

# A Cultural History of ROHINGYA

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Inevitably, it is the prime concern of conscious people to discover their lost cultural heritage. We feel that every conscious Rohingya is indebted to do overall development of Rohingya community under hostile environment to uphold their culture and tradition, which has been eroding under the influence of junta's Burmanisation policy.

We must therefore, preserve our heritage, culture and traditions, which characterise our identity. To enable us to do so, it is as part of responsibility, the Rohingya's culture and tradition have been presented.

## THE ROHINGYAS OF ARAKAN

*Their quest for justice*

"This comprehensive and fascinating work of historical literature by A.F.K. Jilani tell the story of Asia's most extraordinary and little known ethnic group, the Rohingyas....." Edith T. Mirante, Project Maje, USA

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## Acknowledgement

The writing of this book would not have been possible for me had I not received the cooperation of some friends who deserve to name here. Particular thanks would go to Mr. Habibur Rahman who encouraged me all the time in carrying on research in such an interesting project. My sincere thanks also go to Mr. Mamtaz Jamil who saw the potential of the original draft and shape it to present stage. I am also grateful to Mr. Aman Ullah who helps me by lending rare books from his personal library. I am also thankful to Dr. Waker Uddin (USA), Reza Uddin (USA), Edith T. Miranti (USA) and friends who always encourage me for the publication of this work.

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*A.F.K. Jilani*

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*In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful!*

## **PREFACE**

Culture is an inexplicably meaningful word almost defying any definition. It is the visible manifestation of the entire gamut of human endeavours. As civilisation develops, so is the culture that follows to acquire new dimensions. Art, literature, music, rituals, festivals, folk belief, taboos and countless other forms of versatile human feeling are expression of culture. It is a continuous stream of past and present, tradition and modernity assimilated into an integrated whole in the ever growing panorama of nation's life.

Islam arrived in Arakan in 788 A.D. From the days of myths and legends, Arakan entered the historical era from the days of the Chandra dynasty. The first group to leave its mark upon the culture and civilisation of Rohingya were the Arabs who came to trade and settled down permanently in Arakan. They brought Islam, which as a resurgent force vastly influenced and inspired the local people of Arakan to accept Islam. The descendants of these people founded the original nucleus of the Rohingyas in Arakan.

Great literature emancipates and does not enslave. It is noteworthy that Harold Bloom's "The Western Canon includes literature of the ancient near East, ancient India, and classical Arabic as part of the Canon". While we are quite familiar with, and may even have grown accustomed, to, the anti-Islamic rhetoric of the West, the following remarks of Bloom's bear repetition: "..... once the reader in conversant with the Bible, Homer, Plato, ..... the crucial work is the Koran ..... Ignorance of the Koran is foolish and increasingly dangerous."

Robert Hughes remarked that the religion of Islam has played

vast role in enriching world civilisation and culture. He described, "Islam the destroyer is a myth. Without Arab scholars, our mathematics would not exist ..... Medieval Rome was a scavengers' village compared with medieval Baghdad. Without the Arab invasion of southern Spain Europe would be unimaginably poorer."

In the language of A.K.M. YAQUB Ali of Rajshahi University, education and culture are intimately related to each other. The former is prerequisite for the development of the latter. Islam lays much stress on education. The first revelation that came to the Prophet started with the word 'iqra' or 'read in the name of the Lord'. (Al-Quran, Surah Al-Alau, Vs. 3-4). The Prophet considered the acquiring of knowledge obligatory on every Muslim man and woman. The Prophet preferred his association with a group of learners to that of devotees in the mosque of Madinah (Miskat al-Masabib, Kitab al-ilm, p-36). In the early days mosques were main forum for education. In the later periods *madarasas* sprung up in the towns, cities and other important places. (Society and Culture in Islam, M. Enamul Hoq P. 117-118).

It has been said that you cannot see other cultures well until, through knowing your own. Otherwise you are left with mere indecieve much. To do this, we must restore the cultural position of knowledge and learning in society. The Prophet of Islam said: "The superior rank the '*alim*' holds in relation to the '*abid*' is like the superior rank I hold in relation to the least of my companions". "Seek knowledge from cradle to grave" is also the *Hadith* of the great Prophet.

Knowledge is the greatest of pleasures just as ignorance is the greatest pain. Men of knowledge played a pivotal role in enabling Islam to produce one of the most dazzling civilisations ever known to humanity. Ali Ibn Abi Talib said: "*Ya kamil!* Knowledge

is better than wealth for knowledge watches over you whilst you have to watch over your wealth. And knowledge governs while wealth is governed. Wealth diminishes with spending but knowledge increases therewith."

For Frantz Fanon every people-in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the culture of the mother country... to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. (Black Skin, White Mask, p. 38)

Fanon's thrust is toward a civilisation of language or aesthetic linguistics, not of social or political norms. He sees language as emancipation. Culture, which language defines is not monolithic, or particular to a region in the last analysis, but universal to a large extent, has discontinuities and disruption behind the semblance of an architectonic exterior.

For culture, which for various lengths of time has been traumatised by the colonial experience, certain similarities should exist in their learned patterns of behaviour and their response to history.

Recent American studies of course- cultural phenomena, engineered by the likes of Richard Sykes, David Kajokan and Leo Marx, have established the claim that the study of literature is, in fact, a study of culture, "Culture is the key concept, the unifying concept, the root word which suggests both theory and method."

» Hence, cultural enrichment through literature is indeed limitless. Students should be exposed to the great works of world literature. Apart from the value of literature and the arts in the refinement of the human personality, the influence of cultural forces in the shaping a new world order will become more prominent in the

years to come.

In our day, the authority to teach is conferred upon the doctoral candidate who has proven his skill with his thesis. This phenomenon of the doctorate's authority, the dignity of the doctoral degree, first came into being in classical Islam in the guilds for the study of the discipline of the Shariah (Islamic Law). Universities' graduates who not only excel in their own chosen field of specialisation such as engineering, law, medicine and economics, but also have a firm grasp of diabetics and philosophy, in addition to having a taste for art and literature. Students must aspire to be multidimensional men of learning, *mutafannin*, as they were called during the apogee of Islamic civilisation.

A society or a community without a culture of its own is destined to permanent end in no time and there are many instances in the history that once a dominant race was later found to be nowhere as it lost cultural war waged by some others. The poison of cultural adulteration is on in Burma and many races there have already been the victims of such invasion.

Inevitably, it is the prime concern of conscious people to discover their lost cultural heritage. We feel that every conscious Rohingya is indebted to do overall development of Rohingya community under hostile environment to uphold their culture and tradition, which has been eroding under the influence of junta's Burmanisation policy.

» We must therefore, preserve our heritage, culture and traditions, which characterise our identity. To enable us to do so, it is as part of responsibility, the Rohingya's culture and tradition have been presented.

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## INTRODUCTION

In ancient Burma, Mon-Khamar, Tibeto-Burman, Thai-Chinese came from the Northeast in search of green pasture and clean water and settled there. With the passage of time many more new races emerged out of those mixed blood. Similarly, in Arakan Rakhines and Rohingyas have been born with the arrival of the Aryan people from the Northwest and their intermarriage with the locals through the evaluation of history.

It is the right of a distinct group to live in their own place, uphold their culture and practice religion of their own freely. Depending on the extent of civilisation and environment and in course of time, many changes take place within and around. And it is no exception in Burma. The ethnic Ta Line has become Mon, Taung Thu is now Pa-oh, Karenni is known as Kaya, Shan Taroke as Kokan etc.

It is, thus, not unfair to call the Muslims of Arakan as Rohingyas as they like to be called so. In fact, Rohingya is not a new name nor it is invented or adopted, as some Burmese ultra-nationalists do prefer to brand. 'Rohingya' is a historical name based on replete historical backgrounds. While changes of names of cities from Akyab to Sittwe, Rangoon to Yangon, Arakan to Rakhine, Burma to Myanmar etc. have recently be made, the centuries old name of ethnic Rohingya has however, been branded as a name created by anti-state elements in post-independent Burma. It simply gives a grim picture on the status of the Rohingya race.

Ethnic Rohingyas are a mixed blooded people having their origin in the following ethnic peoples during a long course of their establishment in Arakan:

- (a) Local Pre-Aryan, Aryan and Mongolian, that is, Hindu and

- Magh (local converts).
- (b) The Arab and Persian traders
  - (c) The Pathans army of Gen. Wali Khan and Sandhi Khan of 1429 and 1430.C.E, Turkish, Afghan and other Muslims from *Sonargaon*, Gaur and other parts of Bengal.
  - (d) The Mughals of Shah Shuja's followers.
  - (e) Bengali captives or slaves.
  - (f) Various ethnic nationalities who entered Arakan as officials, including Prime Ministers, Ministers, courtiers, judges, physicians, soldiers of both cavalry and infantry, merchants, traders, labourers, workers and sailors who were soon absorbed in the general population.

## 1. THE PEOPLE OF THE SOIL

### *The Historic Right of Rohingya*

Arakan, in fact, a continuation of the Chittagong plain was neither purely a Burmese nor an Indian Territory until 18th century A.D. Chiefly for its location, it had not only remained independent for the most part of history, but also endeavoured to expand its territory in the surrounding tracts whenever opportunity came. It is a natural physiographic unit clearly separated from the rest of Burma for a long and high impassable hill range of Arakan Yoma and also located far away from Indian capitals. The relation between Chittagong and Arakan is influenced by geographical, cultural and historical consideration.

Culturally, socially, economically and politically the people of Arakan were independent for centuries. Hinduism and Buddhism spread here from India, whereas Islamic civilisation began influencing Arakan and Bengal from the seventh century A.D. As such, her relation with the Western Muslim countries is millennia old.

Across the last two thousand years, there has been great deal of local vibrancy as well as movement by different ethnic people through the region. For the last millennium or so, Muslims and Buddhists have historically lived on both sides of the *Naaf* River, which marks the modern border with Bangladesh. The Muslims (Rohingyas) and Buddhists (Rakhines) had been peacefully coexisting in Arakan over the centuries like twin brothers. In addition to the two majority groups, a number of other minority peoples also came to live in Arakan, including the Chin, Mro, and Khami are mostly Christians today, who were traditionally animists.

It is not possible to ascribe to Rakhines a "historic right", the right of the first occupier. The Arakanese chronicles record a line

of kings reaching back to the year 2666 BC. More certain is the kingdom of *Dhannavati*, which flourished at the beginning of the Christian era.

Many modern scholars including U Aung Tha Oo and U San Tha Aung believe that the Rakhines were Aryans who came from the west. According to E.H. Johnston basing on Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan, 'Brahmancial and Buddhist culture together with an influx of Aryans speakers arrived in this area, in the early centuries of Christian era'. So the people in the kingdom of Dhannavati were not of Aryan stocks. They might have been Proto-Australoid people like that of Bengal or Negrito group of Neolithic descendants. These pre-Aryans peoples are the real *Adivasis* (aboriginal) of the land. They were not only the first occupants of the land but also had been there for thousand of years until the Aryans and other peoples came.

There is reliable evidence recorded in the earliest history of Arakan, the *Anandachandra Inscription* that plays an important role in the history of Arakan. This inscription mentions a *Chandra* dynasty, which might have been founded as early as the middle of fourth century A.D. with its capital by the Indian name of *Vaisali*. Archaeological remains, many historical and numismatics evidence confirms that it was a Hindu Indian state in the style of the period. According to MS Collis, 'the area now known as north Arakan had been for many years before the 8th century the seat of Hindu dynasties. In 788 A.D. a new dynasty known as the *Chandra* founded the city of *Wesali*. It was an easterly Hindu kingdom of Bengal following the Mahayanist form of Buddhism and that both government and the people were Indian.' History does not help us in forming any idea of Burmese infiltration into Arakan before 11th century. Historian D.G.E Hall in his classic "History of South-East Asia" described the Arakanese of today as "basically Burmese with an unmistakable Indian admixture ... the earlier dynasties are

thought to have been Indian, ruling over a population similar to that of Bengal."

The 'True *Chronicle*' records that in the 957 AD; a Mongolian invasion swept over *Wesali*, destroyed the Chandras and placed on their throne Mongolian kings. According to Wilhelm Klein, 'all of a sudden, Arakan changed. The invading tribes made the country face east, away from India. As Burma began to flex its muscles, the profound changes born at Pagan started to transform Arakan. The Tibeto-Burmans who had entered the country had become to stay. So had Theravada Buddhism, which reached Arakan via Ceylon, South India and South Burma. Over the centuries the physiognomy of the Arakanese people changed. The racial mixture of Indo-Europeans with the only recently arrived Central Asians became predominantly Mongoloid, an ethnic mixture which still characterises today's Arakanese.' It is only about the 11th century that we can speak of a people of Indo-Mongoloid stock, formed into an ethnic group in the intermixture of tribes of various ethnic origins, such as, Australoid, Mongoloid and other elements now known as Arakanese Buddhists. Historically they are called *Magh*. According to Phayre, the name *Magh* originated from the ruling race of Magadha. Professor San Tha Aung also says, 'the derivation would probably be *Moghodhi-Magai-Mog* or *Magh*.' But the Arakanese prefers to identify themselves as *Rakhine* rather than *Magh*.

Those who are now known as Rohingya are not solely descended from migrants' people but are the local indigenous people living in Arakan since the dawn of the history that later embraced cultural and religious reformation to upgrade their ancient tradition.

They are thus not descended from the Arabs, Moors, Pathans, and Moghuls alone. The Arabs arrived in Arakan late 7th century AD, settled there and intermingled, intermixed and intermarried



with the local people and converted a large number of population (including the Buddhist). The appearance of the Arabs in Arakan in the 7th century was far more of a cultural phenomenon than an ethnic one. The Persians, Turks, Pathans, and other Muslim immigrants who came into Arakan in the course of time were also merged with the local populace. These various migrations and local converts led to the admixture of blood and culture to form one common racial and linguistic classification to be known as *Rohingya*; a term derived from *Rohang*, the ancient name of Arakan.

With the passage of time, there came to exist two distinct communities of Rohingya and Rakhine in Arakan out of those heterogeneous races and tribes and are thus equally entitled to similar historical rights. Both are indigenous peoples characterised by objective criteria, such as historical continuity, and subjective factors including self-identification, which need to define an indigenous people, and entitled to have the right of ethnic origin from Arakan. It means that, if the Rakhines have a 'historic right' in Arakan, the Rohingyas have also the same right in Arakan.

## 2. THE MUSLIM COINS OF ARAKAN

Coins are considered to be the most perfect, authentic and informative source of history. There is no doubt about the facts that the coin reveals, and no one can challenge it as untrue. Thus, the value of the coins, as evidence of history, surpasses all the other sources. They are beyond doubt the primary and the most important source for the study of history and cultures.

The coins found in Arakan belong to Wesali are Hindu and those of Mrauk-U are of Muslim. Coinage of Muslim era is of an inscriptional nature. Save for a few exceptions, it contains not a portrait or a figure but the name of the king title, date and faith. The coin's artistic merit depends upon the calligraphy; and as everyone is aware who has studied the Persian script as a mural decoration this can give a remarkably balanced and vital impression of art.

According to M.S. Collis, Mr. Htoon Aung Gyaw, Barrister-at-law and certain other private collectors of Akyab have in their possession over a hundred coins found in Arakan. When recently arranged by Mr. San Shwe Bu, many of them were seen to be duplicates, but sixteen belonging to the Maruk-U dynasty (1430 to 1784 A.D.) were distinct specimens, bearing the dates and titles of fifteen different kings of that line. Moreover there were a few coins belonging to the Wesali dynasty (788 to 951 A.D.).

The Burmese invaded Arakan in 1406. Min Saw Mwan, the king of Arakan fled the country, taking refuge at Gaur, the capital of the Sultan of Bengal. The Arakanese king remained there for twenty-four years. In 1430 the Sultan of Bengal restored him to the throne of Arakan as his tributary. He turned away from what were Buddhist and familiar to what was Muslim. In so doing he loomed from the mediaeval to the modern, from the fragile fairyland of the

Glass Palace Chronicle to the robust extravaganza of the Thousand Nights and one Night.

Jalaluddin Mohammed Shah restored him in 1430 A.D. and Mrauk-U was built. It is note worthy that one of the Nasir-ud-din's coins was recently found near the site of that 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 in that tradition the coinage of Mrauk-U were subsequently modeled. In this way Arakan became definitely oriented towards the Muslim states. Contact with a modern civilisation resulted in a renaissance. The country's great age began.

Shin Araham would have found himself as much out of place at the court of Gaur as St. Bernard in the university of Cordova. To avoid such a sensation and snatch advantage from change, the Arakanese had to forsake a fashion in ideas, which had fallen behind in the march of the world's thought, and bring themselves up to date. It took the Arakanese a hundred years to learn that doctrine from the Muslims.

In 1531 Minbin Zabauk Shah ascended the throne. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Islamic studies and the Arakanese Empire was founded. In Mr. Htoon Aung Gyaw's collections one is of Minbin's coins. It presents a succinct commentary on the sudden rise of Arakan to importance in the Bay of Bengal. On one side of it is inscribed the word "Minbin" in the Burmese character. On the reverse in Nagari is his Muslim title, Zabauk Shah. So Arakan had turned into a Sultanate.

For a short period during the reign of Razagri Salim Shah Arakan extended from Dacca and the Sundrbans to Moulmein, a coast strip of a thousand miles in length and varying from 150 to 20 miles in breadth. Copying the imperial Court of Dehli, its kings adopted the title of Padshah. At this moment Arakan was of its

highest destiny.

The coins of Sultans were inscribed with a precise inscription in useful and sufficient Persian lettering. With Akbar and his successors the scrip becomes a fine art. Imperially cursive, whirling under the eye, it has a living beauty. M.S. Collis and San Shwe Bu possessed a coin of Razagri Salim Shah. On the obverse is his title in Burmese, on the reverse in Persian and Nagari. The style is essentially that of the Sultanates, and it is an evidence of advancement in Arakan.

One of the coins of Sultan Ali Shah (Thatasa-1525 C.E) found recently at Mrauk-U, inscribed in Persian, it reads; "There is no God but Allah, Mohammed the Messenger of Allah. May Allah perpetuate his kingdom." The reverse side, also inscribed in Persian, reads as; "Sultan Ali Shah, father of the victorious. May Allah perpetuate his kingdom." A coin of Razagri/ Salim shah (1593-1612) also found in the collection of Chittagong University museum. Dr. A. Karim remarks that the coin of Salim Shah is very interesting and its throws light on Arakan relations with Bengal.

Another Muslim coin of Arakan which was minted during 1430 A.D.-1530 A.D. with a mural decoration of mosque and Persian inscription of fine art is invaluable in the cultural history of Arakan and its civilisation. The reverse side of the coin is an inspirational nature. It contains faith (kalima- the profession of faith in Islam) and the names of Islam's four *khalifas*- Abu Bakar (R.A), Umar (R.A), Osman (R.A) and Ali (R.A) carefully recorded with artistic merit.

Of the last seven kings of Arakan all have coins except number 42 and 46 who both ruled but a few weeks. The coins themselves exhibit little variation, which remained in the Muslim tradition. On the other hand, the Burmese never had a coin of their own when it was in vogue in Arakan. It is, therefore, clearly known that Muslims

and Rakhine of Arakan were much ahead culturally and economically as well as in ruling the state more superior in style and governance than the Burmese of that era.

After the occupation of Arakan, king Bodaw's first act was to strike a medallion in the style of the Mrauk-U coinage. Having no tradition of minting coins, he had no model of his own. He simply copied the Muslim design. The legend reads- "The kingdom of the Master of Amarapura and of many white elephants." This is the numismatic document to the fall of Mrauk-U. It was the last coin struck in Arakan. The first time in its long history that Arakan had lost a home government of its own.

What is more important is that Manrique who had witnessed the coronation of the king Thiri Thudamma Salim Shah II, used the Muslim name Salim Shah only, he did not use the Magh name of the king. So there is no doubt that the Arakanese kings took the Muslim names deliberately, purposely and not only one king but all reigning for more than two hundred years used the Muslim names and inscribed the same in the coins. So A.P. Phayre is wrong when he says that the Arakanese kings made "barbarous imitations" and adopted "fanciful designations."

"In striking the coins the policy of inscribing Islamic creed (*Kalima*) and the Muslim names of their kings in Persian character was followed, and because in the court of the Arakanese kings Muslim ministers were appointed, modern Arakanese Rohingya Muslims believe for certain that those Arakanese kings were Muslims" written by a writer. Another writer says that the Arakanese kings considered it glorious for them to inscribe Muslim names and Muslim creed (*Kalima*) in their coins along with their Magh names. There is no evidence that they were not Muslims. We can call them Rohingyas, as they were the kings of Rohang!

### 3. VIEWS OF MR. SHAMSHUDDIN

*Morocco or Mrauk-U dynasty*

*And*

*The Muslim Kings of Arakan*

After spending 24 years in Bengal, Naramaikhla was restored to the throne by the Sultan of Bengal. Since he was dethroned from his palace in Launggret earlier he decided to build his capital at a strategically secured place. As he might have felt that living among the Muslim community would be safer and wiser, he chose a large Muslim village known as Rwaung, which literally means "old village" and named it Mrohaung "old city". The city was inhabited by the descendants of Moorish Arabs who were rehabilitated by the king of Arakan, Mahataing Chandra (788-810) after shipwrecks. As they were Moorish origin, the city came to be known as Morocco and later mutilated as Mrauk-U. Advocate Shamsuddin Ahmed wrote in his book, "Glimpses into the history of the Burmese and Chinese Muslims". Page 56 as follows:

"Old Arakan is known as Rohang/Ormashin the social and cultural history of Bengal. 'M.A Rahim, Vol. 1'. The then capital was Mrohaung (Pathariqilla), which was built by king Solaiman Shah (Corrupted into Saw Mwan) the founder of the Maraukku Dynasty in 1430 A.D. The king's original name was Naramaikhla. As is borne out by historical facts, in all probability, he was converted to Islam during his long stay at Gaur between 1406 and 1430 A.D." He had studied Monotheistic Belief- he turned away from what was Buddhist and familiar to what was Mohamedan and foreign. In 1531 Min Bin (Zabuk Shah) ascended the throne. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Muslim studies and the Empire was founded. (JBRS, Vol. II, P. 491). "It is difficult to conceive that the Muslims after the conquest of a country shall leave it to be ruled by

a non-Muslim”, wrote by Dr. Mohammed Yunus. He further said, “All those kings who bore Muslim names had been unreservedly Muslims. We can clearly see from the succession of Mrauk-U kings that only those kings who belonged to the legitimate lines bear Muslims names because they are Muslims whereas the usurpers never use any Muslim title. Sanda Thadita and Thamada are also Muslims and are the descendants of Kaman archers who have been deported to Ramree earlier.”

Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed wrote that when Shah Shuja and his party reached Myohaung the king of Arakan was a Magh (Buddhist?) or a Rohingya (Muslim), the truth of this historical fact is yet to be thoroughly researched”.

***The Grave of Shah Shuja:***

“Mystery shrouds the end of the ill-fated Shah Shuja. But, many in Sargodha (Pakistan) believe, he lies buried there. A popular legend regards Dharema, a small village of Sargodha as the place where he lays eternal rest. It is said that when the Maghs of Arakan attacked the Prince, he escaped to India and was on his way to Persia, met mystic Sultan Habib near Sargodha. The Prince stayed with the mystic and was enlisted among his followers. He was given the name of Sultan Bazid in order to save the Prince from the vigilant eye of Aurangzeb. Near the tomb of the saint lies the simple grave of Shah Shuja without any dome. Another legend says that Shah Shuja escaped fighting through a tunnel in the castle into the mountains. Some Malays claim that Shah Shuja escaped to Malay and there is a grave there described as that of Shah Shuja. (Glimpse into the History of Burmese and Chinese Muslims by Shamsuddin)

***Princess Aameena:***

Sanda Thudama, the king of Arakan asked for the hand of Aameena in marriage. Shah Shuja turned down the request. The

king felt insulted and attacked Shah Shuja and party and forcibly carried away Aameena to his palace. She was kept in confinement for sometime till she managed to escape to Mandalay or Shwebo with some Muslim traders through the land route. Mr. Shamsuddin mainly concentrated on the point of Thibaw Min being a descendant of Aameena. Thibaw Min was the last Burmese ruler who was deported to Ratnagiri in Madras in 1885 by the British. There are also many Burmese Muslims who believe that king Bodaw was a Muslim and was disciple of a Muslim saint (Abed Shah Hussein) by producing various kinds of documents. They believe him to be an undeclared Muslim.

