of the kingdom of Rhami of the Arab writers hardly correspond to the principality of Ramu"<sup>12</sup> but fit to the kingdom of Rohang. In Rashiduddin's work compiled in 1310 C.E. the name of Arakan appeared as Rahan closely resembling to Rohang. He writes: "The country of Rahan (Arakan) is subjected to the Khan".<sup>13</sup> That ancient Arakan was called by the name of Roang/Rohang/Roshang was amply testified by many historians and chroniclers. "In Burmese history Chuijang Kyatha it is mentioned that Burma was divided into three parts, one of which was under the Chakma king. The Chakama selected one of them as their king, named Shakalia (selected

by all) who had no son but a daughter named Manikbi. Her husband sided with the Bangalees and fought many battles with the Maghs in the country called Roang (Arakan) in the year 1118-1119 A.D. (Vide Arakan History: Dengyawadi Aradafung, pages 17 to 19). After Manikbi her son Manikgri became king. His son Madalia became king after him. Then Madalia's son, Rama Thongza, became king. Rama Thongza's son was Kamalchega. During his reign there was war in Roang and the Chakmas migrated into that country".<sup>14</sup> The Tripura Chronicle Rajmala mentioned that the Tripura king "Dhanyamanikya occupied Chittagong and appointed Roshang Mardan Narayan (the conqueror of Roshang) governor of the conquered country". In another place of the same chronicle it is mentioned "the king penetrated deep into Roshang and conquered it. He built a fort in that place and posted troops to strengthen his position. The king then returned to his capital entrusting Roshang Mardan Narayan, the Tripura governor of Chittagong, to carry the plan of complete subjugation of Roshang into effect".<sup>15</sup> The Maghs (Buddhists) of Bangladesh are categorised into two groups namely Jhumia Maghs and Roang Maghs indicating that the Roang Maghs<sup>16</sup> have come from what was known as Rohang and they belong to a separate ethnic group of Arakan.

The celebrated 17th century Arakan court poet Shah Alawal who composed the famous ballad on the lamentations of Ameena, the youngest daughter of the ill-fated Moghul prince Shah Shuja after his death, amply mentioned about the kingdom of Rohang and Rohingyas. The poet similarly referred to Rohang and Rohingyas in his two other popular ballads: Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal and Sikander Nama. From all the above facts and evidences it has become crystal clear that indigenous name of Arakan was Rohang, a term used first by Arabs.

### **The People of Arakan**

There are two major ethnic communities in Arakan. The Rohingyas who form the majority population of Arakan, as a whole, are the believers in the religion of Islam and the Maghs (Rakhaings) who are the minority profess the cult of Buddhism. The Arakan, before 1942, has been occupied over its entire length by both Rohingyas and Maghs. During the 1942 anti-Muslim riotings the Muslims of southern Arakan had been pushed to the north where as the Buddhist Maghs took over the southern half of the country where they now form majority.

There are a few tribes dwelling in Arakan hills who are mostly animists. Their number is still insignificant. They are Kamis, Mros, Chaungthas, Saaks, Chins, Chaws, Khaungtsos, Ahnus and Kons. The principal races are however, the Mros, Kamis, Chaungthas and Chins.

### **The Rohingyas**

The term Rohingya is derived from the word Rohai or Roshangee, a terminology perverted to Rohingya.<sup>17</sup> Rohai and Roshangee are terms denoting the Muslim people inhabiting in the old Arakan (Rohang/Roshang/Roang). Among the Muslim population of Chittagong two distinct ethnic characters are found; one is known as Chatganiya and the

other Rohais. Although professing the same religion they have different cultural habits. In fact the Rohais of Chittagong today are those Muslim people who fled Arakan (Rohang) as a result of Burman atrocities after the country was occupied in 1784 C.E. As many as 50% of the total population of Chittagong district are Rohais who trace their ancestral origin to Arakan. The Rohingyas trace their origin to Arabs, Moors, Turks, Persians, Moghuls, Patthans and Bangalees.<sup>18</sup> A British army officer who served in the Arakan front during Second Great War remarked about the ethnic character of the Arakan Muslims as follow:

"and to look at, they are quite unlike any other product of India or Burma that I have seen. They resemble the Arab in name in dress in habit. The women and more particularly the young girls, have a distinctive Arab touch about them".<sup>19</sup>

The development of the 'Rohingya Language' is most curious. It is an admixture of different languages developed during a course of more than one thousand years. It is worthwhile to mention herein that the official language of arakan had been Persian since the days of early Mrauk-U kings till 1845, 22 years further beyond the conquest of Arakan by the Britishers. During Mrauk-U period contact with bengal was so cordial and deep that Bengali literature had flourished in the court of Arakan. Many famous Muslim court poets who served the kings of arakan like Shah Alawal, Daulat Qazi, Magan Siddiqi etc. wrote in Persian and Arabic or in the mixed language, Rohingya, which they developed among themselves and which was a mixture of Bengali, Persian, Arabic and Arakanese (Rakhaing). Although the Rohingya Language was widespread during the era of Arakan Kings<sup>20</sup> today its existence as a written language has diminished as it was mainly destroyed by the Burman invaders in 1784 and not preserved well by subsequent colonialists.

### **The Maghs (Rakhaings)**

The world Magh is undoubtedly of Bengali origin, but the exact significance of the word and the ultimate derivation are not clear. The most satisfactory derivation is the one which connects it to the ancient kingdom of Magadha-raj family in India. Buddhist ascendancy began to wane after the downfall of Maurya dynasty in India to which Asoka belonged at the beginning of the Christian era. During the successive eight centuries there was a struggle between Buddhism and an ineluctable Brahmanised Hinduism. There in Magadha, old Bihar, the Buddhists were so seriously persecuted by the chauvinist Hindus and rival Mahayana Buddhist sects that the Theraveda Buddhists were compelled to flee eastward who took shelter in Vesali reigned by Hindu Chandra Kings. Since then they have been called Maghs. But the purity of Arian blood in these Magadah immigrants was lost as a result of intermarriages between them and their co-religionists -- the Mongolians and the Tibeto-Burmans -- who overwhelmed the region for nearly five centuries since 957 C.E. The new hybrid, having Indian and Mongolian blood manifesting in their features, could be easily discerned from common purely Mongoloid and Tibeto-Burman races of today. Thus the present day Buddhists found in Arakan undoubtedly trace their origin to Magadah, but that they have been assimilated with the Mongolians and lost the Indian character.

The derivation of the word Magh would probably be Magadhi (the adjective for m of proper name) -Maghi - Magi - Mog or Magh. The new English dictionary states the words Mog, Mogen, Mogue, appear as names of Arakan and the people in 15-16th centuries.<sup>21</sup> Ralph Fitch the 16th century English traveller, identified Arakan as the country of Mogen. Today both the Maghs of Arakan and Bangladesh disown this name and claim that this is the coinage of the Englishmen just as they have coined words of similar type. The British came to the East in 18th century but, as stated above, the term Magh was prevalent even in the seventh and eighth centuries. Thus it is clear that the word Magh is not a wanton coinage of the Englishmen as is considered by most of the present day Buddhists of Arakan and Bangladesh.

But the question is why they disown this name? The fact is that for more than 2 centuries from the middle of the 16th century till 1784, the year of Burmese conquest of Arakan, the Maghs of Arakan in collusion with Portuguese freebooters caused such an agonising terror and consternation in the minds of the people of Bengal that the word Magh became synonymous with pirates. The fierceness, cruelty, lawlessness and their obnoxious activities had led the land under their occupation to earn the ignoble name of Magher Mulluk which means a land without law, justice and order.<sup>22</sup> Magher Mulluk has become a proverbial saying in Bengali language meaning lawlessness. Some historians doubt as to whether those relentless and rapacious Magh raiders who plundered and carried out depredation excursions belong to the same racial stock of the Magh Buddhists who now live in Arakan and Bangladesh. With all facts and accounts available the re remains not the slightest doubt as to the ancestry of the present day Maghs to those of the marauding Maghs of Arakan. An account of the mid-seventh century historian Shahaduddin Talish suffices to authenticate the fact that those Magh marauders belonged to the kingdom of Arakan. "Arracan pirates, both Magh and Firingi, used constantly to (come) by water route and plunder Bengal. They carried off the Hindus and Muslims, male and female, great and small, few and many, that they could seize, pierced the palms of their hands, passed thin canes through the holes, and threw them one above another under the deck of their ship. In the same manner as grain is flung to fowls, every morn and evening they threw down uncooked rice from above to the captives as food."<sup>23</sup> The Maghs have earned such a bad name during last many centuries that it has become a great shame for their descendants of today to own the name Magh. Instead they started calling themselves Rakhaing the derivative of which is directly related to Arakan and Muslims.

According to Arakanese chronicles, the word Rakhaing is derived from Rakkapura or the land of Rakkash -- a savage man - eating people called Bilo (orge) --- that stands for the Pali word Rakkha or Raksasas. Rakkash signifies a monster half man half beast. The claim of the Arakanese chronicles is based on mere mythological legendaries. There is no historical evidence, whatsoever, to substantiate the claim of the Arakanese chronicles. The term Rakhaing is in fact the corruption of Roang / Recon, the old name of Arakan.<sup>24</sup> Sidi Ali Chelibi, a Turkish navigator belonging to the middle of the sixteenth century, writes it Rakanj. It is also possible that the Mongolian Burmans, because of their phonetic difficulties in pronouncing Arabic words beginning with the alphabet Alif omit it and thus pronounced Arakanas Rakan. However, these terms --- Rakan, Rakanj, Arkhank, Recon, Arraco, Arrcan -- used by different historians are all related to either Roang or

Arakan. It is in no way related to Rakkapura as claimed by Arakanese chronicles.

The spoken language of maghs -- Maghi or Rakhaing -- as they call it, is not a separate language but pure Burmese with slight phonetic variations. There is no separate written Rakhaing language. Historians commented on the Rakhaing language as follows:

"The question of the emergence of Arakanese (Rakhaing) language is more difficult. Whether it was the language of the Mongolian invaders of the 10th century or whether it filtered across the mountains after contact with Burma in the 11th and 12th centuries is undecided. As Arakanese (Rakhaing) language is the same as Burmese, being merely a dialect, to suppose that it was the language of the invaders is to contend that the Mongolians who extinguished Chandras spoke the same tongue as those who afterwards became predominant in the Irrawaddy plain. If the contrary is postulated, and it is argued that the Burmese language, coming over the mountain road, impinged upon the Mongolian speech of the then Arakanese and created modern Arakanese. Linguistic difficulties are raised which are difficult to resolve, this question awaits judgement."<sup>25</sup>

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## **Chapter II - Early History**

### **The Kingdom of Dhanavati**

All available historical records, traditions, accounts and chronicles refer to the conclusion that in time in the long past Arakan was a Hindu land. Chronicles record a line of kings reaching back to the year 2666 B.C. More certain is the kingdom of Dhannavati a city that flourished on the bank of Iemro river about 40 miles northwest of Mrauk-U (Mrohaung), the ancient capital of Arakan, around first century Christian Era.<sup>1</sup> Archeological findings indicate that before 8th century the area now known as Arakan had been for many years the seat of Hindu dynasties. Adjacent to Arakan, in the Ganges delta, the contemporary religion was also Hinduism.

Four hundred years before the Chandras, Fa-Hein (405-411 C.E.), the Chinese pilgrim, visited the plain of Hindustan when that land was ruled by Guptas (320-455 C.E.). The supreme government was Brahmanical, but he was able to collect from the thousands of Mahayanist and Hinayanist monasteries, which were flourishing side by side with the temples of ancient gods, quantities of Buddhist books and relics, with which he returned to China. India was no longer Buddhist but numerous Buddhist foundations persisted.<sup>2</sup>

M.S. Collis, in his book 'the land of the Great Image' wrote: "In the early period before the Mongolian invasion a town had stood there (in Arakan) called Dhannavati. when I visited the hill in 1924 I saw lying there numerous stone sculptures of the Hindu Pantheon in the Gupta style of the 5th century A.D."<sup>3</sup>

Arrival of Buddhism to Arakan during those early days could not be unusual because of its contact with the centre of this great civilisation, India, via sea routes. There is no doubt, states Elliot: "that the intercourse between the east coast of the Bay of Bengal and the straits of Malacca was far greater in the ancient times. It had attained its height when the Buddhists were in ascendant i.e. during the fifth and sixth centuries."<sup>4</sup>

According to Arakanese Chronicles Buddhism arrived during the reign of King Chandra Suriya of Dhannavati and that the image of Buddah, Mahamoni, was built under his patronage around first century C.E.<sup>5</sup>

A hundred and fifty years before the Chandras (788-957) another Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang (630 C.E.) visited Hindustan then under emperor Harsha who had erected temples to Siva, to the sun and to the Buddah.<sup>6</sup> This narration allows to conclude that Mahayana Buddhist was a compromise in which Hindu gods and Buddha ranked equally. This concept of religious practices of that time must have influenced the religious practices in the adjacent land of Arakan also. Citing all the above references we can reach to the conclusion that both Hinduism and Mahayanist form of Buddhism flourished in Arakan before Vesali period.

### **The Kingdom of Vesali (788 - 957 C.E.)**

In 788 C.E. a new dynasty, know as Chandra, founded the city of Vesali. This city became a noted trade port to which as many as a thousand ships came annually. According to Arakanese chronicles there reigned, in lineal successions, nine kings of this dynasty from 788 to 957 C.E. The ninth sovereign in named Tsu-la-taing Sandra (951-957 C.E.) who went on an expedition to Bengal and defeated one Thu-ra-tan and erected a victory memorial at a place called Tsetta-going (Chittagong).<sup>7</sup>

To ascertain the religious practices of the Chandras study of the site of the ruins of the old city, still to be seen on the bank of a tidal creek six miles from Mrauk-U and about fifty miles inland from the Bay of Bengal, and the study of the coins found in Arakan belonging to Vesali group are of great significance.

The site of the ruins of the old city of Vesali has neither been surveyed nor excavated but the casual observer may perceive the remains of brick walls enclosing a large area. On the south side was to be seen until lately portions of a stone pier. Within the walls are numerous monds and lying on them are pieces of stone and inscriptions in the Nagari character of the eighth century. The figures represent deities; on the capitals its the sacred bull of Siva. All these remains are purely Hindu in execution and subject.<sup>8</sup>

Stamped on the Vesali coins are the bull, Nandi, the avatar of Siva; Siva's trident; on one is what appears to be a vase of votive flowers; on some there is undecipherable Nagri inscription. all these indicate that the coins of Vesali were in the pure Brahmanical tradition.<sup>9</sup> But coins bearing Brahmanical symbols are not inconsistent with Mahayanist dynasty. The Mahayanist kings of Bengal in the same period, the Palas, struck Brahmanical coins. It is a proof that how closely the Mahayanist Buddhism of 8th century Bengal approximated to Hinduism.<sup>10</sup>

As Vesali was a Hindu State adjacent to Bengal it is presumed that its religious history was similar. Hinayanism had vanished; Mahayanism had compromised with original Hinduism to such a point that Buddah had become one of many gods; even the sexual magic of Tantricism was no anomaly. It is significant that at least on Tantric sculpture

has been found in Vesali.<sup>11</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from all the above references is that Vesali was an easterly Hindu kingdom of Bengal, following Mahayanist form of Buddhism and that both government and the people were Indian.

### **Advent of Islam in Arakan**

The Arabs were a foremost seafaring and maritime people of the ancient times. They had been in contact in contact with Southern Asia, South eastern Asia and Far East as early as third century C.E. Since then the Arabs had founded small trading colonies all along the shores of Southern Asian and South eastern Asian waters including Arakan up to Sumatra, Java and the Molucus.<sup>12</sup> Then towards the middle of the seventh century C.E. dawned a new day for the Arabs with the rise of Islam as a great spiritual, social and political force. Within a hundred years of the demise of the Prophet they became the masters of a mighty empire than that of Rome. Their domination of the seas extended from the two basins of the Mediterranean, down the Red sea to the known lengths of the Indian Ocean... The Red Sea was virtually an 'Arab Lake'. In the Indian Ocean, however, their direct political control did not extend in the east beyond the coastal areas of the lower Indus. Yet we find the strange spectacle of numerous Arab settlements with the full enjoyment of their religious and social practices, along the Konkan, Malabar and the Coromandal coasts, in the Maldives and Ceylon, and their commercial activity extended to the Andamans, the Nicobars., the Arakan coast, Malaya, Sumatra and Java. Islam had come to these regions without any political support whatsoever and remained rooted to the soil for centuries, away from the turmoil's of Mahmud's invasion of India and the struggle between the Cross and Crescent in the world of the west.<sup>13</sup>

Mr. R.B. Smart, author of Burma Gazetteer, stated: "About 788 A.D. Mahataing Sandya ascended the throne, founded a new city (Vesali) on the site of old Ramawadi and died after a reign of twenty two years. In his reign several ships were wrecked on Ramree island and the crews, said to have been Mohamedans, were sent to Arakan proper and settled in villages."<sup>14</sup>

During the same period, stated Arakanese chronicles that Muslim faqirs and dervishes (saints) used to visit Arakan coast. One of the widely known fact is the existence of Muslim shrines called Badr Moqam are essentially the commemorative shrines originally erected by the followers of devotees of Pir Badrudin Badri-i-Alam, popular known as Pir Badr scattered along the coastline of Arakan.<sup>15</sup> The legendary Hanifar Tonki and Khayafurir Tonki (shrines) in Mayu territory, the shrines of Babaji Shah Monayam of Ambari and Pir Badr Shah at Akyab all bear conclusive evidence of the arrival of mystic saints in arakan as early as 8th century C.E.<sup>16</sup> The Arakanese chronicle further gives reference to the travelling of Muslim mystics in the country during Pagan period. The chronicle while referring to an incident during King Anawrata's rule (1044-1077) states : "when he (attendant of the king) entered the forest he found a fakir, possessed of mystic wisdom, dead with marks of violence upon him". Thus it is proved that not only Muslim merchants but also saints and dervishes used to frequently the coast of the bay during those early times.<sup>17</sup>

The Arab merchants and mystics carried out missionary activities among the locals. The superior moral character and high missionary zeal of those devout followers attracted large number of people towards Islam who embraced it enmasse.<sup>18</sup> Many of the Arabs married local women and settled in towns and villages permanently. The Arab merchants used either overland routes across Arakan Yoma to upper Burma and then to China or travelled by the water way through Malacca, Sumatra and Java to the far East. On their return journey to the Middle East the Arab traders used the same routes via Arakan. The Arabs are said to be in control of the foreign trade of Arakan until recent centuries.<sup>19</sup>

During the successive centuries Muslim population grew in large numbers as a result of conversation and new immigration. Historian G.E. Harvey stated: "After the tenth century the country was professedly Buddhist, notwithstanding the spread of Mohammedanism which by thirteenth century had dotted the coast from Assam to Malaya with the curious mosques known as Budder mokam. Doubtless it is Mohammedan influence which led to women being more secluded in Arakan than in Burma".<sup>20</sup>

By the 13th century Islam had conquered the heart and soul of the people between Africa's Atlantic seaboard and Bengal. It disseminated the most powerful set of values of the age. Arakan being adjacent to Bengal and having already a substantial Muslim population of its own the impact of Islamic influence on Arakan since 13th century had been tremendous. Historian D.G.E. Hall, in support of the above stated: "In the reign of Anawrahta Pagan asserted its authority over Arakan, but after 1287 this lapsed; and although before the establishment of Mrohaung by Naramaikhla in 1433 there was from time to time Burmese and Mon interference, Arakan's contacts with Mohammedan India were probably closer than those with Burma".<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Arakan king, Naramaikhla, had preferred to take refuge in Muslim Bengal rather than adjacent Buddhist Tripura or Hindu Indian states. However his long stay in Bengal has had a tremendous impact in the history of Arakan. "Naramaikhla had spent the intermediary years at Gaur court learning revolutionary ideas in the fields of Mathematics and natural sciences which together with monotheistic belief fostered the Islamic success. Asia's feudal caste oriented societies could offer no lasting resistance and were unable to halt the eastward surge of this formidable alliance of faith and knowledge".<sup>22</sup>

### **Influx of Magadah Buddhists into Arakan**

Arrival of Buddhism into Arakan, as stated earlier, began around first century Christian Era. In 8th century under the Hindu revivalist leader, Sankaracharijya, Buddhists in India were persecuted in large-scale. In Magadah, old Bihar of India, Buddhists were so ruthlessly oppressed by chauvinist Hindus and rival Mahayana sect of Buddhists that large numbers of Hinayana Buddhists had been compelled to flee eastward<sup>23</sup> who ultimately found shelter in Arakan under the Chandra kings. also, Buddhist refugees from Bengal, during the Tibetan conquest in the eighth and ninth centuries, crossed over to the nearest place viz. Arakan where they could preserve their religion.<sup>24</sup> It is to be noticed

that Magadah in its pristine days included Bengal. These Buddhist immigrants assumed the name Magh as they have migrated from Magadah. By this time, in Arakan, all the three religions -- Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam -- flourished side by side, but there had been large-scale conversion to Islam.

### **The Mongolian Invasion**

While the three great religions were flourishing side by side, a Mongolian invasion from the north swept over Arakan which ended the Chandra dynasty in 957 C.E. Hinduism in the easterly Hindu State of Vesali thus vanished for ever. This invasion not only closed the epoch of the Chandras but also carried away the Pala kings of Bengal at the same time. Vesali could never reemerge but in Bengal the Hindus regained their supremacy in a few years by pushing back the barbaric Mongolians into deeper mountainous areas.<sup>25</sup> "The Mongolians were a savage people and the five centuries which followed the arrival of Tibeto-Burmans in Arakan were an age of darkness".<sup>26</sup> But the invaders became educated in the mixed culture of the country they have conquered and were ultimately assimilated with its inhabitants during those long five centuries. After the disappearance of Hinduism and the assimilation of Mongolians and Tibeto-Burmans there remained only two distinctive races -- the Rohingyas and the Maghs -- who lived together in Arakan centuries after centuries.

Arakan became feudatory to Pagan under Anawrahta (Aniruddadeva) 1044-1077. According to Arakanese chronicle, the country shook off the Pagan yoke and regained independence. A new dynasty was founded in the city of Parim. King Galya, the sixth sovereign of the dynasty ascended the throne in 1133 C.E. Numerous dynasties ruled during the ensuing centuries each with its own city but in the same locality on or near the Lemro river. However, till 1287 Arakan had been more or less feudatory to Pagan kings, and that is to say it maintained its own kings but paid tribute as an acknowledgement of suzerainty.<sup>27</sup>

After 1287 there is not even the pretence of Burmese overlordship till 1374. In that year some Magh Buddhists of Arakan went to Ava and asked for intervention in their internal affairs. But the Burman intervention did not last long and Arakan went on her own way.<sup>28</sup> In 1404 Narameikhla was the king of Arakan ruling from Launggret. Again another batch of disgruntled Magh Buddhists went to Ava and appealed for intervention. Three possible propositions may be forwarded as to why some Buddhist Maghs went to Ava to surrender their independence and sovereignty to the Burmans. The first proposition is that under the growing world-wide Islamic influence, which had conquered the heart and soul of the people from Africa to Bengal, Narameikhla might have embraced Islam. This enraged the fanatic Buddhists to the extent of surrendering their independence by inviting Buddhist Burmans from the other side of the Arakan hill. The second proposition is that Narameikhla might have established such cordial relation with Muslim Bengal or had shown such favour to his Muslim subjects of Arakan that it became intolerable for the Buddhists. The third proposition is that intercommunal fighting might have broken out between the Muslims and the Maghs where the king, Narameikhla, did not take side with the Maghs. This caused dissatisfaction among the Buddhist section of the community

leading to the plot to oust him by inviting the Burmans. The king of Ava, Minkhaung, sent his son Minye Kyaw Swa, the heir apparent to the throne of Ava, to invade Arakan. Narameikhla fled to Bengal leaving the country at the hand of the Burmans.

During the long five centuries of Tibeto-Burman over lordship religious ideas and culture infiltrated to Arakan through the overland route connecting Arakan with upper Burma. Thus the Buddhist religion became less Mahayanist and more Hinayanist in Arakan.<sup>29</sup>

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### **Chapter III - Muslim conquest of Arakan**

#### **Early Mrauk-U kings of Arakan**

In 1404 the deposed Arakanese king, Narameikhla, fled to Bengal. He was well received by sultan Giyathuddin Azam Shah (1390-1411), the greatest and most famous of the Ilyas shahi Sultans of Bengal. The capital of Bengal, at that time, was at Pandua (Firozabad). Sultan Giyathuddin was a great patron of Islam and Islam learning. After the death of the Sultan the throne was usurped for a while by a Hindu courtier named Raja Ganesh. He was killed by his converted son Jalauddin Mohammed Shah who shifted the capital from Pandua to Gaur. After a reign of more than 2 decades with the same religious fervour and enthusiasm he died in 1433. So during his long 24 years exile, the Arakanese monarch had the opportunity to live closely with two most learned and pious Sultans of Bengal and Noor Kutb Alam, the famous spiritual leader, who brought down the rule of Raja Ganesh. He learned many things from the culturally superior Bengal sultans and above all, Islam -- the dynamic sociocultural and political force of the age -- which completely changed his ideas and life-style. In the words of a historian; "He turned away from what was Buddhist and familiar to what was Mohamedan and foreign. In so doing he loomed from the mediaeval to the modern, from the fragile fairy-land of the Glass Palace Chronicle to the robust extravaganza of the Thousand Nights and one Night".<sup>1</sup>

Narameikhla embraced Islam and adopted the Muslim name of Solaiman Shah. The Arakanese chronicler corrupted it to Sawmuan. After the conversion of the Arakanese king to the fold of Islam, the king of Bengal, Jalauddin Mohammad Sha, dispatched his military commander of Chittagong, Gen. Wali Khan, at the head of 50,000 soldiers to conquer Arakan and reinstate Solaiman shah on the throne.

Wali Khan drove away the Burmans but betrayed his trust. He came to terms with an usurper named Shua Mangji, and took control of the power himself. Solaiman Shah returned to Gaur. In Arakan, Wali Khan introduced Persian in his court and appointed Qazis.<sup>2</sup> On hearing the news of Wali Khan's betrayal, Jalaluddin Mohammad Shah sent a second army under Gen. Sandi Khan overthrew Wali Khan and ultimately restored

Solaiman Shah to the throne in 1430 C.E.

The Bengal king who restored the fugitive king to the throne of Arakan is mistaken by some historians as Sultan Nasiruddin Shah or Nazir Shah, the first Sultan of the restored Ilyas Shahi dynasty. But Nasiruddin Muhammad Shah had not become king yet in 1426. As numismatic evidence suggests, Jalauddin Mohammad Shah was holding the sceptre of the Bengal ruler at that time and therefore the credit of restoring the king of Arakan should go in his favour.

Solaiman Shah shifted his capital to a new site known as Mrauk-U or Pattahri Quillah in 1433. One year after he died. It is noteworthy that one of the Sultan's coins was recently found near the site of the city. It is a unique document in the history of Arakan. When the Muslims entered Bengal in 1203 they introduced the inscriptional type of coinage, and it was on that coin and it follows that the coinage of Mrauk-U was subsequently modelled. In this way Arakan became definitely a modern civilisation resulting in a renaissance. The country's great age began.<sup>3</sup>

Eleven Kings successively ruled Arakan for the hundred years from 1430 to 1530. The relation with Bengal remained extremely cordial. The Arakanese paid tribute to Bengal and learnt history and politics. In 1531 Minbin (Zabuk Shah) ascended the throne. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Moslem studies and the empire was founded.<sup>4</sup>

Eleven kings who ruled Arakan since 1430 are enumerated hereunder along with their Pali titles.

1	Solaiman Shah Naramekhla	1430-1434
2	Ali Khan Meng Khari	1434-1459
3	Kalima Shah Ba Saw Phyu	1459-1482
4	Mathu Shah Doulya	1482-1492
5	Mohammed Shah Ba Saw Nyo	1492-1493
6	Nori Shah Ran Aung	1493-1494
7	Sheikh Modullah Shah Salingathu	1494-1501
8	Ili Shah Meng Raza	1501-1523
9	Ilias Shah Kasabadi	1523-1525
10	Jalal Shah Meng Saw Oo	1525
11	Ali Shah Thatasa	1525-1531

The territory of Arakan in the north, during that period of one century was confined to present-day Bangladesh-Burma divide. The district of Chittagong was undoubtedly under

the control of Bengal Sultans till 1540.

The assertion of Arakanese Chronicle that Meng Khari or Ali Khan (1433-1459), successor of Meng Saw Muan, "did not long submit to the authority of the king of Bengal and that he took possession of the country as far as Ramu";<sup>5</sup> and Sir A.P. Phayre's suggestion that Ba Saw Pru or Kalima Shah (1459-1482), successor of Ali Khan had extensive possession in Bengal including the town of Chittagong are without merit. Phayre wrote: "for the next half century (1482-1532) though by reason of the weakness of the kings of Bengal they retained Chittagong".<sup>6</sup> But the happenings during that period do not justify either the statement of the Arakanese chronicle or the suggestion of Phayre. From 1434 to 1459 the throne of Bengal Sultanat had passed again to a descendant of Ilias Shahi dynasty, Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud. It was during Ilias Shahi's rule that the king of Arakan, Naramekhla, fled to Bengal and took shelter there. Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud was a strong ruler and find-spots of his inscriptions and mint-towns mentioned on his coins show that during his reign there was no diminution of the territory of the Bengal Sultanat and that he effectively exercised his jurisdiction over the whole of Bengal.<sup>7</sup> There is also no reference to any military expedition undertaken by him. So the assertion of Arakanese chronicle that Meng Khari took possession of part of Bengal lacks historical evidence.

From 1459 to 1475 Rukunuddin Barbak Shah son of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud ruled Bengal. Epigraphic evidence definitely tells that Chittagong was under the effective control of the Bengal Sultan in 1474 C.E. and it remained under the Gaur occupation till the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah (1476-1481 C.E.) the son and the successor of Rukunuddin Barbak Shah. An old mosque inscription in Hathazari, close to Chittagong, reads that the building which contains the inscription was constructed by Rasti Khan in 1474 C.E. during the reign of Sultan Rukunuddin Barak Shah.<sup>8</sup>

Neither the Arakanese chronicle nor any other source gives slightest reference to any hostile engagement between Sultan Barbak Shah and King a Saw Pru (Kalima Shah). Sultan Barbak Shah was one of the greatest conquerors among early independent Sultans of Bengal. A powerful ruler and a many sided genius as he was the Sultan would not give up the claim over the territories on which his predecessors had full control.<sup>9</sup> The rule of Barbak Shah ended in 1476 and it was followed by that of his son and successor, Sultan Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah who reigned from 1474-1481.

His sway over Chittagong is proved by an inscription engraved on the surface of a wall of a mosque built during his rule.<sup>10</sup> The mosque is situated only about 2 miles to the north of Rasti Khan's mosque. There is also no indication that from 1482 to 1494 the monarchs of Arakan (Daulya to Ran Aung) ever invaded Bengal as they had been comparatively weaker rulers than their predecessors. In 1493 Sultan Hussain Shah ascended the throne of Bengal. Before 1513 C.E., the year of temporary Tripura conquest of Chittagong by Dhanya Manikya, the district of Chittagong was definitely under the hold of Sultan Hussain Shah from whom Dhanya Manikya wrested Chittagong. But Hussain Shah sent a large reinforcement consisting of twelve Bengalis and certain other army divisions to recapture Chittagong in 1514. The next year in 1515 Chittagong was reoccupied by

Sultan Hussain Shah. On the authority of the contemporary Portuguese historians we have definite evidence of Hussain Shah's occupation of Chittagong. During Joao Coelho and Joao Silveria's visits (1517-18) to Chittagong the governor of that place was a Muslim.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary Portuguese historian De Barros explicitly writes that "the King of Arakan was that time (1517-18) subject to the King of Bengal".<sup>12</sup> The map of De Barros shows a large tract of land comprising Chittagong, Hill Chittagong and northern Arakan as part of the kingdom of Bengal.<sup>13</sup> From 1517 to 1538 Chittagong remained under full Gauri control. In fact, the Hussain Shahi governors of Chittagong made their hold over the district so well founded that it became almost impossible for either Arakanese or Tripuras to challenge the hegemony of the Bengal Sultanat even on a portion of the district.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the suggestion of Phayre that Chittagong was under the control of Arakanese kings from 1482-1532 is not based on historical facts. It seems also illogical to think, given the then prevailing situation in the eastern and southern front of Arakan where the Burmans and Mons had only recently been driven away, that the Arakanese kings should rebel against their benefactors without the support of whom they could never dream of regaining their country.

### **Zabuk Shah (1531-1553)**

Zabuk Shah (Min Bin) was one of the strongest rulers in the history of Arakan. He ascended the throne in 1531 and founded what was known as the 'Arakanese empire'. By now, the Arakanese had become politically matured having graduated in their Moslem studies.<sup>15</sup> Two capital events occurred which gave Zabuk Shah necessary weapon and opportunity to consolidate and enlarge his empire --- the arrival of Portuguese and civil war in Bengal. The Portuguese had already entered Arakan port (1517) fourteen years before Zabuk Shah's accession. Zabuk Shah turned Mrauk-U into the strongest fortified city of the Bay, employing the Portuguese to lay out his walls and moats and to forge and mount his cannon. He appointed them as military officers to train and equip a mercenary army of heterogeneous races, foreign and domestic; and he built with their aid, a large fleet manned with his own men, who were hardly boatmen but guided and stiffened by Portuguese mariners. Zabuk Shah, in this way, became master of a powerful modern weapon. The second opportunity was the civil war in Bengal. Sher Shah, an Afghan, captured Gaur in March 1538 for a while. But in July of the same year the Moghuls under Humayun entered Gaur and the Afghans traced back to Bihar. Chittagong, the capital of southeastern Bengal, had become a bone of contention between two rival governors of Mahmud Shah of the last Hussain Shah dynasty, Nogazil, the general of Sher Shah and Humayun's appointee to its governorship. The contending parties fought each other rendering southeastern Bengal defenceless.

The political change in 1538 also put an end to the loyalty and friendship of Arakanese Kings towards Bengal. They bore no moral obligation to be loyal to the usurper Sher Shah and the Moghul expansionists who were not their benefactors. Taking advantage of the weakened position of the various contending parties fighting to wrest control of Chittagong, the Arakanese king Zabuk Shah advanced northwards and occupied eastern

Bengal including Chittagong in 1540.<sup>16</sup>

The occupation of Chittagong by Abuk Shah resulted in the flight of the Pattahn governor of Chittagong to the Tripura Court. The Rajmala informs us that the Pattahn chief of Chittagong with his army of not less than one thousand took shelter in Tripura. The fugitive Pattahn chief prayed for intervention of the Tripura king Bijoymanikya to conquer Chittagong from the Arakanese and it was granted.<sup>17</sup> In 1546, Tabin Shwehti, the king of Burma, of Toungoo dynasty attacked Arakan in the cold weather. Many of Tabin Shwehti's war canoes were wrecked on the west coast. However, all his land forces arrived but Mrohaung (Mrauk-U) was a strong town; it has deep moats filled with tidal water, and the only chance of taking it was when the walls were in disrepair.<sup>18</sup> Zabuk Shah had his defences in perfect position. Unable to occupy Mrohaung Tabin Shwehti returned home.

While Zabuk Shah was thus engaged with the invading Burman King in 1546-1547 the Tripura king Bijoymanikya invaded and occupied Chittagong. Rajmala states that the king who had been in command of two thousand troops led the campaign in person. The exiled Pattahn chief of Chittagong with his thousand Pattahn troops and carriages under Tripura wazir followed the advancing troops under royal command. The combined operation was crowned with success and the Pattahn chief regained his position.<sup>19</sup>

The Arakanese chronicles state that Zabuk Shah not only regained his lost possessions but retained it till his death in 1553. But the assertion of Arakanese chronicles seems to be incorrect as there is no supportive evidence either in Tripura chronicles or Bengal history to justify the claim. In fact since 1546 Chittagong remained under the Pattahn governor till it was again brought under Tripura subjection for a while. But Mohammad Khan Sur, the governor of Bengal who proclaimed independence assigning the royal title of Shams al-Din Abu al-Muzaffar Mohammad Shah reoccupied Chittagong from Tripura control with the collaboration of deposed Pattahn governor of Chittagong around 1554.<sup>20</sup>

Zabuk Shah, although a Muslim by faith was able to fuse diverse elements into a particular style. Arakan had turned into a Sutanat. The court was shaped on Gaur and Delhi; there were eunuchs and seraglio, the slaves and the executioner. There was absolute freedom of religion, thought, movement, culture nay all the fundamental rights and freedoms. Zabuk Shah embellished Mrauk-U with mosques, pagodas and monuments which were neither Indo-Islamic nor Indian but of a particular type came to be known as 'Bengali Muslim architecture' of the Muslim Bengal period. Zabuk Shah died in 1553 and the throne was usurped by a commoner named Dikka whose reign was marked with misrule that lasted for only two years (1553-1555).<sup>21</sup> The usurper seems to be a Buddhist Magh since he bore no Muslim name.

## **Second Conquest of Arakan by Bengal**

The Bengal Sultan, Shamsuddin Abu Muzaffar Mohammad Shah, after conquering Chittagong in 1554 ordered his generals to proceed further south into Arakan the same year. The generals, in obedience to the king's command, carried their victorious banner

into Arakan and forced the Arakanese king to submit to the authority of Bengal Sultan. To commemorate his victory over Arakan, Shamsuddin Abu Muzaffar Mohammad Shah ordered striking of coins in Arakan in 962 A.H.<sup>22</sup> (1554-1555). Whether he appointed a Pattahn governor in Arakan or could be make any appreciable change in Arakanese government or was he simply satisfied with the submission of Arakan king as a vassal is not known. Strangely, the conquest of Arakan by Sultan Mohammad Shah has completely been ignored by the Arakanese chronicle.<sup>23</sup>

The successor of Mohammad Shah, Giyathuddin Bahadur Shah (1555-60) also struck coins in his name in Arakan proving that Arakan remained under the effective control of Bengal Sultan till 1560. Two more kings, Saw Hla (1555-1564) and Min Sekkya (1564-1571) ascended the throne of Arakan, according to Arakanese chronicles. They are seemed to be Magh Buddhists commoners as they bore no Muslim names. If the assertion of Arakanese chronicles were true, Saw Hla and Min Sekkya must have been vassal kings under Bengal Sultan. But how long the Pattahn rulers after Bahadur Shah's death could hold on Arakan given the internal political crisis in Bengal remains in the dark.

### **Sikandar Shah (1571-1593)**

After an interrregnum of misrule by usurpers for more than two decades Sultan Sikandar Shah (Min Phalaung), the worthy son of Zabuk Shah, ascended the throne in 1571. At that time Chittagong district, bordering north Arakan, was held by Pattahns and their hold on the same lasted till 1580 in which year Amar Manikya, the king of till 1580 in which year Amar Manikya, the king of Tripura, overpowered Pattahn garrison at Chittagaong and occupied it.<sup>24</sup> after that time Chittagong became the bone of contention between Tripura king and Skiandar Shah who finally conquered it in or around 1582. It was not possible for the arakanese King to capture Chittagong before that years because he had to be on his guard against the aggressive designs of Burman king Bayin Naung (1551-81), the successor of Tabin Shwehti who earlier failed to capture Arakan. Bayin Naung's unexpected death while he was actually sending expedition to annex Arakan greatly relieved the Arakanese king in the eastern front to enable him to divert his energy to Chittagong then under the occupation of Tripuras.<sup>25</sup> Besides the territorial ambition of the contending monarchs, there was another cause of hostility between them. The Tripura king gave shelter to Adam Shah, the arakanese governor of Ramu and Chakaria. The latter had incurred displeasure of the Arakanese king and to avoid punishment he fled from his assigned territory.<sup>26</sup> Sikandar Shah not only captured Chittagong but also gave a hot prusuit to the fleeing Tripuras till their capital was taken over. The most significant result of the war was that it decided the age long rivalry between Arakanese and the Tripuras for the supremacy over Chittagong. The Arakanese gained possession of the whole of Chittagong including the Hill Tracts and they retained it for about a century while the Tripuras permanently lost Chittagong.<sup>27</sup>

Following their occupation of Chittagong the Arakanese now felt directly exposed to the Moghul threat as the Moghul emperor considers Chittagong to be under his rightful jurisdiction. Sikandar Shah was, therefore, favourably disposed towards the assistance of Portuguese in the light of prevailing political events. He gave the Portuguese immense

facilities for carrying on trade within his kingdom; but the latter's high-handedness and disloyalty to the Arakanese government soon strained the good relation that had been prevailing between them. One Portuguese marauder, Antonio de Souza Godinha, took up arms against the Arakanese king and forcibly captured the fort of Chittagong in or about 1590.<sup>28</sup> But later the matter was resolved through conciliation.

### **Salim Shah (1593-1612)**

Sikandar Shah was succeeded by his son Salim Shah (Min Raza Gyi) in 1593. During his reign Arakan reached its zenith of greatness. For a short period during his reign Arakan extended from Dhaka and Sundarbans to Moulmein, a coast strip of a thousand miles in length and varying 150 to 20 miles in depth.<sup>29</sup> This large domain could have been built by Salim Shah by means of the strong cosmopolitan army and navy initially organised by Sultan Zabuk Shah and by including the Portuguese outside his army to fight for him in return for trade concessions. But the Portuguese were out only to serve their selfish ends. They proved tracherous whenever their loyalty was put to test. They are like a double edged sword. Thus only when there was a strong central government at Mrohaung, the Portuguese could be kept in order. Salim Shah's reign was the first and only period in its history when Arakan was able not only to repulse Burmans but also annex part of their country.

The Burman menace in the east reduced after the death of Bayib naung. His son, Nanda Bayin (1581-99), had been compelled to recall the expedition against Arakan as rebellion broke out at home. Later, the prince of Toungoo, first cousin of the king, actually wrote to Arakan king proposing a joint attack on Burman king and division of the spoil. The Arakanese shipped a force which occupied Syriam, effected a junction with Toungoo levies, and with them besieged Pegu in 1599. The townsfolk and officers deserted. The king and a faithful son surrendered on a promise of good treatment but were put to death. On the division of the spoils the strip up to and including Syriam and Moulmein was added to his long coast line. This campaign was rendered possible by Salim Shah's excellent navy and the participation of his Portuguese subjects. The spoils included the daughter of Nanda Bayin and a white elephant. A Portuguese mercenary, Philip de Brito, was appointed governor of Syriam by the Arakanese king after the successful Pegu expedition.<sup>30</sup>

In the northwest the Moghuls had been increasingly asserting their authority and a showdown with Moghuls had become imminent. The Portuguese reaped maximum advantage out of that situation and gave great trouble to the Arakanese king. The friendly relation between the Arakanese and Portuguese soon turned to hostile one. In 1602 the Portuguese captured Sondip from the king of Bakla. The conquest of Sondip alarmed the Arakanese king of the danger to the security of his kingdom. The Arakanese king took necessary steps, first, by driving out the Portuguese from Diang and capturing Sondip in 1603. In spite of the reverses the Portuguese could not be prevented from piratical activities. The hostile relation between the two sides, however, did not last long. A reconciliation was eventually reached between the contending parties. The Arakanese king allowed the Portuguese to stay in his kingdom and Sondip was returned to them.<sup>31</sup> The

few years of peace following the reconciliation provided the Portuguese with sufficient time to strengthen their bases. they conducted several hostile incursions in different parts of the kingdom. Unable to tolerate their evil doing anymore, the Arakanese king determined to destroy their bases. Accordingly in 1607 he ordered a general massacre of the Portuguese inhabitants in his kingdom. The order was most barbarously carried out. About six hundred Portuguese lost their lives in that cold blood massacre. Some few scaped to the woods, whilst others managed to reach their vessels and put out to sea among whom was Sebastio Gonzales.

At this time the island of Sondip was ruled by a Portuguese namely Manuel de Mattos. The death of Mattos in 1607 gave Fateh Khan, his subordinate officer, an opportunity to curving out an independent Muslim principality in that island. Sebastio Gonzales made an arrangement with the King of Bakla to wrest Sondip from Fateh Khan. In 1609 the Portuguese occupied Sondip again.

The establishment of the Potuguese base at Sondip gave a signal of danger to the Arakanese king. Salim Shah died in 1612 leaving the Portuguese Problem unsettled. Salim Shah's rule was epoch making in the history of Arakan. If Zabuk Shah founded the prosperity of Mrauk-U, Salim Shah, his successor of 40 years later, may be said to have consolidated it.

### **Hussain Shah (1612-1622)**

Salim Shah was succeeded by his eldest son Hussain Shah (Min Khamaung). The establishment of moghul sway over Bengal was viewed as a common danger by both Hussain shah and Gonzales, the ruler of Sondip. And naturally both now thought in terms of cooperating with each other against Moghuls who consider Southern Bengal including Chittagong under their rightful jurisdiction. Moghul Viceroy Islam Khan's conquest of Bhulua (Noakhali) practically brought the Moghul power in direct contact with the Arakanese. Hussein shah soon patched up his quarrel with Gonzales and in league with him launched a combined land and naval attack upon Bhulua early in Decembar, 1614. Hussain Shah proceeded by land from Chittagong with a large army including 700 war-elephants and accompanies by the Portuguese land forces, while his navy joined that of Gonzales advanced by water. Abdul Wahid the Moghul Thanadar of Bhulua, found it impossible to oppose the invading forces and retreated north towards the Dakatia river and the Machwa Khal in order to be out of reach of the large Portuguese-Arakanese war-boats. This gave a free hand to the latter who, after plundering Bhulua and the land that lay on both sides of the river, advanced up to Dkaria river. At that stage, however, the allies fell out among themselves when Gonzales' forces decided to withdraw. The Arakanese king arrested the Portuguese officers in his company including the nephew of the Portuguese admiral, Antonio Carvalho, while the latter, in retaliation, captured the admiral and other officers of the Arakan fleet; plundered its treasures and artillery and quickly retired to Sondip leaving the Arakanese king alone on land to face the Moghuls. Abdul Wahid did not fail to take advantage of the situation. Meanwhile he received more reinforcements. He crossed the Dakatia and launched a vigorous counterattack upon the Arakan King forcing him to make a precipitate retreat across the Feni river leaving

behind a large number of his soldiers and war-elephants in the hands of pursuing Moghul army.<sup>32</sup>

The conquest of Sondip marked the culmination of the Portuguese power in the region. The Portuguese now, are considering to conquer the whole eastern coast off the Bay of Bengal with Chittagong and Pegu as abses for their activities. Having been betrayed by Gonzales, in the expedition of Bhulua, and Philip de Brito, who made himself independent at Syriam, the Arakanese king decided to destroy their bases. In early 1615, the Arakanese laid siege to the island of Sondip. Gonzales found himself now in precarious position and being in need of assistance, in order to maintain his power, went to Goa for aid. Gonzales' appeal for aid was responded to and the viceroy of Goa sent a fleet under the command of Dom Francisco de Menazes Rovo who arrived Arakan on October 3, 1615. The Arakanese King in the mean time, made alliance with the Dutch -- the chief competitors of Portuguese in trade. On October 15, the joint Arakanese and Dutch fleet launched an attack on the Portuguese expeditionary forces. The naval engagement that followed inflicted great loss to both sides but the Portuguese were defeated. Gonzales withdrew to Sondip where he found no body obeying his command. His dispirited followers quarelling among themselves allowed the Arakanese to occupy the island. The Arakanese capture of Sondip in 1615 shattered the Portuguese dream of establishing a maritime and religious empire in the region.<sup>33</sup>

In the eastern front Syriam and Pegu were lost to the Burman king Anaupetlun (1605-28). But Burman king's engagement in the east with Siam relieved Hussain Shah for a while. By capturing Sondip and as both Burmese and Portuguese threat now averted, the Arakanese king renewed his attack on Bhulua. As on the previous occasion, this time also, Abdul Wahid, the Moghul thanadar, found it necessary to withdraw to the more convenient position near the Dakatia river. His son, Mirza Nur al-Din, however, made a plan to trap the Arakan forces. He lay in hiding with a considerable force of cavalry opposite a bog near the river. When the Arakan king had just crossed that spot Nur al-din suddenly made a cavalry charge upon him. Abdul Wahid also attacked him from the other direction. Thus being surrounded by enemies the Arakan forces were thrown into utter confusion. In their attempt to retreat they were forced into the quagmire. A large number of them were killed, some managed to escape, but the king himself together with his nephew and war-elephants were stuck up in the muddy ground. In utter distress he sued for peace offering to surrender all his officers and men including his nephew, and also the elephants and other war-equipments and praying in return only to be spared his life and personal liberty. Abdul Wahid accepted these terms and allowed the Arakan king to escape almost alone towards Chittagong.<sup>34</sup>

In February 1616, moghul viceroy Qasim Khan sent an expedition under Abdul Nabi to drive away the Arakan king from Chittagong and to capture that place. The progress of the Moghul forces were checked, however, at Khatgar, near Sitakund, where Arakan king had erected a forte and had concentrated a large force backed by a fleet of about 1000 war-boats. Abdul Nabi at first attempted to capture the forte by assault, but being unsuccessful in that effort he laid siege to it. The siege dragged on for a long time as a result of which food supplies ran short forcing the Moghul general to raise in May 1616

and to return to Bhulua.<sup>35</sup>

the unsuccessful Moghul invasion of Chittagong in 1616 effected the frontier policy of Hussain Shah. He depopulated the whole area north of Chittagong between the hill ranges and the coast and it was allowed to be covered with forest growth to serve as natural resistance to possible Moghul land invasion. After the capture of Sondip the Portuguese were reduced to submission. Hussain Shah now employed them in his service; the port town of Diang was assigned to the Portuguese in exchange of their promised help against Moghul sea invasion. This helped the Portuguese in making Diang their chief place of settlement and a base of piratical activities.

Hussain Shah proved to be a great and most successful king of Arakan. He subdued the rebels of his kingdom, crippled the power of Portuguese, defied the world conquering Moghul army and baffled the aggressive designs of the Burmans.