**4. ROHINGYA LANGUAGE FROM THE ACCOUNT OF FRANCIS BUCHANAN (1762-1829)**

Francis Buchanan was born in Scotland in 1762, graduated from the University of Glasgow, and then studied medicine in Edinburgh. He qualified as a medical doctor in 1783 with a dissertation on the treatment of recurrent fevers. After having made journeys to Asia and the West Indies as a ship’s surgeon, he was appointed in Bengal. In 1795 he was attached as surgeon to Captain Michael Symes’ Embassy to Ava, the capital of Burma. He used this journey to collect and record information on many aspects of life in Burma and the Andamans.

In his account “A comparative vocabulary of some of the language, spoken in the Burma Empire,” Asiatic Researches, Vol. 5, New Delhi 1979, PP.219-242, about the languages of Burma proper, that of Arakan, that of the Yo, and that of Tenaserim.

“.....About the language of Arakan Buchanan wrote:-



“I shall now add three dialects, spoken in the Burma Empire, but evidently derived from the language of the Hindu nation. The first is that spoken by the Mohammedans, who have long settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan. The second dialect is that spoken by the Hindus of Arakan. I procured it from a Brahmen and his attendants, who had been brought to Amarapura by king’s eldest son, on his return from the conquest of Arakan. They call themselves Rossawn, and for what reason “I do not know, wanted to persuade me that theirs was the common language of Arakan”.

The last dialect of the *Hindustanee*, which I shall mention, is that of a people called, by the Burmas, *Aykobat*, many of whom are slaves at Amrapura. By one of them I was informed, that they called themselves Banga, that formerly they had kings of their own, but in his father’s time, their kingdom had been overturned by the king of Munnypura, who carried away a great part of the inhabitants to his residence. When that was taken last by the Burmas, which was about fifteen years ago, this man was one of the many captives who were brought to Ava. He said also, that Banga was seven days journey south-west from Munnypura: it must, therefore, be on the frontiers of Bengal .....

Buchanan in his account also stated that the native *Mugs* of Arakan called themselves *Yakain*. He wrote... “Which name is also commonly given to them by the Burmans. The people of Pegu name them *Talain*. By the Bengal Hindus, at least by such of them as have been settled in Arakan, the country is called Rossawn, .....The Mohammedans settled at Arakan, call the country Rovingaw; the Persians call it *Rekon*.”

Buchanan continued: “ Mr. Gilchrist has been so good as to examine particularly these two dialects, and mark thus (\*) those

words which come nearest the *Hindustanee* spoken on the *Ganges*; and thus (†) those not so evidently in connection with the same, but which show resemblance by analogy.

No.	English	Rooinga	Rossawn	Banga
1.	Sun	Bel	*Sooja	Bayllee
2.	Moon	Swan	Sundsa	Satkan
3.	Stars	Tara	*Nokyoto	*Tara
4.	Earth	Kool	Murtika	*Matee
5.	Water	Pannae	Dosol	*Panne
6.	Fire	Auin	*Aagane	Zee
7.	Stone	Sheel	*Sheel	*Heel
8.	Wind	Bau	*Pawun	*Bo
9.	Rain	Jorail	†Bistee	*Bocun
10.	Man	Manush	†Moanusa	*Manoo
11.	Woman	Meealaw	Stree	Zaylan
12.	Child	Gourapa	*Balouk	Sogow
13.	Head	Mata	Mustok	Teekgo
14.	Mouth	Gall	Bodon	Totohan
15.	Arm Bahara	*	Boho	Paepoung
16.	Hand	Hat	Osto	Hatkan
17.	Leg Ban	†Podo	Torooa	
18.	Foot	Pau	Pata	Zankan
19.	Beast	Zoomttoo	Sasce	sanget
20.	Bird	Paik	†Pookyee	†Pakya
21.	Fish	Maws	Mootsae	†Mas
22.	Good	Goom	Gam	Hoba
23.	Bad	Goom nay	Gumny	Hopanay
24.	Great	Boddau	Dangot	Domorgo
25.	Little	Thuddee	*Tsooto	Hootoogo
26.	Long	Botdean	Deengol	Deengul
27.	Short	Banick	*Batee	*Batee

28.	One	Awg	*Aik	*Ak
29.	Two	Doo	*Doo	De
30.	Three	Teen	*Teen	†Teen
31.	Four	Tchair	*Tsar	*Saree
32.	Five	Pansoce	*Paus	*Pas
33.	Six	Saw	*Tso	*Tsae
34.	Seven	Sat	*Sat	*Hat
35.	Eight	Awtoa	†Awtoa	*Asto
36.	Nine	Nonaw	*No	*No
37.	Ten	Dussoa	*Dos	*Dos
38.	Eat	Kau	*Kawai	*Kaek
39.	Drink	Karin	Kawo	*Peek
40.	Sleep	Layrow	†Needsara	Hooleek
41.	Walk	Pawkay	Bayra	O-teea-ootea
42.	Sit	Boihaw	†Boesho	†Bo
43.	Stand	Teheilayto	*Karao	†Oot
44.	Kill	Marin	*Maro	*Mar
45.	Yes	Hoi	Oir	Oo
46.	No	Etibar	*Noay	*Naway
47.	Here	Hayray	Btay	Brang
48.	There	Hoary	Horay	Orung
49.	Above	Ouchalo	*Ooper	Oos
50.	Below	Ayray	Hayray †	Tol

## 5. FEATURES

Generally Rohingyas are comparatively broad shouldered, than the Rakhine and Burmese people but a bit darker in complexion. They are bronze coloured and not yellowish. They have not so high cheek bone as that of Tibeto Mongoloid and jaws are proportionate with their faces. Eyes are not narrow and shallow like Rakhines and Burmans. Their hairs are mostly straight but a few have curly hair. The nose of the Rohingya is not as flat as the Burmese or as sharp as that of European stock. It is pleasant looking. Some Rakhines also have pointed nose. The Burmese discriminates the people of pointed noses.

The Aryans are noted for their pointed nose. Some people rate pointed nose as pleasant to look at. The Iranians consider themselves as descendants of Aryans and the ruler, Reza Shah Pahlvi, added a racial insignia to his name, Arya Meher (Meher being sun, Arya indicates Aryan). The beauty of nose, the cheeks, the eyes and the lips particularly touched in Persian literature. A long sharply pointed nose, the experts' claim, yields prominence to the cheeks, which Poet Hafiz poetically decorated with beautifying black moles and for one such spot he wanted to barter Samarkhand and Bokhara.

Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, the French diplomat, is best known for his contribution to the theory of racial inequality and the supremacy of the Aryan peoples. He talked of Aryan supremacy and the nobility of the German people as the finest representatives of the Aryan race.

He firmly believed that the purest Aryans originated from Central Asia and, in particular, Iran. The very name "Iran" means land of the Aryan and the pure Persians are among the closest to

the early type of the race. (Daniel Easterman, "The last Assassin" "UK, 1991-page 439-440).

The Rohingyas are proud of their distinctive culture and tradition. In his book- *Burmese Outpost*, Anthony Irwin remarked about the ethnic character of the Rohingyas as, "and to look at, they are quite unlike any other product of India or Burma that I have seen. They resemble as Arab in name, in dress and in habit. The women and more particularly the young girls, have distinctive Arab touch about them." (Anthony Irwin-*Burmese Outpost*, London, 1945, page-22).

## 6. THE ROHINGYA

The word Rohingya is derived from Rohang, the ancient name of Arakan. Situated on Burma's southwestern with Bangladesh; Arakan has a population of five million, half of whom are Muslims<sup>1</sup>. The Muslims of Arakan are the direct progeny of the early Muslims. They are the descendants of the Muslim Arabs, Pathans, Moors, Persians, Turks, Afghans, Mughals and Bengalis who came mostly as traders, warriors and saints through over land and sea-route. Many settled in Arakan and mixing with the local people developed the present stock of people known as "Rohingyas"<sup>2</sup>

Some people say that the term Rohingya is derived from the Arabic word 'Raham' meaning "sympathy". They say that it was during the reign of Mahataing Chandra (788-810 A.D.) some Arab ships were wrecked along the shores of Arakan and the ill-fated people who boarded them begged for help by uttering Raham, Raham. Gradually it changed from Raham to Rohang meaning God bless-land and finally they were named Rohingyas.

A Rohingya writer Mr. Khalilur Rahman in his book "Tarik-

i-Islam Arakan and Burma"<sup>3</sup> first expressed this view. Mr. Zahiruddin Ahmed, former President of Buthidaung Peace Committee, rejected this view. In his view Rohingyas are the descendants of the inhabitants of Ruha in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> This view is also untenable.

It is true that the term Rohang or Roshang is the corrupt form of the old name of Mrohaung. Later on, the inhabitants who lived in Rohang or Roshang were treated as Roshangee or Rohingya. Among the Muslim population of Chittagong two distinct groups are found; one is known as 'Chatganiya' and the other is 'Rohai'. Even the latter form half the total population of Chittagong, who trace their origin to Arakan or Mrohaung<sup>5</sup>. Since Chittagong was an integral part of the Arakanese Kingdom till the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>, the natives of Chittagong lived in the capital Mrohaung to serve the Kings in various capacities. In the medieval Bengali literary works the name Roshang is frequently used instead of Arakan. In colloquial Chittagonian dialect the country is called Rohang and the people Rohingyas.

There are also those who believe that Rohingya is a mutilation of the word Rwa houg ga kyar, "tiger from the ancient village". Which means, "brave" and is the name given to the Muslim soldiers who settled in Arakan. After spending 24 years in Bengal, Naramekhla was restored to the throne by the Sultan of Bengal. Since he was dethroned from his palace in Launggret earlier he decided to build his capital at a strategically secured place. As he might have felt that living among the Muslim community would be safer and wiser, he chose a large Muslim village known as Rwa haung, which literally means "old village" and named it Mrohaung - "old town". The city was inhabited by the descendants of Moorish Arabs who were rehabilitated by the king of Arakan, Mahataing Chandra (788-810) after shipwrecks. Afterwards the Muslims of the areas were known as 'Rwa-haung ga kyar' pro-

nouncing it as Rohingya. As they were Moorish origin, the city came to be known as Morocco and later mutilated as Mrauk-U. (Moulana Taher Jamal Nadwi "Sarjminin Arakan ki Azadi Pas Manzarmi"). Advocate Shamsuddin Ahmed also theologised the same.

In Rashid Uddin's work the name of Arakan appeared as Rahan closely resembling to Rohang.<sup>8</sup> In his book Rashid Uddin writes, "Beyond that is the country of Ratban (Martaban), then Arman (Mramyan, old name of Burma), then Zardandan... after wards comes the country of Rahan the people of which eat carrion and the flesh of men." According to Dr. S.H. Hodivala, Rahan, "which the people ate carrion, must be Mrohaung - the ancient capital of Arakan or Rakhang, as it was called by old Muslim authors. Jahangir says of the Mugs of Arakan "they eat every thing there is, either on land or in the sea, and nothing is forbidden by their religion" (Tazuk-i-Jahangir, Ed (Sir) Sayyid Ahmed, "Aligrah," 1864 - P-115). Rashid Uddin probably wrote Rakhan. The modern form of Arakan is said to be derived from the Arabic "Al-Rakhang". (S.H. Hodivala, studies in History of Indian Muslims, New Delhi, 1992, PP-58, 59).

Chakma queen Manikbi's husband sided with the Bangalees and fought many battles with the Maghs in a country called Roang (Arakan) in the year 118-119. Manikbi's great grandson was Kamalchega. During his reign there was a war in Roang and the Chakmas migrated into that country.<sup>9</sup>

The Tripura Chronicle Rajmala mentioned that the Tripura king "Dhanyamanika occupied Chittagong and appointed Roshang Mardan Narayan (the conqueror of Roshang) governor of that conquered country."<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Shwe Lu Maung defines Rohingya as a Chittagonian

dialect of Rakhine Thar.<sup>11</sup> He said that the Buddhists of Rakhine state view the Rohingyas as spearhead of the Islamic expansionism. But his presumption was rejected by this writer saying that Rohingyas are victims of permanent intolerable persecutions in the name of Kalas (with contempt the Burmese call Muslims as Kala). Beside the Rohingya believe in peaceful coexistence and unity of the people of Arakan regardless of their religion and creed. They are asking for a piece of peace only. Not only did the Rohingya participate in the pro-democracy uprising of 1988, many Rohingya organisations actively take up (for democracy and human rights) for the 45 million people of Burma including the Magh "Rakhine of Arakan".<sup>12</sup> One Khin Maung Saw (Berlin) alleged that Rohingyas was a creation during the 1950s. Widura Khin Maung Gyi saying that Rohingya is as old as Bengali literature refuted it. In Bengali, Arakan is called Rohang and the people who live in Rohang are called Rohingyas. Kin Maung Saw (Berlin) also alleged that Rohingyas are not the citizens of Burma because they don't know any language except Chittagonian dialect. But he should study the ruling- "Hasan Ali V. Union of Burma and Mehar Ali V. Union of Burma Supreme Court criminal miscellaneous case No. 155 and 156 of 1957" and also "Sayed Alam (a) Sayed Khan Ahmed & 23 others Vs. Secretary of Immigration & two (1960 BLR (SC) 218)," in which their lordships of the Supreme Court of Rangoon remarked: "Mere face appearance of a person or whether he has knowledge of Burmese or Arakanese is not the test as to whether he/she is a citizen of the Union."

Dr. Shwe Lu Maung also alleged that Rohingya are British-era settlers, which is quite contrary to the real history. History says that Muslims of Arakan fought along with Burmese generals Maha Bandula against British. The Rakhine Maghs sided with Britishers against the Burmese forces as the British promised to restore Rakhine Kingdom. During the Japanese occupation the Muslims of



Arakan fought along with the Britishers and the Rakhine Maghs sided with the Japanese. It indicates that the Muslims of Arakan were always faithful to the existing administration and stood against the invaders. Although the British promised to make the Rohingya people a happy and fair state out of Arakan, it was not materialised. The Rohingya language was in use widespread during the era of Arakanese kings<sup>13</sup>, their written language was however, mainly destroyed by the Burmese invaders in 1784.

The celebrated 17<sup>th</sup> century Arakan court poet Shah Alawal who composed the famous ballad on the lamentations of Ameena, the youngest daughter of ill-fated Mughal 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" which were composed in 1669 and 1673 AD. This was also endorsed in Dr. D.C Sen's two Ballads on 'The Bereavement of Pari Banu' the wife of the said Mughal Prince and 'The lamentation of Shuja's daughter'.

In the medieval Bengali works of Qazi Daulat, Mardan, Shamser Ali, Quraishi Magan, Ainuddin, Syed Nasir, Abdul Gani and Alawal had made frequent references to "Rosanga Shahar (Rohingya city) "Roshanga" and also sometimes, 'Roshanga des' Abdul Karim Khandakar of the eighteenth century, call the people, Moraung: and the king of the country is described as Moranga Rai' and the capital as 'Roshanga shahar' (Qazi Daulat, Sati Moyna O Lor Chandrani ed. Ghasal, p-45, Alawal, Saiful Mulk Badiuzzama, ed. A. Sharif P-63, Tohfa, ed. Ibid, P-78 Puthi Parichili, Ibid P-242,269,600)

A British Army officer who served in the Arakan front during the Second World War remarked about the ethnic character of the Arakan Muslims as, "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 and in habit. The women and more particularly the young girls, have distinctive Arab touch about them." <sup>14</sup>

### *The Maghs (Rakhine):*

There in Magadha, old Bihar, the Buddhists were so seriously persecuted by the fanatic 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 their Aryan blood was adulterated as a result of intermarriages between them and their co-religionists - the Mongolians and the Tibeto-Burmans. Thus the present day Buddhists of Arakan originated in Magadha but they were overwhelmed by the Mongolians and lost the Indian character.

Today both the Maghs of Arakan and Bangladesh disown this name because the word Magh became synonymous with pirates or dacoits as for more than two centuries the Maghs of Arakan were sea pirates. 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 their canes through the holes, and threw them one above another under the deck of their ships. In the same manner as grain is flung to fowls, every morn and evening they threw down uncooked rice from above the captives as food.<sup>15</sup> The Maghs earned such a bad name during the last many centuries that it has become a great shame for their descendants of today to own the name Magh. Thus, they started calling themselves Rakhines.

According to them the word Rakhine is derived from Rakkapura or the land of Rakkash - imaginary man-eating monster. The claim is based on legends of imagination or mythology.

The term Rakhine is in fact derived from Rohan or Arakan.

The spoken language of Maghs or Rakhine is not a separate language but pure Burmese with phonetic variation. Historians commented on the Rakhine language as follows:

“The question of the Arakanese Rakhine 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 Rakhine language is the same language 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 afterwards became predominant in the Irrawady 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>16</sup>

### *Etymology of Arakan:*

The term Arakan is of Arabic or Persian origin having the same meaning in both these languages. It is a slight variation of the word *Arkan* 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. The name might be given by the early Arab traders or by the Arakanese kings while Persian was the official language of Arakan up to 1845.

One of the coins found in Arakan and preserved in the Museum of 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.

The name Arakan did not appear as a solitary instance in the above languages. Different important places, rivers and mountains in Arakan also bear names of Persian or Arabic. For example: the name of the capital city of Arakan is Akyab (Ek-ab) meaning “one water” in Persian like Punjab (Panj-ab) meaning, “land of five waters.” Chaduba Island meaning “Right angular”. Kaladan (Intellectuals) Kulapanj (fifty learned men) are also of either Persian or Arabic origin, the Naf (naw, meaning “boat” in Rohingya) and Mayu (Mayur, meaning “Peacock” in Rohingya) testify to the fact of Islamic sway over the region now known as Arakan.<sup>17</sup>

The superior ideas, culture, etiquette and ways of life of the Rohingyas to an appreciable extent reacted the Maghs in many ways. The Maghs until this day speak Rohingya as well, the original lingua franca of these two communities in Arakan. The word Arakanese attributed to the Magh alone is highly erroneous. Looking at the past history of Arakan it can legitimately be asserted that if the indigenous Rohingyas cannot claim Arakan as their sacred motherland the Maghs too have no right at all to be the sons of the soil.

“I shall now add three dialects, spoken in the Burma Empire. The first is that spoken by the Mohammadans, who have long settled in Arakan and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan,” Francis Buchanan, “The languages of Burma,”<sup>18</sup>. In 1795 Francis Buchanan was attached as surgeon to Captain Michael Symes, (Ambassador of British to Burma) Embassy in Ava, the capital of Burma. He used this journey to collect and records information on many aspects of life in Burma and the Andaman Islands.

In a memorandum to the government of the Union of Burma, dated 18th June 1948, Mr. Sultan Ahmed, in his capacity as parliamentary secretary, Ministry of Minorities, it was written that according to history, Islam reached Arakan before 788 A.D. and it

attracted the local people to come to the fold of Islam en masse all over Burma. Since then Islam had played an important part towards the advancement of civilisation in Arakan where Muslims and Buddhists lived side by side for centuries with amity and concord as one family and ruled the country together... The Muslim of north Arakan have been together as a race in a group from time immemorial in a territory included within the union of Burma..... the President of the constituent assembly, at that time His Excellency the President of the Union of Burma, who when approached for clarification with this question (of Rohingya as an indigenous race of Burma) said "Muslims of Arakan certainly belong to one of the indigenous races of Burma, and that if you do not belong to indigenous race of Burma we also can not be taken as indigenous race of Burma". Being satisfied with his kind explanation, the objection put in was withdrawn.<sup>19</sup>

According to the historian Magasthenes, the Greeks named the present day Barisal- Chittagong division of Bangladesh and Arakan as Aghyre. During Chandra Gupta Muraya's rule the name "*Kalamukha*" was used in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It was then known to be a land producing cotton, bean, vegetables and fruits. From 300 A.D until 700 A.D it was known as "*Canaras*". During the period of sultans of Delhi, the name of Arakan was "*Maghari*".

The existence of wild animals like elephants and rhinoceroses the production of the extremely fine cotton fabrics, the use of kauri as medium of exchange, the growing of aloe wood etc. point to the fact that the Arab geographers explored that part of the territory of *Rahmi* where these objects could be seen. Elliot and Dowson are probably correct in locating this place "on the Bay of Bengal about Dhaka and Arakan". The Arabs mention a seaport called *Samandar*, which has been identified by Dr. Abdul Karim with Chittagong.

Marco Polo (1295 A.D), put Burma and Bengal under one king who was subjected to the domination of the great Khan (Kublai Khan). The noted historian Rashiduddin writes, "The country of Rahan (Arakan) is subjected to the Khan". If it is true then Chittagong, a subject province of Arakan at that time happened to be included in the empire of Kublai Khan.

There is a historic stone pillar of Vesali Chandra dynasty (788-957 C.E) known as Vesali stone pillar or Ananda Chandra's Stone Pillar, which now lies close to the Shittaung Phara Pagoda's entrance down the stairway in the old Mrauk-U city. The pillar has inscriptions on three sides - east, west and northern side. The northern side has a total of 73 lines of inscription of which, 69 lines were written in Proto-Bengali script. In the 42<sup>nd</sup> line, the name of Arakan (country) was written "Arakandesh". (Dr. Saw Tun Aung: Shittaung Phara Stone Pillar's Northern side Inscription, Rakhine Welfare Association's 25 Anniversary Magazine, P-49, 51 and Pamela Gutman: Ancient Arakan, Ph.D.-Thesis, Australian National University, 1976.)

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## 7. COMPOSITION OF THE ROHINGYA SOCIETY IN ARAKAN

Dr. Than Tun, the Rector of Mandalay University and former professor of History, Rangoon University wrote that, "The Kings of Arakan had Muslim titles. The Muslim kings mentioned in the inscription might be Rohingya, from the Mayu River, the eastern part of the Naf River, who claimed over thousand years of their existence. Their existence might be from the time of 1202 CE when the Muslim conquered Bengal that is 800 year ago. In the *Kyaukza* or stone inscription of 1442, it was written that some Muslim kings of Arakan were the friends of king of Ava. They used to visit Ava<sup>1</sup> Naramekhla had paid visit to king of Ava.<sup>1(a)</sup>

Islam came to Southeast Asia borne on the seas by Sufis and merchants rather than overland by soldiers brandishing swords. Conversion was by choice, not coercion. This peaceful and gradual Islamisation has moulded the Southeast Asian Muslims' psyche into one, which is cosmopolitan, open-minded, tolerant and amenable to cultural diversity.<sup>2</sup>

In his journey from China to the Levant in 1292, Marco Polo stayed for five months at a city port of Northeast Sumatra called Perlak. He observed:

"That the people of Perlak ... owing to contact with Saracen (Muslim) merchants, who continually resort here in their ships, they have all been converted to Islam. This applies only to the inhabitants of the city. The people of the mountain live like beasts".<sup>3</sup> According to authentic historical references there is direct evidence of Arabs being in contact with the Far East since 300 A.D as they were a foremost seafaring and maritime people of the ancient time. Since then the Arabs had founded small trading colonies all along the shores of South Asia and South East Asian waters including Arakan up to Sumatra, Java and Moluccas.<sup>4</sup> Then towards the



middle of the Seventh Century CE dawned a new era for the Arabs with the rise of Islam as a great spiritual, social and political force. Within hundred years after the Prophet they became masters of a mighty empire greater than that of Rome. Their domination of seas extended from the two Basins of the Mediterranean, down the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.... The Red Sea was virtually an Arab lake. In the Indian Ocean their political control extended up to the Indus valley. There were numerous Arab settlements with the full enjoyment of their religious and social practices, along the Konkan, Malabar and the Coromendal 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 of Mohammed's invasions of India and the struggle between the Cross and Crescent in the world of the west.<sup>5</sup>

During the same period, Arakanese chronicles states that Muslim *Faqirs* and Sufis (saints) used to visit the Arakan coast. One of the widely known facts is the existence of Muslim shrines called *Bader Mokam* which are essentially the commemorative shrines originally erected by the followers of *Pir Badruddin* Badri-i-Alam popularly known as *Pir Bader* scattered along the coastline of Arakan.<sup>6</sup> The legendary *Hanifa Tonki* and *Khayafuti Tonki* in Mayu mountain, the Shrines of Babaji Shah Monayam of Ambari and Pir Badar Shah at Akyab all bear evidence of the arrival of mystic saints as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>9</sup> When *Hazarat Hanifa*, according to *Hanifa O Khayafuti* Laric by Shah Barid Khan, arrived from Korbala, Iraq to Mayu valley the natives were wild cannibals.<sup>9</sup> Their queen was *Khayafuti*. She was married to *Hazarat Hanifa*<sup>10</sup> and after embracing Islam the natives became the civilised citizens of the majestic Mayu valley. Hence, from the *Kaludan* river to the *Naf* River the whole

fertile Mayu valley became a Muslim area. Some say *Khayafuti* and most of her subjects were Hindus and the rest were *Chakmas*. The local Hindus believed that Rama and Sita Devi arrived at the southern side of Maungdaw, and her trial of purity was performed there and the place was still known as *Sitaforikka* para. Some believed that *Khayafuti* was a Chakma Queen. Some say that her name was not *Khayafuti* but *Khayafuri* and she was a fairy and the whole legend was a fairy tale, though there are many Puthi (ancient Bengali history) books telling the story as true supporting the arrival of *Hazarat Hanifa*.

The more literate often read out Puthi to the villagers. In recent years, scholars have generally recognised the relevance of indigenous literary sources for writing the history of the people. Puthi in Bengali may literally mean 'a book or 'a manuscript' but the term generally came to be associated with a particular genre composed in verse. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Puthi became almost an exclusive concern of semi-literate Muslims. It became a vehicle for transmitting to the Muslim mass stories relating cultural heritage of Islam as well as the basic issue of their religion.

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 Anawrahta's rule (1044-1077) states: "When he (attendant of the king) entered the forests he found a fakir, possessed of mystic wisdom, dead with marks of violence upon him".<sup>11</sup>

While Burmese King Anawrahta was ruling the Burmese people the Mon King Manuha was ruling the Mon people from *Thaton*, the then port city. An Arab ship wrecked. And two young Muslim brothers escaped from the jaws of the death with the help of a timber from the wrecked ship. The monk of *Thaton* took the



two brothers, *Byawi* and *Byatta* and the clergy adopted them. One day the monk took the two boys to a deep forest where they found a dead body of a Muslim saint. The two brothers grew up and they became famous for their strength of even fighting elephants with bare hands. The king felt envious and afraid of these two Muslim mighty men who might take his throne by force. He had trapped *Byawi* as he felt in love with the daughter of the king's Prime Minister. *Byatta* escaped to King *Anawrahta*. With the help of *Byatta*, King *Anawrahta* conquered *Thaton* and *Manuha* was taken as prisoner. *Byatta* was married to a woman from *Popa* from where he had to carry magnolia flowers seven times a day to the Pagan palace. He had two sons in the service of King *Anawrahta*'s army. With their help King *Anawrahta* won the battle with Chinese. On their returning journey from China, the two sons of *Byatta*, *Shwe Pyine Gyi* and *Shwe Pyine Ngay* were beheaded by the king because they refused to put bricks on the construction of a Buddhist Pagoda as they were Muslims by faith. It shows that from the very beginning the Burmese were ungrateful toward Muslims. *Anawrahta* was killed in a fight with a mysterious mad buffalo. There were Muslims residing at Pagan and *Popa* in those days.

*Anawrahta*'s son *Saw Lu* was fed milk from the breast of *Rahman Khan*'s mother or she was the wet-nurse of *Saw Lu*. Thus King *Saw Lu* was the foster brother of *Rahman Khan*. *Rahman Khan* was the ruler of Pegu. With a minor quarrel *Rahman Khan* fought with his Mon army and conquered Pagan. But he was defeated by *Saw Lu*'s half brother *Kyansistha*.<sup>12</sup>

The daughter of *Kyansistha* was in love with a Muslim prince. The king was unable to agree with his daughter to marry the Muslim prince as his ministers protested the love saying that the country would turn into a Muslim state.<sup>13</sup> (In a statement by General *Khin Nyunt*, the SLORC Secretary). (With contempt they call Muslim as *Kala*).

The Muslim prince who was the *Majinun* to the daughter of *Kyansistha*, the *Laila*, might be an Arakanese Muslim prince from *Mrauk-U* or from *Mayu*. According to Dr. *Than Tun* there were Muslim kings who ruled Rohingyas of *Mayu* valley. There are numerous Rohingyas folk tales supporting it.<sup>14</sup>

On the southern side of the island of *Akyab*, near the Eastern Shore of the bay, there is situated *Bader Mokam*, *Bader* being the name of a saint of Islam, a *Mokam*, a place of abode. It is said two brothers named *Manick* and *Chan* with a vessel with turmeric called at *Akyab* for water. On the following night, after *Chan* and *Manick* had procured water near these rocks, *Manick* had a dream that the saint *Bader Aulia* desired him to construct a cave or a place of abode at the locality where they procured water. *Manick* replied that he had no means wherewith he could comply with the request. *Bader* then said that all his (*Manick*'s) turmeric would turn into gold. When morning came *Manick* observing that all the turmeric had been transformed into gold, consulted his brother *Chan* on the subject of the dream and they conjointly constructed a cave a mosque, and also dug a well at the locality now known as *Bader Mokam*.<sup>15</sup>

There were orders in Persian in the Deputy Commissioner's court at *Akyab* dated 1834 and also from *T. Dickerson Esq.* Commissioner of Arakan, to the effect that one *Hussain Ally*, the then *Thugyi* of *Budamaw* circle, was to have charge of the *Buddermokam* and to enjoy any sums that he might collect on account of alms and offerings.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "About 788 A.D *Mahataing Sandya* ascended the throne, founded a new city (*Vesali*) on the side 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 *Muhamadens*, were sent to Arakan proper and settled in villages."<sup>17</sup>

The Arab merchants and mystics carried out missionary activities among the locals. The superior moral character and high missionary zeal of these devout followers attracted large number of people towards Islam who embraced it enmasse.<sup>18</sup> Many of the early Arabs married locals' women and settled in towns and villages permanently. The Arabs and Persians such as Sulayman (AD 851) Yaovbi (AD 880) Masudi (AD 943) Marvazi (AD 1120) Hudud Al Alam (AD 982)<sup>19</sup> and many others used routes over Arakan Yoma to travel to Burma and then to China. They wrote about the relation between Burma and China and internal ethnic groups' relations.<sup>20</sup> The Arabs were said to be in control of the foreign trade of Arakan until recent centuries.<sup>21</sup>

During the successive century the Muslim population grew in large number as a result of conversions, inter-marriage and new immigration. The Rakhine Maghs also graduated themselves in Islamic studies and even embraced Islam in numbers.<sup>22</sup> Muslims inter-married freely with the women of the country who nominally at least become Mussulmans.<sup>23</sup>

The Muhamadans of Arakan, who were bona fide residents though recruited by immigrants from Bengal, were for the most part, descendants of slaves captured by the Arakanese and Burmese in their wars with their neighbours. The Arakan kings in former times had possessions all along the coasts as far as Chittagong and Dacca, and many Muhamadans were sent to Arakan as slaves. Large numbers are said to have been brought by Min-Raja-gri after his first expedition to Sandwip. The descendants of the slaves are resident, of the most part in the Kyauktaw and Mrohaung Township.<sup>24</sup>

The Indians and the Pakistanis numbering about 1,200,000 who came to Burma (after the British occupation) left the country decades back. Those who left after 1962 have never been com-

pensated. So to brand the majority of the indigenous Muslims in Burma now as aliens is nothing short of racism.<sup>25</sup>

Joint Magh/Portuguese raids on Bengal continued until the end of the eighteenth century and ceased entirely with the strengthening of the British naval force in the Bay of Bengal. The capture and enslavement of prisoners was one of the most lucrative types of plunder. Half the prisoners taken by the Portuguese and all the artisans among them were given to the king of Arakan. The rest were sold on the market or forced to settle in the villages near Mrohaung. A considerable number of these captives were Muslims. In addition to the Muslim prisoners and slaves brought to Arakan from Bengal and even from North India, many more came to serve as mercenaries in the Arakanese army, usually as the king's bodyguard.<sup>26</sup>

The main source of information on that period is the Portuguese traveller, Sebastian Manrique, who was in Arakan from 1629 to 1637. Manrique in his book describes the arrival of Muslims and Muslim army unit at the king's court; he mentions important Muslims who were holding key positions in the kingdom and comments on the foreign trade colonies, mostly Muslims, which existed in Arakan. The prisoners were brought from Bengal in Portuguese and Arakanese ships, some of whose sailors were Muslims themselves. Manrique gives a detailed description of a convoy of Muslim prisoners, which he accompanied. He even tried without success to convert the Muslims to Christianity. A conversation, which Manrique had with one of the captives, and which he later recorded, contained a good many Arabic and Persian words and expressions. The captive slaves were settled in special areas guarded by Muslims soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

There was large-scale conversion of Buddhists to Islam. During the successive centuries the Muslim population grew in large

numbers as a result of conversion and new immigration. By the Thirteenth Century the coast from Assam to Malaya had dotted with the curious mosque known as Bader Mokam. Doubtless it is Muslim influence, which led to women being more secluded in Arakan than in Burma.<sup>28</sup> Even the Buddhist women of those days practised *Purda* (veil system).

By the 13th century Islam had conquered the heart and soul of the people between Africa's Atlantic seashore to Bengal and from Bengal to Southeast Asia. Arakan's contacts with Muslim India were closer than Burma.<sup>29</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Arakan king, Narameikla, had preferred to take refuge in Muslim Bengal rather than adjacent Buddhist Tripura or Hindu Indian states. His long stay in Bengal has had a tremendous impact in the history of Arakan. "Narameikla had spent the intermediary year 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>30</sup>

Two maps in the "Time Atlas of the World History" edited in 1979 by Geoffrey Barraclough clearly indicated Arakan as a Muslim country. Arakan had turned into a Sultanate and Islam had flourished to its zenith. Persian was adopted as a state language, which continued up to 1845. One of the preconditions for Mrauk-U kings before their ascension to the throne of Arakan was that they were to be graduated in Islamic studies. Coins, medallions and state emblems were inscribed with '*Kalima*' (the profession of Faith in Islam) and "*Aqimuddin*" (establishment of God's rule over the earth) in Arabic script.

Thadomintra (1645-1652) succeeded Narapati. During his reign relation with the Dutch deteriorated and ordered to the closer of the Dutch factory at Mrauk-U. It may be mentioned that when the Dutch Industrialists were ordered to quit Arakan they were afraid of leaving behind their offspring through local wives for fear of their conversion to Islam. A relevant position of information containing in the Dutch Dagh register on Batavia runs as follows:" Another important demand was for the extradition to Batavia of all the children born to the Dutch of Arakanese Magh mothers. It had been reported at Batavia that these children were being brought up as Muslims and the pious Dutch Calvinists were extremely horrified". Since they are reported to be brought up as Muslims, the influence of Muslims was much greater than Buddhists.

According to the author of the "Time Atlas of World History" Muslim rule in Arakan had already been established before Narameikla fled to Bengal. Muslim kings of Arakan used to visit to Ava as was written in the *Kyaukza* (stone plates) inscription of 1442, as state guest of kings of Ava.

One of the coins of Sultan Ali Shah (Thatasa- 1525 CE) found at Mrauk-U, inscribed in Persian, in the obverse side, read as follows:

"There is no God but Allah, Mohammad the Messenger of Allah. May Allah perpetuate his kingdom." On the reverse side, also inscribed in Persian, it reads as "Sultan Ali Shah, father of the victorious May Allah perpetuate his kingdom."

The eleven kings, who ruled Arakan for one hundred years (1430-1530) from Sultan Sulayman Shah to Sultan Ali Shah, were feudatory to Bengal. From the time of Min Bin (Zabuk Shah 1531-1553) Arakan was no more feudatory to Bengal. The south-eastern district of Bengal, Chittagong, came under the sway of Zabuk

shah around 1540. Even after becoming independent from Bengal Sultans, Arakanese kings had continued the custom of using Muslim titles, inscribing *Kalema* in coins, using Persian as state language and graduating in Islamic studies.

Apart from the position of ruler many important posts like Chief Minister, Senior Minister, secretaries, Governors, Qazis (Judges), court poets, Doctors and army generals are also Muslims. The Chief Minister of Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudamma), according to Dagh register of Dutch in Batavia, was a Muslim named Lascar Zuzil (Wazir). According to Guerreio, a certain 'Rumi' exercised considerable power over the king. The works of Daulat Qazi and Alawal give reference to a number of Muslims holding important posts by persons like, Lashkar Wazir, Ashraf Khan, Qureishi Magan Thakur, Sulayman, Sayed Musa, Sayed Mohammad Khan, Navraj Majlis, Sayed Shah etc. (Dr. S.B. Qanungo - A History of Chittagong Vol.1, p-291)

Of the Muslim poets who found patronage at the palace of Arakan the most notable are Daulat Qazi, Alawal, Magan Siddiqi (Thakur) and Mardan. Daulat Qazi wrote his "Sati Mayna O Lor Chandrani" at the request of Ashraf Khan, who was the Chief Minister and defense Minister of Salim Shah II. Ashraf Khan patronised many other Muslim immigrants - Sayyids, Sheiks, Mughals and Pathans.

Daulat Qazi died before he could complete the work, which was subsequently completed by Alawal. Alawal's father was a courtier or minister of Fathabad (Faridpur). On a trip to lower Bengal by boat, the Portuguese pirates attacked Alawal and his father. The father fought and was killed by the pirates and the wounded Alawal was taken prisoner to Arakan. Later he became a cavalry officer of the king of Arakan.

One of the most glorious periods of Bengali literature was the seventeenth century. It was indeed a golden age. The romantic Bengali literature free from unnecessary divine or religious sentiments began in the hands of the Muslims poets at the court of Arakan. Their works corroborate some facts about Arakan and its history. Their poems in the seventeenth century have left clear records of the reigning monarchs of Arakan.

Daulat Qazi wrote his Sati Mayna O Lor Chandrani at the request of Ashraf Khan, the Chief Minister of Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudama) 1622-1638. This great work of Daulat begins with a graphic picture of the capital of Arakan of the king and his chief minister and of the people of the country in general. The chief minister was Ashraf Khan and in whose able hands the reins of monarchy were entrusted for the major period of the king's reign. In this context Daulat writes "the great king (Thiri Thudama or Salim Shah II) knowing that his life would come to an end, transferred the rule of the kingdom to the hands of his minister Ashraf Khan".

According to history, the coronation of Salim Shah II was deferred for twelve years, in pursuance of an astrological prediction that the king would die within a year of his coronation. Alawal mentioned that the kingdom of Arakan was entrusted to the joint rule of the son and the daughter of the Thado Mintra, after his death. The daughter and the Chief Minister, Magan Thakur, had very important roles in the administration of the state. Another minister Sulayman of the king Sanda Thudama also figures very prominently in one of the Alawal's works.

Alawal, was not only a good army officer, but also was a man of literature, a great scholar, writer, poet and musicians, well-versed in Arabic, Persians, Pali, Sanskrit, Bengali, Rohingya, Rakhine, Hindi and Urdu. Soon his qualities attracted the Chief



Minister of Arakan Magan Siddiqi (Thakur). Magan himself was a scholar and a poet. Under his patronage, Alawal wrote, "*Padmavati*" a famous Hindu romantic epic by Malik Mohammad Jaisi, in Bengali. Alawal turned the mystic idea and supernatural ornamentation of Jaisi into human life and activities. His next work was "*Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal*" based on "*Arabian Nights*". This was followed by "*Haft Paikar (seven Portraits)*" based on the Persian poet Nizam Ganjabi's work of the same name.

Alawal was arrested on alleged involvement in the Shah Shuja revolt instigated by Mirza. But Qazi (Justice) Masud Shah and Minister Sulayman Siddiqi released him. At the latter's request Alawal composed the "*Tuhfa*" based on Yusuf Gada's Persian work of the same name. In his old age Alawal was promoted noble or minister. He also wrote "*Sikandarnama*" and many other poems in his old age.

The incident of Shah Shuja had been recorded by Shah Alawal in his two later works "*Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal*" and "*Sikandar Nama*" composed in 1669 and 1673 respectively as follows

*of Jaisi*  
***Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal:***

After this Shah Shuja, the king of the kings came to the city of Rosango accidentally. He quarreled with the king of Rosango,....Most of them got death punishment..... A sinner, Mirza, did harm to many men like Yazid, the son of a slave girl. Got many men arrested telling lies. Many men lost their lives untimely due to him. The sinner made me a culprit too. And I was thrown into the prison without any justice, torture, and pain, affliction I got, for fifty days I was living in a womb. God saved me as I had longevity. But I am now earning my bread by seeking alms. (Arakan, Sept. 3, 1993)

***Dara Sikandar Nama:***

In this way I spent sometime in happiness, but unfortunately I was implicated in troubles at last, Shah Shuja came to Rosango accidentally. All his foolish counselors befogged him; all caused his destruction due to his own fault. A sinner falsely accused me; I was thrown into the prison without any justice. He was ultimately impaled who defamed me. My residence and other dwelling were destroyed, I was tortured like any thing at an evil place, and my life became miserable due to begging and ill repute. With my wife and son I had to depend on others. Some great men still loved me because of my parts. My son and wife paid off taxes by seeking alms. In this way I spent eleven years, after which the sun of my fortune rose again. (Arakan, Sept. 3, 1993)

Poet Marden stated his birthplace to be *Kanchipuri* in Arakan where there lived a number of Ulamas and Sheikhs. He wrote an epic entitled "*Nasib Nama*". Another Muslim poet was Abdul Karim Khandakar. He said that his great grandfather Rasul Mia was a custom officer of Arakan Port. His grandfather Masan Ali was an interpreter at the port. His father Ali Akbar also was a man of learning. Abdul Karim received the patronage of one wealthy merchant named Sadiq Nana Atibar.

Speaking about a village named Bandar in Roshang (Arakan) Abdul Karim says, "There lived in that village Qazis, Muftis, Ulema, Pir and Sufis. Those high-ranking Muslims used to converse with the kings 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 Ulamas in the village who supervised the regular saying of prayers. One of them was appointed as Khatib, while another was appointed Imam."



Other well-known Muslim poets of the Arakan court were Shamser Ali, Quraishi, Aminuddin, Syed Nasir and Abdul Gani and etc. Some of the prominent Judge in the history of Arakan are: Daulat Qazi, Gawa Qazi, Shuzu Qazi, Abdul Karim, Masud Shah, Mohammad Hussain, Osman Abdul Jabbar, Abdul Gaffer Mohammad Yusuf, Rawsan Ali and Nur Mohammad etc.

Since Naramiekhla, the whole kingdom was a feudatory of the sultans of Bengal. He turned away from what was Buddhist and familiar to what was Muhamadan and foreign. In so doing he loomed from the mediaeval to the modern, from the fragile fairyland of "the glass Palace Chronicle" to the robust extravaganza of "the Thousand Nights and One Nights". (JBRS)

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## 8. ISLAMIC CIVILISATION AND THE RENAISSANCE OF ARAKAN

After the downfall of the Roman Empire Muslim civilisation extended from Cordova to Dacca. An average observer of the period would have seen nothing in the world but the triumph of Islam. From all points of view, military, political and cultural, the Muslim Sultanates were in the vanguard of civilisation. For every other state they represented modernity as western countries now represent what is modern for Asia and Africa. Bengal was absorbed into this great polity in 1203.<sup>1</sup>

After the Mongolian invasion, the five centuries that followed the arrival of Tibeto-Burmans in Arakan were an age of darkness. A new dynasty was founded in the city of Parim. King Gaulya ascended the throne in 1133 C.E.. Numerous dynasties ruled during the ensuing centuries each with its own city. Till 1287 Arakan had been more or less feudatory to Pagan kings.<sup>2</sup>

After 1287 there was no Burmese over-lordship till 1374. In that year some Rakhine Maghs went to Ava and invited them to invade Arakan. But the Burmese intervention did not last long.<sup>3</sup> In 1404 Naramekhla was the king of Arakan ruling from Launggret. Again another batch of disgruntled Magh Buddhists went to Ava and asked for intervention. Under the growing Islamic influence world wide, which had conquered the heart and soul of the people from the Atlantic to the Indus and the Ganges and from the Ganges beyond the Strait of Malacca, Islam might have impressed Naramekhla. This enraged the fanatic Buddhists to the extent of surrendering their independence by inviting Buddhist Burmese from the other side of the Arakan hills.<sup>4</sup>

The king of Ava, Minkhaung, sent his son Min Ye Kyaw Swa, the heir apparent to the throne of Ava, to invade Arakan in

1406. The deposed Arakanese king Naramekhla fled to Bengal and was received by Sultan Giyazuddin Azam Shah (1390-1411). The Sultan was a great advocate of Islam and Islamic learning. After his death a Hindu courtier, Raza Ganesh, usurped the throne for a while. He was killed by his converted son, Jallauddin Mohammad Shah, who shifted the capital from Pandua (Firozabad) to Gaur. That kingdom had been independent of the Sultanate of Delhi for eighty-six years. It was one of the many sovereign states of the world wide Muslim polity. The Arakanese king remained there for twenty-four years, learning revolutionary ideas in the fields of Mathematics and natural science, which together with monotheistic belief fostered the Islamic success.

During his long 24 years in 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 socio-cultural and political force of the day.

He turned away from what was Buddhist to Mohammedan. In so doing he loomed from the medieval to the modern, from the fragile fairyland of the glass palace Chronicle to the robust extravaganza of the Thousand Nights and one Night.<sup>5</sup>

In 1426 Naramekhla took the title of Sulayman Shah. The Arakanese Chronicle corrupted it to Sawmuan.<sup>6</sup> The king of Bengal dispatched his military commander of Chittagong Gen. Wali Khan, at the head of 50,000 soldiers to conquer Arakan and reinstate Sulayman Shah on the throne.

Wali Khan drove away the Burmans but took control of power himself. Sulayman Shah returned to Gaur. In Arakan Wali Khan introduced Persian in his court and appointed Qazis.<sup>7</sup> On

learning the king of Bengal sent a second batch of army under Gen. Sandi Khan who over-threw Wali Khan and restored Sulayman Shah to the throne in 1430 C.E.

Arakanese history narrate the story of Naramekhla as follows:

When Longgeret dynasty's last king Thingathu died, Naramekhla, the son of his elder brother, Razathu, ascended the throne of Longgeret. Saw Pu Nyo, the sister of Anandathein (the governor of Dallah) was very beautiful and Naramekhla was mad for her. Being unable to control himself, he took her as his queen after a forced divorce from her husband. Anandathein was furious. He took it as a great insult to the courtiers, people and to himself. So, he sought assistance from Burmese King of Ava, Min Khong.

King Min Khong, considering the previous infiltration of Arakanese king Hla Ra Giri to Yaw, Saw and Long Shay, the request of Anandathein and his own lust for expansion of his territory, sent his 13 years old son Min Ye Kyaw Swa, as the head of 30,000 soldiers, to Arakan in 1404 A.D. He conquered Arakan. The deposed king, Naramekhla, fled to Bengal and took refuge at the court of Sultan Giazuddin Azam Shah. His younger brother Naranu fled to *Hanthawadi* and took refuge at the court of Mon (*Talaing*) king Razadirize.

When King Min Khong received the news of victory, the king gave his daughter, Shwe Pyi Chan Tha, in marriage with Anawratha Saw, the governor of Kalay, and sent him to Arakan to replace his son. But his tyrannical rule was unbearable to the people of Arakan. At this Naranu requested help from Mon king Razadirize, who sent Mon and Muslim army - both land and naval forces to Arakan. They conquered Arakan and Naranu ascended the throne of Longgret. Anawratha Saw and Shwe Pyi Chan Tha

were taken captives to Hanthawadi where the former was put down to death and the latter was made queen.