### **Salim Shah II (1612-1638)**

Hussain Shah was succeeded by his son Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudamma) in 1622. The Portuguese menace upon the throne of Arakan now relatively diminished, Salim Shah II turned a blind eye to their piratical activities in league with the Arakanese as they are an asset to him to counter the Moghuls. However, Salim Shah II sent an envoy to the Moghul prince, Shah Jahan, who came to Dhaka in 1624 for a while. Salim Shah, with great humility, prayed that he should be considered as loyal vassal and he swore by God, the Great, that he would serve loyally whenever he would be summoned for any work.<sup>36</sup> This was merely a diplomatic move on the part of the Arakan ruler who before long resumed his father's policy of aggressive raids into Bengal as soon as Shah Jahan retired from the province, Shajahan came to Bengal in rebellion against his father in a palace intrigue. Shah Jahan's rebellion, followed by Bengal viceroy Mahabat Khan's coup, had thrown Bengal out of gear. Taking advantage of the situation, the arakan king made a raid upon Bhulua, plundered the territory and then retired with a rich booty.<sup>37</sup> When Mahabat Khan was away, he led another expedition into Bengal; advanced as far as Dhaka and, according to one account, "entered the city, burnt and looted it, and retired with a large number of captives".<sup>38</sup>

Around 1630, the Arakanese governor of Chittagong came to know the Portuguese making an underhand plotting with the Moghul governor of Dhaka to overthrow Arakanese rule in Chittagong. He informed Salim Shah II to take appropriate steps who ordered to prepare 500 galias and forty galleys and to proceed with full speed to the port of Dianga.<sup>39</sup> The captain was also instructed to conduct a surprise attack on the Portuguese to make them prisoners. In case of the failure of a naval seizure he was instructed to lay a siege on them. Meanwhile the Portuguese residents of Arakan proper got scent of the preparations and hurriedly sent messengers to Chittagong to warn their countrymen therein of the impending danger.

Manrique, the Portuguese friar then preaching at Diang, led a mission to the court of Arakan to allay the king and restrain him from seizing the Portuguese settlements. On

July 2nd, 1630 Manrique undertook his memorable journey from Diang to Arakan. The mission was successful in the backdrop of Moghul threat looming large in the west and Burma's returning to strength. The king of Arakan sent orders recalling the Arakanese navy. Manrique compiled memoirs of his journey to Arakan which contain remarks derogatory to Muslims.

Since the time of Salim Shah II, Portuguese piratical activities increased in the Bay. The Maghs and Rohingyas also took part in the raids. But the Portuguese pirates took a leading part in the slave hunting expeditions and the participation of the Arakanese in such expedition was on lesser scale than that of Portuguese.<sup>40</sup> The Portuguese freebooters committed inhuman atrocities in lower Bengal. Besides plundering its wealth and manufactures they carried away thousands of men, women and children and sold them as slaves or forcibly converted them to Christianity. Innocent boatmen, traders and travellers lived in constant terror of the Feringi pirates.

Salim Shah II cultivated friendly relations also with the Dutch at Batavia who were in urgent need of regular supplies of rice and slaves for their Indonesian settlements. The Dutch opened a factory at Mrohaung to carry out trade with the Arakanese.<sup>41</sup> During Salim Shah II's reign a terrible famine visited Arakan in 1631-35 C.E.<sup>42</sup> The price shot up to four times of the normal price. The famine was due to crop failures of the past successive years.

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## **Chapter IV - The Decline and fall of Arakanese Empire**

### **Usurpation of Arakan Throne by Narapati**

With the death of Salim Shah II in a palace intrigue in 1638 the period of Arakan's greatness came to an end and the period of Arakan's greatness came to an end and the period of decline began. He was succeeded by his son Meng Sani but was murdered by the lover of the dowager queen, a commoner, who usurped the throne and now assuming the title of Narapati.<sup>1</sup> Although Narapati tried to win the support of the people by heaping up blames and accusations on his predecessor he utterly failed to achieve it. In fact the

usurpation of power resulted as culmination of a deep rooted conspiracy to grab power from Muslims. Narapati was a Magh Buddhist commoner.

The late king's brother, Matak Rai (Kamal),<sup>2</sup> viceroy of Chittagong, there upon declared independence and attempted to oust the usurper. Kamal failed in his attempt, however, because of lack of adequate naval power and was forced to seek asylum with the Moghul thanadar of Bhulua. As Kamal proceeded towards Bhulua an Arakanese fleet of about 200 war-boats (Jalias) pursued him up to Feni river and attempted to prevent his crossing the river. The forces of the Moghul thanadar drove back the Arakanese fleet by incessant gun fires and Kamal was enabled to cross the Feni river safely and to reach Jahangirnagar with his family and nearly 9000 of his Arakanese followers.<sup>3</sup>

Narapati did not, however, give up the attempt to get hold of Kamal and fitted out a full-scale naval expedition against Bengal with more than 650 vessels of different types. Islam Khan, the Moghul governor of Bengal, met the threat by mobilising his army and navy near the mouth of the river Meghna. Although the Arakanese fleet had entered the estuary of the river, it did not dare advance further and quickly withdrew.<sup>4</sup>

Before Kamal's departure for Jahangirnagar the Portuguese of Chittagong sided with him. Hence out of fear of Narapati's vengeance they left the place and migrated to other Portuguese possessions in the subcontinent. As a result about twelve thousand people of Bengal who had been forcibly held in slavery by the Portuguese there now escaped and returned home. But the Portuguese subsequently returned to Chittagong.<sup>5</sup>

### **Thadomintra and Sanda Thudamma**

Narapati was succeeded by his nephew Thadomintra in 1645. During his reign relation with the Dutch deteriorated, on account of the seizure of a Dutch free burgher with his ship and crew by the king, forcing to the closure of the Dutch factory in Mrohaung.<sup>6</sup> The people of Arakan suffered much as a result of the king's misrule. There was internal disturbances. For this reason, he had to rely on the Portuguese for the protection of the northwest frontier of Chittagong from Moghul penetration. His exclusive dependence upon the Portuguese for the defence of Chittagong turned the port town virtually to a haunt of Portuguese freebooters.<sup>7</sup> The Arakanese king had also committed the folly of making a naval raid into the southern part of Barisal district where he was utterly defeated and forced to withdraw. In 1652, Sanda Thudamma, son of Thadomintra, became king of Arakan. The Dutch reopened their factory at Mrohaung after concluding an agreement with Batavia.

### **Shah Shuja's flight to Arakan**

Towards the end of September, 1657 the Moghul emperor, Shahjahan, fell seriously ill. This acted as a signal for war of succession among his four sons: Dara Shaikho, Shuja, Aurangzed and Murad. Aurangzed emerged victorious. Shah Shuja did not submit to Aurangzed and vowed to fight back but he was utterly defeated and put to flight. In 1660 unable to offer further resistance to the hot pursuit of Mir Jumla, the army general of

Aurangzeb, shah Shuja sought asylum in the neighbouring kingdom of Arakan. He came to Arakan with his family and a retinue of his followers as the king of Arakan promised him to provide ships to take him to Makkah where he wished to spend his last days. Shuja's life ended, however, in a sad tragedy. The Magh King proved false to his promise. He wanted to marry Shuja's daughter, grab his valuables and treasures and planned to imprison him. In a desperate state Shuja attempted to effect a coup with the help of Muslim army and countries of the Arakan king. The plans were detected, however, and the luckless prince at last tried to escape towards Pegu, but was pursued and killed, and all members of his family, including his daughter whom the Magh king had forcibly married, were cruelly massacred. The circumstances of his flight and death caused some uncertainty and rumours to prevail for sometime. The position is best summarised by Benier as follows:

"I have heard three or four totally different accounts of the fate of the prince from those even who were on the spot. Some assured me that he was found among the slain, though it was difficult to recognise his body; and I have seen a letter from a person at the head of the factory which the Hollanders maintain in that region, mentioning the same thing. Great uncertainty prevails, however, upon the subject, which is the reason why we have had so many alarming rumours at Dehli. It was reported, at one time, that he was arrived at Massipatam (Masalipatam), and that the kings of Golkonda and Visapur (Vijapur) engaged to support his cause with all their forces. It was confidently said, at another period, that he had passed within sight of Sourate (Surat), with two ships flying red colours, with which he had been presented either by the king of Pegu or Siam. Again we were told that the prince was in Persia: that he has been seen in Schiras (Shiraz), and soon afterwards in Kandahar, ready to invade the kingdom of Caboul ...But in my opinion there never existed ground for any of these reports. I attach great importance to the letter from the Dutch gentleman, which states that the prince was killed in his attempt to escape; and one of Sultan Shujah's eunuchs, with whom I travelled from Bengale to Massipatam, and his former commandant of artillery, now in the service of the king of Golkonda, both assured me that their master was dead, although they were reluctant to communicate any further information. the French merchants whom I saw at Dehli, and who came direct from Ispahan, had never heard a syllable of Sultan Shujah's being in Persia. It seems also that his sword and dagger were found soon after his defeat; and if he reached the found soon after his defeat; and if he reached the woods, as some people pretend, it can be scarcely hoped that he escaped; as it is probable he must have fallen into the hands of robbers, or have become a prey to the tigers or elephants which very greatly infest the forest of that country".<sup>8</sup>

For some time before this last incident the Moghul viceroy of Bengal had been sending urgent messages for the surrender of the young princess. Sanda Thudamma paid no attention to them, and on the occasion of the last massacre even went so far as to imprison a Moghul envoy. Fearing reprisals he encouraged the Ferengis of Dianga to redouble their efforts in raiding Bengal. Thus in 1664 their galleasses (jalia) sailed up to the river towards Dhaka, broke up a Moghul flotilla of 240 vessels and laid waste far and wide.

## **The Moghul conquest of Chittagong**

Auranzeb having been firmly entrenched in his positions by occupying Kuch Bihar, recovering Kamrup and neutralising the Assamese, could now concentrate more on Arakan. All necessary Ferengi-Magh depredations by capturing Chittagong. Shaista Khan, who became viceroy of Bengal in 1664, threatened the Dutch to withdraw from Arakan or risk their trade with Bengal. So one night in November, 1665 the Dutch loaded four ships with everything they could carry from their Mrohaung factory, and before the king of Arakan realised what was afoot, they were beyond pursuit.

Shaista Khan first attacked and occupied Sondip -- a strategic island situated at the mouth of Ganges -- on Nov. 12, 1665 before the Arakan expedition began. With Sondip captured, Shaista Khan now pushed forward with his final preparations. He persuaded the Ferengis of Chittagong successfully to abandon the Arakan king and come over to Moghul side. There were various reasons for the Ferengis to side with the Moghuls. The most important one is that the Arakanese king, on coming to know about Shaista Khan's communications with the Ferengis and fearing the consequences after the Moghul conquest of Sondip, ordered the governor of Chittagong to deport the Ferengis from that place to the interior of Arakan with a view either to keeping them under surveillance or to massacring them.<sup>9</sup> Getting scent of this plan the Ferengis, on December 19, 1665 set fire to a number of Arakanese ships at Chittagong and on 40 to 50 Jalba boats came in a body over to the Moghuls at Noakhali.<sup>10</sup>

After the defection of Ferengis an immediate expedition to Arakan was decided. Buzrug Umed Khan would lead the main forces to advance by land whereas the Imperial Nawwara under the command of Ibn-i-Hussain and Mohammad Beg Abakash, the Zamindars flotilla under Munawwar Khan and the Ferengi Fleet commanded by Captain Moor was to proceed by river and sea keeping touch with the land forces. Shaista Khan stayed behind to look after the overall conduct of the campaign and to ensure the supply of the provisions. Meanwhile, Kamal, the ex-governor of Chittagong, and his followers who fled to Dhaka during the reign of Shah Jaha also took part in the Arakan expedition in the van of the land forces.<sup>11</sup> Near Kumira, the first naval encounter with the Arakanese took place on January 23, 1666. The Arakanese were routed. Soon, however, the fleeing Arakanese Jalbas were joined by their big ships which were waiting behind. There was continuous naval cannonade between the two sides. On the following morning, 24th January, a second naval battle followed in which Arakanese fleet being defeated fled and entered Karnafuli river at about 3:00 pm. The Muslim fleet pursued the enemy, came to Karnafuli and seized its mouth. In the meantime the land forces moving in great speed reached the bank of Karnafuli on the same day. Ibn-i-Hussain entered Karnafuli and dashed upon the Arakanese ships. Captain Moors and other Moghul officers came swiftly from different sides. After a great fight the Arakanese were decisively defeated. Many of them were slain; some escaped by abandoning the ships and the rest surrendered. Many of the ships were sunk by the fire or ramming of the Moghul fleet and 135 ships were captured. The Arakanese fort subsequently fell to the land forces. Its governor, who was the son of the king's uncle, surrendered on January, 26 and was taken prisoner.<sup>12</sup>

Large number of peasants of Bengal who had been carried off and kept prisoners here were now released from Magh oppression and returned to their homes.<sup>13</sup> The Maghs in the fort on the other side of the river also fled and it fell into the Muslim hands. Buzrug Umed Khan entered Chittagong on January, 27. after capturing Chittagong an expedition to capture southern Chittagong was also sent under Mir Murtaza. Murtaza traversing difficult roads, dense jungles, and terrible rivers reached Ramu after 12 days march and wrested it from the Arakanese King's brother, Rawli. Many Muslims who had been kept as captives there were liberated.<sup>14</sup> Thus was the pirates' nest broken and the Muslim sway re-established over the area.

The fall of Chittagong was a terrible blow to the Arakanese and with it their century of greatness came to an end. Never again they hold Chittagong or even Ramu and they lost their sword arm by the desertion of Ferengis. In fact Sanda Thudamma sowed the seed of the downfall of Arakan by massacring Shah Shuja and his followers and great many number of Muslims of Arakan. His death follows a century of chaos with internecine feud raging the whole country.

### **Occupation of Arakan by Bodawphaya**

After the loss of Chittagong the territory of the kingdom of Mrauk-U was reduced to the present districts of Akyab, Kyaukpyu and Sandoway. Those areas in Lower Burma which had been won by Salim Shah I and resumed in part by Salim Shah II had all lapsed back to the Burmans. Arakan was no larger than it had been 250 years previously<sup>15</sup> when it was first conquered by Muslims.

A total of 26 kings ruled Arakan after the death of Sanda Thudamma till it was occupied by the Burmans in 1784. Between the fall of Chittagong (1666) and Sanda Wizaya (1710) there were ten kings averaging two and half years each. Three reigned only one year and two did not reign one month each. Between Sanda Wizaya and Nara Abaya (1742), the average was under 2 years and the last seven kings to 1784 averaged just three years each. The last century of the independent Arakan was marked by intercommunal strife. The Kamans, units of Muslim archers servicing the Arakan King, got the upper hand continually reinforced by fresh Afghan soldiers from north India. From 1666 until 1710 the political rule of Arakan was completely in their hands.<sup>16</sup> Ten kings were crowned and dethroned by them during that period. In 1692 they burnt the palace and for twenty years roamed over the country carrying fire and sword, wherever they went.<sup>17</sup>

Finally Sanda Wizaya (1710-1731), a Buddhist, succeeded in gaining upper hand; he deported the Kamans to Ramree; there and at Thinganet or Tharagon near Akyab, their descendants still exist under the name Kaman (Persian Kaman = a bow) speaking Arakanese but retaining their Mohammedan faith and Afghan features.<sup>18</sup> Sanda Wizaya was murdered. King after king was murdered and village fought against village. The last two kings, Sanda Thadita (1777-1782) and Thamada (1782-1785) were Muslims belonging to the descendants of Kaman archers who were earlier deported to Ramree by Sanda Wizaya. According to G.E. Harvey, "The last king Thamada 1782-5, bearing as less authority than ever, for he was from the despised race of Ramree".<sup>19</sup>

A band of lords went to Ava asking intervention. Historian Harvey commented on the appeal of the Arakanese lords for Burman intervention as follows: "Perhaps they were patriots desiring to see their land at rest". But the actual fact is that the bigoted Buddhists could not tolerate the rule of Muslim kings once again. So they did the same as their predecessors did in 1406 and before. In 1784 the King of Ava, Bodawphaya, invaded Arakan by land and sea, and after slight operations gained complete victory. Thus came the end of the independence of Arakan.

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## **Chapter V - Socio-Religious life of Mrauk-U period**

After the disappearance of Hinduism from the easterly Hindu kingdom of Vesali, two main religious faiths, Buddhism and Islam, grew side by side in the pre-Mrauk-U Arakan society. But there had been large-scale conversion to Islam as a result of missionary

activities by Muslims saints, mystics, preachers and traders.<sup>1</sup> The Muslim population of Arakan had grown substantially during the pre-Mrauk-U era, especially after the advent of Muslim rule in Bengal in 1203.

Consequent upon the Mongolian invasion and the arrival of Tibeto-Burmans, Arakan became more Hinayanist as that ideal had been transmitted from Burma to Arakan through the mountain road connecting Pagan with Lemro. During the five hundred years (957-1430) preceding Muslim conquest Arakan became a holy land for Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> The presence of revered *Mahamuni*, image of Buddha, in Arakan made it a place of pilgrimage for the Buddhist world. The Arian Magadah Buddhists were gradually assimilated with their Mongolian and Tibeto-Burman co-religionists during these long five centuries.

After 1287, however, the Arakanese shook off Pagan overlordship and became free.<sup>3</sup> Muslim influence in the free Arakan society led, some times, to internal dissensions as bigoted Buddhists could not tolerate such an environment. Such people prefer to remain under foreign domination rather than see a free, independent and prosperous Arakan where the Muslims would also have unfettered freedom and a share of the fruits of independence. The loss of independence of Arakan in 1374, 1406 and lastly in 1784 is the result of hypocrisy of those bigoted Buddhists. With the illusion that the religion of Islam poses a great threat to their Buddhist religion, as preached by their co-religionists Burmans, these fanatics fought tooth and nail to wipe out the Muslims from Arakan. The Muslim massacre of 1942, where more than 100'000 people perished, is the handiwork of these bigots. They are responsible for the slavery, frustration, religious intolerance and a dark future of the people of today's Arakan.

The period 1430 to 1638 in the Mrauk-U dynasty was the glorious era or the country's great age in the history of Arakan. One can see clearly what made the Arakanese great and what caused their downfall. The glorious era began with the Muslim conquest of Arakan around 1430 C.E. and the decline leading to ultimate downfall started with the change of power from Muslims to Buddhists in 1638. It was because of the moral superiority of those Muslim rulers who ruled the country with justice and equity as taught by Islam, and the advancement in the knowledge of history, politics and natural sciences encouraged by them that Arakan could achieve its greatness. When the forces of fanaticism, religious intolerance and morally corrupt elements got upper hand the country declined and ultimately met its doom.

Many historians and chroniclers contend that the Arakanese kings were Buddhists although they kept Muslim names and inscribed *Kalema* -- Muslim confession of faith -- on their coins.<sup>4</sup> Reasons put forward in support of their claim are:

Firstly, they carried out all the above practices in fulfilment of the conditions set in the agreement with Bengal Sultans for helping them regain Arakan<sup>5</sup> and secondly, only those Arakan kings adopted Muslim names who had control over Chittagong, capital of the southeastern district of Bengal.<sup>6</sup>

In refutation of the above propositions relevant portions of the remarks made by some eminent historians may be cited hereunder:

"by the 13th century Islam had conquered the heart and soul of the people between Africa's Atlantic seaboard and Bengal. It disseminated the most powerful set of values of the age ..... Naramekhla had spent the intermediary years at Gaur court learning revolutionary ideas in the field of Mathematics and natural sciences which together with **Monotheistic Belief**<sup>7</sup> fostered the Islamic success. Asia's feudal caste oriented societies could offer no lasting resistance and were unable to halt the eastward surge of this formidable alliance of faith and knowledge".<sup>8</sup>

According to this historian, Naramekhla or Sawmuan or Solaiman Shah -- the reinstated Arakan king -- was a confirmed Muslim by faith. But whether he embraced Islam before he fled to Bengal or was converted during his long 24 years stay Bengal is undecided.

A historical research paper prepared by MS Collis in collaboration with San Shwe Bu, a Magh Buddhist of Arakan, captioned 'Arakan's place in the civilisation of the Bay' corroborated the statement that Naramekhla became a Muslim and recognised the Arakanese kings to be upholders of Islamic faith. The relevant portions of the research paper may be cited hereunder:

"the Arakanese king remained there for 24 years leaving his country in the hands of the Burmese ..... He turned away from what was Buddhist and familiar to what was Mohamedan and foreign. In so doing he loomed from the mediaval to the modern, from the fragile fairy-land of the Glass Palace Chronicles to the robust extravaganza of the Thousand Nights and one Night".<sup>9</sup>

In another place of the research paper it is mentioned that "It took the Arakanese a hundred year to learn that doctrine [Islam] from the Moslem-Mongolians. When it was well understood they founded what was known as Arakanese Empire. For hundred years 1430 to 1530, Arakan remained feudatory to Bengal, paid tribute and learned history and politics. Eleven kings followed one after another at Mrauk-U in undistinguished succession ..... In 1531 Min Bin (Zabuk Shah) ascended the throne. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Muslim studies and the Empire was founded".<sup>10</sup>

In 'The time Atlas of world History' edited by Geoferry Barraclough, Arakan is indicated as a 'South West Burma Islamic State'. In mentioning about Arakanese people it is written that "their Muslim Kingdom was independent in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; later it was absorbed by Burma".<sup>11</sup> According to the author of this Atlas on World History Muslim rule in Arakan has already been established before Naramekhla fled to Bengal. It may well a cause for some disgruntled Buddhists to invite Burmese king for invasion of Arakan in 1406.

One cannot argue on the basis that the king could not be a Muslim since the vast majority of his subjects remain non-Muslims. When Ikhtiar al Din Mohammad bin Bakhtiar conquered Bengal the vast majority of his subjects were Hindus and Buddhists. Yet he

established Muslim rule over there. But gradually the Muslim population increased as a result of immigration of more Muslims from Central Asia, Middle East etc. as well as conversion of local people under the Muslim rule. In an era where an average observer of the period would have seen nothing in the world but Islam, this great polity from the point of Muslim Sultanats were seen model of civilisation, progress and prosperity it is difficult to conceive that the Muslims after the conquest of a country shall leave it to be ruled by a non-Muslim polytheist.

The fact is that the Arakanese chronicles had distorted the real history with an ill-motive of belittling the role of Muslims in the history of Arakan. Historians have written about Arakan, mostly, alluding to Arakanese chronicles. Such assertion of the chroniclers and historians, when thoroughly examined, is found out to be devoid of any truth. According to Arakanese chronicle Meng Khari or Ali Khan (1434-1459), successor of Meng Saw Muan "did not long submit to the authority of the king of Bengal. He took possession of the country as far as Ramu"<sup>12</sup> and his successor Ba Saw Pru or Kalima Shah (1459-1482) proceeded further north and "took possession of the town of Chittagong".<sup>13</sup> If, in fact, those kings had cast off the Bengal yoke, as the Arakanese chronicles assert, what is the necessity left for Arakan kings to continue keeping Muslim names, inscribe coins with *Kalema* and use Persian as court language any more since they are under no obligation to abide by the agreement?

Actually eleven kings, who ruled Arakan for one-hundred years (1430-1530) from Sultan Solaiman Shah (Narameikhla) to Sultan Ali Shah, had extremely cordial relationship with Bengal. They learned everything: history, politics and Islam from Bengal. They were even graduated in Muslim studies. No where in the history of Bengal one can find the above kings either attempted to wrest control of Chittagong or occupied it. They were even dubbed by historians as feudatory to Bengal.<sup>14</sup>

Some historians, e.g. Dr. S.B Qanungo, want to identify Arakan kings having Muslim names to those who had control over Chittagong. According to them, the Arakan kings kept Muslim names as a mark of their suzerainty over a part of Bengal, especially over Chittagong, a Muslim province. In one place the said historian remarked.

"after a short reign of two years he died and was succeeded by Ran Aung, son of Daulya who ruled for a few months in 1494 A.D. After him the throne was captured by Tsa Lang ga tha, uncle by mother's side of Ran Aung in the same year. The absence of Muslim names indicates their loss of hold over Chittagong".<sup>15</sup>

But we find from different historical sources that the monarchs in question actually bore Muslim names. Ran Aung's Muslim name is Nori Shah and Tsa Langgatha's name is Shekmodullah Shah.