King Min Khong, on hearing the fall of his son-in-law sent again Min Ye Kyaw Swa to Arakan. He again captured Arakan and Naranu fled to the upper part of Kassapa Nadi (Kaladan River). Mon soldiers came again to drive the Burmese. In this way Arakan became the battlefield of Burmese and Mon.

While Naramekhla was serving at the army of Sultan Azam Shah, the Indian King of Delhi (according to Rakhine Razawin, the king of Janpur, Sultan Ebrahim) invaded the Sultanate of Bengal. Naramekhla fought back with full of valour and skill and won the battle. The king was very pleased and called him son, and Naramekhla called the king, father, which was written by Sayadaw U Nyana in his *Danyawadi Razawin Theik* (The Modern History of Arakan). Their relation became as father and son. Since then, fraternity began to develop between Rakhine and Muslim Rohingyas. Hence, Rakhine Maghs and Muslims became brothers and sisters.

Then Naramekhla pleaded help from the king to take back his lost throne of Longgret. The King sent Gen. Wali Khan at the head of Pathan army numbering 50,000 with Naramekhla to restore him the throne of Arakan. The Pathan army crossed to Arakan through *Golangi* pass and Wali Khan (later Ali Khan) pass. They conquered Arakan and Naramekhla ascended the throne at Longgret.

Soon Wali Khan and Naramekhla had a dispute. Wali Khan arrested Naramekhla and locked up fettering him at *Balouchaung*. Sir Arthur Phayer wrote that Gen. Wali Khan arrested Naramekhla with the collaboration of Magh Chief who was Naramekhla's enemy (may be Anandathein). Gen. Wali Khan ruled the country for one year. He introduced Persian in the court of Arakan, which

lasted till 1846, and appointed Qazis - Muslim judges.

From the upper Kissapa Nadi (Kaladan River) Naranu came down and rescued Naramekhla from the lock-up at Balouthoung. He went straight to Sultan Giazuddin Mohammed Shah and reported the matter. The king became furious and sent his ministers of right hand and left hand, such as Dampasu, Razamani, and Setta Khan with an army larger than that of Gen. Wali Khan under the command of Gen. Sandi Khan. They defeated Wali Khan and throned Naramekhla with the title of Min Sulayman Shah (in Rakhine Razawin, Min saw Mon) at Longgret in 1430. A.D. and sent back Gen., Wali Khan to Bengal.

Min Saw Mun or Sulayman Shah shifted his capital to a new site known as Mrauk-U or Mrohaung or Roshanga in 1433. As Pathan soldiers of Gen. Sandi Khan were faithful to him, Naramekhla not only kept them in his army but also deployed them at all important and strategic places and all bordering areas. They lived in Arakan and faithfully served. Though the religion of Islam and the culture of Muslim began with the arrival of Arabs, but it came to prominence with the arrival of Gouri Pathan armies of Gen. Wali Khan and Sandi Khan.

It is noteworthy that one of the Sultan's coins was found near the site of Mrauk-U. It is a unique document in the history of Arakan. When the Muslim entered Bengal in 1203, they introduced inscriptional types of coinage that the coinage of Mrauk-U was subsequently modelled on. In this way Arakan became oriented towards the Muslim civilisation resulting in a renaissance of Arakan. The country's great age began. <sup>8</sup>

Shin Araham would have found himself as much out of place at the court of Gaur as St. Bernard in the University of Cordoba. To avoid such a sensation and snatch advantage from change the

Arakanese had to forsake a tradition in ideas, and be up to date. They had to learn the history of recent events, the meaning and the triumph of Islam. It took the Arakanese a hundred years to learn the doctrine from the Muslims. For the hundred years, 1430 to 1530, Arakan remained feudatory to Bengal, paid tribute and learnt history and politics.

Eleven kings successively ruled Arakan for the hundred years.

They were:-

1. Sulayman Shah (Naramekhla)-----1430-1434
2. Ali Khan (Men Khari (a) Naranu)-----1434-1454
3. Kalima Shah (Ba Saw Pru)-----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 (Salimgathu)-----1494-1501
8. Ili Shah (Meng Raza)-----1501-1523
9. Ilyas Shah (Kasabadi)-----1523-1525
10. Jalal Shah (Men Saw Oo)-----1525-
11. Ali Shah (Thatasa)-----1525-1531

Some Arakanese kings with Muslim titles that ruled for another hundred years were:-

12. El Shah Azad (Min Khong Raza)-----1531
13. Zabuk Shah Min Bin (a) Min Pa Gri) -----1531-1553
14. Daud Khan (Min Dikha)-----1553-1555
15. Sikandar Shah (Min Phalaung)-----1571-1593

16. Salim Shah I (Min Raza Gri)-----1593-1612  
 17. Hussain Shah (Min Khamaung)-----1612-1622  
 18. Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudama)-----1622-1638

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5. "*Arakan's place in the civilisation of the Bay*". JBRS No.2, Page- 491.
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## 9. THE LOSS OF CHITTAGONG

Aurangzeb had been quite prepared himself to murder his own brother, but became angry when the Arakan king dared to harm a member of the Royal Mughal family. He decided to use this as an excuse to put an end to the Portuguese-Arakanese pirate raids on the East Bengal coast. In 1665 to 1666 a large Mughal force attacked the Portuguese and Arakanese, demolished their settlements in Sandwip and destroyed their navies and conquered Chittagong and Ramu. During their retreat to Mrohaung, the local Muslim who had been settled on the land also attacked Arakanese army units. <sup>1</sup>

After the death of Mir Jumla, Shaista Khan became the new viceroy of Bengal. He was ordered by the Emperor Aurangzeb to teach how impudent Raja was chastised and to finish Ferengi-Magh pirate raids. All necessary preparations had been carried out to put an end to Ferengi-Magh depredations by capturing Chittagong. Shaista Khan 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 Sandwip — a strategic island situated at the mouth of Ganges on Nov.12, 1665 before the Arakan expedition began.

Shaista Khan thought that the Island of Sandwip would be conquered as a first step to the conquest of Chittagong. The base of operation to Chittagong was Bhula, which was for long under the occupation of the Mughals and where they had a fort. Bhula was base for land force, but Arakan was primarily a naval power, and to conquer Chittagong's navy was most effective and Chittagong



was to be attacked both by land and sea. So a base for the fleet was necessary and Sandwip was an ideal naval base.

Shaista Khan ordered Abul Hasan to attack Sandwip, which he did on 9th Nov. 1665. Dilawar Khan the ruler of Sandwip, who was 80 years old, fought with valour and skill, but was defeated. He was taken in chains to Dhaka with his family consisted of 92 souls, men, women and children as prisoners of war. Dilawar Khan died there in a few days. His grownup sons were kept in confinement. But Shaista Khan granted land for the support of the younger members of his family. One thousand Mughal soldiers were stationed in the island and Sandwip was brought under imperial administrations.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Alamgir Nama, Dilawar Khan was in league with the Magh and was in friendly term with them. This was another reason why Shaista Khan conquered Sandwip before his invasion of Chittagong. As a result, his rear became safe and he also subdued the Portuguese and severed relations with the king of Arakan.

### *Expedition starts against Chittagong:*

Shaista Khan's preparations for the conquest of Chittagong became now complete. 300 war boats became ready for battle. The Ferengi pirates were won over and they came to the Mughals. The Dutch withdrew from Arakan and their assistance to Shaista Khan in his conquest of Chittagong was assured. Sandwip was also occupied. With all these preparations being completed, Shaista Khan became ready to strike.

It was decided that the Nawab's son Buzurug Umed Khan would lead the campaign. A number of imperial officers were ordered to accompany him. The nowwara was to be led by Admiral

Ibn Hussain to be assisted by other zamidars of the nowwara. Hayat Khan was ordered to go to Noakhali, join Farhad Khan and Captain Mor and other Ferengis and then all to proceed on land and sea as the vanguard of Buzurug Khan's army.<sup>3</sup>

Farhad Khan, Mir Murtaza and Hayat Khan marched by land. Simultaneously Ibn Hussain also started with his flotilla of war boats. He was ordered to creep along the coast, while the army should march parallel to the fleet, so that one could support to the other. On 21 January, Farhad Khan and Mir Murtaza joined hands with Ibn Hussain, probably at the creek of Kumera. On the evening of 23 January, the Arakanese navy was sighted at Katalia creek. On 24 January the first naval battle was fought at the Karnafully.

On the night of 25 January, Admiral Ibn Hussain took rest with vigilance and encircling the fort of Chittagong. He also sent information to the Magh commandant of the fort to surrender and open the gate of the fort of the following day.

On 26 January, the fort of Chittagong was surrendered to Ibn Hussain. Buzurg Umed Khan reached the foot of the fort. On 27th January Umed Khan entered the fort.

### *Mughal gains at Chittagong:*

After the surrender of the fort of Chittagong, the Magh Commandant of the fort was sent to the Subader at Dhaka. He was taken prisoner with one son, some relatives and 350 men of his tribe. The Maghs' commandant was the uncle of Arakanese king Sanda Thudama or Nga Ku Tha. The Mughals also captured 235 ships, 3 elephants, 1026 guns made of bronze and iron, many matchlocks and zamburaks (Camel-swivels) and much ammuni-

tion. Besides the main fort of Chittagong, the Mughals also captured the stockades built by the Rakhine Magh on the other side of the river near the Dianga settlement of the Portuguese. The Maghs who were at the stockades fled but the Muslims who had been kidnapped by Maghs before attacked them. They killed many of them including the leader. Another important result of the capture of Chittagong was the release of thousands of Bengali peasants who had been kidnapped by the pirates and held in slavery. "We can easily imagine how fast cultivation will increase in Bengal, now that Magh violence has been put down,"<sup>4</sup> reported Shaista Khan to the Emperor.

The most important result of the conquest of Chittagong was the annexation of Chittagong permanently with Bengal. The Bengal southern border became fixed at the West Bank of the Naf River or Kaladan River. The Magh fled to Arakan beyond the east bank of Kaladan (boundary of Bangalee) river. Ex-Health Minister of Bangladesh, Mr. Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, writes in an article that Shaista Khan had conquered up to the Kaladan River. Ex-Health Minister of Burma, Mr. Sultan Mahmud, writes in many articles and told at the parliament and at press conference and an article on 'Muslim in Burma' published in the Nation on 12 April 1959, that Shaista Khan conquered up to the Kaladan River. In his book "Rohingyas and Kamans" (page 39) M.A Tahir Ba Tha writes that there are historical views that Buzurg Umed Khan had conquered the whole of Arakan but retreated soon as Arakan was not important for them. If after the conquest of the Chittagong the eastern border of Bangladesh is extended to the Naf river, then from the east bank of the Naf to the west of Kaladan that is the whole Mayu valley was independent under the control of Rohingya Muslims as Maghs fled beyond the Kaladan river leaving their hearths and homes at Chittagong, which is known among the local people as *Magh-dhaiya* (the fleeing of the Maghs) from Bengal to

the Kaladan or Mrauk-U. Burma historical commission's compiler Prof. Dr. G.H. Luce and History Prof. Dr. Than Tun also support the possibility of Rohingya and their kings in the Mayu valley since 800 years back;<sup>5</sup>

Sufi A.M Waheed's view is as follows: "Under the order of Emperor Aurangazab, the Subeder of Bengal, Nawab Shaista Khan deputed his son Buzurg Umed Khan, and in 1666 he conquered Chittagong and annexed the area from Dhoom in Chittagong, to Bay of Bengal. The Buddhist (Maghs) population of Chittagong then migrated to Myohaung and started whispering campaign against the Muslim (Rohingyas). After a lapse of eleven years in 1677, when a fresh batch of Magh refugees from Chittagong reached Myohaung with stories of atrocities by Muslim rulers of Chittagong, the whispering campaign of Maghs refugees against the Muslim gained momentum. The Muslims on the face of all odds, created by the whispering of Maghs, managed all the affairs of state till 1710. Then things went out of control. There was disturbance all over Arakan. As a result two-sided migration took place. The Buddhist (Maghs) going eastward and the Muslims (Rohingyas) northward in the land between Sankau (Sangu) river in Chittagong and Seindaung Range (east of the Mayu river) became almost depopulated in which subsequent Muslims refugees came from south Arakan and settled down there. They are still known as Rohingya though all the entire Muslim population from Dhoom in the north of Chittagong up to Sandaway in the south of Arakan is the same people of same origin. They have same language, a mixture of Bengali, Arabic, Persians, and Magi (Rakhine) language and the same culture."<sup>6</sup>

After the conquest of Chittagong an expedition to conquer southern Chittagong was also sent under Mir Murtaza. Murtaza travelling difficult roads, dense jungle and terrible rivers reached

Ramu after 12 days march and captured it from the Magh king's brother Rowli. Many Muslim captives were set free. Thus the pirates' nest was broken and the Muslim sway re-established over the sea.

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

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## 10. THE LAST DAYS OF MRAUK-U

The massacre of Shah Shuja along with his family and great many number of Muslims of Arakan led to the loss of Chittagong, which spelled the end of the power of the kingdom of Arakan. From 1666 to 1710 the political rule of Arakan was completely in the hand of Muslim Kaman units.<sup>1</sup> They were the king makers of Arakan. They played a decisive role of not only king makers but also displacers of kings of Arakan. Ten kings were crowned and dethroned by them during the period. In 1672 they burnt the palace and for twenty years roamed over the country carrying fire and sword, wherever they went.<sup>2</sup> These Kaman units were being continually reinforced by fresh southern Indian and Afghan mercenaries from North India. They cared neither for the person of the king nor for the aspirations of the people, adventurers appeared every few years, some times every few months and the throne constantly changed hands. Between the fall of Chittagong (1666) and Sanda Wizaya (1710) there were ten kings averaging two and a half years each. Three reigned only one year and two did not reign one month. Between Sanda Wizaya and Nora Abaya, (1742) the average was under two years each and the last seven kings to 1784 averaged just three years each. The three kings named, Sanda Thudama, Sanda Wizaya and Nora Abaya, each were notable men and each tried to stop the downward tendency, but without success. So insecure a polity is little removed from anarchy. Of the following set of six, two are represented and of the last seven all have coins except number 42 and 46 who both ruled but a few weeks. The coins themselves exhibit little variation. It remains in the Mohammadan tradition of 1450 A.D.<sup>3</sup> There were 48 kings in Mrauk-U dynasty (1430-1785 A.D.).

Sanda Wizaya (1710-1731) succeeded in gaining upper hand over the Kamans. He deported them to Ramree, and at Thinganet or Tharagon near Akyab, their descendants still exist under the

name of Kaman (Persian Kaman = a bow), speaking Arakanese but retaining their Mohammadan faith, southern Indian and Afghan features.<sup>4</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, writes Dr. Mohammad Yunus in his "A History of Arakan - Past & Present".<sup>5</sup> According to G.E Harvey, "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 from the despised race of Ramree".<sup>6</sup> In 1782 Thamada became king of Mrauk-U. So reduced had become the once great kingdom, that his role did not extend more than a few miles beyond the walls.<sup>7</sup>

A band of lords went to the king of Burma asking intervention. Historian Harvey commented on the appeal of the Arakanese lords for Burman intervention, "Perhaps they were patriots desiring to see their land at rest. "But the actual fact is that the bigoted Maghs could not tolerate the role of Muslim kings once again" is the comment of Dr. Mohammad Yunus in his 'A History of Arakan'.<sup>8</sup>

Such a kingdom as was Arakan from 1666 to 1784 could only stand alone and independent as long as it had no aggressive neighbour. The Mughals had ceased to be an expanding power. Burma was merely as distracted as Arakan: the English were new comers. In other circumstances it could not have endured a century and a quarter. But when in 1760 the *Alaung Mintara* dynasty had united Burma, Mrauk-U's fate was certain. The sole question was when the blow would fall.

There were six pretenders in the country, each with his followers and each anxious to enter the capital city. One of these, Ngathande, asked King Bodaw of Burma, to invade the realm.

After so long a period of looking west, Arakan turned eastward again. Ngathande's idea was that King Bodaw would place him on the throne as a feudatory monarch. It was a familiar point of view in Arakanese foreign relations. Bodaw however had no intention of anything of the kind. He used Ngathande, invaded the country and reduced it to the position of an administrated province, the first in its long history that it had lost a home government of its own.<sup>9</sup>

Bodaw's first act was to strike a medallion in the style of the Mrauk-U coinage. The Burmese had never used coins and hence he had no model of his own. He copied therefore the Muslim design. The legend reads-"The kingdom of the Master of Amarapura and of many white Elephants." This is the numismatic document to the fall of Mrauk-U. It was the last coin struck in Arakan.<sup>10</sup>

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## 11. THE BURMESE OCCUPATION (1785-1825)

Arakan learned nothing from Burmese connection of 1784-1825. The Burmese governor of Mrauk-U found the country in a very lawless state. One *Chinbyan* organised a rebellion. To secure peace and maintain order the Burmese put to death some and deported others to Burma. Two hundred thousand were said to have fled to India (Bengal).<sup>1</sup>

After his victory and to clinch the affairs and prove to the world that Arakan was really down, King *Bodaw* removed *Mahamuni* to *Amarapura*, where it now sits. This event, long prophesied and long guarded against crushed the Arakanese more than defeat in the field.<sup>2</sup>

He carried away the Royal family, the commanders, the Educators, the Ministers, and manufacturers etc. over to Burma. And in order to carry the huge booty of Arakan and the heavy Muhamuni Image from *Mrohaung* to *Mandalay* in Burma, the Burmese conscripted hundreds of thousands of Maghs and Muslims. Of these conscripts thousands died on the way due to fatigue and hunger. When the purpose of conscription was over the survivors among the Muslims, a paltry numbers of 3700 were settled in different areas of Burma. These formed the nucleus of the Muslims of Burma. They are known as *Thun Htaung Khunya*, meaning three thousand seven hundred.<sup>3</sup>

R.B. Smart writes, "When Bodaw was king of Burma, the discontented Arakanese who hated their Ramree ruler invited the Burmans to aid them in dethroning him. A large Burmese Force assembled at *Prome* under three Royal princes and invaded Arakan by three different routes. After some severe fighting the Arakanese army was defeated near *Kyaukpyu*, and the Burmese advanced on the capital and took possession, meeting with hardly any resist-

ance; the country was annexed and *Thamada Raja* was carried prisoner to *Ava*, where he shortly afterwards died".

There was also a Muslim unit, "*Myedu*," in the Burmese standing army posted to *Sandoway*. Their descendants, few in number, live there still and cannot be distinguished from their Burmese and Arakanese neighbours, but by their religion and religious habits.<sup>4</sup> All these event in Arakan caused certain population movements eastward. Among these there were also Muslims who came to service the Burmese *Kun Baung* king.<sup>5</sup>

In her previous connections with outside states, Arakan had always been the gainer. As feudatory to *Pagan* she had received the little vehicle and learnt her present alphabet. As feudatory to *Bengal* she had laid the foundations of her great age. But administered as a governor-ship by the Burmese of the 18th century, she had nothing to gain for the Burmese had nothing to teach a country, which for centuries had been in touch with the world of thought and action through the Muslim Sultanates at a time when *Burma* herself was isolated, and backward.<sup>6</sup>

But an extra-ordinary turn of events had changed the face of *India* since the fall of *Chittagong* in 1666. The *Mughals* had disappeared and their place had been taken by other foreigners, not *Mongolians* on this occasion but *English*, persons stranger to say who resided three thousand miles away but who maintained themselves by means of a sea connection as the *Portuguese* had done but far more successfully. These individuals became irritated with the Burmese in 1824 for the same reason that *Aurangzeb* had become irritated with the Arakanese in 1665, namely in the matter of frontier raids.<sup>7</sup>

The fall of *Mrauk-U* was a mortal blow to the *Rohingyas* for everything that was materially and culturally Islamic was razed to ground.<sup>8</sup> 40 years of Burmese rule over Arakan was marked with



unprecedented tyranny and cruelty. People were forcibly conscripted for army services 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 construction of a pagoda in Burma. Bodaw's repeated demand for forced labour and conscript service and the rapacity of his local officials drove the Arakanese into desperate resistance<sup>9</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>10</sup> The East Indian Company made no objection to the settlement of these people in the southern part 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.

The condition of Arakan during Bodaw's rule is summarised in a 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 every excuse: they were rebelling not against government but against tyranny. Thus they would be called in various garrison headquarters on the pretext of disarming them and when they arrived the Burmese would round them up and massacre them. Quite apart from extortionate revenue, there were continued exactions 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 morn-

ing, 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>11</sup>

This acquisition brought the Burmans into contact with the British and disputes soon arose. Large number of inhabitants escaped from the cruelties of the Burmans and settled in Chittagong and in other parts of lower Bengal. Chin-byan who was usually styled King Barring in the official accounts of this period — the son of the man who had invited the Burmans into Arakan, twice raised a revolt, and his standard was joined by most of the respectable Arakanese families; but the raising was finally suppressed and those who could do so escaped to Chittagong. Here Chin-byan continued his intrigues till he died in 1815, and the difference which arose in consequence between the two governments and the retaliatory eruption's of the Burmese, who attacked and carried off the East India company's elephant hunters, together with the attitude assumed and the demands made by the Burmese court not only regarding this part of the county but also in connection with the northern frontier in Manipur, led eventually to an open rupture.<sup>12</sup>

By the middle of 1811, the whole of the Burmese province of Arakan corresponding roughly to the modern district of Akyab was in Chinbyan's control. At the end of the rainy season the Burmese began offensive against Chinbyan. They met 300-armed boats near Cheduba, under the command of Chinbyan. In the battle two hundred war boats of Chinbyan were destroyed. With the remaining 100 boats Chinbyan again tried his luck, which did not favour him. Chinbyan escaped to British area with his remaining followers.

The Burmans were making frequent incursions across the frontier in hot pursuit of the rebels and refugees. They even threat-

ened to occupy from *Teknaf* to Dhaka with the assistance of the French. But the tension was defused diplomatically while strengthening Chittagong with the reinforcement 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 Chinbyan crossed the Naf and took possession of Maungdaw. But the Burmese soon routed them again. The relation between Burmese and British again deteriorated. The Company had ordered to arrest Chinbyan. But nobody could arrest him. In November 1812 Chinbyan occupied Cox's Bazaar and started building war boats to attack Burma. The company's forces attacked him. Chinbyan shifted his head quarter from Cox's Bazaar to *Minglagyi* of Maungdaw Township and advanced towards Mrohaung. They were intercepted by the Burmans and defeated. Chinbyan retreated to the British area. The Burman followed them and once more the problem of Burmese incursion to British area arose. The problem of Chinbyan and Burman incursion continued until Chinbyan died in 1815.<sup>13</sup>

After the death of Chinbyan the Burmans began a series of petty irritating outrages upon British subjects. On the night of 24<sup>th</sup> September 1823 the Burmans proceeded to enforce their claim to *Shahparirdip*; a thousand men landed on the island, over-powered the guard, killed and wounded several of them, and drove the rest off the island.

The Burmese had lived so long out of the world that their geography and political information were lamentably weak. They were not aware that the then masters of Hindustan represented a more modern polity than their own. The Arakanese, however were better informed. For just as Min Saw Mwan realised in 1430 that the Sultanate of Bengal was a polity in the vanguard of the world thought and would be able to drive the Burmese out of Arakan and

restore him, so the Arakanese of 1824 perceived that the English were moderns and that the Burmese could not resist them. Accordingly they sided enthusiastically with them and facilitated in every way their occupation of Arakan in 1825.

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13. D.G.E. Hall "Burma" P. 102.