In another place the same historian remarked:

"All Arakanese rulers from Ran Aung to Thatasa failed to hold authority over

Chittagong, for which they did not feel necessity of taking Muslim names".<sup>16</sup> Contrary to his statement we find all those monarchs bearing Muslim names as follows:<sup>17</sup>

Ran Aung	=	Nori Shah
Salingathu	=	Shekmodullah Shah
Meng Raza	=	Ili Shah
Kasabadi	=	Ilias Shah
Meng Saw Oo	=	Jalal Shah
Thatasa	=	Ali Shah

The fact of their keeping Muslim names is corroborated by coins of two Arakan kings, Ilias Shah and Ali Shah, found at Mrauk U. The Photo of the coins and their contents are reproduced hereunder.<sup>18</sup>



**Ali Shah**, a title used by Thatasa, 1525 AD

Obv.:	لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله	lā ilah illā Allah Mohammed rasūl Allah
(Kalima)	خالد الله الملك	Khallad Allah al Mulkaḥu

There is no God but Allah, Mohammed the Messenger of Allah.  
May Allah perpetuate his Kingdom

Rev.:	ابو المظفر علي بن سلطان خالد الله ص	al rahman abu Al-muzaffar Ali Sh(ah) Sultān Khallad Allah (? Mulkaḥu)
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Sultan Ali Shah, Father of the victorious (and merciful)

May Allah perpetuate his Kingdom  
Dia.: 29 mm Wt.: 10.17 gm (BM)



? **Ilias Shah** (ascribed by Phayre to Ilias Shah, 1523 AD,  
but this reading is uncertain)

Obv.:	Kalima, as 7.1	
Rev.:	---	
	ابو النصر	abu al nasr (?)

Dia.: 32 mm Wt.: 9.62 gm (BM)

After Salim Shah II, Narapadigyi usurped the throne. He was a Buddhist. So he did not feel it necessary to keep Muslim name although he had control over Chittagong. Narapadigyi's coins are the first to omit the Persian/Nagari and to have Arakanese inscriptions on both sides. Phayre claims that it is from 1000 B.E. 1638 A.D., that Chittagong was returned to the Moghul viceroy Islam Khan, and thus gives a reason for the omission of the Persian/Nagari, but historical evidence e.g. Hall (3) is clear that Chittagong was not taken back until 1666 A.D. This indicates clearly that the keeping of Muslim name is not related to one's control over Chittagong, but that either one is a Muslim or not.

The southeastern district of Bengal, Chittagong, came under the sway of Zabuk Shah around 1540 while Bengal was gripped with civil war as Moghuls, Afghans and remnants of Arab Hussain Shahi dynasty were locked in fighting. Gaur was occupied already by the Moghuls. Min Bin (Zabuk Shah) and his successors Razagri (Salim Shah), Min Phalaung (Sikandar Shah), Min Khamaung (Hussain Shah), and Thiri Thudama (Salim Shah II) were under no compulsion either to keep Muslim names or fulfill other so-called conditions imposed on their predecessors had they been not Muslims as those who imposed these conditions had already been ousted from power in Bengal. Therefore, the only logical conclusion is that all those kings who bore Muslim names had been unreservedly Muslims.

After Zabuk Shah's death, a commoner with the name of Dikka had usurped the throne. He was succeeded by one Saw Hla followed by Meng Sekkya, all commoners. They had no Muslim names as they were not Muslims. But after Meng Sekkya the throne was regained by the heir of the legitimate line, Min Phalaung or Sikandar Shah (1571-1593), who was succeeded by his son Min Razagri or Salim Shah I (1593-1612) followed by his Thiri Thudamma or Salim Shah II, all of whom bearing Muslim names. After Salim Shah II's death the decline of the Arakanese empire began with the usurpation of the throne and held by Magh Buddhists for a long time none of whom kept Muslim names. We can clearly see from the succession of the Mrauk-U Kings that only those kings who belonged to the legitimate lines bear Muslim names because they are Muslims whereas the usurpers never use any Muslim title. Rivalry for power between the Muslims and the Buddhists however continued all along. The Muslim archers known as Kamans held complete sway of political power from 1666 to 1710. Sanda Thadita and Thamada are also Muslims and are the descendants of Kaman archers who had been deported to Ramree earlier. In support of the proposition that the last kings of Arakan were Muslims relevant portion of remarks by historians D.G.E. Hall is cited hereunder: "Shuja's followers in 1661 were retained as Archers of the Guard ..... They murdered and set up kings at will and their numbers were recruited by fresh arrivals from upper India. In 1662 they burnt the palace and for twenty years roamed over the country carrying fire and sword wherever they went. Finally they were broken by a lord who set up as king Sandawizaya 1710-31; he deported them to Ramree: there, and at Thiganet and Tharagon near Akyab, their descendants still exist under the name Kaman (Persian Kaman = a bow), speaking Arakanese but retaining their Mohamedan faith and Afghan features ..... the last king Thamada 1782-5, bearing as if in irony the name of the first king on earth, had less authority than ever, for he was of the despised race of Ramree".<sup>19</sup>

Coins struck by Arakan kings itself prove the fact that those kings had in fact been Muslims. One of coins of Sultan Ali Shah (Thatasa - 1525 C.E.) found recently at Mrauk-U, inscribed in Persian, in the obverse side, reads as follows:

"There is no God but Allah, Mohammed the Messenger of Allah. May Allah perpetuate his Kingdom".

In the reverse side, also inscribed in Persian, it reads as follows: "Sultan Ali Shah, father

of the victorious. May Allah perpetuate his Kingdom"

If one studies the contents of the coins carefully, there should remain no doubt for him to consider that the one who struck the coin should belong to a different religion other than Islam. The theory that one has to carry out that practice under compulsion is against religious history of Islam. The Holy Quran says: "There is no compulsion in religion". The Muslims cannot force someone either to obey or follow some Islamic practices against his will. History bears full testimony over this fact. Some historians still like to identify Arakan with a Buddhist Kingdom despite confessing that even after becoming independent from Bengal Sultans, the Arakanese Kings had continued the practice of keeping Muslim names, inscribing *Kalema* in coins and using Persian as court language. Relevant portion of the remarks of a historian may be cited here under.

"Even after becoming independent of the Bengal Sultans, the Arakan kings continued the custom of using Muslim title in addition to Burmese or Pali title. This was because they not only wished to be thought of as Sultans in their own right, in imitation of the Moghuls; but also because there were Muslims in ever larger numbers among their subjects. Court ceremonies and administrative methods followed the customs of Gaur and Dehli sultanats. There were eunuchs, harems, slaves and hangmen, and many expressions in use at court were Moghul. Muslims also held eminent posts despite the fact that the kingdom remained Buddhist'.<sup>20</sup>

It is to be noticed that the presence of a large muslim population among their subjects cannot be a compelling factor for the kings in proclaiming the basic faith of a foreign religion in such important insignia of the State like coins, medallions and State Emblems. If such is the case, as historians have argued, why the kings from Narapatigyi to Sanda Thudamma did not bear Muslim names and strike coins inscribed with *Kalema* since they were in control of the Northwest frontier district of Chittagong with vast Muslim population? There is no reasonable ground, whatsoever, to claim that even though the kings kept Muslim names and inscribed their coins with *Kalema* they remained Buddhists.

Although the majority of the people of a country profess certain religion, it is not necessary for the ruler to belong to that religious group. India, despite more than 1000 years of Muslim rule vast majority of the people remained Hindu. Since the rulers were Muslims and the administration was in the Muslim style, India of those days could in no way be called a Hindu Kingdom. Similarly, although both Buddhists and Muslims lived in Arakan and since the rulers were Muslims who ruled in the Muslim style it cannot be termed a Buddhist Kingdom.

There is no reason, whatsoever, as to why the Kings should wish to be thought of as Sultans other than the reason that they in fact had accepted Islam as their religion. There is no example anywhere in the world where a non-Muslim king wanted him to call a Muslim king.

The court language or official language of a country signifies that it is the language of the

rulers. The court language of Moghul India was Persian, although the languages in vogue of the vast majority of the Indians were non-Persian. So was the court language of Bengal Sultans; it was Persian whereas their subjects spoke different languages. Had the rulers of Arakan been not Muslims establishment of Persian as a court language and flourishing of Islamic values with far-reaching repercussion on the socio-cultural life of the people of Arakan would not have happened.

At present, in Arakan, as in other countries and even in States with overwhelming Muslim majority not a single non-Muslim could be found bearing Muslim name. But when one is converted to Islam, only then, he keeps a Muslim name attached to his old ancestral non-Muslim name. A Magh Buddhist of Arakan, Shwe Lu Maung, who converted to Islam recently serves as a good example. He is now popularly known with the name Shah Nawaz Shwe Lu Maung. This is a tradition practiced since long long ago. One can find names similar to that of Muslims among the people of the Book only, i.e. Jews and Christians who also trace their common ancestral origin to Prophet Abraham.

There are also indirect evidences corroborating the assertion that the kings of Arakan bearing Muslim names were in fact Muslims. A relevant portion of information contained in the Dutch Dagh register in Batavia runs as follows: "Another important demand is for the extradition to Batavia of all the children born to the Dutch of Arakanese mothers ... It had been reported at Batavia that these children were being brought up as Muslims and the pious Dutch Calvinists were extremely horrified".<sup>21</sup> The children of Dutch whose fathers are away must have been under the loving care of the State. If the rulers were Buddhists, they should well be brought up as Buddhists. Since they are reported to be brought up as Muslims the rulers of Arakan therefore must have been Muslims.

Apart from the position of ruler many important posts like Chief Minister, Senior Ministers, Secretaries, Governors, Qazis, Court-poets and Army Generals are also occupied by Muslims. The Chief Minister of Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudamma), according to the Dagh register of Dutch in Batavia, was a Muslim named Lascar Zuzil<sup>22</sup>/ Lascar Wazir. According to Guerreiro, a certain 'Rumi' exercised considerable power over the king. The works of Daulat Qazi and Alawal give references to a number of Muslims holding important posts mentioned above by persons eg. Lashkar Wazir, Ashraf Khan, Qureishi Magan Thakur, Suleiman, Sayed Musa, Sayed Mohammed Khan, Navraj Majlis, Sayed Shah etc.<sup>23</sup>

A characteristic feature, however, for most of the period, remained that the Muslim kings belong to the indigenous royal lineage whose root goes back to the remote past of Arakan whereas other posts including important ones are found to be occupied by later immigrants like Arabs, Egyptian, Syrian, Turkish, Abyssinian, Rumi (Byzantian), Khorasani, Uzbek, Northern Indian, Deccanian, Assamese, Bangalee, Kotanese, Achenses, Cochinese, Central Asians and host of nationalities.<sup>24</sup>

Islamic historical monuments built during the time of Arakan kings are existing till today. The *Magya mosque* or *Musa mosque* situated on the hill near the present Maung

Tha Gon village, Northeast of Mrohaung, was built in 14th century; the *Sandikhan mosque* situated at village Kawalong near Mrauk-U (Mrohaung) was built by Gen. Sandi Khan in 15th century (1433); the *Alam Lashkar mosque* was built in 1668 at Pan Mraung village near modern Minbya township; the Shuja Mosque was built by Prince Shah Shuja in 1661 at Mintayabyin at Mrauk-U; the *Qazi mosque* was built by famous Qazi of Minbya township near Krit mountain; the Qazi mosque of Zaliyapara at Kyauktaw township and *Musa Dewan mosque*, the biggest mosque of Akyab, were built in 17th century.<sup>25</sup>

Many Buddhist kings of Mrauk-U era built pagodas, monasteries and stupas. But after the country was occupied by Bodawphaya in 1784, he razed to the ground a number of mosques and madarassahs. Even the Royal library was burnt to ashes destroying invaluable relics belonging to Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic periods. Bodawphaya had constructed more pagodas and monasteries in Arakan, particularly on the site of demolished Islamic structures, with a view to changing the face of Arakan and give it a Buddhistic appearance. That is why stone-plates and stone-tablets with Arabic or Persian inscriptions could be retrieved from inside the pagodas or monasteries till today.<sup>26</sup>

The kingdom of Arakan had come in close cultural contact with the Muslim Sultanat of Bengal since the fifteenth century. When there was political turmoil as a result of the break-up of the Afghan state in Bengal, and gradual advance of Moghuls, Afghan nobles and other Muslims of rank and position fled towards the eastern most districts of Bengal. Quite a few of these people found shelter at the Arakan court where they filled up important positions in the government. Under the patronage of these men a number of such immigrant Muslim intellectuals continued the cultivation of Bengali literature.<sup>27</sup>

The Muslim poet who found patronage at Arakan court in the seventeenth century the most notable are Daulat Qazi (Qadi), Alaol (Al Awwal?), Magan Siddiqi (Thakur) and Mardan. Daulat Qazi wrote his *Sati Mayna O Lor Chandrani* at the request and under the patronage of Ashraf Khan, described as a Hanafi Muslim who was the adviser and defence minister of Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudamma) 1622-1638.<sup>28</sup>

Daulat Qazi speaks very highly of his patron Ashraf Khan who patronised many other Muslim immigrants -- Sayyids, Shaikhs, Mughals and Pathans -- besides others from among Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Sudras. Daulat Qazi died before he could complete the work which was subsequently completed by Alawal. Alawal's father was a courtier or minister of Majlis Qutb of Fathabad (Faridpur). Once, while going by through one of the rivers in lower Bengal the father and son were attacked by the Portuguese pirates. The father was killed in the battle that ensued while Alawal was wounded and taken prisoner. Later on he found himself in Arakan where he became a cavalry officer of the Arakan king. Besides being a good soldier, however, Alawal was a great scholar, poet and musician, having perfect command of a number of languages: Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi. Soon his qualities attracted the notice of Magan Siddiqi (Thakur), who was chief minister of two successive Arakan kings from 1645 to 1660.<sup>29</sup> Magan was himself a man of learning and a poet. He had Alawal released from the cavalry, took him under his patronage at court, and commissioned him to render into Bengali the

*Padmavati*, a famous Hindi romantic epic by Malik Mohammed Jaisi. Alawal accomplished the work with consummate ability and unlike Jaisi, who had embossed his story with mystic ideas and supernatural ornamentation, gave prominence to human life and activities. Alawal's *Padmavati* was completed most probably in 1651. His next work was *Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal*, based on the same romantic story in the famous Arabian Nights. It was completed most probably in 1655-1659. This was followed by the composition of *Half-Paikar* (seven portraits) based on the Persian poet Nizam Ganjabi's work of the same name. It was completed after the Moghul prince Shah Shuja's flight to Arakan in 1660, which is mentioned in the work. Alawal was thrown into prison for his suspected but unfounded complicity with Shah Shuja. After a short time, however, the poet was released and was restored to favour at the instance of an influential Qadi named Masud Shah and a minister at the Arakan court named Sulaiman Siddiqi.<sup>30</sup> At the latter's request Alawal composed the *Tuhfa* on the basis of Yusuf Gada's Persian work of the same name. It deals with the injunctions and observances of Islam. The work was completed the remaining portion of Daulat Qazi's *Sati Mayna O Lor Chandrani*. In his old age Alawal received the patronage of Majlis Navaraj, an important noble or minister at the Arakan court.<sup>31</sup> At his instance Alawal rendered into Bengali Nizam Ganjabis famous work *Sikandarnama*, which is a collection of enchanting stories that had developed in Persia round Alexander's expeditions. Besides these works Alawal also composed a number of mystical and lyric poems, mostly in his old age. Though his principal works were mainly in the nature of translation or adaptation from Persian works, Alawal recreated much in the process. He was undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of Bengali literature.

Alawal's patron Magan Thakur also was a poet of no small merit. He was a Muslim born of a Siddiqi family; but the title of Thakur was conferred on him by the Arakan ruler who used to confer that title on persons of the highest rank and distinction. Magan was well versed in Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Bengali. Only one of his poetical compositions, the *Chandravati*, has hitherto been discovered. It is the story of love between prince Birbhan with princess Chandravati and possesses considerable literary merit. Magan died most probably in 1660. One of his contemporaries and for sometime a contemporary of poet Daulat Qazi, was poet Mardan. He states his birth-place to be Kanchipuri in Arakan<sup>32</sup> where there lived, according to his description, a number of Ulama and Shaikhs together with Brahmans and Kayasthas who were engaged in literary activities. He wrote an epic entitled *Nasib Nama* which is somewhat original in nature in that it is not based on any Arabic or Persian work but on contemporary social life. The literary tradition established at Arakan by those poets continued for long till at least the end of the eighteenth century when we come across another important Muslim poet named Abdul Karim Khandakar. He says that his great grandfather, Rasul Mia, was a custom officer under the Arakan King, while his grandfather, Masan Ali, was well-versed in different languages so that he acted as an interpreter at the port in connection with foreign ships and merchants that used to come there. Abdul Karim's father Ali Akbar also was a man of learning. Abdul Karim received the patronage of one wealthy merchant named Sadiq Nana Atiabar. At his request Abdul Karim translated into Bengali a Persian work entitled *Dulla Majlis* in 1789. Previously he had composed two other works, *Hajar Masail* and *Tamam Anjari*, also on the basis of Persian work. Speaking about a village named Bandar in Roshang (Arakan)

Abdul Karim says "There lived in that village *qadis, muftis, ulama*, religious fakirs and darvishes. Those high-ranking Muslims living there used converse with the king on equal and friendly terms. Whenever a poor man happened to visit the village, he was never returned empty handed. For saying prayers a mosque was built there by Sadiq Nana Atiabar. For this act he became well-known in the society. There gathered a good number of *Ulama* in the village who supervised the regular saying of prayers. One of them was appointed Khatib, while another was appointed Imam (respectively for Jum'a and daily prayers).<sup>33</sup>

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## **Chapter VI - Arakan under Bodawphaya (1784-1824)**

The fall of Mrauk-U was a mortal blow to the Rohingyas for everything that was materially and culturally Islamic was razed to the ground.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of Muslims and nationalist Buddhists were put to death. At least 20'000 captives<sup>2</sup> including Muslim soliders, artisans and technicians were herded away to central Burma across Arakan hills, hundreds of them dying on the way. As for the Buddhists, their revered *Mahamuni* image was taken away to Burma. This image still exists at the Arakan pagoda in the town of Mandalay. Bodawphaya's army also took away rare Buddhist and Hindu inscriptions and relics.

Bodawphaya's 40-year rule over Arakan was marked with unprecedented tyranny and cruelty. People were forcibly conscripted for army service and engaged in forced labour. Collection of tax was beyond common men's ability. Thousands of Arakanese captives had to work as slaves for seven full years in the construction of a pagoda in Burma. Bodawphaya's repeated demand for forced labour and conscript service and the rapacity of his local officials drove the Arakanese into desperate resistance<sup>3</sup> and thousands of them to flee across the border into Chittagong district. By 1798, two thirds of the inhabitants of Arakan were said to have deserted their native land. In one year alone, 1798, a body of not less than ten thousand entered Chittagong followed soon after by many more.<sup>4</sup> The East India Company made no objection to the settlement of these people in the southern parts of the district, partly on ground of humanity, partly because the district was sparsely populated and an increase in the number of inhabitants was welcome.

In 1811, one Chinbyan, an Arakanese refugee popularly known as *King Bering* organised a rebellion against the Burmans. He mustered considerable number of forces, made necessary perparation in the Company's territory, crossed the border into Arakan and laid siege to Mrohaung. Although he failed to take Mrohaung by force, but he induced the garrison to capitulate on the condition that the lives and properties of its inhabitants should be spared.<sup>5</sup> However, after the surrender of the garrison he put to death many Burman soldiers, their families and their Arakanese supporters. By the middle of 1811, the whole of Burmese province of Arakan corresponding roughly to the modern district of Akyab was in Chinbyan's hands. This caused straining of relation between the

Burmans and the British.

At the end of the rainy season the Burmans made preparation to recover their lost domain. Troops were being collected, and the province of Pegu had been directed to provide 3000 men for the purpose. Two bridges had been fitted out to carry six six-pounder guns and two hundred men, in addition to a ship commanded by an Englishman named Taylor. On 6th December 1811, this fleet departed from Rangoon, followed a week later by a flotilla which was to effect a junction with a second flotilla at Bassein. The Burman land force, drawn partly from Pegu and partly from Upper Burma, concentrated at Negaris, whence they marched to Sandoway; there they embarked and went up the coast to Ramree. Then they set out by sea to look for the insurgents. They found ten thousand men in 300 armed boats among the islands near Cheduba, under the command of Chinbyan. In the fight which ensued the Arakanese sustained a severe defeat, with the loss of 200 boats and Chinbyan managed to rally the remnants of his force; he gallantly returned to renew the fight with a division of only 100 boats, but was again defeated with the loss of half of his flotilla. The Burmans then occupied Cheduba. Chinbyan and his followers made their escape across the frontier.<sup>6</sup>

The Burmans were now making frequent incursions across the frontier in hot pursuit of the rebels and refugees. They even threatened the Company's government that they would send a large force and with French assistance overrun the country from Teknaf to Dhaka unless the Arakanese rebel chiefs are surrendered. However, diplomatic initiative was taken by the Company to diffuse the tension while strengthening Chittagong. More reinforcement came from Calcutta. When the rain began the Burmans withdrew to Mrohaung so was the Company's posts to Ramu.

Taking advantage of the absence of troops on both sides of the frontier Chinbyan planned a second invasion of Arakan. He crossed the Naf and took possession of the Burman stockade at Maungdaw and defeated a small Burman detachment in the neighbourhood; but were soon routed again by the Burmans. The Arakanese fled with their boats but many had sunk. Once more the surviving Arakanese fled to the district of Chittagong. The situation of a few months before was now repeated, the Arakanese seeking refuge, in the Company's territory and Burmans demanding their surrender.

Chinbyan had become a headache for the Company. He was ordered to be arrested but no one can catch hold of him. In November, 1812 the followers of Chinbyan occupied Cox's Bazar and made the town their headquarters. There he started building ships for his next descent on Arakan. In the same month the Company's forces stationed at Ramu and dispatched from Chittagong launched a joint attack on the forces of Chinbyan dislodging them from their headquarters. Chinbyan crossed the border and assembled his men at Minglagyi and advanced into Arakan towards Mrohaung. But they were intercepted by the Burmans and defeated. Chinbyan with about 150 men made his way up one of the upper branches of the Naf. The Burmans followed the scattered bands of his fleeing men to frontier; and once more difficulties arose over the incursions of Burman troops into Chittagong in pursuit of the rebels. The problem of Chinbyan and Burman incursion continued until Chinbyan died in 1815.<sup>7</sup>

After the death of Chinbyan the Burmans began a series of petty and irritating outrages upon British subjects. Repeated attacks were made upon elephant hunters in the public service, and the people were killed or carried off and sold as slaves, though following their avocations within British boundaries. A claim was set up to the possession of the small island of Shahapuri at the mouth of the Naf although it had been for many years in the undisputed occupation of the East India Company. Tolls were levied upon boats belonging to Chittagong; and in one occasion, the demand being resisted, the Burmans fired upon some boatmen and killed one of them. This act of violence was followed by the assemblage of armed men on the eastern side of the Naf. The people of southern Chittagong passed their days in fear and consternation. On the night of 24th September, 1823 the Burmans proceeded to enforce their claim to Shahapuri; a thousand men landed on the island; overpowered the guard, killed and wounded several of the party, and drove the rest off the island.

The condition of Arakan during Bodawphaya's rule is summarised in nutshell by Harvey as follows:

"From the very first year of its conquest, 1785, Arakan had been in turmoil. It was no unusual thing for a Burmese outpost to have to run for their lives; terrible reprisals were exacted but the trouble continued. The Arakanese had very excuse: they were rebelling not against government but against tyranny. Thus they would be called in to the various garrison headquarters on the pretext of disarming them and when they arrived the Burmese would wound them up and massacre them. Quite apart from extortionate revenue, there were continual exaction of human cattle. Thus 3'000 men were called to work on the Meiktila lake and none ever returned. 6'000 were dragged away to serve against Chiangmai, where they died of disease in numbers. When in 1797, 2'000 more were required to work on the Mingun pagoda, the people beat the war drum and rose wholesale. Year after year the fighting never ceased, while thousands flocked in terror across the English frontier to Chittagong, where folk could go to bed at night without wondering if throats were going to be cut in the morning. Arakan had never been populous, and now it became a desert; the towns were deserted and overgrown with jungle, and there was nothing to be seen but "utter desolation ..... morass, pestilence and death".<sup>8</sup>

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## **Chapter VII - Arakan under British Occupation**

### **The First Anglo-Burman War (1823-25)**

The Burman forces abandoned Shahapuri island after temporary occupation. An attempt by the British to set up an Anglo-Burmese frontier commission failed.<sup>1</sup> Then in January, 1824 Burman general Bandoola took over the command in Arakan and began to concentrate troops for a march on Chittagong. The Burmans had been led grossly to underestimate British power. They failed to realize that the Indian situation was the real cause of the weakness shown in the Chittagong area, and that, until the Marathas were decisively defeated, the Government of India was not in a position to take a strong line on its eastern frontier.

The Burman Army under Bandoola began operations by crossing Naf and routing a small detachment of Company's troops. Meanwhile British troops staged a sea-borne invasion of Lower Burma from an assembly point in the Andaman islands without a blow to the complete surprise of the Burmans. The news of the British capture of Rangoon put a stop to Bandoola's advance in India. Two Burman generals were sent successively to retake Rangoon but failed and Bandoola was called to expel the invaders. Bandoola marched with an army of 60'000 men and a considerable artillery train. His two main attacks were repulsed and was forced to retreat to Danubyu. On 1st April 1825, while attempting to hold Danubyu, Bandoola was killed in action.<sup>2</sup> Early in 1825 Mrohaung was taken and soon afterwards Cheduba and Sandoway occupied.<sup>3</sup> Thus Arakan came under the effective sway of the British in 1825.

### **British rule over Arakan (1825-1947)**

In 1826, when British assumed the task of ruling Arakan conditions were unsettled and remained so for some years. A widespread revolt against Britishers was put down in 1836<sup>4</sup> and the country began really to settle down. At first the two provinces of Arakan and Tannasserim were separately administered under the direct supervision of the Governor-General of India; but Arakan was soon transferred to the Government of Bengal and its Superintendent subordinated to the Commissioner of Chittagong. The Indian system of administration was introduced there with almost exclusively Indian experience. Before long, however, Arakan had its own Commissioner and was placed under at his disposal.<sup>5</sup> The administration was reorganised. Under the Commissioner the district officer, styled senior assistant to the Commissioner of Arakan, and now called Deputy Commissioner, performed the duties of a District Magistrate, Judge and Collector; under him was Junior Assistant Commissioner, who exercises similar powers except those of hearing appeals. There was also a native revenue officer known as *Myothugyi* who superintended all revenue affairs of the district. Under the *Myothugyi*, there are *Kyun-oks* who collect revenue from their respective circles. Under *Kyun-oks* are *Ywa-gaung* or village head. This arrangement was, however, reorganised from time to time. Township officers (T.O.) were appointed for each townships and every T.O. was

Magistrate, Judge and Assistant collector within his jurisdiction.<sup>6</sup>

The introduction of rule of law did contribute much to the welfare of the people. Official oppression and extortion became illegal, banditry was far more energetically suppressed than before, and security of life and property became a recognised feature of the new regime. With the return of peace Arakanese people who had earlier been driven out by the Burmans or escaped during the war and settled in mostly southern district of Chittagong, started to return to their former homes in Arakan. That phenomenon of movement of Arakanese people was summarised by Phayre as follows: “Numbers of descendants of those who fled in troublous times from their country and settled in southern part of Chittagong, the islands of the coast, and even the Sundarbans of Bengal are gradually returning; and during the northeast monsoon boats filled with men, women and children, with all their worldly goods, may be from Bengal, to return to the land of their fathers abandoned thirty or forty years before”.<sup>7</sup>

It is totally misleading and ill-motivated to allege that bulk of the Muslims entered Arakan during British era. The fact is that many Muslim families, who had earlier been driven out by the Burmans, have returned to their homes in Arakan when peace prevailed there as explained by Phayre. But, since 1942 anti-Muslim riot till today as a result of continuous ethnic cleansing operations, as many as a million Rohingyas have been forced to leave Arakan.

The British government improved communication system of Arakan to certain extent, on which depended the exploitation of its vast agricultural resources. The Arakan Flotilla Company's launches (steam ships) plied all over the inland waters of Akyab district communicating Akyab with every township headquarters (including Maungdaw partly by road). This Company also maintained services between Akyab and Paletwa, the headquarters of the hill districts of Arakan, and the districts of Kyaukpyu and Sandoway. The land communication was poorly developed owing to the multiplicity of waterways. A steam tram line was constructed between Buthidaung on Mayu and Maungdaw on Naf, by the Arakan Flotilla Company with the objective of connecting up their steamer services on these two rivers. There was no railway in Arakan. The Indo-Burma connection railway carried out surveys and actually started Chittagong-Akyab line but it stopped short of Maungdaw.

With the improvement of communication Akyab became a thriving trading centre. Every year seasonal labourers (Feb. to May) from neighbouring Chittagong used to come to Arakan to work in the fields who usually returned to their homes at the end of the season. Many traders also did enter Arakan for business but they confined mainly to the capital city Akyab. Most of the immigrants who entered Arakan during British rule returned during Second World War and the rest in the aftermath of Ne Win's anti-foreigners drive in late sixties.

### **Anti-colonial nationalist movement**

The Britishers completed annexation of whole Burma in 1885. An organisation named

Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) led by students of Rangoon college was established in 1906 originally intended to promote Buddhism and education and to render social service.<sup>8</sup> The YMBA started taking political resolutions as early as 1917. The YMBA converted itself into the General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA) which was more broad-based and a symbol of Burmese nationalism. The GCBA fought with the British government for the rights of the Burmese. Meanwhile anti-foreigners hatred had been fanned by GCBA and other quarters, particularly Buddhist monks. Fiery speeches were delivered to drive out the Indians and loot their properties. Anti-Indian riots broke out in 1930 in Rangoon. Around 1930 a new organisation, Do Ba Ma Asiayone (Our Burman Association), was founded by young university students calling themselves *Thakins* (masters) who sent a wave of anti-Indian thrill throughout the country.<sup>9</sup> Burmese Buddhist masses are unable to distinguish native Muslims like Rohingyas of Arakan, Zerbades of central Burma, Panthays of eastern Burma and Bashus of southern Burma from general Indians who entered during colonial era and attacked them indiscriminately.

In the meantime Burman religious and political leaders came to Arakan to organise the Arakanese Maghs into Thakin Party. The objective of Thakin Party is to free Burma from British occupation. However, the Thakins infused are Muslim hatred in the minds of Arakan Maghs during the struggle for independence Burma with the ulterior motive of dividing the two sister communities. When the question of 'separation' arose, the British government invited 24 delegates representing various communities of Burma to a 'Burma Round Table Conference' held in London from November 27, 1931 to January 12, 1932. No representatives of the Rohingyas were invited as the Britishers counted them within the Indian community. Mr. Tun Aung Gyaw, a Magh Buddhist Thakin, led the Arakanese delegation.<sup>10</sup>

With the separation of Burma from British India, and granting of 'Home Rule' (internal self government) in 1937, the Thakins got full control of the administration. Just one year after the separation in 1938, anti Muslim riot broke out again in Rangoon. Aung San, leader of Thakin Party, paid a secret visit to Arakan around the same time where he attended a conference held at Myebon township. He discussed with Arakanese Buddhist leaders his strategy of gaining independence of Burma including his policy towards the Rohingyas of Arakan. When the Second Great World War started in Europe, Burma was declared by its Governor to be automatically at war with Axis powers. Aung San and his thirty comrades secretly went to Japan where they formed Burma Independence Army (BIA) under the patronisation of Japanese. The Japanese bombed Rangoon on December 23, 1941. The Britishers withdrew from Burma and Arakan into India. The first group of BIA men led by Ne Win (Ex-Gen.Ne Win) reached Rangoon in early months of 1942 via Moulmein. This caused great consternation in the minds of Indians in proper Burma and Rohingyas in Arakan. The Indians had already started to flee Burma through all available routes.

### **The Muslim Massacre of 1942**

When the British withdrew, the administration of Arakan Division was entrusted to a Magh Buddhist, U Kyaw Khine, who was vested with the power of Commissioner of

Arakan Division. This made the Maghs extremely happy. The Thakins who had been wanted by the government for various crimes came out of their hiding and started indulging in looting and plunder. Muslims were their natural victims. Before the Japanese bombed Akyab most of the Muslims from different towns and villages left for their homes for fear of the rumor of an imminent anti-Muslim rioting going to break out in Akyab.

The Japanese bombed Akyab on March 23, 1942 killing many British, Gorkha, Rajput and Karen soldiers. Many British soldiers left leaving behind a large quantity of assorted arms. Some misguided Karens sold or gave arms to the Magh fanatics bolstering their strength.<sup>11</sup> The Thakins also seized all the arms of Township Officers, Police officers, and Police constables which were left by the British to take care of the security of the public. Moreover the Magh Commissioner, U Kyaw Khine, supplied the Thakins a boat-load of arms and ammunition at Kyauktaw and Minbya.<sup>12</sup> Thakins had also seized all the licensed firearms of the Muslims. Now the Thakins have become well armed whereas the Muslims are left barehanded only with the spirit of *Iman* (faith). The Muslims have utterly failed to recognise the impending disaster. They nurtured fanciful thoughts of facing the enemy and some even hoped that they would be protected by their Magh friends. The Muslims were not organised and there was no one to guide them.

In the meantime full preparations were being made by the Maghs to attack the Muslims. They held a secret meeting at Minbya and came out with the following resolutions:<sup>13</sup>

1. There shall be three categories of Thakin militia holding the gun, the sword and the club;
2. The Chief Commander of these forces shall be San Kyaw Aung; Second in Command shall be Maung Kyaw and Tun Hla Aung; but the order of attack shall come from President Thakin Tha Zan Hla and Vice-President U Pho Khine, and
3. The aims and objectives were as follows:
  - a) to support the Japanese against British colonialists in the battle for Autonomy of Arakan;
  - b) to drive out the Kalas ..... white Kalas (Britishers) and black kalas (Indians) .... and to confiscate their properties for the welfare of Maghs and
  - c) to allow the Rohingyas and Kamans to stay who settled in Arakan for generations, but to drive out them too like Chittagonians if their activities prove undesirable.

The resolution to allow the Rohingyas and Kamans to stay is just an eyewash for that section of Magh Buddhists who harbour a soft corner for the Muslims living side by side with them for generations. Actually the conspiracy to wipe out the whole Muslim population of Arakan, irrespective of their ethnic origin, had been hatched by the Thakin leaders of Burma and their Arakan partners long ago. The Thakins saw that the independence of Burma was coming very soon and if the Muslims could not be finished during this chaotic and anarchic situation, they would remain as a permanent headache in the post-independent Burma. The Magh Buddhists of Arakan had been deluded by the

Thakins that the Muslims are a serious threat to their Buddhist religion. In fact it is the machination of the Burmans to divide the two sister communities forever so that it could be easier to rule a divided people and make Arakan their permanent colony. But the misguided Maghs have their grudge against the Muslims and preferred to live under Burman domination rather than enjoy freedom together with the Muslims. Now, except Akyab, the whole countryside fell under the sway of the rapacious Thakin. Looting of Hindu and Chittagonian Muslim shops started just after the British withdrawal. Most of these people fled away. The Rohingyas were ordered to warn their Chittagonian Muslim brethren to quit or that they would also not be spared. Almost all of those people left. But the cunning Maghs would not stop. Bazars after Bazars of the Muslims have been looted indiscriminately.

The Thakin leaders of Arakan namely U Pinnya Thiha (Buddhist monk), U Tha Zan Hla, U San Kyaw Aung and U Maung Kyaw etc. gave orders to carry out general massacre of the Muslims. Thus started the barbaric Muslim massacre on 28th March 1942. The Thakins fell upon the innocent Muslims of village Chanbilli under Minbya township. The Muslims fought tooth and nail. But they could not withstand the onslaught of the Thakins whose rifles overpowered their local firearms. The plunder, slaughter and rape of the Maghs and their Thakin masters during the assault was so great; hundreds of innocent men, women and children were murdered. The Rohingyas were defeated. Many people of the village jumped into the river or hid in the forest. The swimming people were shot dead. With their long swords the inhuman Maghs brutally butchered the half dead men, women and children. Those alive in the slaughter were stabbed with the pointed spears and cut into pieces. Rohingya girls and women after having been raped were murdered and the children were mercilessly slaughtered. The Maghs of the neighbourhood carried away their cattle, rice, paddy and even clothes. Costly things like gold and silver were taken by the Thakin leaders and other booties were given to savage plunderers. The waters of Lemro river turned red with the blood of innocent victims.

The next day on 29th March the thigh tattooed Maghs attacked Lombaissor. The Rohingyas resisted most gallantly but they were overpowered. Many men, women and children got killed. Many women in order to save their modesty threw themselves into the river. Some people swam across the river and escaped towards Patthari Qilla. At one river crossing point known as Taungyinyo ghat the Maghs stopped the fleeing Rohingyas; stripped them of their valuables first, and were mercilessly slaughtered. Beautiful girls and women were taken away to houses and after satisfying their sexual enjoyment for a few days killed them. At the Taungyinyo ghat approximately 15,000 lives fell victim to the sword of the ruthless Maghs. Also about 10,000 men, women and children were blocked at the mouth of 'Afaqer dala', a mountain pass linking Apawkwa (Afaq) in the east with Rathedaung in the west. All of them were killed there.

After destroying Chanbilli and Lombaissor in Minbya township the Thakins attacked the flourishing Muslim villages of Myebon township, namely Raischaung and Pankha on April 1, 1942. About half of the 15,000 Rohingyas of these two villages were massacred. Attempts were made to carry out massacre at Kyauknimaw near Ramree township, but they were saved in a miraculous way. The Muslims of Kyaukpyu town acquired the help

of some British troops stationed there and got saved. On April 8, 1942 the Thakins attacked Baharpara of kyauktaw. Countless Muslims were killed. Then the thugs went on rampaging the villages of Mahamuni, Paktoly (Pauktaw), shotily (Minchaung), Bargoapara (Alaygyun), Nayashar (Myauktaung), Ambari, Fidapara, Afaq (Apaukwa), Kazipara and Rwangya para. The richest man of Afaq, Abeddin, fled away leaving behind his wealth. Before the Magh's carnage he used to say 'the Maghs are like dogs; if you throw bones at the dogs they are silenced. Similarly if you give money to the Maghs they would not harm you'. But, Alas! at the last moment his wealth could not save him. Although he narrowly escaped the massacre he had to breathe his last in refugee camps at Rangpur, needy and broken hearted.

Meanwhile the Muslims from Ataraung and Ponnagri evacuated and fled under the threat of Thakin attack. Muslim villages east of Akyab city like Chandama, Meeurkul, Quiniprang, Solipara, Toenpara and Taukpho and villages of Pauktaw township were under constant threat of the Tahkins. Similarly Rohingya villages of Todaing, Nonakhali, Zolapara, Ziza and Kim were targeted by Thakins for pillage and destruction.

At the end of April the onslaught swept over the township of Rathedaung and Buthidaung. The villages up to kwason in the township of Buthidaung were destroyed and burnt down. Taung bazar, north of Buthidaung, and surrounding villages also came under Magh attack who burned many of them. Three fourth of the Muslims in the Rathedaung township were massacred. The Muslim villagers of Lengwin (Mrawchaung) fought the Maghs heroically with only one D.B. gun. The Rohingyas of Prinkong crossed the Mayu river by country-boats and reached Akyab island. On their way the Maghs fired at them drowning many people. Muslims from Mozi, Anauk prang and Kodaung villages of Rathedaung township fled to take refuge in Akyab. Bulk of the Muslims from Mayurtek, Zofrang and Razarbil had already left their villages of Akyab. By the mercy of Allah the Muslims of Akyab had the opportunity of acquiring some arms and training to defend themselves from the marauders. Both offensive and defensive preparations of the Muslims in Akyab frightened the Maghs to the extent that they could not dare to attempt an onslaught. Some wicked Mahgs were also driven out of Zabbargyafara in Akyab.

The result of this Burman instigated anti-Muslim massacre in terms of physical and material loss is myriad. More than 100'000 Muslims were massacred. Thousands of Muslim villages were destroyed. The Muslim majority areas in the east of Kaladan river had turned into a Muslim minority area. But the loss in terms of human civilisation and moral values is much greater. The 1942 massacre impressed such an indelible black mark in the minds of Arakanese that the reminiscence of which shall serve as a constant source of impediment for a long way in the process of rapprochement between the two sister communities living together in Arakan from time immemorial.

### **Battle for Buthidaung ---- the turning point**

In the last week of April, 1942 as the onslaught of the Maghs was spreading like conflagration the Muslims of Kwason, Godumpara, Sindiprang, Ali Yong, Fuimali, Roingadaung and all other Muslim villages around Buthidaung gathered under the

leadership of prominent Muslims like Abdul Majid popularly known as Atura Raja of Fonduprang, Mir Ahmed Jonnal of Au Yong, Abdul Jabbar dubashi, Abul Baser chowdhury etc. to resist the advance of the Maghs. Meanwhile hundreds of valiant fighters under the leadership of persons like Master Sultan of Kiladaung and Noor Ahmed Jannal of Hancchurata also came from Maungdaw with their arms and ammunition and joined the main force at Buthidaung. Some Muslims who escaped from the jaws of death in the interior part of Arakan, now in the Muslim stronghold, are seething with rage to avenge the death of their near and dear ones. They took active part in the battle for Buthidaung.

The Muslims encircled the town of Buthidaung from all directions and laid an effective siege to it. Fighting started. The infidel Maghs and some Chinese were resisting from the bunkers of the police station and other government buildings. After a few days when the fall of Buthidaung became imminent the panicky Maghs of Buthidaung and the Chinese scrambled to board on the steamers at Buthidaung Arakan jetty kept standby for any eventuality. But the Maghs would not allow the Chinese families to board before evacuation of their lot; this attitude of Maghs enraged the Chinese so much so that they started firing shots at the steamers now full with Maghs ready to leave. As the frightened people dashed towards the safe side, the steamers turned upside down and sank. Two steamers thus sank at Arakan jetty with all the inmates drowned while another managed to escape. But it was intercepted by one Furuk Raja at Sindaung who sank it also. On hearing the news of sinking of the steamers the Magh defenders of Buthidaung dispersed and fled into the hills. Buthidaung was captured by the Muslims. Then the Muslims gave a hot pursuit to the fleeing Maghs. The report of the fall of Buthidaung halted the advance of Thakins from the east. The Muslims liberated all areas upto kwasone and Razarbil in the Rathedaung township. The Maghs of Maungdaw, afraid of possible reprisal from the Muslims, fled across the Naf river into British controlled territory. Muslim and Buddhist refugees from the affected area were sheltered at Rangpur and Dinajpur in the erstwhile Bengal by the British government. Then the whole area under Maungdaw townsip, Buthidaung township and part of Rathedaung township were brought under the administration of Peace Committees set up by Muslims. Mr. Omrah Meah became head of the Peace Committees.

On May 1, 1942 the Japanese Imperial Army (JIA) led by Gen. Esa Goda and Burma National Army (formerly BIA) Arakan Front led by Bo Ran Aung marched to Minbya town from Prome in the lower Burma across Arakan Yoma. Minbya town was the headquarters of Japanese supporting Thakins in Arakan. The Maghs and Buddhist monks of Minbya gave them a rousing reception and vowed to help JIA occupy Akyab. On 3rd May Japanese troops and BNA men reached Ponnagyun a few miles northeast of Akyab. British navy stationed in the Kaladan river shelled Japanese positions and the Japanese returned fire. On 5th May British navy was withdrawn and the Japanese advanced towards Akyab via Pauktaw. Akyab was occupied by the Japanese on 7th May without any resistance.

On the very day BNA led by Bo Ran Aung also entered Akyab and brutally killed 30 Muslims of Ambari and Manupara.<sup>14</sup> The frightened villagers left their houses. BNA

troops and Maghs entered the villages and carried away all the belongings of the Muslim villagers including their cattles. But the presence of Japanese forces at Akyab helped considerably in saving the lives of the people from the marauders and thugs. An uneasy peace prevailed around Akyab area.

During the first half of May, a contingent of BNA with Thakin leaders cruised upstream in a patrol boat along Mayu river towards Buthidaung. They fired shots at the Muslims on the shore to frighten them. But a group of valiant Muslim fighters led by Ezhar Mian Chowdhury intercepted the patrol boat in between Sindiprang and Godumpara. In the ensuing encounter British appointed wartime Commissioner, U Kyaw Khine, was shot dead. The patrol boat did not proceed ahead and turned back. The Maghs and Japanese became furious over the news of the incident. But the Japanese calculated that without the support of the Muslims of Rathedaung, Buthidaung and Maungdaw it would be very difficult for them to complete the occupation of Burma and drive further westward. With this end in view the Japanese discussed with many influential Muslim elites of Akyab including Mr. Sultan Mahmood, leader, Mr. Mohammad Yasin, B.A.,B.L., Advocate and Thakin supporting U Po Khine (a) Nasiruddin. A delegation constituted by Mr. Mohammad Yasin and U Po Khine from the Muslim side and BNA officers Bo Yan Naung, Ho Yan Kin and Bo Myo Nyunt and some other Maghs, was sent to Maungdaw by the japs. The delegation had planned to hold a public meeting at Shikderpara on 8th June. Local Rohingya leaders headed by Tambi saheb met the delegation. In the meeting the BNA and Muslim leaders spoke for making peace between the two warring communities. They also argued that it would hamper the interest of the Muslims to go against the Japanese. Meanwhile local Muslims joined by refugees are seething with rage to see the infidels who carried out the carnage of the Muslims. Muslim leaders and Tambi saheb tried their best to control the Muslim zealots. It is to be noted that both groups in the meeting were equipped with firearms. In the ensuing hue and cry gun fire broke out suddenly. There was exchange of fire. Bo Yan Naung, Bo Yan Kin and Bo Myo Nyunt died from the Magh side whereas Inna Amin, Abu Hakkar, Habibullah, Molvi Abdus Salam and a son of Molvi Abdur Rahman died from the Muslim side. The rest of the Maghs fled. Both Moahmmad Yasin and Po Khine were arrested by BNA and taken to prison. Tambi saheb was also arrested and was confined at a secret place in Akyab. But the Japanese came to know, somehow, about the detention of the three Muslim leaders. They ordered Bo Ran Aung to immediately release them and as such he was compelled to do so.

The intercommunal and interreligious strife halted the Japanese advancement for a while,<sup>15</sup> but gradually they pushed northward along Mayu Peninsular and occupied Buthidaung and Maungdaw towns in October. The Japanese built a number of defensive positions in the area and reconnoitered the Indian frontier. The British had withdrawn already to the west of Naf river.

### **British re-entry into Arakan**

The British had their forward outposts at Cox's Bazar and Teknaf. A local intelligence organisation known as 'V force' was raised with recruits from local Muslims of Arakan.

Although they were, initially untrained later along the whole front 'V force' became an important and very valuable part of the intelligence framework for the British.<sup>16</sup> Before the campaign for Akyab actually began, British officers moved to the most possible forward areas in the Japanese Controlled areas; with the help of 'V force' gathered informations and later extended their activities to include minor raiding operations. Ninety-nine percent of the Arakan Muslims cooperated with the British because the Japanese are the friends of their arch enemy, the Maghs. There are a few Muslims who worked in the secret service of the Japanese also.

Starting from December 16, 1942 British troops made a major advance towards Akyab on both sides of the Mayu range, along the sea-coast and astride the Mayu river with a flanking detachment still farther east in the Kaladan valley. Although in the beginning it seemed all went well for the Britishers, they were met with heavy resistance from Japanese bunkers. In the subsequent battles that raged the British had to withdraw their forces to the north of Maungdaw-Buthidaung lateral road lying across Mayu range with heavy losses. The British forces again made necessary preparations and by November, 1943 they were ready to advance for Akyab. The whole year of 1944 saw actions between the two Armies in north Arakan, so fierce and rare, in the annals of military history. British and Japanese forces fought hand to hand at many places. The British forces are, man to man, no match to the Japanese in the jungle warfare but the Allied forces' superior military machine, manpower and logistic supply turned the tide in favour of them. Along with advances across the northwest India-Burma frontier British forces marched into Arakan and captured Akyab, Kyaukpyu and Sandoway around the end of 1944. In 1945 before August Lower Burma was cleared off of the Japanese. Thus Burma became again under complete control of the British. On August 6th, the first Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and on the 9th the second fell at Nagasaki. On 2nd September, 1945 the Japanese surrendered.

The British withdrawal and subsequent anti-Muslim rioting and war between the two great powers fought over Arakan resulted in immense loss to the Muslims with far reaching consequences. Muslims of Arakan were pushed to the north as a result of the communal riotings. A British officer who was in the Arakan front wrote: "The Arakan before the war had been occupied over its entire length by both Mussalman and Maugh. Then in 1941 the two sects set to and fought. The result of this war was roughly that the Maughs took over the southern half of the country and the Mussalman the northern".<sup>17</sup>

Their courage was praised by the same author in the following words: "They are a hardy and diligent people ... were they to get together, were they to be regimented and trained, I would go so far as to say that I would soon take a battalion of them into the fighting line as any other Native Battalion that I've seen or fought with, they are living in a hostile country and have been for hundreds of years, and yet they survive. They are perhaps to be compared with the Jews ...."<sup>18</sup>

The Arakan Muslims served the British soldiers very faithfully. They risked their lives, fought and died for the British perhaps thinking that their future lies in the victory of the British. The same author revealed his feeling about the immense contribution of these

people to the success of the British as follows: “Without these people we would have been blind and deaf. With them we have eyes and ears and continual entertainment. They make wonderful material for the fair-minded and far-seeing colonizer .... their future is in our hands. We have a chance of making a happy people and a fair state out of the Arakan. Any fairness, any kindness will be repaid us one hundred fold. I would very often wonder whether the fairness and help that they have shown us will be repaid as fully as it would have been had the boot been on the other foot”.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the tremendous sacrifice rendered to the British what the Rohingyas got in return is manifest today. Their successors are even denying Rohingyas to be the natives of Arakan.

### **Arakan at the eve of independence of Burma**

The British were pledge bound to grant independence of Burma according to the Atlantic Charter which promised independence to the Colonies that helped the Allied forces win the war. Aung San, the Burman national leader, who at first helped the Japanese invade his country switched allegiance in favour of the Allied forces in the last days of the British re-entry into Burma. After the Japanese surrender in 1945 and the victory of Allied forces in the war talks on granting independence to Burma resumed in full swing. The Alee-Aung San agreement was signed on January 27, 1947 at London which provided full independence within one year and elections within four months to set up Constituent Assembly.