## 12. ARAKAN UNDER BRITISH OCCUPATION

### *The first Anglo-Burma War (1823-24) :*

In 1824 war was declared and the Burmese dominions were invaded, a force under General Morrison moved on the Arakan and another under Sir Archibald Campbell operated by way of the valley of the *Irrawady*. General Morrison's force camped at *Teknaf*, opposite the extensive stockades of Maungdaw, the first Arakan post, until the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1825, just a month from the period of advancing from Chittagong. On the evening of the 1st February when they landed on the east bank of the Naf, Maungdaw, the Burmese beat a hasty retreat over the mountains, leaving the invaders to take undisputed possession of their stockades at Maungdaw. Here were found the great quantity of grain, several war-boats, one about ninety feet long and a small ship on the stocks. A considerable force was sent in pursuit of the fleeing Burmese through the forests, but of no avail. After a halt of many days at Maungdaw, General Morrison pushed on through dense forest and grass plain, or by the seashore, to the Mayu River. Commodore Hayes left Maungdaw on the 16<sup>th</sup> February commanding half of the gunboats and Magh boats and proceeded to the Arakan River to join General Morrison with the main body of the army.

The Burman army under Maha Bandoola began operations by crossing the Naf River and routing a small detachment of company's troops and went on to concentrate troops for a march on Chittagong. While Bandoola arrived at Ramu, 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 Burmese generals were sent successively to retake Rangoon but failed and Bandoola was

called back 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 he was forced to retreat to Danubyu. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1825, Bandoola was killed in action. The capture of Mrohaung ended the war as far as the Arakan province was concerned; the Burmese troops at once abandoned Ramree and Sandoway and retreated through the mountain into Pegu. The steady advance of Sir Archibald Campbell up the valley of the Irrawaddy, driving the Burmese forces before him. This advance ended at Yandabo, where a treaty was signed on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826 by which Arakan and Tanansaerin became British territory.

### *British rule over Arakan:*

When the First Burmese war came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826, the main body of the British troops was withdrawn, one regiment was kept in Arakan and a local battalion was raised to keep law and order. In 1836 a rebellion breakout but was suppressed in time. Arakan was divided into 160 circles, of which 148 were denominated *Kyun* or islands, being situated in the lowlands, and 12 were called *chaung* or streams being in the hill districts. They contained total 960 villages. Each of the circles was placed under an officer designated *Kyun-ok* or *Chaung-ok* according to the locality of the charge. His main duty was to collect revenue: he was paid 15 percent upon his collection. Under the *Kyun-ok* there were *Ywa-gaung* (village headman) who delivered it (revenue) to the *Kyun-ok*. He was paid 4-percent of his collections.

To conduct all revenue affairs there was an officer styled *myo-thu-gyi*, his duty was to superintend all the *Kyun-ok*. This officer was paid a fix salary and resided at the chief town of the

district. The district officer, styled Senior Assistant Commissioner, performed the duties of a District Magistrate, Judge and Collector; under him was a junior Assistant Commissioner, who exercised similar powers except those of hearing appeals, civil, criminal and revenue; there was also a *tayama-thugyi*, who tried all civil suits of a value not exceeding Rs. 500. In 1863, Township officer was appointed to each town of Arakan and every T.O. or Myo-ok was Magistrate, Judge and Assistant collector within his jurisdiction.

A new police force was organised for the whole of lower Burma in the year 1861 and placed under the Inspector General of Police. At Akyab headquarters a police training school had been established for the training of recruits and at this school each constable in the district had to attend annually for one month's training.

With the return of peace, Magh and Mussolman or Rohingyas who were earlier expelled started to return to their former homes in Arakan. It is unnatural and bias in its entirety to remark that bulk of the Muslims entered Arakan during British era. The fact is that many Muslims families who were from Arakan returned to their respective homes when peace prevailed.

### **Communication:**

The British government improved the communication system of Arakan to certain extent. The Arakan Flotilla Company's steamers plied all over the inland waters of Arakan. This company also maintained services between Akyab and *Paletwa*, the headquarters of the hill district of Arakan and the district of Kyaukpyu and Sandoway. The road communication was also improved. Telegraph and postal services were introduced.

### **Education :**

In 1894 there were only 9 Urdu schools, with 330 boys and 45 girls. These schools were then under the control of the Deputy Inspector of Burmese Schools. The appointment of a special Deputy Inspector of Muslim schools gave an impetus to Muslim education in Arakan. In 1902 the number of schools rose to 72 and that of boys and girls attending them to 1,474 and 104 respectively. Muslim education began to retrograde as the Deputy Inspector neglected the North Arakan due to communication reason. The result was that both schools and pupils decreased year by year till 1912, when a Deputy Inspector of Muslim school was appointed for Arakan division. With appointment of this officer, a new life was given to Muslims' education. The number of schools rose rapidly to 68 and boys and girls attending to them to 1849 and 174 respectively. The year 1912 also witnessed the establishment of two District Cess Muslim school at Maungdaw and Kaungdaw. In 1894 there were 187 private schools with 1055 pupils and in 1913 the return shows 175 schools with 2839 pupils. Two Anglo-Vernacular schools, one Government High School, another St. Anne's School were established in Akyab. The former was established in 1846 and a Roman Catholic Mission started the latter in 1890.

The number of girls attending school had risen from 335 in 1894 to 1047 in 1913. The progress though slow was steady and continuous. Female education had, however, been a comparatively less progressive because of early marriage and seclusion observed by the Muslim grown up students. Want of qualified female teachers was also a bottleneck.

### **Health:**

Maungdaw Hospital with six beds was opened in 1885. A new ward of six beds was built by the generosity of Ali Hussein, headman of *Ngakura*, and Kazi Abdul Ali at a cost of Rs.4000.



The daily average of attendance indoor and outdoor in 1915 was 9 and 45, respectively. In Buthidaung a hospital with ten beds was opened in 1904. The building was erected by a private enterprise. In 1915 the average attendance of indoor and outdoor patients was 6 and 39. Kyauktaw Hospital was opened in 1907 and Minbya Hospital was opened in 1908. Rathidaung and Myohaung had model dispensaries since in 1910. At Myohaung U Tha Baw had added a hospital of eight beds at a cost of Rs.8000, while another hospital with 12 beds had been provided at Rathidaung.

The Akyab General Hospital was established in the year 1864. An up to date operation theatre was built from provincial funds, and a female ward and lying in ward were built mainly by the generosity of Mr. Maracan and U Re Kyaw Thu.

#### ***Akyab Municipality :***

The British Burma Municipal Act was extended to Akyab on 1st October 1874. The committee was consisted of six officials and five non-officials. This body was responsible for and managed police, roads, beggars, hospital, conservancy, and water-supply within the limit of the town. The committee as newly constituted in 1882 was relieved of charges for police and was entrusted with additional responsibilities and powers in respect of schools, hospital, vaccination and similar charges. The committee consisted of three officers - the Deputy Commissioner was President, the Civil Surgeon was vice-president and the Executive Engineer - two members nominated by the Government and twelve members elected from the public: European community-2, Muslim-4, Buddhist-4 Hindu-2.

#### ***Commentary:***

When the Burmese fled and the English occupied Mrauk-U, the Arakanese expected that the history of 1430 would be repeated

and that an Arakanese prince would be placed on the throne. For subsequent forty years Arakan was treated as part of occupied Burma and hence, to reconstitute it as a principedom by the British ruler would have been just a matter of their decision. If the Arakanese were disappointed it indicates that they were in need of the very education they were about to receive.

The Arakanese had learned many things during the course of the history in Hindustan in Hinayanism, and graduated in the real Politic of the Muslim Sultanates. They were to graduate again and this time in economics. Just as the country's connection with Muslim Bengal dissipated mediaeval fantasies, so its subordination to the Government of India brought it again up to date.

### **13. PEACE COMMITTEE RULE OF NORTH ARAKAN**

#### ***The Muslim massacre of 1942:***

When British withdrew, the administration of Arakan division was entrusted to a Magh Buddhist extremist, U Kyaw Khine, with the power of commissioner of Arakan division. Many British soldiers left leaving behind a large number of arms, which easily reached the hand of Maghs.

The barbaric Muslim massacre started on 28th March 1942 at the order of Thakin leaders of Arakan. The Magh fell upon the innocent Muslims of *Chanbilli* Village of Minbya Township. The carnage was unbelievable and hundreds of Muslims including children and women met their fatal end. Many Muslims jumped into the river and hid in the forest. People in water were shot dead. With their long swords the Maghs butchered the half-dead men, women and children. Those still alive in the carnage were stabbed with the pointed spears and cut them into pieces. Rohingya girls



and women after having been raped were murdered and throwing them upward and putting the sharp side of the long-dahs or swords under them mercilessly slaughtered the children. The breasts of the women were peeled.

The same event of the tragic end of Shah Shuja and his followers in 1662 was just repeated once more in 1942. The Maghs of the neighbourhood carried away their cattle, rice, paddy and even clothes. The Thakin leaders took costly things like gold and silver and other booties were given to savage plunderers. The waters of the historic Lemro River had once more turned red with the blood of Muslims.

The next day on 29th March the armed Maghs attacked Lombaissor. The Rohingya resisted but were defeated and many Muslims were massacred. Like the daughter of Sultan Shuja many women in order to save their modesty threw themselves into the river. Some escaping group of 15000 Muslims were intercepted at Taungyi Nyo by the Maghs and were killed after looting their belongings. Women were killed after being raped for some days. Also, 10,000 men, women and children were killed at Apawkwa pass in the same way as Taungyi Nyo.

After destroying Chanbilli and Lambaissor in Minbya Township the Thakin attacked Raichaung and Pankha villages of Myebon Township on 1st April 1942. Almost all of 15,000 Muslims of these two villages were massacred.

Attempts were made to carry out massacre at *Kyauknimaw* of Ramree Township, but they were saved in a miraculous way. The Muslims of *Kyaukpyu* were given protection by British forces. On 8th April 1942 the Magh carried out the massacre at the villages of *Kyauktaw*, *Mrohaung*, *Pauktaw* and *Rathidaung*.

Abedin was the richest man of Afouk (Apawkwa). But 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 heart. It is one of the thousands of examples.

At the end of April the onslaught swept over the township of Rathidaung and Buthidaung. The villages up to *Khwachoung* in the township of Buthidaung were destroyed and burnt down. *Taung Bazar*, north of Buthidaung and its surrounding villages also came under Magh attack.

Three fourths of the Muslims of Rathidaung Township were massacred. The rest were lucky enough to reach Akyab. The Muslims of Akyab had the opportunity of acquiring some arms and training to defend themselves. Both offensive and defensive preparations of the Muslims in Akyab under the leadership of Sultan Mahmud, Tambi Maracan and others frightened the Maghs.

The result of the Muslim massacre of 1942 is that, 307 Muslim villages had disappeared from the soil of Arakan. More than 100,000 Muslims were massacred and 80,000 fled to Chittagong and Rangpur Refugee camps. The Muslim majority area of the east of Kaladan River had turned into a Muslim minority area. But the loss in terms of human civilisation and moral value is much greater. The 1942 massacre gave the scar mark of bitterness in the minds of the two-sister people against one another who, otherwise, peacefully co-existed in Arakan since 1200 years back.

### *The battle of Buthidaung, The turning point:*

As the blood of innocent Muslims was flowing in the rivers of Kaladan and Lemro, the Muslims of Mayu valley under the leadership of prominent Muslim leaders *Atura* Raja of Phoundaw Prin (his real name was Abdul Majid), Mir Ahmed Gannal of Alihaung, Abdul Jabbar Dubashi, Abul Baser Chowdhury etc. had prepared to resist the onslaught of Maghs. Meanwhile hundreds of

fighters from Maungdaw under the leadership of Zahiruddin, Zamira, Amir Hamza Gandhi, Master Sultan Jinnah, Noor Ahmed Gannal, and Master Du Du Meah of Bagguna, mechanic Abul Hussain of Nagpura etc. crossed the Mayu range in groups and joined the main resistance force at Buthidaung. Meanwhile, Muslims who escaped from the brutality of the bloodthirsty Maghs also joined and fought courageously in the Battle of Buthidaung.

Buthidaung came under siege. The Muslims from the outside were on the verge of taking over the town. The Maghs found themselves in weaker position and started retreating. In a disorderly manner they boarded on a steamer at the jetty. Chinese of the town who felt unsafe also tried to join the Maghs, but were not allowed to board. At these, there was serious clash between them. The Chinese shot at a steamer jam-packed with the Magh. Without a second thought, the passengers took shelter on safe side and the steamer tumbled upside-down. Two steamers sank at the same point. Another one could leave only to be sunk by *Faruk Raja* at *Saindaung*.

#### ***Peace Committee of North Arakan:***

On hearing of the ill fate of the streamers, the Magh fighters of Buthidaung fled into the hill. The Muslims captured Buthidaung. The report of the fall of Buthidaung halted the advance of Thakins from the east. The Muslims liberated all area up to *Razarbil* in Rathedaung Township. The whole Mayu frontier area comprising Maungdaw, Buthidaung and most part of Rathedaung Township were brought under the administration of the Peace Committees set by the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan. Mr. Omrah Meah became the head of the Peace Committees.

Mr. Omrah Meah was the son of Mr. Farhat Ali. Farhat Ali was the Head Master of Maungdaw Vernacular Board Mohammadan High School. The other members of the Central

Peace Committee were Mr. Noor Ahmed of Asikapara, Mr. Azizur Rahman of Kadirbil, Advocate Sultan Ahamed of Balu Khali, Molvi Sayed Saheb (Mufti Sayedu Rahman) of Myo-Thugyi, Mr. Yakub Kerani of Shujapara, Master Ali Hussain of Pandawbyin and etc. Abdul Rahman Gannal, whose military tactics were highly command able at Buthedaung battle, was made military in-charge. British time Police Inspector Mr. Abul Khair and sub-inspector Mr. Ali Joher were head and deputy head of the police administration. Mr. Mohammad Darga, Abdur Shukkur Darga, Abdul Rahim Darga, Kalu Darga etc. also played important part in keeping law and order under the administration of Peace Committee.

Maungdaw south was under the administration of the Peace Committee headed by Mr. E.D.S. Marcan (Tanbi Saheb). Molvi Abul Khair, Molvi Amir Hamza and Master Ashraf Hussain were the executive members. Noor Ahmed Gannal was the Police head of the Maungdaw South Peace Committee. Maungdaw north was under the administration of the Peace Committee headed by Mr. Faruk Ukil of Bowlibazar. The head of the Buthedaung and part of the Rathedaung Township Peace Committee was Mr. Zahiruddin Saheb.

Mr. Zahiruddin was the second son of Master-Molvi Abdul Hakim, the Head Master of Maungdaw Vernacular Board Mohammadan School. He was the younger brother of Mr. Faizi, the Education officer of the Thaton district in lower Burma and the elder brother of Mr. Sufi M.A. Waheed. His mother and second wife were from Buthedaung. He was a popular leader during the battle of Buthedaung. So he was selected as head of the Buthedaung Peace Committee, which had ruled the region till British re-entry in 1945. It was he who declared the Mayu Republic during Japanese time.

On May 1, 1942, the Japanese Imperial Army (JIA) led by

Lt. 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 was the headquarters of Japanese supporting Thakins in Arakan. On 3rd May Japanese troops and BNA reached Ponnagyun. British Navy stationed in 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. The Japanese occupied Akyab on 7th May without any resistance. On that fateful day Bo Ran Aung also entered Akyab accompanied by Boom Pauk Tha Gyaw. They chopped off 30 heads of innocent Muslims of Ambari and Manupara. The frightened villagers left their houses. The BNA troops and the Maghs entered the villages and carried away all the belongings of Muslim Rohingyas. 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 the Mayu River towards Buthedaung. They fired several blind shots at the Muslims whenever they saw them on the bank of the river. But a group of Muslim fighters led by Azhar Meah Chowdhury of Godum Para intercepted the boat and the Magh Commissioner U Kyaw Khine, was shot dead. The boat returned to Akyab.

Now the Japanese calculated that without the support of the Muslims of North Arakan it would be rather difficult for them to complete the occupation of Burma and move further westward. The Japanese, therefore, began to discuss with many Muslim leaders including Mr. Sultan Mahmud, Mr. Yasin Ukil and U Po Khine (Kaman Muslim-Nasiruddin) Ukil.

A delegation constituted by Mr. Yasin Ukil and U Po Khine Ukil from Muslim side and Bo Yan Naung, Bo Yan Kin and Bo Myo Nyunt and some other Maghs, was sent to Maungdaw by the Japanese. The delegation met Tambi Saheb and other Rohingya leaders. A public meeting was held at Sikdarpara on 8th June 1942. They spoke for making peace between the two warring communities. The Japanese had done a mistake. Because the presence of BNA tops brass and some Magh nationalists made a negative impulse. Local Muslims joined by the refugees became furious. Rohingya leaders and Tambi Saheb tried their best to control them.

In the ensuing hue and cry gunfire broke out. There was exchange of fire. Bo Yan Naung, Bo Yan Kin and Bo Myo Nyunt died from the Magh side whereas Inna Amin, Abu Bocker, Habibullah, Molvi Abdul Salam and a son of Molvi Abdul Rahman died from the Muslim side. The rest of the Magh fled. Both Po Khine Ukil and Yasin Ukil were arrested while Tambi Saheb was confined at an unknown place. They were released as the Japanese ordered BNA leaders Bo Yan Aung to do so.

The 1942 massacre of Muslims in Arakan halted the Japanese advancement for a while, but gradually they pushed northward along Mayu valley and occupied Buthidaung and Maungdaw towns in October. The British had withdrawn already to the West Bank of Naf River.

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

The British had their forward's outposts at Cox's Bazar and Teknaf. A local intelligence organisation known as "V" force was raised with recruits from Muslims of Arakan. Field Marshal Sir William Slim, writes in his "Defeat into Victory" that "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". Had not the Muslims of north Arakan sided with the British and risked their lives and properties for the British, it would have been rather impossible for the Allied Forces to re-enter Arakan and further their advancement to southern part of Burma. It was only with the help of "V" force that the British successfully made their way to control Arakan.

"Only Thirty Comrades slipped out of the country to return with the Japanese Imperial army (JIA) and successfully drive out the mighty British from its sacred soil. And when the Japanese failed to honour their bond, the people of Burma at the behest of their beloved and undisputed leader, General Aung San, rose as one man in what is popularly called the "Resistance Movement". The Japanese, undefeated in a straight run up to the North-eastern gate of India at Imphal and the western gate of Burma at Maungdaw, ever shattered and ran pell-mell out of Burma to meet their ultimate doom at Hiroshima and Nagasaki". Sultan Mahmud's article, "Burma and Bangladesh", published by "People's view", Chittagong on 1st February 1972.

From Akyab Sultan Mahmud, ex-minister, Haji Sultan Mahmud and Saya U Ba Khin (Master Ashrafuddin) led the Japanese and BIA (Burma Independent Army) to Buthidaung. The British for his collaboration with Japanese sentenced Kala Meah, the educated youth leader of *Koandaung* Village of Buthidaung Township to death. ("A short History of Arakan and Rohingyas" by National Democratic Party for Human Rights, P-17).

Passing of death sentence on Kala Meah was indeed unfair, because most of the people of Burma had collaborated with the Japanese. But no body was ever taken action by the British although they joined with the Japanese against the British.

Kala Meah was educated at St. Anne's Convent High School of Akyab. He welcomed the Japanese with thousands of local people. The Japanese appointed him administrator. During his administration he had an accident of shooting hitting the leg of a man. With this case the British arrested him, while he joined British force at Bowli Bazar of Maungdaw, with the instigation of some enemies of Kala Meah. Kala Meah's father, the headman and landlord of Koandaung went straight to the Governor General to appeal for the release of his son. Before his arrival, with the release order, Kala Meah was awarded death sentence and was shot dead by the firing squad. Alas! With the release order in hand, his father, amidst thousands of people shedding tears for Kala Meah's unnatural death buried Kala Meah. For decades the Rohingyas with full of lamentation remembered Kala Meah.

"After the re-occupation of Burma by the Allied Forces,.... thousands more both from the Armed Forces and civilians were taken into custody including myself. At first all were lodged in the Rangoon Central Jail. Thereafter the civilians were separated from the members of the Armed Forces and a batch of about twenty of us was taken to Calcutta by steamer. We were then removed to a detention camp in *Jhingergacha* in Jessore District. In our group were well-known names in Burma like. Tilla Mohammad Khan, S.M. Bashir, Dina Nath, L.B Lathia, Mohammad Jaffar and several others. We were released after Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been atom-bombed by Truman and the consequent surrender of the Japanese. We were in detention for about ten months.

"While in detention in *Jhingergacha*, it so happened that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Moulana Abul Kalam Azad came to Jessore on an election campaign. We manage to smuggle out a letter to Panditji requesting him to use "Jai Hind" as the only form of greeting and salutation by the people of India. A few days later, at a meeting



#### 14. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF ROHINGYAS (1948-1962)

In the General Elections for the Constituent Assembly, Mr. Sultan Ahmed and Mr. Gaffar were elected from Maungdaw and Buthidaung with the tickets of Jamiat-e-Ulema, the political party of Muslims of Arakan. Mr. Sultan Ahmed was made Secretary of Parliament to the Ministry of Minority. The Minister of Minority was U Aung Zan Way (a Rakhine). In 1951 General Elections Muslim won 5 seats, four with Jamiat-e-Ulema's tickets. They were, Mr. Sultan Ahmed (Maungdaw North), Daw Aye Nyunt (Zhura Begum) Maungdaw south, [She is the wife of Mr. Sultan Ahmed, her father U Po Khine (Akyab) won with Burma Muslim Congress Ticket]. Mr. Abul Bahser (Buthidaung) and Mr. Abdul Gaffar were elected to the house of Deputies and Nationality (Akyab west-comprising Maungdaw and Buthidaung) with Jamiat's ticket respectively.

Before the general elections of 1956, the U Nu government abolished Burma Muslim Congress and Jamiat-e-Ulema, branding them as religious parties. As Muslims of North Arakan refused to accept AFPFL of Maungdaw and Buthidaung, the Rakhine were in full control of AFPFL branches of Maungdaw and Buthidaung. As a ruling party, the AFPFL had full influence in the administration. And the Muslim of Arakan began to feel their mistake of refusing the offer of Bogyoke Aung San to join AFPFL. On his return from Haj Mr. Abul Khair met Mr. Sultan Mahmud, Sayadaw U Pinnya Thiha and U Oo Saw in 1955 and discussed on AFPFL and the position of the Muslims of north Arakan. U Pinnya Thiha, the Chief patron of the Arakan division AFPFL and U Oo Saw the Secretary General of the Arakan Division AFPFL had agreed to appoint Haji

Abul Khair to organise AFPFL among the Muslims of Arakan as he was recommended by the most powerful AFPFL leader U Kyaw Nyein, the then Deputy Prime Minister (Finance) with the help of Ohn Gyaw, the man of U Kyaw Nyein.

Haji Abul Khair became the President of Township AFPFL of Maungdaw. The AFPFL party gave the nominations for the 1956 general election to Haji Abul Khair for Maungdaw south constituency and Sultan Ahmed for Maungdaw north. They came out successful.

The other Muslims MPs were Mr. Abul Bashar (Buthidaung south), Mr. Ezhar Meah (Buthidaung North) and Mr. Abdul Gaffar (House of Nationality). A bye-election was held for Buthidaung north constituency in 1957 as the election of Mr. Ezhar Meah was challenged and the verdict was against him. Mr. Sultan Mahmud contested from it and came out successful defeating U Po Khine. Mr. Sultan Mahmud was ex-cabinet secretary, an important post in British India legislative Assembly. He was inducted into the cabinet of U Nu as Health Minister.

Buthidaung Hospital, Akyab General Hospital and numerous health centers in Maungdaw and Buthidaung rural area were established during Mahmud's tenure of Health Ministry. Saheb Bazar State Middle School, Minglagyi State Middle School (later Ngakura State middle school) and many primary schools were established by approaching Education Minister. Rohingya students were sent to London on state scholarships.

Haji Abul Khair secured the top most votes among all the successful AFPFL members. He was highly honoured both by the AFPFL party and the Burma Police Force. *Ye Kyimon*, the Police News paper published in its front page with his life history along with his big photograph in police uniform. A party was held by the



Inspector General of Police of Burma in honour of him. In his speech the IGP said, "we take pride of Mr. Abul Khair" He was very famous among the Police of Burma not less than the famous writer of "Animal Farm", George Orwell, who was also a Police officer of Burma.