Unfortunately, the fate of Arakan had been sealed long ago as a result of the attitude of the bigoted Maghs. They had already surrendered the independence of Arakan to the Thakins in return for their Cooperation to wipe out the Muslim population of Arakan. The communal riot that raged some times back had widened the gap of relationship between the two sister communities. Being weakened by division, the people of Arakan could not unitedly move for their future. Had there been unity of the two sister communities during the outbreak of war, had there been a real willingness from the part of Magh Buddhists to live together peacefully and had not the Maghs opted to remain under Burman rule, the independence of Arakan would not have remained as a dream. It would have come definitely true or at least, in the initial stage, it would have achieved ‘Autonomy’ leading ultimately to independence.

As the coming of independence was drawing near Muslim leaders of proper Burma differed in their opinion regarding their future political strategy in Burma. In December 24-26, 1945 an All Burma Burman Muslim Conference was held at Pyinmana where it was resolved to unite all the Burmese Muslim Organisations into a single body to be called The Burma Muslim Congress (BMC).<sup>20</sup> The conference decided not to move for a separate community representation for the Muslims in Burma defeating the proposal of General Council of Burma Muslim Association (GCBMA) with only one vote. Mr. Razak was elected the President of BMC.<sup>21</sup> The BMC decided to join Anti Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL) headed by Aung San as they believe that they are not different from Burman except in religion quite contrary to historical facts. But the GCBMA continued to move on its own for separate community representation. The Rohingyas of Arakan on account of their separate ethnicity, historical background and the prevailing

situation in Arakan had made their position clear to the British government. They asked the British government to recognise Muslim Arakanese as a separate nationality from that of Buddhist Arakanese and use its influence to grant them regional autonomy.

All the other nationalities of Burma like Karens, Kachins, Shans, Kayahs etc. did not readily support Aung San to join in a Burma Union given their past bitter experience with Burman people. They demanded either full independence or regional autonomy of their respective areas. The British government asked Aung San to achieve the consensus of all the nationalities of Burma as a precondition for granting independence. Aung San toured the whole country; talked with leaders of different nationalities and exchanged views with them. He promised them full freedom and guaranteed their security and preservation of their culture and religion under the formula of 'Unity in Diversity'. But frontier peoples were reluctant. In March, 1946 Aung San visited Akyab where he assured the Muslim leaders of their due rights in the post-independent Burma. He also sent a delegation comprising U Aung Zan Wai and Mr. Sultan Mahmood to Maungdaw and Buthidaung area to organise the Muslims to join AFPFL. But the Muslims refrained from joining Aung San's AFPFL given the Magh and Burman's discriminatory attitude and insisted on granting of Autonomy to them.

With much difficulty, however, Aung San had been able to convene a conference at Pang Long, Shan State, to negotiate the status of different communities in post-independent Burma. The historic Pang Long conference was held in the month of February, 1947. All nationalities except Rohingyas of Arakan were invited to the conference. Aung San had been emboldened to neglect the Rohingyas as a result of Mr. Razak's attitude who claimed to represent the whole Muslim population of Burma. U Aung Zan Wai, a Magh Buddhist, represented on behalf of the whole people of Arakan. Where all representatives fought tooth and nail for gaining their legitimate political rights of their respective areas the Magh representative of Arakan kept silent. The result was that Arakan remained under the rule of Burman dominated Central government in post-independent Burma.

As they were elbowed out from the political process and nothing came out positively from the side of the British government the Rohingyas had decided to send a delegation to Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah who was fighting for the independence of Pakistan. The Muslim delegation set out from Maungdaw and met Mr. Jinnah at Lahore in 1947. They appealed Jinnah either to fight for including north Arakan within Pakistan as Muslim majority area of the then British India or pressurise the Burman leader, Aung San, to grant autonomy to the Muslims of north Arakan.<sup>22</sup> But before the delegation actually met Mr. Jinnah a special envoy of Aung San, Mr. Rashid, a former minister in U Nu's Cabinet who was an immigrant Indian Muslim, had already met with Mr. Jinnah. The envoy assured Mr. Jinnah on behalf of Aung San that the rights of Arakan Muslims shall be constitutionally guaranteed. Mr. Jinnah, in turn, assured the Arakanese delegation that they had nothing to worry as he was convinced of the promise given to him by Aung San about the future of the Arakan Muslims. Thus the Arakan Muslims' case had gone in default. The Muslims waited in fear and thrill the coming of independence to Burma.

After the Pang Long conference, the first general elections for the Constituent Assembly was held countrywide in April 1947. But the provisional government of Burma deliberately excluded elections in north Arakan with various lame excuses. Thus the Muslims of Arakan were excluded from participation in the drafting of the first Constitution of Burma. Differences remained seriously between contending parties at the time of independence over ideological stand and sharing of power. The communists and Peoples Voluntary Organisation (PVO) went underground. In Arakan the ultra-nationalist Maghs who went underground after the British re-entry, now joined the communists and the PVO with the dream of gaining independence of Arakan.

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## **Chapter VIII - Why the Arakanese did not gain 'State'?**

In the Pang Long Conference regional autonomy, in the name of 'State', was granted to the Shan, Kachin, Karen and Kayah with right of secession after 10 years to the Shan and

the Kayah. The Chins were granted 'Special Division' status. The decision to grant the status mentioned above was based on the following qualifications.<sup>1</sup>

1. having a clear geographical boundary,
2. having a separate language other than Burmese,
3. having a separate historical background,
4. having a separate civilisation,
5. having economically viable enterprises and economically self-sufficient community,
6. having a fairly large population and
7. having the desire to maintain its distinct identity as a separate Unit.

In terms of the above qualifications Arakan is not behind any other States mentioned above. Rather, it has more positive and favourable points than others in qualifying for 'State'. But the Arakanese were deprived of the 'State' as their representative at Pang Long did not demand for it. However, the decision of the Arakan representative not to demand for a separate 'State' for Arakan did not reflect the desire of the majority of the people of Arakan. From the beginning of the independence struggle for Burma the "Arakanese Buddhists were in a better position to demand for a separate 'State' or raise the issue at appropriate forum but they had never been serious about it. Arakanese Buddhist members of the delegation led by Mr. Tun Aung Gyaw, had every opportunity to demand a separate State for Arakan at the 'Burma Round Table Conference' held in London (Nov. 1931 to January 1932). However they remained silent at the insistence of Burman delegates, while Shan and Kachin members of the delegation argued for their States with great force."<sup>2</sup>

In fact a secret agreement was reached between Aung San and Arakanese Buddhist leaders long ago to the effect that the Arakanese would not demand for 'State' till the Muslim problem is tackled and that Burmans would grant Arakanese 'State' after that. The presence of a majority Muslim population in Arakan was perceived by both Arakanese Buddhists and Burmans as a real problem. They felt that it would go against their interest if Arakan was granted 'State' before solving the Muslim problem. It was decided that all-out efforts shall be made to reduce the population of the Muslims which cannot be done alone by the Arakanese Buddhists without the support of the Burmans. When that goal would be achieved, in the course of time, the Arakanese Buddhists would have their own 'State'. Under this blueprint the 1942 anti-Muslim massacre was carried out. The objective was to drive out most of the Muslims beyond Naf river. They had been successful to certain extent. 100'000 people were killed; the eastern side of the river Kaladan had turned into Muslim minority area. But they could not fully achieve the target. Muslims could not be pushed further beyond Rathedaung and substantial number of Muslims remained in Akyab island and Mayu peninsular too. They were, by then, also strengthened with arms left by the British during war. That situation was felt dangerous by the Arakanese Buddhists to demand for 'State' at the eve of independence. So they preferred to remain under the Central government led by the Burmans in the post-independent era till the Muslim problem is fully tackled. By 1962 the situation for granting 'State to the Arakanese became more favourable; now that Mujahid rebellion

had already been crushed and the Magh Buddhists had advanced much in socioeconomic, education and political spheres of Arakan. As bulk of the Muslims were also confined under a frontier military administration Muslim danger no more existed. U Nu decided that it was time to honour the long awaited promise to the Arakanese Buddhists. But Ne Win's military coup deferred the implementation of the deal for some time more.

The fact of the Arakanese Buddhist leaders' unwillingness to achieve 'State' for Arakan at the eve of independence of Burma is proved beyond any doubt in the parliamentary debates concerning granting of 'State' to Arakan as mentioned hereunder:

In response to the submission of constitution amendment bill regarding granting of 'State' to Arakan in Parliament on Feb. 22, 1956 by U Ba Myaing of Ramree constituency, Government minister Bo Khin Maung Gale replied: "Before the death of Bogyoke Aung San in 1947 he considered the issue of Rakhaing nationals of Rakhaing division. He told the Rakhaing leaders they could decide whatever they liked, either to take 'State' like Shan and Kachin or remain under Proper Burma. The then Rakhaing leaders, Myochit Kyaw U and U Pinnya Thiha, believed it was not useful for the Rakhaings to have a separate 'State' and therefore they unanimously supported to keep Arakan as a 'Division' while drafting the Constitution".<sup>3</sup>

Ra-Ta-Nya (Rakhaing National United Organisation) member, U Hla Tun Pru, while submitting the constitution amendment bill for granting 'State' to Arakan on Feb. 19, 1958 told the Parliament that "Bogyoke Aung San had agreed to grant 'State' to Arakan. His statement was supported by member of Parliament U Paw Thin of Ponnagyun who claimed that Bogyoke Aung San in a meeting at Kyet Khine Tan village of Akyab told that Arakan had all the 4 characteristics of gaining 'State'.<sup>4</sup> In response to U Hla Tun Pru's proposed amendment of constitution bill for granting 'State' to Arakan Govt. minister U Ba Saw told the Parliament that while he was performing the affairs of Japanese revolution at Calcutta, he met and discussed with U Thein Pe Myint about the future of Arakan region. He discussed with him whether it would be good in all respects for that region to take Autonomous self-government, U Thein Pe Myint replied that since Arakan Division is historically and geographically a separate entity the people of Arakan have the right to ask for self-government. However, since the Rakhaing people and Burman people worked so intimately and was responsible for the weal and woe of Burma, by enjoying that right the Rakhaing will have no benefit and can't prosper as they would by continuing the present cooperation. U Ba Saw continued, before independence of Burma in 1946-1947, while the constitution was being drafted he met with ex-Chairman of Ra-Ta-Nya, U Ba Myaing, M.P., and discussed with him how to write the constitution for the progress and prosperity of Arakan Division, U Ba Myaing replied the same as U Thein Pe Myint.<sup>5</sup> U Ba Saw continued, in 1946-47 a meeting was held with Rakhaing AFPFL members and Rakhaing intellectuals living in Rangoon in the residence of U Kyaw Min. In the meeting it was discussed that the Shans, Kachins, Karens etc. are demanding for 'State'. For our Rakhaings whether it would be better to remain as in the present form or ask for self-government, U Kyaw Min, the then M.P., replied if 'State' was taken Arakan would have no fund. If there is no fund nothing can be done".<sup>6</sup> From the above Parliamentary debates we can easily draw the conclusion as to why Arakan did

not gain 'State'.

However, after the independence of Burma and as the situation of Rakhaings had improved day by day they demanded 'State' for Arakan. While the movement for achievement of Arakan State was launched in and outside the Parliament, Muslim MPs of north Arakan differed in their opinion regarding granting of 'State' to Arakan.

## **Reference**

1. Burma's Constitution by Maung Maung p. 231
2. Ibid p. 27
3. National Assembly (Pyithu Hlutaw) proceedings 9/5, No. 378 referred in Burma's politics, 1958-1962, Vol. III pp. 193, 202.
4. Second National Assembly proceedings 5/6 p. No. 250; Ibid p. 207
5. Second National Assembly proceedings p. 283; Ibid p. 208
6. Second National Assembly proceedings 5/6, p. 283-285; Ibid p. 208

## **Chapter IX - Arakan under post-independent Burma**

The coming of independence to Burma caused mixed reactions among the people of Arakan. The anti-Muslim Magh Buddhists were happy. They felt that they are now in a better position to deal with their arch enemy, the Muslims. They thought they could now carry out what they could not during the British period. They considered it as a triumph of Buddhism. A small section of them, however, felt sorry as the dream of an independent Arakan, with their kings and courtiers, is now seemed to be more remote than ever. They could perceive that they had gone now under a new, but, hidden colony.

### **The Mujahid insurrection**

Soon after independence, the Anti Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL) regime dismissed a great many Muslim officers and officials and replaced by Arakanese Buddhists<sup>1</sup> who increasingly offended the Muslim community, discriminating against them, putting their elders to ridicule and treating them arbitrarily. The authorities made no effort at all to correct the wrongs against Rohingyas.<sup>2</sup> The immigration authorities imposed limitations of movement upon Muslims from the regions of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung to Akyab. Thousands of Muslim refugees who were forced to flee in 1942 to India were not allowed to return. Their properties had been confiscated.<sup>3</sup>

The wounds of 1942 massacre was yet to be healed when the Muslims were meted out step-motherly treatment by the Burmans in 1947. Added to these grievances, the new harassment and atrocities inflicted upon the Muslims were just like throwing them from frying pan to the fire. The Muslims were becoming more certain now that their existence and survival is in great danger.

One Mohammad Jafar, popularly known as Jafar Kawal, a Japanese trained Rohingya, started organising the people. He ignited the conscience of the Muslim masses by singing lyrics of poet Iqbal of Indian sub-continent and urged them to sacrifice their property and lives in defence of their faith, honour and dignity. The Muslims readily responded. Jafar started recruiting and training Mujahids. But until 1949 no worth mentioning encounter took place between the Mujahids and the government forces.

In 1949, the new Burmese administration formed a frontier security force known as Burma Territorial Force (BTF) with local recruits. In Arakan 90% of the BTF was manned with Arakanese Buddhists particularly those who are sworn enemies of the Muslims. The BTF under the direction of the Deputy Commissioner of Akyab district, Kyaw U, a Magh, unleashed a reign of terror in the whole north Arakan. Muslim men, women and children were mowed down by machine gun fire. Hundreds of intellectuals, village elders and Ulema were killed like dogs and rats. Almost all Muslim villages were razed to the ground. The BTF massacre triggered refugee exodus into the then East Pakistan numbering more than 50,000 people.

As the demands of the Muslims to correct the injustices, and allow them to live as Burmese citizens according to the law, and not to subject them to arbitrariness and tyranny, were not listened the Mujahid insurrection gained momentum and spread quickly, for the central government was busy putting down rebellion that broke out in other places in Burma and was unable to devote itself to Arakan.<sup>4</sup> The government, however, made some attempts to negotiate with the rebels. A government delegation came to them to hear them out but failed to bring any result.<sup>5</sup> In June, 1949 the 26th battalion, Union Military Police, stationed in Arakan mutinied and together with communists and PVO brought the fall of Kyaukpyu and Sandoway both being district headquarters. Thus government control was reduced to the port of Akyab only, whereas the Mujahids were in possession of all of north Arakan, and other groups of Arakanese Buddhist rebels had other districts in their control.<sup>6</sup>

In the years from 1951 to 1954, government forces annually conducted large-scale campaigns against the Mujahids. Towns and police stations erstwhile controlled by Mujahids were recaptured by government forces.<sup>7</sup> During these campaigns a number of civilians were arbitrarily detained, tortured and killed. Many houses suspected of harbouring insurgents were burnt down. The Mujahids lost their effective control of the area for some time as a result of change of leadership and factional fighting. Around 1951 *Mujahid-e-Azam*, Jafar Kawal, was assassinated and one Mr. Abbas took over power. Col. Rashid, an important lieutenant under Jafar Kawal broke away to establish his own faction at Fuimali, southeast of Buthidaung. Another firebrand commander, Qassim, later to be popularly known as Qassim Raja declared himself chief of the Mujahids in the south of Maungdaw. There had been fighting between government forces and various factions of Mujahids. After 1954 Qassim became a major threat to the government and the Mujahids also reinstated their superiority in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and most of Rathedaung.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime the government took a strong political initiative to isolate the Mujahids from the Muslim masses. On 25th Sept. 1954 at 8:00 p. m., the then Prime minister of Burma, U Nu, in his radio speech to the nation declared Rohingya as an indigenous ethnic community.<sup>9</sup> All basic rights of Rohingyas had been restored to certain extent. The government tried to convince the Muslim leaders and Parliament members that it was a futile exercise to go on rebellion as the rights of Rohingyas had been restored. The politicians, fed up with factional fighting among the Mujahids, failing to see any chance of winning the war over the government and finding improvement in the political status of the Muslims, encouraged the people to take side with the government. The Mujahids, torn by in-fighting and growingly bereft of public support, found it increasingly difficult to survive. They committed various crimes and injustices against their own people losing the faith reposed on them by the people. Many villagers had to shift to towns to save themselves from Mujahid excesses.

Taking advantage of such a situation from November, 1954 the government launched an extensive campaign against the Mujahids code named 'Operation Monsoon'. Major centres of Mujahids were captured and several of their leaders got killed.<sup>10</sup> Qassim fled to East Pakistan. The backbone of the Mujahid insurgency was broken. The Mujahid movement was further weakened as a result of more breakups in their rank and file, but lingered on. The government raised a volunteer force from among the local Muslims with the help of whom the Burmese army dealt a crushing blow to the Mujahids. In a bid to isolate the mujahids further, Prime Minister U Nu and Defence minister U Ba Swe visited Buthidaung and Maungdaw towns in 1959. They held big political rallies in those towns where they spoke of recognising Rohingya as an indigenous ethnic community of Burma like the Shan, Kachin and Karen. They also promised equal rights to them as citizens of Burma.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile further division among the Mujahid factions occurred as difference of opinion arose against the government offer of establishing a 'Muslim National Area' in north Arakan with substantial local autonomy. Ultimately the Mujahids decided to lay down their arms and before the end of 1961 most of the Mujahids surrendered to the Government.

### **Political activities of the Arakanese during Parliamentary democracy period (1948-1962)**

As stated earlier general elections for the Constituent Assembly was held in the whole Arakan except two areas of Maungdaw and Buthidaung where Muslims constitute 98% of the total population. After independence, however, elections were held there; Mr. Sultan Ahmed and Mr. Abdul Ghaffar were elected from these two areas. Since the holding of the Constituent Assembly elections till 1962 military takeover 3 general elections were held for both houses of Parliament in 1951, 1956 and 1960 respectively. In 1951 general elections Muslims won 5 seats, four in the Lower House and one in the Upper House. The AFPFL won 3 seats and the rest were captured by Ra-Ta-Nya (Rakhaing National United Organisation). The Muslims had no political party of their own. They stood either as independents or supportive group of AFPFL. In 1956 general elections Muslims retained all their five seats of north Arakan. The Ra-Ta-Nya won only about one third of the total seats; the rest were captured by AFPFL. Muslim MPs elected

to the Parliament in 1956 were Mr. Sultan Ahmed, Mr. Abul Khair, Mr. Ezhar Mian, Mr. Abul Basher and Mr. Abdul Ghaffar. Prominent elected members of Ra-Ta-Nya were U Kyaw Min, U Maung Kyaw Zan, U Hla Tun Pru, U San Tun Khine, U Ba Sein, U Aung Kyaw Khine, U Paw Thein etc. A bye-election was held for Buthidaung north constituency in 1957 as the election of Mr. Ezhar Mian was challenged and the verdict was given against him. Mr. Sultan Mahmood, Ex-Parliamentary Secretary, in British India legislative Assembly, was elected and he was inducted into the cabinet of U Nu as Health minister. The Rakhaing (Buddhist) members of Parliament formed their own Independent Arakanese Parliamentary Group (IAPG). They pressed for granting 'State' to Arakan in the parliament but initially they were not serious. The Rees Williams Commission set up in 1947 to examine the necessity of granting 'States' to different areas, earlier, kept aside the question of granting statehood to Arakan.<sup>12</sup> Three more Regional Autonomy Commissions-Regional Autonomy Commission headed by minister U Nyo Tun (a Magh) formed in March 1948, Sir Ba Oo Commission formed in October 1948 and Kelleys Commission formed in 1950 — examined the question of granting State to Arakan.

The Regional Autonomy Commission headed by Minister U Nyo Tun consisted of 3 other members, U Kyaw Min, Accountant General, U Tin and U Tin Phet. The Commission, instead of carrying out inquiries for Regional Autonomy, submitted an interim report to the government suggesting the following immediate steps for Arakan.<sup>13</sup>

1. to open Pakistani consulate in Akyab and Burmese consulate in East-Pakistan for effectively curbing illegal immigration;
2. to suppress the insurgency more intensively;
3. to appoint officials suitable for Arakan conditions;
4. to effectively take action against government officials indulging in corruptions and
5. to re-examine those arrested under the Public Law and Order Act, clause 5, and to release those who are ought to be released.

The Sir Ba Oo Commission was formed by Prime minister U Nu under the Chairmanship of the then Chief Justice, Sir Ba Oo, in October, 1948 under which three sub-committees for dealing with the question of Karen, Mon and Arakanese nationals respectively were formed. Each sub-committee is constituted by one representative from the State, three Burman representatives and four national representatives from the concerned area.<sup>14</sup> The 4-member Arakanese national representatives are U Kyaw Yin, U San Tun Aung, U Tha Tun and Mr. Sultan Ahmed. They submitted their opinion on 29th October, 1948 as follows:<sup>15</sup>

1. to appoint an Arakanese affairs minister and include it as a Law in the Constitution;
2. to constitute an Arakanese affairs council to assist the Arakanese affairs minister and include it as a Law in the Constitution;
3. according to clause 12 of the Constitution, to make rules, regulations and laws to be able to perform all activities of Arakan region by the Arakanese affairs

- minister and Arakanese affairs council in accordance with the wish of Arakan people; and
4. after five years this scheme depending upon its results shall either be re-examined and amended in accordance with the wish of Arakan people or terminated.

U Shwe Baw, The Arakanese (Rakhaing) representative of the Committee submitted the following proposals:<sup>16</sup>

1. to exploit the natural resources of Arakan and improve industrialisation;
2. to improve the water, land and railway communications of Arakan;
3. to upgrade education standard including higher and technological education;
4. to improve the health and treatment facilities;
5. to improve the agricultural and aquatic enterprises;
6. to deploy one or two Rakhaing battalions in permanent Army to carry out law and order in case any border problem arises in Burma's northwest frontier;
7. to give necessary powers for rehabilitating the Rakhaing nationals living in 'Bomang State' (Chittagong Hill Tract) and Awa Kyun (Sundarbans);
8. to award the power of making laws and collection of revenue and
9. to grant Self rule' in every affairs of Arakan division.

The Burman members of the Committee rejected the idea of Separate State but recommended that Arakan should be made a division under proper Burma with the right of Self rule; the power of formation of Army should be vested in the national Parliament only and rather than appointing an Arakan affairs minister and council Arakan division council should be formed which would be more effective.<sup>17</sup> After four years of enquiry, in 1952, although Sir Ba Oo Commission could submit its report on Karen and Mon Affairs, the report of Arakanese Affairs could not be submitted for reasons best known to them.<sup>18</sup> The Kelly Commission was formed under the Chairmanship of Arakan Divisional Commissioner, Mr. Kelly, on 26th July, 1950 to enquire about the possibility of granting 'State' to Arakan.<sup>19</sup> Extensive inquiries and investigations were made. But the report of the Kelley Commission was not officially announced. So the question of granting 'State' to Arakan lingered on without arriving to a decision. Throughout their Parliamentary tenure the Ra-Ta-Nya members acted in an unfriendly manner against the Rohingyas. They branded Rohingyas as 'Kalas' or Chittagonians and did not recognise Rohingyas as their equals. They always tried to distort the image of the Rohingyas and even accused Muslim MPs of masterminding illegal entry of large number of Chittagonians into Arakan with the tacit approval of AFPFL to win elections.<sup>20</sup> They were allergic to citizenship question of Rohingyas. They incited Buddhist monks of Arakan to stage hunger strike against Mujahid insurrection and to use force against the Muslim Arakanese MPs on the question of making Buddhism State religion of Burma. The hostile attitude of the Ra-Ta-Nya members towards Rohingyas caused Muslim MPs to remain aloof from them and cooperate, rather, with Burman politicians.

When AFPFL was divided into two factions in 1958 the prospects of achieving Arakan State became very bright. Prime Minister U Nu declared that if he wins in 1960 elections, he would grant Arakan 'State. Both the factions of AFPFL wooed the IAPC to their

respective sides. But the Ra-Ta-Nya decided to support U Nu faction after getting his commitment.

The question of granting 'State' to Arakan was taken seriously by most of the Muslims as they feared that the Maghs would create a 1942-like situation if they come to power in Arakan. In response, the Muslims of north Arakan demanded 'autonomy' of their region to be directly controlled by the Central government in Rangoon without the involvement of any Magh officials or their influence whatsoever. Their minimal demand was the creation of a separate district governed by the Centre.<sup>21</sup> Muslim MPs raised this demand also during the debates in Parliament and in the press. Many Rohingya Socio-cultural organisations initiated frantic activities with reference to the Muslim status in Arakan.<sup>22</sup>

After winning the election U Nu appointed an enquiry commission to study all the problems involved in the question of Arakan.<sup>23</sup> The Rohingya Jamiatul Ulama submitted to this enquiry commission a long and explanatory memorandum on the position of the Muslims of north Arakan.<sup>24</sup> They demanded establishment of a separate district which have a district council of its own and shall be vested with local autonomy. As a compromise solution the authors of the memorandum agreed to the district being a part of the Arakan State; however they insisted that the Head of the State was to be counselled by the council in the appointment of officials and in the matters concerning the district and its problems.