Haji Abul Khair shot to limelight among the Muslims of Arakan for his hardship to establish the high school of Maungdaw, mosques, Madarasa and *Eid-gah*. His contributions towards the promoting of the living standard of the Muslims of Arakan were remarkable and unforgettable to the Muslims of Arakan. He not only helped building mosques in Maungdaw and Buthidaung but also helped in Kyauktaw and Sandoway where he served as a Police Officer. He was also a pious Muslim.

AFPFL party also honoured him. Soon Mr. Abul Khair was made an executive member of the Arakan division AFPFL party. He was also offered a post of Minister by U Nu. He did not accept it but advised to give it to Mr. Sultan Mahmud who was his political teacher.

President Nasser of Egypt nationalised Suez-Canal in 1956. The Muslims of North Arakan were all on the streets in support of their Arab brothers when the British, French and Israel waged a war for the Suez Canal. In 1967 the Rohingya *Mujahid* group of Jafar Sani offered one thousand volunteers through the Arab embassies at Karachi for the liberation of Arab lands. RIF also donated a small sum of money for the Arab refugees through the Ambassador of Sudan, who was at that time the acting head of the Arab diplomats as the Iraq Ambassador Abdul Kader Jilani, the head of the Arab diplomats in Pakistan, was away. The President of Sudan, Ebrahim Aboud, acknowledged their generous donation.

At that time Burma was very friendly with Israel. Israeli experts were brought for military training, agriculture and business.

Israelis ran Burma five star shipping line. Most of the Directors of the Ava bank were Israelis. Many Jews were brought to settle at central Burma and Shan State. Ben Gorion the Prime Minister paid a private visit to Burma and he took rest and meditated at Kaba Aye's Buddhists Shrine, for which he was strongly criticised by the Jew religious leaders. U Nu was invited by Nasser and explained actual fact and began to think about Arab stand.

Throughout Parliamentary tenure the Ra-Ta-Nya members were always acted unfriendly against the Rohingyas. They hated Rohingyas and called Rohingyas as '*Kalas*' a word full of sarcasm. They branded Rohingyas as Chittagonians and never regarded them as fellow human beings. They always cried (wolf-fool) illegal entry of large number of Chittagonians. They not only distorted the image of the Rohingyas but also accused Muslim MPs of masterminding illegal entry of large number of Chittagonians into Arakan with the approval of AFPFL to win elections. Moreover, they incited Buddhist monks of Arakan to use force against the Muslim MPs of Arakan on the question of Arakan State. The hostile attitude of the Ra-Ta-Nya members towards Rohingyas caused Muslim MPs to oppose their demand of Arakan State.

In response to the submission of constitution amendment bill with regard to grant 'state' to Arakan in Parliament on Feb. 22, 1955 by U Ba Mying of Ramree constituency, Mr. Basher (Buthidaung) strongly opposed it-, "..... the implementation of local government is underway. Soon it will be in Arakan. According to it the administration will be in the hands of the people. At that time the people of Arakan can do what ever they like for the development of Arakan. We don't want to hear '*Rakhine Praynay*'. State is under restriction of centre. We cannot proceed beyond the boundary. We don't want to live in a state, which is like a pool; we will live in Burma proper, which is like an ocean.

“Mr. Speaker, certainly there would be communal riots if a state is granted. If the government still grant state we request not to include Maungdaw and Buthidaung in the state and keep it as a separate district under the direct control of central government.”

Ra-Ta-Nya member of Parliament, U Hla Tun Pru (Mrohaung) while submitting the constitution amendment bill for granting ‘state’ to Arakan on Feb. 19, 1958, told the parliament that... by gaining Arakan statehood they could stop illegal immigration of Chittagonians, the smuggling of rice and crush the Mujahid.”

At that time the examination centre for matriculation students of Akyab district is at Akyab only. If any Rohingya MP opposed the bill, the Maghs might attack Arakan state Muslim students of Maungdaw and Buthidaung. So Haji Abul Khair asked the authority to grant an examination center at Maungdaw and Buthidaung. The Authority approved Mr. Abul Khair’s demand and a matriculation examination centre has been granted at Maungdaw since 2nd March 1958.

While opposing the proposed bill of Hla Tun Pru, Mr. Abul Khair told the parliament that, “Mr. Speaker, if the state is granted we will be Ministers and Deputy Ministers as we are the ruling party MPs in Arakan. But we are not greedy for the posts. We are looking for the betterment of the people of Arakan. In all aspects we Arakanese are not inferiors than Burmese. We want equal status with Burmese. If one kyat is for Burmese, then one kyat also is for Arakanese too. If state is granted there is the risk of depending on Burmese. The Burmese may become the donors and we may become beggars. Mr. Speaker, by no means we can be in that position. We must be in equal status with the Burmese. We cannot accept the proposal of development of the Union by granting state. While the relation is good it may be better. If the relations were not good then it would be harmful to the Union. The people

and the Union will prosper when we are united. So I oppose the proposed amendment bill of 1958 of U Hla Tun Pru.”

After winning the election of 1960, U Nu appointed an enquiry commission to study all the problems involved in the question of Arakan. On 3rd January the commission put up their report to the Prime Minister U Nu. According to the report they met 32 Arakanese in Rangoon, 57 at Sandoway, 63 at Kyaukpuru, 30 at Akyab and 14 at Buthidaung.

80% of the people of Sandoway opposed the Arakan state. If the state is granted they want to remain in Burma by incorporating Sandoway with the Bassein district. The Rohingya of Mayu district did not want Arakan state. They requested to keep them under Burma proper if the state is granted. 90% of the people of Akyab district want the state. 50% of Kyaukpyu’s district opposed the granting of state. The commission recommended for the plebiscite to grant the state of Arakan.

The preparatory committee for the formation of the Arakan state was formed with all the members of parliament of Arakan excluding the MPs of Mayu Frontier region as the region was kept outside the would be Arakan state.

For the appointment of the Arakan Affairs Minister there was very much competition between U Ba Myine and U Kyaw Min. There was big friction among the Rakhine masses between the U Ba Myine supporters and U Kyaw Min’s supporters. Lastly Ra-Ta-Nya decided that U Ba Myine and U Kyaw Min would routinely take the post for eight months each.

When the Frontier Administration has been withdrawn, Mayu district would be part of the Arakan State. To oppose such arrangement the MPs of Buthidaung and Maungdaw, Mr. Sultan Mahmud, Mr. Abul Basher, Mr. Rashid and Mr. Abul Khair met

Judiciary Minister Dr. Aye Maung. He was empowered by U Nu for the formation of Arakan and Mon states, on 27 November 1961. The leaders of the MPs Mr. Mahmud asked Dr. Aye Maung not to include Maungdaw and Buthidaung in the Arakan state and as for the 29 villages of Rathedaung which are now in Mayu Frontier Administration, decision there of be by ballot in the area before including in the Arakan state.

Arakan Indigenous Muslim League opposed the draft bill of Arakan state through Arakan State preparatory committee to the government, stating that the draft bill had no fundamental rights of the all races of Arakan, the power was given to only a handful of persons, which was against the principle of the Prime Minister and the bill had no provision on the rights of the indigenous Muslims, Chin, Kami, Dinet. So they protested the draft bill of Arakan. The protest letter was given to Dr. Aye Maung.

While there was the problem of appointing Arakan Affairs Minister, the Indigenous Arakan Muslim League of Kyaukpyu demanded for a Muslim Minister in the proposed Arakan State. If a Minister were given to the Muslims of Arakan, the Muslims of Burma and the Muslim of other states would also demand Muslim Ministers, by saying so the Union Party government rejected the demand of the Muslims of Kyaukpyu.

On February 27, U Ba Swe the President of AFPFL wrote to Prime Minister U Nu that he requested earnestly to postpone the bill of Arakan and Mon states till the settlement of Federal proposal of the minorities. The Union Party government of the Prime Minister U Nu postponed the schedule time of Arakan state bill to parliament on 28 February for unspecified time.

Mr. Sultan Mahmud, Health Minister in U Nu's government demanded a Muslim state comprising the region from the Kaladan River to the Naf River, pointing out that in 1666 - Shaista Khan had

conquered up to the Kaladan River. Since then the Kaladan river became a permanent border between Rakhine and Rohingya majority areas. Kaladan itself means "boundary of Kalas". Muslim state was the platform of election campaigns of Mr. Sultan Mahmud and his colleagues' in 1960 election. They won the election with the slogan of Muslim State. The coup of Gen. Ne Win shattered the demand of the "Muslim State" of North Arakan.

**Source:** "The True History of Burma" SLORC's Publication, Burma's Politics (from 1958-62) Vol: III.

## *SOCIAL LIFE OF THE ROHINGYAS*

### 15. MARRIAGE

Every race has its own tradition of marriage. Rohingya too has its peculiarity in marriage. Generally, there have been arranged marriages among the Rohingya since ancient time. The Rohingya parents take responsibility of their children and arrange marriage between the parents. In case of illicit affairs or even eloping, the Rohingya society used to condemn them. If a Muslim marries a non-Muslim, the society would make social boycott until the non-Muslim converts. There is little scope for Rohingya for wooing the young girls except in the evening when they go to the ponds to carry water.

Betrothal is arranged by the Rohingya parents. The bride and the groom are not allowed to meet before marriage. Family lines, character, beauty, education and religious practices are thoroughly considered before the engagement. Engagement ceremony is usually held at the residence of bride either with a feast or tea party according to their financial condition. The groom party would give a ring or gold chain or earring or any kind of ornament to the parents of the bride or guardian in front of all present at the ceremony. If there arose any kind of dissension among the parents, engagement can be cancelled. If the groom party cancels it they have to bear the expenses of engagement party and also lose the ornament given for the bride. If the bride cancels it they have to return it to the groom.

Mohar a compulsory payment by the bridegroom in terms of ornaments and money is fixed on mutual agreement by the parents

of the bride and the groom. It is essential according to the Islamic law. Both the bride and groom must declare their willingness to the knot by pronouncing the word '*Khawbul*' (I do agree) in front of the Molvi Saheb who performs the marriage with two witnesses. Divorce rate among the Rohingyas is less than other races of Burma.

The wedding ceremonies are held by throwing a dinner party as far as possible. The reception dinner is usually held by the family of the bridegroom. In special cases called "*Salami*" the reception dinner is held at bride home. '*Salami*' is generally not appreciated by the society, as it requires the bride's guardian to pay cash and kind to the groom at the time of marriage. In present day it is as good as dowry.

In early days, the wedding function of Rohingya would be held by holding stage show consisting of singing religious songs, *kavali* after the sunset. The members of the groom party would come to the village of the bride in-group singing, dancing and of course ringing the traditional gong, a musical instrument.

Womenfolk would sing "*Howlla*" using mouth organ. However, with the change of time and restriction that follows when military regime came to power, the beauty of traditional Rohingyas' wedding ceremony started to wane. In pre-military regime, at least 2/3 persons from a family would join the wedding party and now due to travel restriction only a handful of persons would go to the bride house if it were at a distant place.

Although there was tradition of simple dinner and strictly no alcoholic drink was served as is against the religious practice, now-a-days Rohingyas have to invite the local officials and must serve them drinks to please them. Otherwise, the couple or the relatives



would be bound to receive the wrath from the authorities. In almost all Rohingya wedding ceremonies '*Howlla*' singing and folk dancing by females are common.

People of both sexes especially the girl would wear dazzling and resplendent garments. The occasion is an arrangement of rich food and display of wealth. The ladies attired in expensive clothes and displaying all the jeweleries they possessed. It is the tradition of the Rohingyas to join the wedding party wearing the best dress one would have without discrimination of sex or age.

The splendour of the marriage procession is really an enjoyable scene to be observed by the village folk. It is arranged according to the status of the bridegroom party. The bridegroom is ceremoniously received into the bride's house by in-laws. The *nikah* (marriage contract) is performed in the presence of Muslim clergy, *ukils* (witnesses) and other dignitaries.

It is followed by reciting of '*darud*' and invocation of divine favour to make the conjugal life happy. (Sayid Sultan, Nabi Vansa). After the conclusion of the *nikah* the bride is taken to the bridegroom's house where she would be greeted amidst hilarious scenes. According to Alawal's Towfa, the water in which the feet of the bride had been used to be sprinkled in the four corners of the household. Nowadays it was out of use. After a feast, guests were usually entertained with professional singers and sometime dancers especially hired for the occasion.

The bridal party will come to the bride home consisting of 20 to 60 men and 10 to 20 women. *Phalki* was in use in early days to carry the bride to her in-laws house. Now-a-days jeeps or cars are used. After seven days, about 15 to 30 men and women from bride side will go to the bridegroom's house and will bring back the bride.

After seven days the bridegroom's family members and relatives reciprocate to bring back her.

After the wedding over, relatives or close friends of the newly wedded couple would invite the couple to a dinner where '*duroast kura*' (a traditional roasted fowl) and rich food would be served as a mark of affections for the couple. Sometimes presents of garments or longyi or Tami or one set or even rings are given by the relatives.

Generally the bride lives with the in-laws. Rohingyas have the tradition of family value. In a house, rooms are created so that every son could have lived with his wife and children. Children would earn and bear the expenses jointly. When the bride is pregnant the parents of the bride have to send '*hadi*' for bride. *Hadi* means special food for the pregnant with present for the bridegroom.

After birth, the baby is cleared and wrapped with cloth and is to be brought before a *Molovi* or pious person who would say "*Azan*" near the baby. If the baby is a boy '*Kamat*' is also given after *Azan*. Usually *Azan* is called for *namaz*. The '*namaz*' for this call of '*Azan*' is said only after his/her death, i.e. *Namaz-e-Janazah*. After the delivery the mother would sit near the fire for seven days to protect her from evil and also for speedy recovery.

The head of the newborn is shaven after 7 days, which is called '*fut*'. Silver equivalent to the '*fut*' hair's weight is given to the poor. Within forty days of the birth, a goat for daughter or two goats for son is to be given as '*Akikha*'. Among the Muslim Society such rites during childhood as *Aqiqah* or first shaving of child's hair, *Bismillah Khani* or pronouncing the name of the child, *sunnat* or the rite of circumcision are usually performed with lavish expenditure.



Another writer wrote that all functions like marriage ceremony, *sunnate khatna* (circumcision) and *Aqiqah* are observed. The parents of the bride have to send a cradle, a gold chain for the grandchild and gifts for son-in-law.

In the early days mosques were main centre for education. In the later period *Madarasas* and *Maktab* sprung up in villages and towns. At *Maktab* (basic religious school) the child will study till he/she can read *Quran*. Some will continue till he becomes a *Molvi* or *Hafis*. Many join school if their parents are able to send them to schools. Rohingya children at their tender age, particularly those living at rural areas have to help their parents in grazing domestic animals, farmland and other works.

After schooling the girls will remain indoor assisting her mother. When she reaches adolescence or attaining puberty or menstruate, it is called she has seen the 'flower'. Then the relatives have to give presents to her. Quoting *Shariyat Nama*- page 127-138 Dr. S.B. Qanungo writes that the first time menstruation, which marked her arrival at puberty, was celebrated ceremoniously with rites of purification.

Polygamy was the practice of the medieval period and it was fairly common among the richer classes of all communities. Pyrad de Laval notices in 1607 A.D. that the people "have each three to four wives very richly adorned with gold chain and pearls. (Laval P. 334). Polygamy is practiced by some Rohingyas to avoid extra-marital affairs. The earring ceremony will be held for the daughters and circumcision ceremony will be held for the sons. The boy is circumcised when he attains the age of understanding. But it can also be done after seven days of his birth. Nowadays there is no freedom of marriage among the Muslims of Arakan. The junta put drastic restriction for the marriage of Rohingyas.

## 16. SPORTS AND GAMES

Rohingyas have many indigenous sports and games, which are usually held during winter and summer. Among them Boli Khela (wrestling) is very popular. Many Rohingya Bolis (wrestlers) helped allied forces during the resistance movement against Japanese for the Independence of Burma. As part of indigenous games, Rohingya wrestlers participated in the Union Day celebration held in Rangoon. Boli Khelas are held in various villages of Maungdaw and Buthidaung. Alihaung Boli Khela is very famous and people from far-flung area joined it.

Hawtu (Haji Kalilur Rahman) Boli, Shuna Ali Boli, Yusuf Boli, Rostum Boli, Ulu Boli, etc. are famous Bolis of Mayu Frontier. Boli Khelas are held in the afternoon. At night 'betayli geet' which is singing local song is usually held at the same place of Boli Khela.

Ghari Khela (Boat racing), Mohal Khela, Gila Khela, Du Du Khela, Qunda Khela (weight lifting with big round stone), Dan Khela (like Cricket), Bowadi Khela, Molfat Khela (a kind of chess) etc. are among the Rohingya sports and games.

Paddy Transplanting competition is also popular among the Rohingyas. They will sing the songs of paddy transplanting. Buffalo fighting is traditional recreation for Rohingyas. The owners of the buffalo have to serve the onlookers with 'Bini but' (glutinous rice) and *Doh Pira* (a kind of winter rice cake). Many people from many nearby villages would come to see the fight.

### *Traditional Reading Circle:*

Puthi reading is also a kind of recreation for elderly people.

All people will assemble at the rest house of the village or teashop, one man would read out the puthi and another would explain the meaning. Whenever the reader completes one stanza he will utter "hai hai ray" together with all the listeners.

## 17. HUNTING

Hunting is a part of Rohingyas traditional games. In early days, people would organise hunting and hundreds of people from 2-3 villages would join hunting deer and other wild eatable animals. This mass hunting using stick, knife, spear, net and sometime firearms was carried during dry season in hills. However, with the restrictions imposed, people are not allowed to enter the forests and the mass hunting has now come to an end for the last two decades.

Such mass hunting has one meaningful object, which is all participants irrespective of class, and creed would have equal facility and feeling while in hunting. The meat of animals would be distributed among those who went for hunting.

## 18. TAUNGBRO KAYLA

Taungbro Kayla, a game involving persons who know supernatural things. Competitors would chant mantras to make another to behave like monkey, tiger or anything he likes. Then the No. 2 or defending *Boetdaw* will climb a tree or anything like monkey till he succeed in cutting the mantras of No.1 *Boetdaw*. Then No.2 chant mantras to No.1 to behave like a tiger or anything he likes. Then

No.1 *Boetdaw* would behave like what No.2 has chants mantras till it is cut down.

Again and again they would chant mantras alternately till the time of the game (keyla) is over. During the game, persons involved would have to come out of the mantras with his mantras and if anyone fails to come out, he would be a loser. The winner will have to cancel his own mantra and he would cut the mantras given to the loser.

## 19. DALA HUNTING

Hunting at night with the help of fire or lamp putting in a bowl carried by a man on his head is called 'Dala hunting'. The dala carrier will lead and a gunman with a dozen or more followers would follow one by one behind the light. When they see a deer, the gunman would shoot it. Then they carry the prey and divided the meat among them and also distribute it to the elders of the village including the headman.

Sometimes the dala hunters encounter tiger or other dangerous beasts. This time the dala carrier must be very careful. His followers would slip slowly. He must put the bowl of fire or lamp on a trunk of a tree and slip away very calm and quietly taking the cover of the shade of the dala bowl. The tiger would be staring at the lamp of the bowl till the light is out. Then the tiger would jump on the bowl with anger.

Usually Kanyan oil is used for dala fire or light. It is a very interesting but dangerous game and generally it is discouraged by the elders. There are incidents in which some such hunters became themselves prey to the tigers they faced.

## 20. SONGS AND MUSIC

Rohingyas do have their own seasonal songs and are very famous among Rohingyas. They call it "geet". In marriage *Howla* songs and folk dance are common. While dancing the women use mouth organ harmonica (*baza*) musical instrument. Gazir Geet, Bitayali Geet, Natua Geet and dancing are held usually outside the village for not to disturb the pious elders of the villages.

Those who had come across the Rohingya National Programme from the Burma Broad casting Service, they may recall how melodious the Rohingya songs are.

## 21. KAWALI

Under the British occupation Urdu was introduced to Rohingyas. As Urdu is a sweet language rich with melodious songs, the influence of *Kawali* crept in among the Rohingya students and educated class.

Kawali, harmony and other music were the legacy of Mughal to Arakan. It was brought to Arakan by Shah Shuja and greatly influenced after the conquest of Chittagong by Sayista Khan, the Mughal governor of Bengal.

The founder of Mujahid movement of Arakan in 1947, Mr. Jafar Kawal, was a prominent singer of Kawali. Kawal Jafar's lyrics of Azad-Arakan are quite famous in 1950s. Mr. Habibullah kawal of Bowli Bazar and Mr. Shabbir Kawal of Nagura Village of Maungdaw Township, were reputed Kawali singers. There are many Kawali singers in Akyab, Buthidaung, Rathidaung, Kyawktaw, Minbya, Myebon and Mrauk-U. Moulana Nurul Islam of

Maungnhama village in Maungdaw Township is a best composer of Kawali and Rohingya songs. Shofi of Shikdapara is a noted singer and Shamaya was a good Rohingya musician

## 22. THEATRE AND DRAMAS

Kubsurat Bala was a famous drama among the Rohingyas of Arakan since 1930 to 1960. Rubban Theatre was an attractive play among the rural Rohingyas of Arakan. In 1965, when Gen. Ne Win was yet to implement anti-Rohingya policy in full swing, the local Military officials organised an Independence Day theatre show in north Arakan where the Rohingya cultural programme was staged and conducted by high school students. In 1970s a Rohingya drama was shown in Arakan highlighting the shipwreck of 788 C.A.

## 23. BHATIALI GEETS

Bhatiali Geets are characterised by a feeling of longing for dear ones. Bhatiali songs mostly express the sorrows of separation, some express simple joy. As the boat plies along with the current, the vast, endless rivers inspire a sense of awe and wonder and the boatman starts singing, giving expression to his feelings. His voice rises and falls in keeping with the movement of his oar with the heaving of water. The dominant theme of Bhatiali is love.

## 24. SAMAJ (SOCIETY)

Every compact village or a part of it formed a (*samaj*) or social unit with the mosque as its centre and it is a uniting force for the convenience and regulation of social life of the inhabitants of the area. The eldest, pious and influential man in the society is recognised as the head of the samaj. He will decide all disputes arose among them with the help of other elders.

Samaj plays very important role in marriage. On the eve of the wedding day a person from each household of the samaj is invited to a meeting at bride and bridegroom's house with their respective samaj. The meeting is known as "*Pan Solla*" (betel discussion). Wedding programme is drawn in this meeting. Arrangement of the feast will be done by the samaj. The bridal party has to bring betel and betel nuts so that it can be distributed among the samaj members. Samaj also plays its role in funerals.

Samaj keeps big utensils and plates (sometimes clay-plates). They use to hire it to marriages and other (*mela*) feasts. Able people usually give (*Mela*) feasts in remembrance of their parents who died before. Sometimes the samaj arranges 'mela' or at least '*sindi*'. In Ahsura day they sometimes arrange 'Hauter Dana' seventy kinds or various kind of grains putting in one pot and distribute among the households of samaj. In every marriage the members of samaj must be invited. They will bring presents if they are invited by the bride party. The samaj also help building or roofing the houses of poor aged men or women.

The neighbours and relatives will send foods for four days for the family of the dead person with an agreement so that there will be no lifting of the hearth of the bereaved family. The women relatives have to live with them if they do not go back before the

carrying of the crops to graveyard. On the death of a Rohingya Muslim, all members of the society (*samaj*) arranged his/her funeral, as a social duty and buried him/her in the graveyard with a prayer (*Janaza*) according to Islamic teaching.

## 25. DWELLING HOUSES

The majority of the Rohingyas' houses are built of wooden pole, bamboo walls and thatches or palm leaves (*dani*) roofs. Most of their kitchens' floors are mud floor. The rich men houses are mostly wooden with tin-sheet roof. Their compound fences are of wall of bamboo called *Zawli*. Their birth rooms are detached from the houses. Log house is attached with the kitchen. Cowshed, *kuzjah* (haystack) and poultry farm are generally situated in the campus with a *Gula Ghar* or *Khachari Ghar* (office or conference room or drawing room) in the case of rich man.