The Rohingya Youth Association in a resolution of the meeting held on July 31, 1961 called upon the government not to grant 'State' to Arakan because of the community tensions still existing between Muslims and Buddhists since the 1942 riots.<sup>25</sup> A similar resolution was taken by the Rohingya Student Association, with the additional warning that if it is decided despite all protest, to set up the State; this would require the partition of Arakan and the awarding of separate autonomy to the Muslims.

Muslim members of Parliament likewise petitioned the government and the enquiry commission not to include their region in the planned Arakan 'State'.<sup>26</sup> They have no objection to the creation of such a state, but only without the districts of Buthidaung, Maungdaw and part of Rathedaung where the Muslims are in majority ..... These districts must be formed into a separate unit in order to ensure the existence of the Rohingya. Forcing the creation of a single State upon all of Arakan would be likely to lead to the renewed spilling of blood.

But the Arakanese Muslim Organisation (AMO) differed in their opinion towards granting 'State' to Arakan. In a memorandum to the enquiry commission Sultan Mahmood, M. P., Chairman of AMO, explained that they would support the 'State' only on two conditions: if the Arakanese Buddhists would support their demands and if the Constitution of the 'State' would include, specifically, religious, cultural, economic, political, administrative and educational guarantees of the Muslims. The Head of the State of the new 'State' of Arakan would alternate; once a Muslim, the speaker of the State Council would be a non-Muslim, but his deputy, a Muslim; and vice versa. The same arrangement would also be in effect in the appointments, committees and other

bodies. No less than one-third of the State's ministers were to be Muslims. No Law effecting Muslims would be passed unless and until the majority of the Muslim members of the Council voted for it. In the matter of appointments to jobs in Muslim areas, the Chief of 'State' would act on the advice of the Muslim members of his cabinet. In all appointments to government posts, to public services, to municipal positions and the like, Muslims would enjoy a just proportion in accordance with their percentage in the population. In filling the appointments allotted to the Muslims, the Muslim candidates would compete among themselves. The government would attentively meet the educational and economic needs of the Muslims. No pupil would be forced to participate in religious classes not of his own religion. Every religious sect would be allowed training in his own religion in all institutions of learning. Every and any religious sect would be permitted to set up his own educational institutions that would be recognised by the government. Muslims would be completely free to develop their own special Rohingya language and culture, and to spread their religion. A special officer for Muslim Affairs would be appointed whose job it would be to investigate complaints and obstructions, and to report on them to the chief of 'State'. For a period of ten years from the date of establishment of the 'State' the right would be reserved to every district — and especially to those of northern Arakan— to secede from the 'State' and transfer itself to the direct jurisdiction of the Central government in Rangoon.<sup>27</sup>

At long last, the government declared to set up a special 'Mayu Frontier Administration' (MFA) in the provinces of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and western portion of Rathedaung under the direct control of the Central government. But it was not autonomy for it would be administered by Army officers; since it was not placed under the jurisdiction of Arakan, however, the new arrangement earned the agreement of the Rohingya leaders.<sup>28</sup> The actual implementation of the administration took place with effect from March 31, 1961. A special police force known as 'Mayu Ye' was raised with recruits from local Muslims and the law and order situation started to improve. At the beginning of 1962 the government prepared a draft law for the establishment of the 'State' of Arakan and in accordance with Muslim demand, excluded the Mayu district. The military revolution took place in March 1962. The new government cancelled the plan to grant 'State' to Arakan. But the 'Mayu District' remained subject to the special administration that had been set up for it till it was put under the ministry of Home Affairs in February 1, 1964.

## Reference

1. The Muslims of Burma, by Moshe Yegar p. 96
2. Ibid p.98
3. Ibid
4. Ibid p. 97
5. Ibid
6. The Union of Burma by Hugh Tinker p. 47
7. The Muslims of Burma by Moshe Yegar p. 99
8. Ibid
9. A short History of Arakan and Rohingya by National Democratic Party for Human Rights p. 31

10. The Muslims of Burma by Moshe Yegar p. 99
11. A short History of Arakan and Rohingya by NDPHR
12. The Union of Burma by Hugh Tinker p. 24
13. Union of Burma Pyithu Hlutaw (Parliament) Session Proceedings No. 1, meeting No. (7), Rangoon Government Press, 1952, pp. 106-107
14. Myanmar Politics 1958-1962 Vol. 111, pp. 178-179
15. Ibid p. 180
16. Ibid p. 181
17. Ibid p. 182483
18. Ibid p. 183
19. Members of the Commission are U Pinnya Thiha, Arakan AFPFL Chairman, U San Thu Aung, Buthidaung AFPFL Chairman, Mr. Sultan Ahmed, M.P., Mr. Abdul Gaffar MP., Mr. Furuk Ahmed, High-grade pleader, Later U Pinnya Thiha, U San Tun Aung, M.P. and Buthidaung AFPFL Chairman Withdrew from the Commission. They were replaced by U Ba Myaing, U Maung Sein and U San Tun Khaing.
20. Arakanese Buddhist leaders including Members of Parliament had always distorted the true facts, as the Burmans do, by claiming that thousands of Pakistanis (Chittagonians) entered Arakan during British period and even after independence of Burma whereas more than one million Rohingyas have been forced to leave Arakan as a result of ethnic cleansing operations since 1942. For example, see... Burma, Nationalism and Ideology by Shwe Lu Maung p. 61
21. The Muslims of Burma by Moshe Yegar p. 102
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. Ibid p. 103
25. Ibid
26. Ibid
27. Ibid p. 104
28. Ibid p. 105

## **Chapter X - Arakan under military rule**

### **The effects of military coup on Arakan**

In March 2, 1962 Gen. Ne Win, the then Burma's Army Chief, seized power in a bloodless military coup; abolished the Constitution and dissolved the Parliament. All powers of the State — legislative, judiciary and executive — had fallen automatically under the control of the Revolutionary Council' (RC) headed by him. The RC announced floating of a new political party known as Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). All other political parties were banned. The BSPP established its branches all over the country. In Arakan, only Arakanese Buddhists (Rakhaing) were inducted to the new political party. With the changeover of power to RC the promised granting of State to Arakan was also consigned to uncertainty.

In February, 1963 the RC regime nationalised entire banks and business enterprises all

over the country. In Arakan, hitherto, most of the major business establishments were in the hands of the Muslims. The Muslims of Arakan were hardest hit in the economic crackdown by the new military regime. Whereas, in other parts of the country small-scale business undertakings were spared, in Arakan all business establishments, big or small, ranging from grocery and rice shops to big departmental stores owned by Muslims were nationalised.

Ne Win now well entrenched in power, started to take action against his old eyesore, the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan. Notifications were sent by Revolutionary Council to Arakan division authorities to restrict the movement of the Muslims. The State controlled media began attacking Rohingya Muslims branding them as aliens. Ne Win himself, while talking to newsmen, used sarcastic language against Rohingyas. He opined that the Arakanese Buddhists should take appropriate steps against these *Kalas*.<sup>1</sup>

The next step Ne Win took was Buddhi-i-zation of Arakan's administration. Almost all the Muslim policemen recruited during the Frontier administration were either expelled or transferred to far flung corners of interior Burma. Other high ranking Muslim officials were either forced to retire or transferred from north Arakan. Excepting a few clerks in government offices and some teachers all other posts were filled up by either Burmans or Maghs of whom some have migrated recently from the then East Pakistan. In 1964 the Revolutionary Council regime abolished the special Mayu Frontier Administration and put the area again within the jurisdiction of Akyab district under the Home ministry.<sup>2</sup> All Rohingya socio-cultural organisations — United Rohingya Organisation founded in 1956, the Rohingya Youth Organisation founded in 1960, Rangoon University Rohingya Students Association, Rohingya Jamiatul Ulama, Arakan National Muslim Organisation and Arakanese Muslim Youth Organisation — were banned in 1964. The Rohingya Language Programme broadcasted from Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS), Rangoon was cancelled in October 1965.<sup>3</sup>

On May 17, 1964 all Kyats 50 and 100 banknotes were demonetised<sup>4</sup> effecting mainly the Rohingya Muslims in Arakan. The Arakanese Buddhists however, managed, with the help of their fellow officials and local BSPP members, to realise most of the value of the deposited money. After the nationalisation of the shops, demonetisation and imposition of restriction on movement, the backbone of economy of the Rohingyas crumbled. The Arakanese Buddhists made easy profits by drawing consumer goods from 'People's shops' at cheap price and selling them in the black market. The inter-township trade carried out before by Muslims mainly now fell in the hands of Buddhists. Except a few government service holders no Muslims were entitled to the facilities of government ration distribution system whereas all Buddhists benefitted from it. The cross border trade is now controlled entirely by the Arakanese Buddhists and government agencies. Some Muslims who undertook this business, risking their lives had to give up most of the earnings to their Buddhist sleeping partners. The military regime rendered all-out facilities to the Arakanese Buddhists to earn.

As the military rule dragged on and the BSPP strengthened more and more, many poor Buddhists of Arakan had turned rich overnight at the expense of the Muslims. While each

and every person in Burma, belonging to different ethnic communities, reeled in acute poverty under the hated BSPP rule, the Buddhists of Arakan alone benefitted from it. The BSPP was absolutely controlled by them; Muslims were not allowed to join it.

In 1967 there were acute shortages of rice and other basic food-stuff in Rangoon.<sup>5</sup> Bulk of the rice produced in Arakan was carried away to proper Burma causing shortage of rice in Arakan. This triggered riotings against the military regime at Akyab. The military quelled the riots with iron hand killing many persons. During 1967 crisis many Muslims died of starvation.

Meanwhile violations of the Human Rights against Arakan Muslims by military regime continued unabated. Arrest of prominent Muslims, in the late hours of the night, by Army officers without warrant and subjecting them to torture and releasing them after extortion had become the order of the day. Law enforcing agencies and judges were clearly instructed to harass the Muslims and deny them justice.

Emboldened Buddhist Maghs started attacking Muslims everywhere beating them and looting their belongings. When Muslims complain about their grievances in the police station, instead of taking actions against the culprits the Muslims are in turn indicted with various false accusations. This kind of treatment by police frightened the Muslims even to seek justice. The military regime, since its assumption of power, has continued the so-called 'Immigration Inquiry Operations' with more ruthlessness. Apart from physical torture, molestation of womenfolk and extortion of money, many innocent Rohingyas were subjected to imprisonment with the false charge of being illegal immigrants. Hundreds of people were driven out of their homesteads by force from the towns of Kyawktaw, Mrohaung, Pauktaw, Myebon, Minbya etc. Many of those people migrated to East Pakistan under compelling circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Excerpts from a 1987 Amnesty International report may be cited hereunder:

“..... expressed concern about the cases of some 34 Muslims of Bengali ethnic origin detained since 1956 or following years in connection with accusation of illegal entry into Burma. Amnesty International's concern is that despite allegations that they had entered Burma illegally from what was at that time East Pakistan they may in fact be Burmese citizens native to the Rakhine (Arakan) state and may therefore have been arrested by local authorities on account of their ethnic minority origin or religion. Many of them have reportedly been detained without charge or trial since their arrest and others are understood to remain imprisoned although sentences handed down against them and which reportedly ranged from one day upto several months expired decades ago”.

The Buddhist barbarity made the life of the Muslims suffocating. A group of Rohingya intellectuals, constituted mainly by university graduates and elites, secretly organised a resistance organisation — Rohingya Independence Force (RIF) — with the objective of freeing their people from the bondage of Burmese tyranny. The RIF established several organising cells in almost all towns and villages of north Arakan and among the Rohingyas living in Proper Burma. It had started making contacts with foreign countries to rally support for their struggle. It also established links with some remnants of old

Mujahid groups which nominally existed with some arms in the jungles of Arakan.

In 1967 a large number of Rohingya Muslims who had been expelled from the towns mentioned above were forced to board on boats bound for Buthidaung. From there they reached Maungdaw where they passed their days under open sky for many days. The local people provided them with food. The immigration authorities were trying to push them across Naf river into Pakistan. Enraged at the inhuman treatment of these innocent Muslims the Muslims of Maungdaw under the leadership of RIF leader, Mr. Sultan, protested against government action and at one stage an immigration officer was beaten up. Soon several of the RIF supporters were rounded up and thrown into jail. Mr. Sultan fled to East Pakistan to escape arrest.

While in Pakistan Mr. Sultan was estranged from his foreign secretary, Mr. Mohammad Jafor, popularly known as B. A. Jafor. Mr. Sultan surrendered to Burmese authorities in 1970 while Mr. Mohammad Jafor took over the mantle of RIF. In East Pakistan the war of liberation started. Mr. Jafor who was well-known to having links with Pakistan military, was afraid to stay in East Pakistan. He made a deal with the group of old Mujahids led by Jafor Thani (Jafor the second) and joined his group as Vice-President. During and just after the war of independence sophisticated arms were flooded in Bangladesh. Jafor Thani acquired a large number of arms and his strength increased rapidly. For some years the Burmese government just observed what was going on in the border and turned a blind eye to his activities. However, there was consternation in the heart of Arakanese Buddhists. Jafor Thani instead of fighting the enemy, started looting his own people and busied himself in building personal fortune. In 1973 a major Burmese army offensive against Jafor forced him to abandon all his strongholds and flee to Burma-Bangladesh border. Jafor's fortunes and wives were captured by Burmese army. While in the border his lieutenant, B. A. Jafor, masterminded surrender of most of the men of Jafor Thani to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in exchange of safe heaven for them on the soil of Bangladesh. Mr. B. A. Jafor returned to Chittagong where he worked as manager in a local hotel but continued to maintain links with some of the old Mujahids who had not laid down their arms.

### **Granting of 'State' to Arakan by BSPP regime**

In 1974, the BSPP convened the first Peoples Congress (Pyithu Hlut law) which ratified the constitution drawn by BSPP. The new constitution granted 'State' to Arakan in the Unitary structure. The new 'Arakan State' was manned by hundred percent Buddhist authorities with Burmans in the top echelons and local Buddhist Arakanese in the lower strata. The 'Arakan State Council' was dominated by pro-Burman Arakanese Buddhists who tightened the screw against the Rohingyas further. Armed operations in the name of so-called immigration inquiry continued. Oppression of Muslims took a serious turn. Educated Rohingya youths were humiliated and denied of any government job. Trade and business are almost totally shut down for Rohingyas. Discrimination of Muslims, lack of security of life and property added by serious unemployment encouraged many Muslims to migrate either across the border into Bangladesh or infiltrate into proper Burma by bribing Burmese officials. The outflow of Muslims increased as the life span of the BSPP

prolonged.

During BSPP rule Ne Win once visited Arakan. He was reportedly enraged at the sight of a very beautiful mosque just at the exit gate of Akyab airport. When Arakanese Buddhist leaders apprised him of the Arakan's economic prospects he told them that it was useless to take up any such projects before the *Kalas* are done away with. Gen. Tin Oo, the then commander of the western military command, later Chief of Army Staff and now in prison as Chairman of National League for Democracy (NLD), in an audience with gazetted rank officials of Arakan State told that the government had taken a 20-year plan to tackle the growing *Kala* problem of Arakan.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddhists of Arakan were instigated by BSPP regime to compel the Muslims to leave Arakan. They have become very much aggressive as they are given a free hand in dealing with the Muslims. Muslims are increasingly attacked on roads, at bazars and in work. There were reports of secret 'slaughter houses' in Akyab town where stray boys and lonely persons are abducted to and murdered. Muslims' religious practices have become objects of taunt and ridicule. The *waqf* land (endowment property) attached to the centuries old Jame-mosque of Akyab was confiscated and lines of stalls were built where pork was sold. A big dustbin was placed just at the mosque's entrance gate. Filth and stone are thrown at the mosque while prayers are going on inside the mosque. Religious persons are humiliated, beaten up, their beards plucked off and their caps snatched off. Pigs are let into mosques and mosque compounds. Graveyards have been taken over and turned into latrines, bus terminals or orchards. Destruction of mosques, madrassahs and desecration of Holy Scriptures had become more frequent. Soldiers often enter into mosques and madrassahs with shoes on and indulge in drinking bouts therein.

As the suppression of the Rohingyas continued, manifestation of their outrage surfaced. A group of youths including old RIF activists, new university graduates including lawyers, doctors and high school students went underground at the end of 1975. They joined the Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF), already in existence since a year ago, under the leadership of Mr. BA. Jafor who was erstwhile working in Chittagong. The remnants of old mujahid groups were amalgamated with RPF. Now, the RPF started recruiting more youths from Arakan and imparted military trainings to them in batches.

### **The King Dragon operation (1978)**

In pursuance of the 20-year Rohingya elimination plan, the Arakan State authorities under the direct supervision of the Council of State—the highest executive body of the State — carried out the Muslim ethnic cleansing operation code named Nagamin or 'King Dragon Operation'. The objective of the operation was to intimidate the Muslims and compell them to leave Arakan. The operation which started in the month of March 1978 from the biggest Muslim village of Sakkifara in Akyab sent shock-waves over the whole region within a short time. News of the mass arrest of Muslims, male and female, young and old, torture, rape and killing in Akyab frustrated Muslims in other towns of north Arakan. Soon, the Nagamin team constituted by Army, Police and Immigration personnel reached Buthidaung area where they let loose a reign of terror. Buthidaung

became the worst scene of Nagamin devastation. Hundreds of Muslim men and women were thrown into the jail many of them being tortured and killed. Muslim women were raped freely in the detention centres.<sup>8</sup> Terrified by the ruthlessness of the operation and total uncertainty of the security of their life, property, honour and dignity large number of Muslims started leaving their homes and trudged across hilly areas, rivers and creeks towards the border with Bangladesh. On their way they were systematically robbed off of their valuables and money by the rapacious Magh Buddhists and security personnel. Many of the refugees were killed by gun fire and many others drowned in the surging Naf river while crossing on heavily loaded boats. As soon as the inmates left their villages local Maghs started pillaging their houses, putting them on fire and carrying away their cattles. Within a few months the number of refugees exceeded 300,000 who were sheltered in makeshift camps erected by Bangladesh authorities.<sup>9</sup> The Bangladesh government tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Burmese regime to stop the operation. The Burmese regime denied any wrong doing but stated that “some Bengali illegal immigrants fled the country for fear of prosecution as census check is going on.”<sup>10</sup>

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was, initially, uncertain whether those fleeing should be recognised as refugees or not. A freelance journalist, Francois Haughter, removed the doubt by publishing an eye-witness account stating that the refugees were forced at gun point by the Burmese military to leave their country.<sup>11</sup>

The UNHCR ultimately recognised them as genuine refugees and started relief operations. The presence of large number of Muslim refugees attracted the attention of the world, particularly the Muslim countries. Although Burma denied, initially, to accept back her people she was bogged down under international pressure. A bilateral agreement was signed between the two countries paving the way for the return of the refugees in 1979 after more than 9 months stay on the soil of Bangladesh. 200,000 people returned home while 40,000 died in refugee camps, according to UNHCR estimate and the rest diffused into Bangladesh society. Unfortunately the contents of the bilateral agreement was not made public leaving the Rohingyas in total uncertainty of their future in Burma.

### **Ne Win's New Citizenship Law**

The return of the refugees in 1979 was followed by the enactment of a new Citizenship Law in 1982. This new Law specifies three categories of citizens: National, Associate and Naturalised. As per section 3, under chapter II (Citizenship) of the Law, all ethnic groups who settled in Burma before 1823, the year of British occupation, have been categorised as 'National'. Associate and Naturalised citizens are those who entered Burma during British rule. The difference between the two is that Associate citizens have already been granted citizenship on application under 'Union Citizenship Act' of 1948 whereas those who had not applied earlier for citizenship on application, now, may be considered for granting the same who will be catagorised as naturalised citizens. The Law bars Associate and Naturalised citizens from owning properties and participation in political activities. But as per section 4 of the Law, the decision as to whether any ethnic group is 'National' or not does not depend on the court of law but rests on the decision of the Council of State. The government arbitrarily excluded 'Rohingyas' from the list of

Nationals on the plea that they are post-1823 settlers in utter disregard of their millennia old history of establishments in Arakan. Ne Win has taken this step deliberately with the ill motive of turning the Rohingyas into 'Stateless people' to enable him to drive them out easily.

With the enactment of the new Citizenship Law and branding Rohingyas as non-nationals, the position of the Muslims have become more precarious. The government, meanwhile, openly patronised anti-Muslim agitations and riotings throughout Arakan. The Rohingyas of southern Arakan, where they are in minority, are severely affected in the post -1982 riotings. Many Muslim villages along with mosques were uprooted or demolished or burnt down in Sandoway, Tongup, Gwa, Kyaukpyu, Ramree and Cheduba townships. In the Akyab district of north Arakan many villages were forced to evacuate and many centuries old mosques were demolished under the scheme of 'forced relocation'. The forced labour exacted from Rohingyas has now turned to the shape of ugly 'slave labour' where the victims are not regarded as human beings deserving any kind treatment. These human cattles are subjected to extreme cruelty, torture and killing. The movement of Rohingyas from Arakan into proper Burma had been totally barred. Rohingyas who had been living in proper Burma since long were rounded up by immigration authorities and deported them to Arakan. Only those persons who could bribe the authorities could continue living there. The Arakan State authorities, in the meantime, had chalked out a grand scheme of erecting Buddhist villages in the entire region of north Arakan with a view to changing the demographic picture. Hill tribes like *Murung*, *Chakma* and *Saak*, who usually are happy to live in the hills, are ordered to come down and settle on the plain lands confiscated from the Muslims. Many Buddhist Maghs from other parts of Arakan and also from Bangladesh are settled in the Muslim area. A number of Buddhist pagodas and monasteries are built in the new villages virtually changing the face of north Arakan. Because of the harassment of the new settlers life of the Muslims has become so unbearable that a bee-line of exodus of Muslims out of Arakan continued. Meanwhile, torn by intra-party dissensions, the resistance movement led by RPF disintegrated as its leaders failed to make any headway or utilise the opportunities accruing from the 1978 refugee crisis. Some of the founder members of RPF reanimated the dying resistance movement again in 1982 by invigorating it with comprehensive ideological moorings, pragmatic programmes and sense of direction in the name of Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). The Rohingya resistance movement gained a new lease of life under the leadership of RSO which is at present spearheading the movement towards the final goal. As the one-party dictatorship is entering into the final years of third decade, the economy of the country was fast collapsing. Burma has turned into a Least Developed Country (LDC). Except the few Army elites, the people of the whole country was reeling under grinding poverty. There are acute shortages of every essential commodities. The price hike, particularly of rice, caused seething discontent among the common masses of Burma. The demonetisation of bank notes of Kyat 25, 35 and 75 denominations in September, 1987 sent the people to the brink of explosion. A small teashop brawl in March, 1988 near Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) acted as the necessary spark for the final outburst. The largely student agitation, in the beginning, has turned soon into mass uprising against the one-party Socialist rule all over the country including Arakan demanding multi-party democracy

and abolition of BSPP. As the demonstrations were brutally crushed, more agitation followed with the participation of government officials and members of defence services. When the situation seemed to be going out of control, Ne Win, by a clever contrivance to save his power swiftly changed the man in the top one after another within a few months till appointment of a civilian President, Maung Maung, who lifted martial law. But the people rejected his appointment also and demanded forming of an interim government and abolition of BSPP. Mass demonstrations continued.

Communal frictions and old grudges were forgotten, and may be for the first time ever, all national and political groups across the country joined together for a common cause. In Arakan, where tension between Buddhists and Muslims have long been prevalent, these two religious groups now marched hand in hand chanting anti-government slogans. Islam's green flag with the crescent moon fluttered beside the yellow banner of Buddhism. Mass rallies were held in the state capital Akyab and other towns including Muslim dominated towns of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung where Muslims and Buddhists from all walks of life including Buddhist monks and Muslim Ulema took part together for the success of the pro-democracy revolution.

### **SLORC's crackdown in Arakan**

On September 18, 1988 in a dramatic turn of events a Ne Win orchestrated so-called military coup removed civilian Maung Maung. The military in the name of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) headed by Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Saw Maung, took over power. The SLORC massacred more than 3000 pro-democracy demonstrators before gaining full control of the situation. Students and political activists were hunted down and either thrown into torture cells or killed. A large number of them fled across the border into the neighbouring countries or joined anti-government revolutionary groups based along the border.

In Arakan Muslims have to bear the brunt of SLORC's wrath. The SLORC started to take vengeance on the Muslims. The security forces hatefully shout at Muslims, "you Kalas have no right to demonstrate, it is the right of the Buddhists". Soon a number of pro-democracy marchers were arrested and tortured. Severe penalties in jail terms and money were awarded to them. Many college, university and high school students and youths fled across the border into Bangladesh or joined revolutionary groups. The SLORC, then, fell upon the so-called 'economic rebels'. Many Muslims, having small trade and business, were detained, tortured and subjected to long prison terms. Some of them were sent to military front lines in southern Burma to work either as mine cleaners or porters. All their business establishments were confiscated.