The dwelling of the common people during Manrique's times was 'usually built of bamboos, called Bans by the inhabitants and thatched with straw' (Manrique, I, 279). Manrique's description indicates the medieval hut was almost similar to its modern counterpart. (S.B. Qanungo's A History of Chittagong P. 543.)

## 26. DRESS OF ROHINGYA

The male Rohingya traditionally wears a shirt with long sleeves called *bazu* covering the upper part of the body while the lower part is covered with a rectangular sheet of cloth stitched from side to side called *longi*. Most of the Rohingya males wear coat and cap.

The adult female Rohingya normally wears long-sleeved garment known as *suli* to cover the upper part of the body while the lower part is covered with a *tami*. A scarf known as *romal*, which covers the head and shoulders, is traditionally used. When going out door a *burka*, a traditional veil completely covering the whole body is put on.

## 27. OCCUPATION

The soil of Arakan is fertile and the climate is ideal for rice cultivation. Over eighty percent of the populations of Arakan are farmers. Over eighty percent of farmers of Arakan are Rohingyas. One hundred percent of the skilled labourers plying river crafts and fishing high sea vessels were Rohingyas too. Nowadays it reduces to 70 percent. In addition to farmers, sailors, fishermen there are also traders, shopkeepers, businessmen, woodsmen, artisans, carpenters, labourers, manufacturers of tobacco and salts. Shrimp culture along the Naf riverside run mainly by Muslims produces best quality shrimps. Border trade of shrimps from Maungdaw to Bangladesh amount a significant percentage of Bangladesh shrimps export. Shrimp culture and short time paddy cultivation are first introduced by Rohingyas, which are gradually spread throughout the country.

## 28. FOOD

Rice is the staple food grain of Arakan. The diet of Rohingya is simple-rice, fish, vegetables, milk and chilies; meat is taken occasionally. The majority of Rohingyas eat fishes with fresh vegetables or potatoes. Dry fish also is not uncommon among Rohingyas. On all festive occasions cows, water buffaloes and

goats are slaughtered for sale and distribution. They eat mutton, beef, and chicken after making '*Halal*' according to Islamic teaching. It was the tradition of the Rohingyas to honour their special guests by slaughtering a goat or more. If the host were poor he would honour his guest with a roasted chicken. Rohingyas do not eat tortoise, crab and pork.

People during Manrique's days were very fond of rice cake and dried fish. The traveller writes: 'Rice cakes, the usual food for these people without which, in spite of eating other food, they still feel hungry' (Manrique, 1, 99).

People of this district still prepare variety of rice cakes popularly known as *pitha* on special occasions or whenever need rises. Sidol (decomposed fish), xaga (hak or vegetables), dried fish etc. were some of the common food of the common people of Arakan Chittagong region during Manrique's time. (S.B. Qanungo's A History of Chittagong P. 545).

The Arakan with its geographical location inherits a mixed culture in food Indian cuisine, the Rakhine dish and the English. While snacks of foreign nature are commonly made, the traditional snacks known as '*Pira*' is in vogue. '*Pira*' is made of rice powder, coconut, molasses, etc. Seasonal '*Pira*' are made and people give special attention in their household.

Steamed rice cake '*Dohpira*' floating rice ball '*Panisatnya*', '*Bawla Pira*', '*Zala Pira*', '*Fakkon Pira*', '*Gura Pira*', '*Luri Pira*', '*Golali Pira*', '*Madhu Bhat*' a kind of fermented cooked rice, etc. have its own peculiarity and taste.



## 29. NAMES

The Rohingyas, on their birth, keeps Islamic Arabic names corresponding the Most Beautiful Names of God, the Prophet and his followers. Some keep Burmese or Rakhine names for the convenience of non-Muslim teachers and officials, as they cannot pronounce Muslim names correctly or as a gesture of communal unity or with the spirit of Burmese national culture. Some keep both names, such as Saleh Tin Sein, Sultan Maung Maung, Elias Ba Sein and so on. In Christian missionary schools the Muslim students have names with English names, such as, Walter Hussein, Marry Khadiza, Robert Hussein, Monica Ahmed and so on.

There are some local names, such as, Kalu, Lalu, Kalaya, Dawlaya, Chand Mia, Kala Mia, Kalafutu, Kalabi, Dawlabi, Shunabi etc. Muslim Rohingya should take pride on the Muslim names of the kings of Arakan.

In the words of Sayed Sajjad Husain 'the tradition of Arabic names for Muslims is as old as Islam itself. A Chinese Muslim can be identified by the Arabic name as a Muslim in Malaysia or in Indonesia sometimes adding their indigenous names. The tradition of Arabic names as a mark of cultural identity was even in Central Asia under Communist rule attaching Slavonic suffixes to Arabic words. Gafur appeared as Gafurov, Rahman as Rahmanov and so on.'

In the words of Sultan Ahmed 'The Muslims throughout the world keep, on their birth, the Islamic names in Arabic language. Some prefer national names; some Islamic names, some both and this are the custom with the Muslims everywhere in the world. Thus with Islamic names, one should not be misled that the children of the soil should be foreigners.'

## 30. NATURE OF ROHINGYA

Rohingyas are good-natured people. Also they are peace loving. They are not oppressors. But they do not tolerate the oppressors. They are brave and intelligent people.

During the struggle of the Burma's independence, the Rohingya fought against the Japanese with courage and valour. Though the Japanese easily conquered the southern part of Arakan within a short time, they were unable to control the north Arakan due to the defence strategy. Japanese, having faced stiff resistance from Rohingya, retreated to advance through the defence operation of Rohingyas. The bravery of Rohingya should be recorded in Burmese history as the British recorded in their writing.

## 31. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

There is a separate Rohingya language, literature and civilisation, which emerged with the evolution of history. Rohingya language is a mixture of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and Rakhine. In the year 1429 C.E General Wali Khan conquered Arakan from the hands of Burmese and Mons and introduced Persian as state language of Arakan and also introduced Qazi Courts in Arakan which lasted till 1845 A.C. Muslim writers and poets used to write in Rohingya language since the early days in Arabic and Persian alphabets. The coin of Arakan were minted in Arabic and Persian and there are numerous Kyauksa (stone inscriptions) carved in Arabic.

The immigrant Muslims must have brought with them their own mother tongue, Arabic, Persian or Turkish, as the case might be, while the language of the local Muslims must have been Bengali

and Rakhine. While the immigrants learned the local language, the Muslim also must have learned Arabic and Persian.

The very fact is that without Arabic it was not possible to follow fundamentals of Islam like offering prayers. Similarly, if they accepted office, they must be conversant with Persian, the official language. The Arakanese Raj appointed large number of Muslims in the state-service. The Muslims monopolised the administration both military and civil.

There were orders in Persian in the D.C court at Akyab dated 1834 and also from T. Dickerson Esq. Commissioner of Arakan, to the effect that one Hussain Ally, the then Thugyi of Budamaw circle, was to have charge of the Buddermokan and to enjoy any sums that he might collect on account of alms and offerings. (Mr. R.B. Samart, Burma Gazetter, Akyab District Pages 37-38, published in 1879 and 1957.)

After the annexation of Arakan by the British in 1825 it was administered by the commissioner of Chittagong Division and even the court language then used was Persian for a considerable number of years. The Rohingya literature is rich in ballads, love songs, folktales, legends, history, Baramasa (Twelve months songs), mystic songs, proverbs, riddles, lullabies (auli) and so on.

There are many Rohingya poets and writers who flourished in the court of Arakan kings. Some of them are: Abdu Minyo or Ahmedu Minyo, Shah Barid Khan, Daulat Kazi, Mardan, Shah Alawal, Quarishi Magan, Abdul Karim Khondkar, Abdul Karim and Qazi Abdul Karim. The Rohingya language was in use widespread during the era of Arakanese kings (Moshe Yegar Page 25), the Burmese invaders however, mainly destroyed their written language in 1784.

The Royal Library with rich collections on Muslim Civilisation, literatures, arts and other historical records were burnt down. Even a Burmese court poet U kala, lamented for the destruction of such a rare library. The British government also used Persian as the official language of Arakan till 1845 C.E. Even Rakhines were well versed in Persian till British period. Later on, the British replaced Persi with English and Urdu.

Thus written language of Rohingyas, Persi and Bengali almost disappeared from Arakan during the later part of British rule. During British India, Urdu language became popular among the students of higher education and it was widely spoken by the Allied Forces who came to Arakan. British introduced Urdu for their convenient or administration.

### 32. ALLAMA IQBAL (THE POET PHILOSOPHER)

Iqbal is popular among the Rohingyas because of there existed a tradition of Urdu and Persian and also for his revolutionary interpretation of the message of Islam. In the words of Sayed Sajjad Hussain 'Iqbal is a great creative artist and thinker, he is a harbinger of a renaissance in Islam, he is a champion of freedom, he is a man who struggled all his life to teach man that he can best fulfill his destiny and potential by a dynamic response to the challenges of his existence.

The way he transmuted his enthusiasm for Islam into great poetry set him apart from all others. His boldness as an advocate of his religion, especially the emphasis he placed on the unity of the

Islamic umma world wide, his belief that Islamic brotherhood offered a better alternative to modern nationalism, the dynamism of his philosophy of selfhood had specially electrifying on the Muslims.

Iqbal brought them promise of fresh hope, and pointed to a way out of despair. The first book widely studied was Iqbal's *Shikwah Wa Jawab-e-Shikwah*. This was both an analysis of the misfortunes which afflicted the Muslims and an attempt to discover a remedy'.

### 33. THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

The late Salvador de la Madariage, the Spanish writer, once told an audience at Dacca that a nation's contribution to civilization could be measured in terms of the myths it gave to the world's pantheon. The heroes in Eastern literature are not dominated by a single passion: neither Quais or Majnun, nor Farhad, nor Hanifa, nor Saiful Muluk is exclusively a man passion; they are also idealist. The Arabian Nights is a unique achievement now available in practically all civilized languages, a surpassingly subtle example of the storyteller's art, which offers the marvellous and romantic along with an undercurrent of satire and cynicism, which is hard to beat. It takes with the laws of Islam and it is one of the most successful evocations in creative literature of the ethos of Islam. (Sayed Sajjad Hussain's *Civilisation and Society*. P. 103-104). Almost all Rohingya grand parents use to narrate, tales from the Arabian Nights, to their grand children mostly before they fall asleep.

### 34. PUTHI AND POETS

'*Puthi*' is a book generally written in Bengali language. People conversant with Bengali language would read the Puthi in a group of persons gathered at a place mostly at night. The style of reading 'Puthi' is different from the reading of a Bangali language book reading was somewhat poetic.

In recent years, scholars have generally recognised the relevance of indigenous literary sources for writing the history of the people. Puthi in Bengali literally mean "a book" or "a manuscript" but the term generally came to associate with a particular genre composed in verse. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Puthi became almost an exclusive concern of semi-literate Muslims. It became a vehicle for transmitting to the Muslim Rohingya mass stories relating cultural heritage of Islam as well as the basic issue of their religion.

Abdul Karim Sahitya Vishared should be given credit for collecting hundreds of Phutis. He also collected manuscripts written by Muslim poets living in Arakan. He and Dr. Mohammed Enamul Huq together wrote a book entitled "Arakan Rajsabhaya Bangla Sahitya", giving accounts of their books and the subject matter discussed in those books. They brought the Muslim poets adorned the court of the Arakanese court.

Daulat Qazi wrote his *Sati Mayna O Lor Chandrani* at the request of Ashraf Khan, the chief Minister of Salim Shah II (Thiri Thudama) 1622-1638. This great work of Daulat began with a graphic picture of the capital of Arakan of the king and his chief minister and of the people of the country in general. Daulat writes "the great king knowing that his life would come to an end, transferred the rule of the kingdom to the hands of his minister Ashraf Khan..... One day king Thiri Thudama (Salim Shah

II).....went on hunting expedition ..... with his army .....stayed there for four months.

The chief minister returned to his court with the permission of the king ..... When Ashraf Khan sat in court the Mughal, the Pathans and numerous Hindus. .... Sat in rows ....Ashraf Khan was like full moon.....” (Missing links in Arakan History by S.N. Ghoshal P.258).

Alawal mentioned that the kingdom of Arakan was entrusted to the joint rule of the son and daughter of the Thado Mintra, after his death. The daughter and chief minister, Magan Thakur, had very important roles in the administration of the state. Sulayman, another minister of the king Sanda Thudama also figures very prominently in one of the Alawal works. Alawal's Padmavati was composed in the court of Arakan during the reign of Thadomintra (1645-1652) at the request of his chief minister Magan Thakur, who was a poet himself.

Alawal pictures him as a very important personage at the palace of Arakan. The rule of the kingdom was vested in Magan Thakur. His influence continued the reign of Sanda Thudama, who was the best friend of Magan, was also mentioned in one of Alawal's works. (Missing links in Arakan History by S.N. Ghoshal, Page-264).

According to Shah Alawal's Sikander Nama, Srimata Mujlis became a Mahamatya or chief or Prime Minister of Roshang after the death of Prime Minister Sayyid Musa. Nabaraj Majlis called Alawal to his court and gave him much support. Once Prime Minister sat in the assembly of learned men. Those present in the assembly praised the Prime Minister for his good deeds, particularly the construction of mosque and excavation of tanks. In reply Nabaraj

Majlis said that mosque and tanks were not permanent. In old days great men did these beneficial works, but they did not last. Only books have lasted, books pleased the readers' books impart education. Illiterate people became learned by reading books; books and poets are honoured not only in their own country but also outside, and books last until the day of resurrection.

Nabaraj Majlis was so important a personality that he administered the coronation oath to the king Sanda Thudamma. Shah Alawal says about this: "The great religious king had a Prime Minister known as Nabaraj Majlis. Now, I will tell something about Majlis. When the king died, the crown prince came to sit on the throne. Outside the throne, he stood facing the east. The Majlis wore his dress and standing before the prince, advised him, "Treat the people as your sons, and do not deceive upon the people. According to religious rites, be just in state duties, and see that the strong do not oppress the weak. Be kind, be true to your religion, be kind to good people, and punish the wicked. Try to forgive and do not be impatient, do not punish anybody for the past offence". The king accepted all this principles, and then bade Salam to the Majlis and then all others of the family of his mother.

Poet Marden stated his birthplace to be Kanchipuri in Arakan where there lived a number of Ulamas and Sheikhs. He wrote an epic entitled "Nasib Nama". The poet refers to the king Thiri Thudama, (Salim Shah II), who reigned from 1622 to 1638 C.E. So the poet was therefore a contemporary of Qazi Daulat. The poet name in full was Madan Nuruddin and the name of his Pir was Sayyid Ibrahim.

Another Rohingya Muslim poet was Abdul Karim Khandaker. He said that his great grandfather Rasul Mia was a custom officer of Arakan Port. His grand father Masan Ali was an interpreter at



the port. His father Ali Akbar also was a man of learning. Abdul Karim received the patronage of one wealthy merchant named Sadiq Nana Atibar. Atibar's father name was Umar. Atibar's Pir was Hamidullah.

In the place of Bandar, the city port area of Arakan there lived Atibar with an affluent Muslim Society. Abdul Karim says, "There lived in that village Qazis, Muftis, Ulemas, Pirs and Sufis. Those high-ranking Muslims used to converse with the kings 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 Atibar. For this act he became well known in the Society. There gathered a good number of Ulamas in the village who supervised the regular saying of prayers. One of them was appointed as 'Khatib', while another was appointed Imam".

It was at the request of Atibar that the poet wrote his book "Dulla Majlis" dealing with religious subjects: it was a big volume consisting of 33 chapters. The book composed in 1200 A.H./ 1785 C.E. In this same year the Burmese king Bodaw Min conquered Arakan and annexed it to the kingdom of Burma. So the poet wrote this book in the last year of the independent kingdom of Arakan. Before that book the poet wrote two other books Tamim Ansari and Hazar Masail. (The Rohingyas, A Short Account of their History and Culture, by Dr. Abdul Karim). Today reading Puthi has been waning as Rohingyas have been under severe mental and physical disturbance from the authorities. Once people from nearby villages would come to the puthi reading place, now it is no more possible. Authorities would easily term it as illegal gathering. With this the popularity of puthi has been diminishing and it is feared that the coming generation of Rohingya would not understand what a puthi is.

### 35. SOME KINDS OF PUTHIS

#### *Romantic works:*

Puthi contains history, religious events, romance and love story of kings, farmers, etc. The most important and most relevant document for the history of Rohingyas is Shah Barid Khan's romantic work "Hanifa O Kaira Pari". Another poem of his on 'Vidya Sundar' is a famous romantic work. 'Yusuf Zolikha of Shah Mohammed Sadhir is the first romantic poem. Laila Majnu of Daulat Wazir Khan is another popular love story. Sati Maina and Iorh Chandrani of Daulat Qazi is the best work. Padmavati and Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal of Alawal are the illustrious translations of the two famous Persian romantic tales.

#### *Ballad or short narrative poem:*

Two of the well known 'hawla' poems are 'Shuja Tanayar Bilap' and 'Pari Banur hawla' which narrate the tragic events relating to the flight and ends of Prince Shah Shuja.

#### *Baramasa:*

This is a tragedy song expressing the sorrows and suffering of a person in all the twelve months of the year just before the fulfillment of her hope. Among this kind of composition Sayid Sultan and Mohammed Khan are noteworthy.

#### *Works relating to Islamic religion and ethics:*

'Towfa' of Alawal- The book was originally written in Persian by Shaikh Yusuf Gada in 795 A.H (1392/93 A.D.). It is a book on religious principles and is the first book of the kind. Later, however, a few more such books dealing with religious subjects were written, such as Nasrullah Khandakar's Shariatnamah, Nuruddin's Daquaeq-ul-Haqaeq and Sheik Muttalib's Kifayet-ul-Musallin. Alawal wrote Towfa in 1663 A.D.

Abdul Karim Khondkar's 'Dulla Majlis' was a book dealing with religious subjects; it was a big volume consisting 33 chapters. The book was composed in 1200 A.H./1785 A.D. at the beautiful and historic village named Bandar of Mrohaung City of Arakan.

### ***Biographical works:***

Rasul Bijoy of Shah Barid Khan and Janiuddin are written on the life and career of the Great Prophet of Islam and his companions. Ofat-e-Rasul of Sayid Sultan is based on the performance and teachings of the Prophet.

### ***Jangnama or war poem:***

Abdun Nabi wrote a puthi based on the military exploits and miraculous activities of the Hazrat Amir Hamza. Nasrullah wrote about Hazrat Ali. The oldest Jangnama poem is 'Maktul Husain' by Mohammed Khan, written the framework of the history of the war from Prophet Mohammed (S.A) to Doomsday.

Puthis are written in couplet and triplet. In couplet the lines are rhymed. In triplet a line is divided into three sections of which the first two are linked by rhyme. The third section is rhymed with the corresponding section of the next line. 'Hawla' or short narrative poem means to be sung by females on marriage ceremony is another popular form of composition.

Puthis are read with tuneful voice. Often some selected hearers took part in the chant. But the latter's job is only to repeat a particular couplet called "ghosha" regularly also uttering 'hai hai ray' after a definite interval during the performance. Usually, puthis are read in an open space where the villagers could assemble in large numbers.

The discovery of a large number of puthis of Arakan indicates

how greatly the society valued education in their cultural life. The poets of Arakan were the most learned men of the world at that time.

Palm leaves (Talpata) known in Burma and Arakan as 'Pay' were widely used as writing materials in those days. Pens were made from bamboo. Ink was extracted from black materials or fruit juice. The puthis were/are used to be read amidst listeners in many households of the villages.

More research should be done to discover the importance and influence of 'Kabis' poets in shaping the history and culture of Rohingya. Libraries in West Bengal might have been a source of valuable references.

## **36. ARCHITECTURE**

Rohingya architecture resembles Arab Saracenic style, which is witnessed by the mosques of Arakan. Sandhi Khan mosque was built with hard rocks and in easier design, which stood as the oldest Rohingyas' archaeological monument in addition to Badar Morkam.

A few of the Rohingya historical monuments built during the time of Arakanese kings exist today. The Majja Mosque or Musa Mosque built by Musa, the prime Minister of Arakan, situated on the hill near the present Maung Tha Gon village, two miles Northeast of Mrohaung was built with big rocks together with a large lake nearby.

The Alam Laskar Mosque was built in 1668 at Pan Mrang

Village of Minbya Township together with twelve large lakes. The Shuja Mosque was built by Shah Shuja in 1661 at Mintayabyin at Mrohaung. The Quazi Mosque was built by the famous Quazi of Minbya, the winner of gold sword, near Krit hill with rocks, inscribing ancient literature. The Quazi Mosque of Zaliyapara at Kyauktaw Township and Musa Dewan Mosque of Akyab was built in 17<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the mosques mentioned above have its peculiar and rich architectural design believed to have given by the workmanship of Mughal era.

### 37. HISTORIC PILLARS

There is a historic stone pillar of Vesali Chandra dynasty (788-957-C.E) known as Vesali stone pillar or Ananda Chandra's stone pillar, which now lies close to the Shittaung Phara Pagoda's entrance down the stairway in the old Mrauk-U city. The pillar has inscriptions on three sides-east, west and northern side. The northern side has a total of 78 lines of inscription of which, 69 lines were written in Proto-Bengali script. In the 42<sup>nd</sup> line, the name of Arakan (country) was written "Arakandesh". (Dr. Saw Tun Aung: Shittaung Phara Stone Pillar's Northern side inscription, Rakhine Welfare Association's 25 Anniversary Magazine, P-49, 51 and Pamela Gutman: Ancient Arakan, Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1976.)

### 38. HISTORICAL SHRINES

Arakanese Chronicles states that Muslim Faqirs and Sufis (saints) used to visit the Arakan coast. One of the widely known facts is the existence of Muslim shrines called Bader Mokam which are essentially the commemorative shrines originally erected by the followers of Pir Badruddin Badir-i- Alam popularly known as Pir Badir scattered along the coastline of Arakan.

The legendary Hanifa Tonki and Khayafuri Tonki in Mayu Mountain, the Shrines of Babaji Shah Monayam of Ambari, Akyab all bear evidence of the arrival of mystic saints as early as 7<sup>th</sup> century to Arakan for propagation of Islam.

### 39. HISTORICAL STONE PLATES

One stone plate inscribed with the word "Allah" in Arabic was retrieved from inside Thein Gyi Taung Pagoda at Mrohaung and another with Arabic script was found in a wall at Nanragone, Mrohaung. Although more such evidence of Muslim influence in the kingdom of Arakan are yet to be found out the regime's effort to obliterate the history could have led to their destruction.

### 40. EARLY TRAVELLERS

The Arabs and Persians such as Sulaiman (C.E. 851) Yacobi (C.E. 880) Masudi (C.E. 943) Marvavi (C.E. 1120) Hudad Al Alam (C.E. 982) and many others used routes over Arakan Yoma to travel to Burma and then to China. They wrote about the relation between Burma and China and Burma's internal ethnic groups' relations. (Dr. Than Tun "Chin-Mru-and Kumi- N-Arakan-base on 1442 inscription-kalya Magazine Page-27, August 1994). Manrique,

other Protugees, Dutch, Chinese and other European travellers visited Arakan during the Mrauk-U dynasty.

In 1795 Francis Buchanan was attached as surgeon to Captain Michael Symes, Ambassador of British to Burma, Embassy in Ava, the capital of Burma. He ravelled to Burma through Arakan Yoma and used his journey to collect and record information on many aspects of life in Arakan, Burma and the Andaman Islands. He wrote that, "I shall now add three dialects, spoken in the Burma Empire.

The first is that spoken by the Mohammadans, who have long settled in Arakan and who call themselves Rooinga, native of Arakan," Francis Buchanan, "The languages of Burma", Asiatic Researches (Calcutta) Vol. 5 (1801).

## 41. AGRICULTURE

Since ancient time, Rohingya mainly depends on farm produces and there were record yield before Burma's independence and it was grainary of the South East Asia. Not only was Arakan a fertile land, but also the people particularly the Muslim Rohingyas were hard workers. Because of their knowledge and endeavour Arakan had become a rich land in the history. It can also be said that with the discriminatory attitude and eviction of large village tracts belonging to Muslims in the interior Arakan, production of agro-based items sharply fell down.