Surprisingly the SLORC had announced that it is going to hold free and fair multiparty elections. On September, 27 the SLORC promulgated a 'Political Parties Registration Law'. The Muslims of Arakan were also allowed to register their political parties. But the Election Commission did not accept any party having the name 'Rohingya'. Therefore the Muslims had to name their political parties without having the word 'Rohingya'. Just before the holding of General Elections in May 1990, a Muslim candidate, Mr. Qasim, of

National Democratic Party for Human Rights (NDPHR) from one of the constituencies in Akyab was arrested on false charges of inciting jail breaking in Akyab during pro-democracy uprising. He was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment by SLORC. His arrest before the election was intended to prevent the Muslims from winning both the seats in Akyab. Muslims own one seat in Akyab and 4 seats of Maungdaw and Buthidaung constituencies in the 1990 general election. Had there been formation of constituencies on population basis, Muslims would have won more seats. The Arakan league for Democracy won bulk of the seats whereas NLD bagged 10 seats in Arakan.

However, the SLORC refused to recognise the results of the election. When the masses are becoming restive as a result of the refusal to hand over power, the SLORC employed the old method of diverting the attention of the masses from the real burning issues by creating some new problems. This time, the SLORC decided to create a border problem with Bangladesh as it knew fully well that Bangladesh was not in a position to retaliate. Burmese forces crossed the international boundary, attacked a Bangladesh border outpost, killed some soldiers and carried away all arms and ammunition. As the tension mounted along the border following the unprovoked attack the SLORC regime geared up barbarous atrocities upon the Rohingya Muslims by uprooting their villages, levelling down mosques and madrassahs, indulging in mass arrest, beating, torture, killing, gang-rape, slave labour, total restriction of movement and forcible eviction. Tens of thousands of refugees began to pour into Bangladesh. Both the countries massed troops along the border creating a warlike situation. By April, 1992 the number of refugees in Bangladesh swelled to more than 300,000. The SLORC in the meantime, has indulged in extensive propaganda against the Rohingyas and accused the Bangladesh government of giving shelter to anti-government rebels. By creating the border problem, the SLORC has succeeded in taming the rage of the Burmese masses at least for some time. However, the two governments, for their mutual interest, agreed to diffuse tension in the border and solve all the outstanding problems including the refugee one through negotiations. A bilateral agreement was signed in April, 1992 between the two countries like the one signed in 1979 which provides safe and voluntary return of the refugees.

Although the Burmese regime gave a lot of assurance to the Bangladesh authorities as to the fair treatment of Rohingyas, the situation inside Arakan did not improve at all; rather it is deteriorating further day after day. Given the unsafe situation in Arakan, most of the refugees refused to go back. They demanded that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) be stationed in the Arakan side of the border to oversee repatriation and rehabilitation process of the refugees. But the SLORC at first refused to accept the presence of UNHCR on the Burmese side of the border despite increasing international pressure. However, in the month of November, 1993 the UNHCR and SLORC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which allows the former to operate inside Arakan. The MOU, according to UNHCR officials, provides lifting of all black laws imposed upon the Rohingyas and recognising them as citizens of Burma. But given the SLORC's past hypocritical records and their continuous barbarous oppression upon the Rohingyas, their future remains as uncertain as ever.

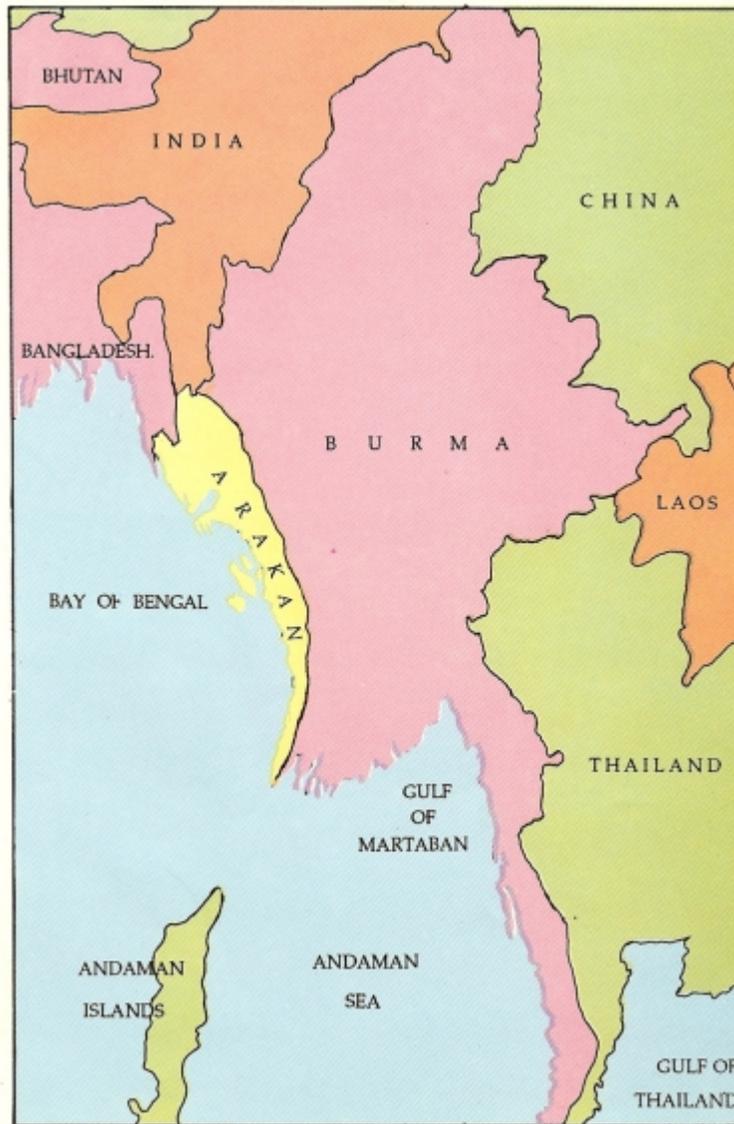
## **Reference**

1. The term Kala' is generally applied to mean ethnic Indians irrespective of religion. It also implies the meaning of foreigner and carries a sense of sarcasm.
2. A short History of Arakan and Rohingya by NDPHR, p. 42
3. Rohingya language programme was regularly broadcasted from Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS), Rangoon from 15-5-1961 till its abolition on 1-10-1965.
4. Outrage, Burmas Struggle for Democracy by Bertil Lintner p. 595.
5. Ibid p. 63
6. No legal proceedings were carried out against those Muslims who were evicted from their houses. They were forced to board on boats bound for Buthidaung township. All their immovable properties were confiscated by the authorities.
7. U Khin Maung Lay (Mr. Mohammad Zakaria), a Rohingya, ex-Head of the Botany Dept. at Akyab College had the opportunity to attend the meeting as a gazetted rank officer, invited unknowingly that he is a Rohingya.
8. Genocide in Burma against the Muslims of Arakan, published by Rohingya Patriotic Front, 1978.
9. The 1978 Rohingija refugee influx drew the attention of the world towards Arakan for the first time since the failure of mujahid insurrection of 50s.
10. Although the BSPP govt. denied large-scale exodus, later it accepted back all the refugees who opted to return back to their country.
11. Mr. Francois Haughter, a journalist from France, visited Tongbro border area in 1978 where he personally witnessed Burmese army gunned down 3 Muslims on the other side of the border separated by a small stream

## **Maps**

### **Map No. (1) - Arakan and its neighbours.**

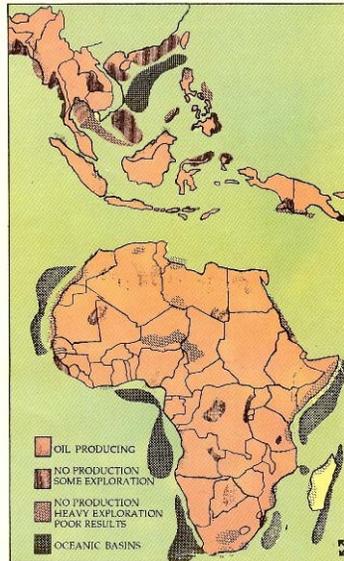
MAP NO. 1



Arakan and its Neighbours

**Map No. (2) - A map showing 'Oil in Southeast Asia and Africa' drawn by New York based Action Committee on Cooperation on Fossil Fuel of the Group of 77 indicating Arakan as an oil producing region.**

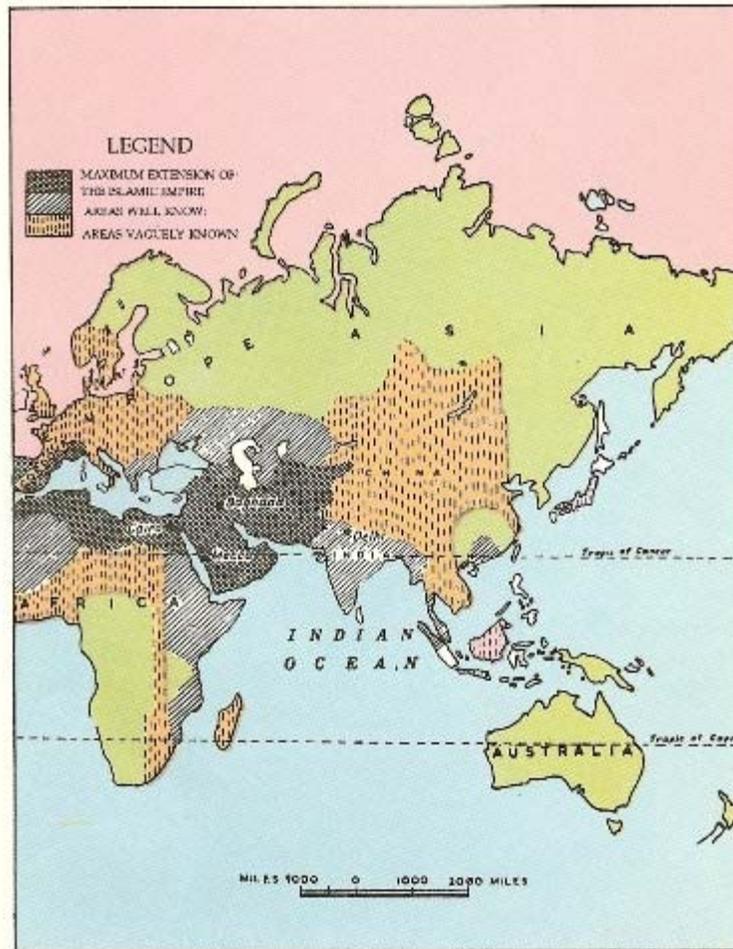
MAP NO. 2



A map showing 'Oil in Southeast Asia and Africa' drawn by New York-based Action Committee on Cooperation on Fossil Fuel of the Group of 77 indicating Arakan as an oil producing region.

**Map No. (3) - A map showing the old world as known to the Muslims from the 8th to the 15th century A.D. as appeared in the book 'Muslim Contribution to Geography' indicating Arakan a well known region to the Muslims since 8th Century C.E.**

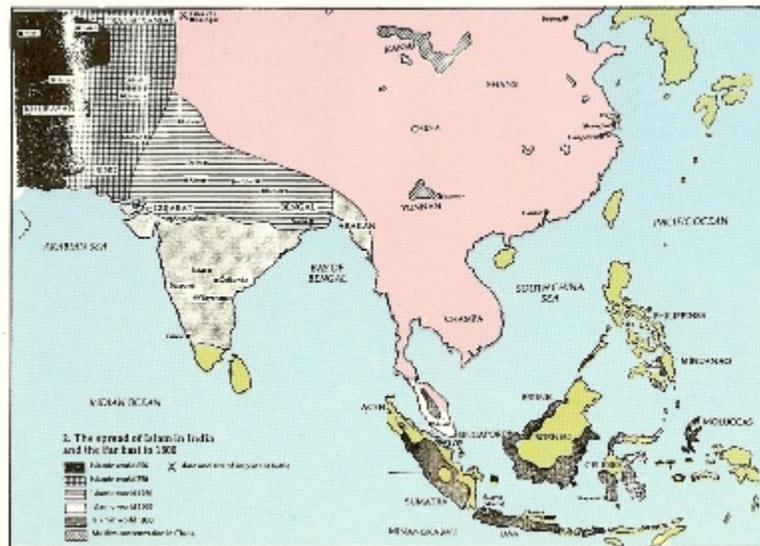
MAP NO. 3



A map showing the old world as known to the Muslims from the 8th to the 15th century A.D. as appeared in the book 'Muslim Contribution to Geography' indicating Arakan as a well known region to the Muslim since 8th century C.E.

**Map No. (4) - A map showing spread of Islam in India and Far East that appeared in the book 'Islam in the world' indicating Islamic sway over Arakan in 1500 C.E.**

MAP NO. 4



A map showing spread of Islam in India and Far East that appeared in the book 'Islam in the world' indicating Islamic sway over Arakan in 1500 C.E.

**Map No. (5) - A map showing Cultural division of Southeast Asia in 1500 C.E. as appeared in 'The Times Atlas of World History' indicating Arakan as an Islamic State.**

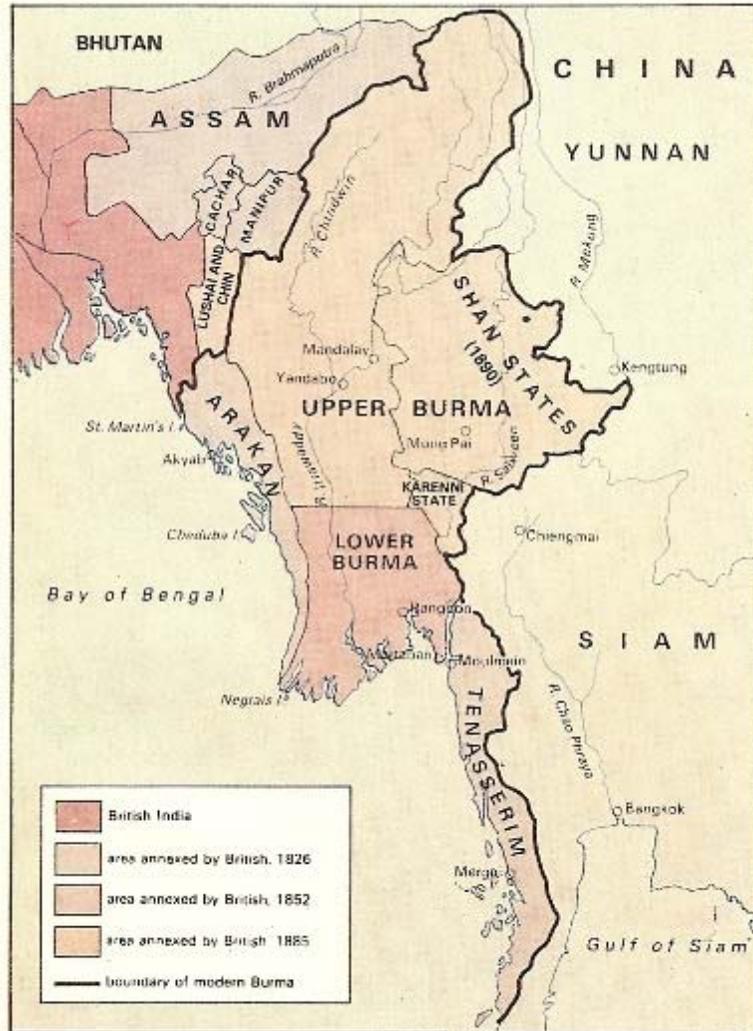
MAP NO. 5



A map showing cultural division of Southeast Asia in 1500 C.E. as appeared in 'the times Atlas of World History' indicating Arakan as an Islamic State.



MAP NO. 7

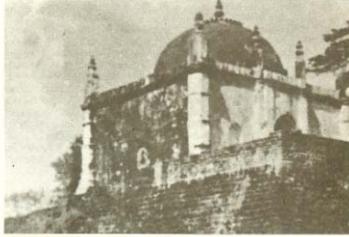


A map showing boundaries of Arakan under British occupation.

## Plates

Plate No. (1) - The one-dome curious Mosque Badr Maqaam-situated on the rocky coast in the southern part of Akyab was said to be founded by the early Arabs in the later part of the 7th century A.D.

PLATE NO. 1



The one-dome curious Mosque Badr Maqaam-situated on the rocky coast in the southern part of Akyab was said to be founded by the early Arabs in the later part of the 7th century A.D.

**Plate No. (2) - The grand Jam-e-Mosque of Akyab built in the 17th century is one of the biggest mosques in Arakan. Its Waqf land on its northern side has been taken over by force.**

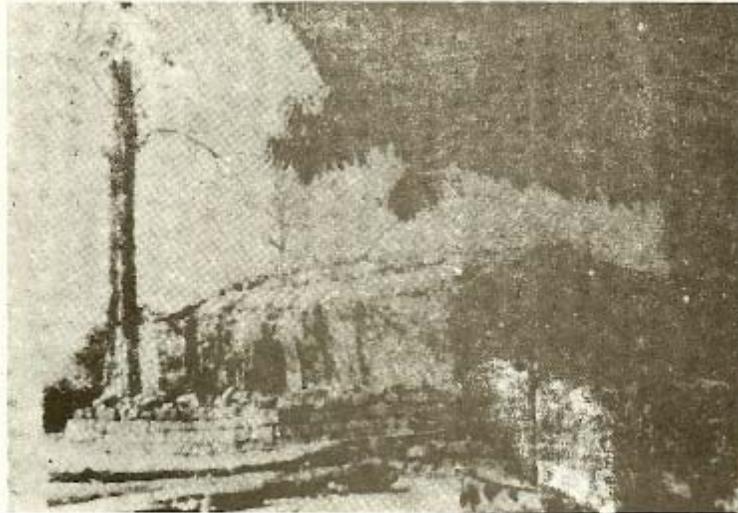
PLATE NO. 2



The grand Jam-e-Mosque of Akyab built in the 17th century is one of the biggest mosques in Arakan. Its Waqf land on its northern side has been taken over by force.

**Plate No. (3) - Sandikhan mosque built in 1433 C.E. by Gen. Sandikhan at Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).**

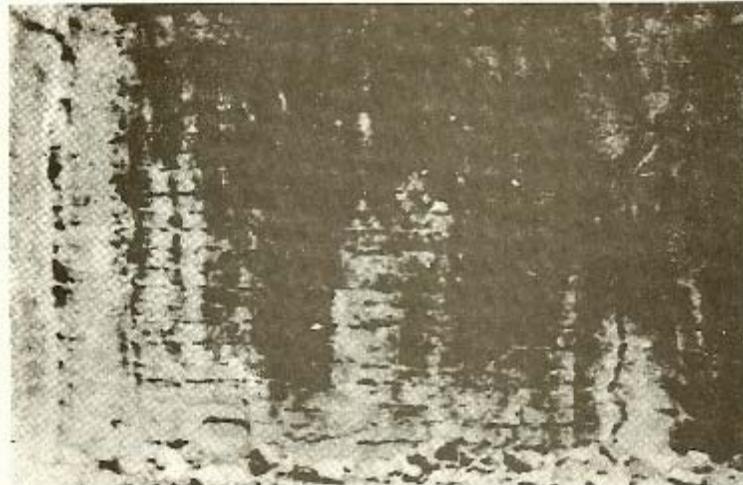
PLATE NO. 3



Sandikhan mosque built in 1433 C.E. by Gen. Sandikhan at Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).

**Plate No. (4) - Ruined structure of Musa Mosque built in the 14th century situated at Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).**

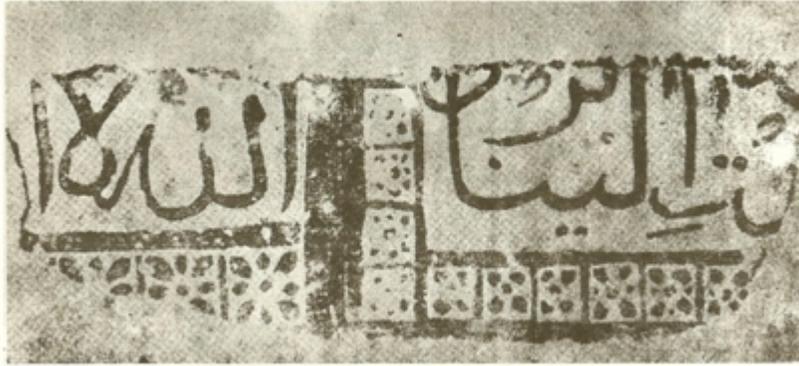
PLATE NO. 4



Ruined structure of Musa mosque built in the 14th century situated at patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).

**Plate No. (5) - A stone plate with Arabic inscriptions found inside the Theingyitaung pagoda at Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).**

PLATE NO. 5



A stone plate with Arabic inscriptions found inside the Theingyitaung pagoda at Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).

**Plate No. (6) - Another stone plate with Arabic inscriptions found engraved in a wall at Nanragone, Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung).**



Another stone palte with Arabic inscriptions found engraved in a wall at Nanragone, Patthari Qillah (Mrohaung)

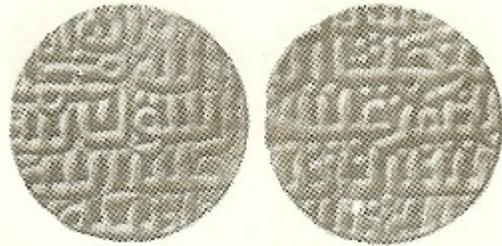
## Coins

Coins struck by the kings of Arakan from 1523 C.E. to 1782 C.E.

Coins struck by the kings of Arakan from  
1523 C.E. to 1782 C.E.



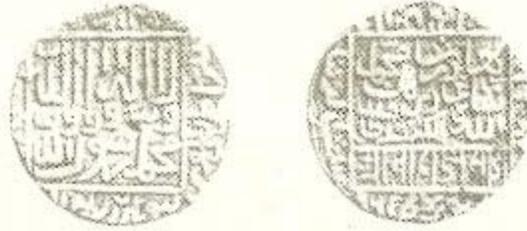
1. Sultan Ilias Shah (1523 C.E.)



2. Sultan Ali Shah (1525 C.E.)



3. Sultan Zabuk Shah (1531 - 53 C.E.)



4. Sultan Bahadur Shah (1554 - 55 C.E.)  
Persian inscription which includes mint name possibly reading 'Arakan' and dated 965 A H.



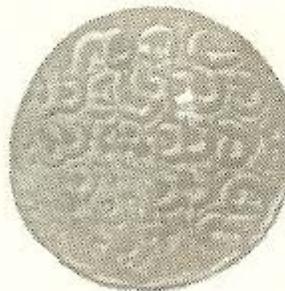
5. Sultan Sikandar Shah (1571- 93 C.E.)



6. Sultan Salim Shah (1601 C.E.)



7. Sultan Hussein Shah (1612 C.E.)



8. Sultan Salim Shah II (1622-1638 C.E.)



9. Narabadigy 1638 C.E.(1000 - 07 B.E.)



10. Thadomitra 1645 C.E. ( 1007 - 14 B.E.)



11. Sanda Thudhamma 1652 C.E. (1014 -46 B.E.)

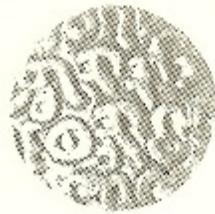


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12. Waradhamma Raja 1685 C.E.(1047 - 54 B.E.)

13. Kalamandat 1697 C.E. (1059 -60 B.E.)



14. Sanda Wizaya 1710 C.E.(1072 - 93 B.E.)



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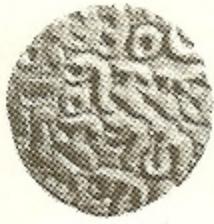
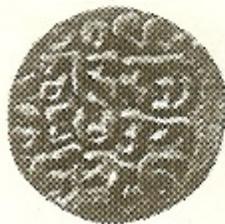
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15. Sanda Thuriya 1731 C.E.(1093 -96 B.E.)

16. Narapawara 1735 C.E.(1097 - 98 B.E.)

17. Sanda Wizala 1736 C.E.( 1098 -99 B.E.)



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18. Madarit Raja 1737 C.E. (1099 -1104 B.E.)

19. Nara Apaya 1742 C.E. (1104 -23 B.E.)

20. Sanda Parama 1761 C.E. (1123 -26 B.E.)



21



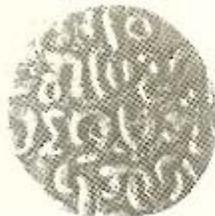
22

21. Apaya Maha Raja 1764 C.E. (1126 -35 B.E.)

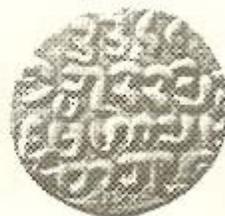
22. Sanda Thumana 1773 C.E. (1135 -39 B.E.)



23. Sanda Thaditha 1777 C.E.(1139 -44 B.E.)



24



25

24. Damarit (Sanda Thaditha) 1778 C.E.(1140 B.E.)

25. Thamada 1782 C.E. (1144 - 46 B.E.)