At the time of paddy transplantation and reaping paddy, many villagers joyously would join by singing songs and the owner would make special snacks made from the rice of new harvest. Local elders would be there as spectators. There were instances when

the large farm field long enough beyond eyesight had to be made transplantation and harvesting. On such occasion nearby villagers or farm labourers from far-flung area had to be hired. Contemporary history has made record of influx of Bengalee field workers to Arakan. Unfortunately their return to Bengal after earning had not been properly mentioned. There is a proverb in Rohingya language and is widely known in Chittagong division of present day Bangladesh which is – "*Boang Boang Tar Bub Geyea Rohang, Rohanger Tiya Barona Fan*" —means: "*Boang boang* (sound of frog in rain season).....your father has gone to Rohang; the money of Rohang is as big as the lid of cooking pot". From this popular saying, it is taken that the child was consoled by others that his/her father would return after earning from Rohang.

The economy of Arakan depends mainly on agriculture. Beside rice, Rohingya produces sugarcane, ground-nut, tobacco, chilli, beans, onion, mustard, garlic, ginger, turmeric, betel leaves and nuts, rubber, cabbage, potatoes, cucumber, pumpkin, tomato, tamarind and many fruits such as mango, jack-fruit, plum, papaya, banana, litchi, orange, lemon, lime, guava, water-melon, pineapple etc. According to Dr. A. K. SUR. pineapple, potato and tobacco were introduced by Portuguese. "Though the Portuguese were for all time to come overthrown, they however left some permanent impress on the life and culture. They added a host of new words to the native language, and also introduced some new fruits, vegetables and commercial crops like pineapple, potato and tobacco."

Land tax for Rohingya nowadays is ten to twelve tung (about 40 kilos) of paddy per acre. The rice tax is calculated as a percentage of the land acreage available to the farmers, rather than on the basis of the yield of the land. The calculation has a discriminatory impact on Rohingyas, who for the most part have access to only the poorest quality land where yield are much less



than for good land.

In addition to the land tax, Rohingyas have also been subject to increasing new form of taxation since 1992. Every family has to pay 100 Kyats per week as a security tax. Every family has to pay chilli tax, regardless of whether they grow it or not. The fishing fee only applies to the Rohingyas. The owner of a cow must pay Kyat 80, goat 30 Kyats and a fowl or duck ten Kyats.

#### 42. DHEHI (SEESAW)

Rohingya villages echo with the pounding and squeaking sound of dhehi seesaw- the wooden object used by women folk to husk paddy. Dawlun was widely used for husking paddy and dhehi was usually used for separating chaff from the rice. Dhehi is an indigenous rice-clearing instrument pressing one side by foot and the other side pounding on the rice in a big wooden bowl. Chaff is used for animal feeds and oil is also extracted from the chaff.

There was widespread use of dhehi for husking paddy and preparing materials for making traditional pithas (cakes) in every village. The poor women who used to earn their living husking paddy by dhehi were of demand in the village. Dhehi was so popular among the Rohingyas there are proverbs of dhehi. For example, "dhehi must husk paddy even if it went to Mecca". The meaning is that a man cannot change his character even if he goes to Mecca to perform Haj pilgrimage. Another proverb of dhehi is that 'the man whose father was eaten by the crocodile, will afraid even when he sees a dhehi seesaw.' Dhehi (seesaw), fara (stone plate use for crushing chilli), daw (sword), doola (basket) etc. are essential things for a Rohingya family.

#### 43. DAWLUN

The Rohingyas farmers used dawlun for husking paddy. The farmers work whole night with dawlun. During the winter season the melodious sounds of dawlun with sweet rhythm prevail in each and every Rohingya village. The dawlun drivers sing song, which is rhymed corresponding the sounds of dawlun.

If the sounds of dawlun were read by someone as 'I will give you', he would hear like that. When he read 'I don't give you', he will hear so. NLD party members will hear "democracy, democracy" "Suu Kyi, Suu Kyi". Sometimes the driver of dawlun would narrate stories, especially from puthis if there are listeners.

It is made of solid wood and in two parts. Upper side has a hollow space in the centre to put the paddy and is rotatable like the peddle of bicycle. When it rotates, the paddy fallen under would grind. At night the sound of grinding paddy, particularly in the dry season could be heard in every village of Arakan. With the restriction on paddy yield, and non-availability of labourers because of constant conscription by the army, the traditional husking has been declining.

#### 44. BOUL BOUL LAYLAY LAYLAY

The paddy is separated from straw with the walking of the cattle. After reaping the paddy plants, the farmer would spread them in a space centring a post. At the post five or six cows are tied with a long rope, and a farmer drive the cows with a song "boul boul, laylay laylay" welcoming the blossom of mangoes. The mouths of the cows are tied with small baskets so that the cows would not try to eat the straws and paddy. Then the straws are taken with a stick bending at the end, which is called 'Hos-sha' by Rohingyas. The stick, which is used to carry the bundles of

paddy, is called "fu-sha". The straw-rope, which binds the bundle of paddy, is called "zuna".

#### 45. LIVESTOCK AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Although there are no commercial and governmental initiative for livestock and animal husbandry project in Arakan, all Rohingya farmers breed cattle, buffalo, goat, duck, fowl, geese and pigeon. About 5% of Rohingyas are fisherman. Arakan's 360 miles long coast is rich in fish. The Bay of Bengal teems with fish of many varieties, as do the great rivers of Arakan with their many tributaries and connecting creeks. Fish makes their way into inland tanks, lakes, watercourse and even paddy fields, during the wet season of the year. It is a common sight in the hot months of April and May when the water of tanks and lakes are at their lowest, to see many Rohingya villagers delving in the mud for fish.

#### 46. THE VIEWS OF DR. THAN TUN

##### *"The 'Kyaukza' of 1442 C.E."*

In the "Kyaukza" stone inscription serial No. 963/20-23-804-Burmese Era 1442 C.E. there is indication of Muslim king's reign of Arakan in 14th century who were friends of Burmese kings and used to visit them. The kings of Arakan had Muslim titles. If they were not Muslim kings mentioned in the inscription, the Muslim kings of Arakan might be Rohingya Muslim kings, from the Mayu River valley, the eastern of the Naf River. Rohingyas claim their existence there of over thousands years. If not thousands years,

their existence might be from the time of 1202 C.E. when the Muslims conquered Bengal, that is 800 years. (Dr. Than Tun, Kalya Magazine August 1994, Pages 27-28, with the reference of Luce, G.H. "K'yan (Chin)" "Mru and K'umi (N. Arakan)", Phases of Pre-Pagan Burma, languages and History, Oxford, SOAS, 1985, 76-97).

#### 47. LIBRARY

In the ninth century A.D. when the Islamic civilisation was at its peak, great libraries were established in the Middle East and in Islamic Spain, Baghdad, Cairo, Alexandria, Cordoba, Tebdo, etc. These were then centres of learning and scholars and the rich libraries there served the basis of study and research carried out by the devotees of knowledge. However, many libraries were later destroyed in Alexandria during the Roman conquest of it. The Mongol hordes of Hulagu Khan razed the libraries of Baghdad.

The Royal Library of Mrauk-U, Arakan, that was supposed to be one of the centres of rich collections on Islamic civilisation, literatures, arts and other historical records was razed to the ground by the invading Burmese king Bodaw in 1784. Even a Burmese court poet namely U Kala, lamented for the destruction of such a rare library. Situated within the surroundings of the greatest centre of learning of the country, the Royal Library of Mrauk-U in bygone days was really a place of pilgrimage for all lovers of knowledge.

As Arakan passed different eras following King Bodaw's invasion, many valuables were removed as the 'Kohinoor of India' to Britain. Had it not been so, the replete historical facts would have made Rohingyas' status to a higher degree. The Independent

Library of Maungdaw was also disappeared due to the negligence of the BSPP government. It is said that numerous documents of Rohingya history written in Arabic, Persian and other languages are still in the stacks of the Indian National Library of Calcutta.

#### 48. MYSTIC (SUFISM)

Since the beginning of the Muslim rule in the subcontinent, India and Arakan had been familiar with the classical Persian literature. Founder of the monotheistic Brahma Samaj, Raja Ram Mohun Roy was well versed in Islamic Philosophy; and one of his best-known works, *Tobfatul Muab-bedin* was written in Persian with a prefatory note in Arabic. Rabindranath Tagore's father Maharshi Devendranth was an avid reader of the '*ghazal*' and verses of Persian Poet Hafiz; and Tagore had an opportunity to offer glowing homage at the shrine of Hafiz during his visit to Iran in the thirties.

The importance of Sufism in the history of Islamic faith and culture is incalculable. The following of Sufi literature, especially mystical love poetry, represents a golden age among the Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu languages. And it was through the effort of Sufi missionaries that Islam was extended into India, Arakan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Central Asia, Turkey and Sub-Saharan.

In the words of M.G. Rasul, the changes in the different spheres were no less due to the contribution of Sufi saints. As regards the influence that they exercise over rulers, Francis Buchanan (Hamilton) remarked in 1808 that there was truth in the assertion that these saints were the real kings ..., as it was only according to their pleasure that the temporal kings could reign. No

history of the country can therefore, be completed without a proper appraisal of the contribution of Sufis and saints, who really led the religious and cultural movement in the country.

In the words of Prof. Gibb "Sufism increasingly attracted the creative social and intellectual energies within the community to become the bearer of or instrument of a social and Cultural Revolution". (Society and Culture in Islam, edited by M. Inamul Hoq P. 113). In the words of Sayed Sajjad Husain 'the majority of preachers belonged to one or other of the various Sufi schools in Persia or Central Asia. The Sufis, by and large, were much more tolerant of religious dissent than preachers from Arabia, as long as it was not against the main doctrines of Islam.

#### 49. PAAN OR BETEL

Paan or Betel leaf has been a part of Rohingya culture. In every marriage ceremony *paan* is a must. Even those who don't take paan regularly take betel on such occasions. Paan-Sallah (betel leaf meeting) is compulsory on the eve of marriage ceremony with members of samaj or society and relatives.

According to country medic, chewing paan helps the digestive process. In some areas women chew paan to redden their lips. It also helps to reduce bad smell of the mouth. The guardians of bride would distribute betel leaf and nuts to all households of the village at the time of wedding. The fee of the village headman is known as "Kun Bho" (betel expense). Kun Bho (betel expense) must be paid by the parties of the case decided by the headman or head of the hundred households or ten households.

## 50. GASA TREATMENT

When a man or woman or a boy or a girl becomes insane the villagers would take it as the jin or evil spirit spoils him or her. Then the relatives will invite the village medic doctor (*boetdaw*). The *boetdaw* will bring a young man who will act as a *gasa*. *Gasa* is a man who will dance by jumping to call the jin or evil spirit. A glass will be placed before the *gasa*. In front of the glass a tray of rice would be placed. On the rice there will be two eggs and a few red flowers.

On one side of the *gasa* the *boetdaw* would strike a tin chanting something he knows better. Then the *gasa* would start dancing and jumping like frog pressing his two palms of hands together for day and nights till the jin or evil spirit arrives. Only the *gasa* would see and hear him while he is in the mood of dancing in the *gasa* business. The jin or evil spirit would instruct him for the treatment of the patient. Treatment was done according to the instruction and in some cases it is said the patients were cured. But the *gasa* treatment is now vanishing, as it is taken by the society as vulgar and useless.

## 51. SNAKE-CHARMING

Snake charmers are known as *hub-baidda garuli* among Rohingyas. The snake charmer recites mantras and then moves his hands over the body of the snakebite victim. There is betel leaf and salt recitation. The patient is given malpractices betel leaf and salt to administer. Sometime a metal plate is mantrasised and kept on the back of the patient.

There are several mantras for the cure of snakebite patient.

Sometimes there are separate mantras for separate snakes and some mantras are absence as well. *Garuli* used *hori salan*. It will bring the snake and forced to take the poison back from the victim.

*Hub-baidda* is the local name for snake charmers. They would carry snake in baskets and visit village-to-village show the people as a living. In early days, many parts of Arakan has been inaccessible and jungle and bush surround people's habitation. The areas have thus been ideal for the snakes. There were reports of frequent snakebite in 50s and 60s'. So is the role of snake Charmer inevitable as no other reliable treatment was available. As in India and other places, the snake, which gave the bite, would be brought to the place of bite by the charmer using mantras. Sometimes it works well. Those who practise treating snakebite victim are called '*Garuli*'.

## 52. STICK OF CHARMS

When things were stolen the villagers would invite the *Boetdaw*. The *Boetdaw* would choice a strong young man to hold a stick. The *Boetdaw* would chant mantras to the stick. Then the stick would carry the young man where the stolen things are.

## 53. MEDICAL PROFESSION

The Muslims adopted Greek system medicine, which is called *Unani*, while the Hindus were trained in *Ayurveda Shastra*; Unani Medical practitioners<sup>2</sup> are called Hakim and the Ayurvedis are called Kaviraj. Both the systems were prevalent in Arakan in bygone days. Hakimi treatment is still found among the Rohingyas of Arakan. Mortality in infant and childbirth is terribly high. Young housewives die in their young age because of rapid child bearing. Epidemics like *malaria, cholera, smallpox* etc. were rampant in

Arakan taking heavy tolls of human lives every year. Because of negligence from the government, the Rohingya populated area has remained prone of communicable diseases like cholera, malaria, smallpox, etc. there were reports heavy death toll from cholera and smallpox epidemic that swept the area in post-independence era.

Facility to modern medical treatment is bleak and more often than not people have to depend on local medical practitioners. There are still a doctor per 100,000 people and a hospital bed per 30,000 people. Infant mortality rate is 200-250 per thousand and maternal and under age 5 mortality is very high.

#### 54. THE DOMESTIC LIFE

Generally, Rohingya family is consisted of joint family—from grandfather to grand children including sons' wives and children, and so forth. While the adult male members of the family are out for earning, the major portions of household activities have to be performed by the female members of the family. The female prepare food, look after the children, cleaning and washing, gardening, farming, rearing cattle and poultry, milking, spinning and so on. The grown up children would assist their parents in their routine activities.

All the adult members of the family have to keep themselves engaged in various activities from dawn to dusk. There is no home for aged people in Rohingya society and is the tradition of looking after the grand parents and orphans by the relatives.

The family life of the common people is harmonised by affection and devoted to each other in spite of their constant hardship and tyranny of the administration. Both husband and wife equally share the joys and sufferings. The husband cherishes a loving

affection for his wife and the parents devoted themselves to the well being of their children. Chastity is women's main virtue. Medieval putis speak highly of men's sweet attachment to his family and women's chastity, which they preserve even at the cost of their lives.

#### 55. POSITION OF WOMEN

Rohingya women observed *purdah* (seclusion) and do not come out of their houses at daytime without a *burkah* (veil). Therefore, their participation in national programme is rare. Because of illiteracy, they are also not in a position to face the challenges meted out to them. They are treated well by their husbands. Polygamy is practiced by some Rohingya to avoid extra-marital affairs. The widow-remarriage is common after observing three months and thirteen days according to Islamic laws.

#### 56. LIFE BOUNDED BY NEIGHBOURHOOD

The nearby hills secure the people an abundant supply of firewood, materials for housing, roofing and fencing their homesteads with (*Zawli*) and farmland with *Tiyarra*. Because of conservative practice and also to present unwanted entry of wild animals and anti-social elements, the Rohingya has the tradition of fencing their compound with bamboo wall locally known as 'Zawli'.

A gate is normally kept for exist entry. In vegetable cultivation, see-through bamboo fence known as *Tiyarra* has been erected. The nearby streams and rivers supply them with water for drink and cultivation, fish for diet and sale and alluvial soils for cultivation yielding best harvest.



## 57. TOOLS

Daoh a single-edged blade must be in every household. *Lamba* (long) daoh, spear, axe and bow and arrows were kept for self-defence and for hunting. Carpenter's tools and spade are also common among the Rohingyas. 'Gotta dula' basket with neck and nets are still common for catching fish. 'Zohor' and oval shape canopy from the head on the back to loin and 'Tala' (hat) made-up of 'kurup' leaves are used by Rohingyas, in rainy season, especially while working in their farms. A peasant family produced surplus rice for sale. Most of the rural folk sleep on the locally made mats. Hunters would have kept firearms. Farmers used hat and oval shaped hanging umbrella made of leaf. Hat is called 'Tala' and umbrella is 'Zohor'.

## 58. RURAL LIFE

The villagers live in a good community feeling. Others know each of the villagers. Good neighbourly feeling is among the villagers. The villagers are always united to face their common enemies and natural catastrophes. The villagers are co-operative and use to borrow the cash and kind from their neighbours.

In marriages and funerals people will take part wholeheartedly and special attention is given if it concerns with helpless and poor. Exchange of views and news, leisure time contracts and mutual aid characterise the village life of the Rohingya rural folk.

## 59. SOCIAL GATHERING

Poet Mardan Nuruddin wrote in his book about Kanchi, a place in Roshang (Arakan). The poet praises the town of Kanchi saying that people living there were the Muslims, Brahmins and the Kayasthas. Among the Muslims there were Alims or scholars who were busy with the (book) kitab and Quran i.e. they were busy in religious pursuits.

Poet Abdul Karim Khondkar writes: "Now listen how this Kitab became a puti. I will tell you something about it. In Roshang, there is a beautiful and heavenly village named Bandar. In that place many Qazis, Muftis, teachers, students, Faqir and darvesh live. Wealthy Muslims live there and talk to the king in friendly terms. If any poor man comes to a house he does not go disappointed. The people there erected mosques to say prayers and thus left their names to be remembered.

Muslim learned were brought there, some were appointed Khatib, some Imam, some offered prayer as musallis. Some of the people were ministers of the king; they all work for increasing the wealth. There was a man who received title of Sadi-uk-Nana from the king. He was the chief of the merchants, and he became in-charge of the mint... His name was Atibar, but the king gave him the title of Nana.. One day he called me and listen the book Dulla Majlis, read to him. He was happy and said that many persons cannot understand Persian ..... At his request I promised to write the book in Bengali ....."

According to Shah Alawal's Sikandar Nama, Srimanta Majlis became Prime Minister of Arakan after the death of Prime Minister Sayyid Musa. Once the Prime Minister sat in the assembly of learned men, arranged foods and drinks for the guests. Those present in the assembly praised the Prime Minister for his good

works, particularly the construction of mosques and excavation of tanks.

Thus, we see the gathering of Muslim gentlemen during the time of Arakanese kings. Friday gathering is common among Rohingya Muslims.

Rohingya rural folk used village teashops and *dharma ghars* (rest houses) as their gathering places. They also gathered during marriages and funerals. Puti and Khawali gatherings are also common among the Rohingya villagers. Sometimes *natawa dal* dancing group also performs outside the village. Buffaloes fighting, boat racing, wrestling and other sport and games are recreation for Rohingya not excluding, hunting, and paddy transplantation and harvest competitions. In winters season 'Ouktha tamasa' (Burmese drama), Rohingya drama, stage show, exhibition, are also enjoyed by Rohingyas by travelling to the nearby towns.

## 60. CLEANLINESS

In Islam, ablution (*Wudu*) means washing those parts of the body, which are generally exposed. Water must be pure, clean and fresh (not used before) and its colour taste and smell are unchanged. The performance of Wudu must be for prayer, walking round the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca and carrying or touching the Holy Qur'an. Ghusl (taking bath) become obligatory after sexual intercourse, discharge or effusion of semen and completion of menses and confinement.

## 61. CONTROLLING THE COMMON PEOPLE

The village headman and village elders exercise power in controlling the common people. They direct them to right path and forbid from doing wrongs.

The headman and the village elders would deal with local law and order situation. Arbitration of family feud, theft, brawl, religious breach like teasing, abusing in intoxication are done by the village elders and the verdict is commonly accepted.

## 62. MANAWS OR OATH TO THE GOD AND SADQAH

If a sick person takes oath that when he recovers from his illness he will donate something to the poor or he will arrange a feast for the poor, he has to fulfil the oath accordingly when he is cured. *Manaws* is also known as *Nazar* among Rohingyas. Manaws is also done for travelling, trips of trade, examinations etc. If a person is seriously ill a goat or other animal is donated for his recovery. That is called *sadqah*. Sadqah can also be given in cash and food.

### 63. TRADE AND COMMERCE

From the time long past, spices, cotton fabrics, precious stones, minerals and other commodities from south and south East Asia were of great demand in the European countries and the Arabs as a seafaring nation almost monopolised this trade between South and South East Asia and European countries.

The Arab merchants carried goods to the Middle East for exchange with the goods of Central Asian, North African and European countries. For about eight centuries they monopolised the trade between the East and the West. According to M.S. Collis, the area now known as north Arakan had been for many years before the 8th century the seat of Hindu dynasties. In 788 A.D. a new dynasty known as the Chandra, founded the city of Wesali, the city became a noted trade port to which as many as a thousand ships used to anchor annually.

It was during the reign of Mahataing Chandra (788-810 A.D.) some Arab ships wrecked along the shores of Arakan, near Ramree, the people on board took shelter and subsequently settled in the villages of Arakan as the king of Arakan ordered. Dr. Kyaw Thet, Harvey and Mauries Collis wrote that the external trade of Arakan was under the control of Arab till recent century.

Mahbub-ul-Alam claimed that there was transient population of sailors of the calmed Arab, Persian and Indian Muslims vessels of the year in the seaports of Arakan waiting for favourable winds.

Poet Abdul Karim Khandakar said that his great grand father Rasul Mia was a custom officer of Arakan Port. His grand father Masan Ali was an official interpreter at the port to deal with

the foreign ships. The fretted seacoast afforded the country to carry an extensive with foreign merchants like the Arabs, the Chinese, the Persian, the Portuguese and the Dutch.

The price of rice was much cheaper in Chittagong than Arakan. From 1582 to 1666 Chittagong division was under the Arakanese Sultanate. Chittagong was second city to Mrohaung. Rice was a royal monopoly. The price of it was generally fixed by the king's ministers.

The European merchants would not slip an opportunity of smuggling rice out of the kingdom by evading the official supervision. In 1636 A.D. the Dutch factor advanced money to private brokers to supply his needs at 2 ½ to three *tangas* (money exchange) for 420 lbs; but the king's agent intervened. He bought all the rice at 2 ¾ *tangas* (money exchange) and sold to the Dutchmen 4 to 4½ *tangas*. (JBRs p. 81).

Elephant was considered a profitable article of export. Catching elephants and their exports had been flourishing business since very early times. Throughout the medieval period Arakan was the chief centre of trading in slaves. A slave is worth six tanga and a young lady double the sum. (C.R. 1938 p. 21). Referring to the Portuguese slave traders in the kingdom of Arakan, Bernier writes: "They sold to the Portuguese of Goa, Ceylon, St Thomas, and other places". Talish says that the slaves "were sold to the Dutch, English and French merchants". But skilled slaves were not allowed to export who were required by the Arakanese king in the capital.

For the trade and commerce coins were used as medium of exchange. The introduction of coins by the Arakanese Sultans is an important turn in the socio-economic history of Arakan. Ma Huan, a Chinese official writes in 1406 A.D: "The currency of the

country is a silver coin called Tang Ka ..... is one inch and two tenths in and is engrave on either side". According to Van den Mendere, the Dutch factor in Arakan, prices in Arakan and Chittagong were always given in tangas and were worth two shillings each. Under the Arakanese regime Chittagong was the second important mint town in the whole of the Arakanese kingdom. Arakanese coins in the Bengalee, Persian and Arakanese were struck by the viceroys in Chittagong. Talish writes, "(the governor of Chittagong) issues gold coins stamped with his own name at Chittagong."

Weaving was an indigenous manufacturing of cloth and silk in Arakan. Arakanese Podune (Silk) longyi is still famous throughout Burma. Many other kinds of work such as furniture and vessels were constructed with extra delicacy. A large quantity of small black and red pottery was made. Drinking vessels and other utensils were made in the finest and most delicate shape. A flourishing ship building industry developed in the ports of Arakan. The tropical forests provided wood for the industry.

The forests of Arakan was ideal for hunting wild animals such as, Gauyal, Taungru, deer, antelope, barking deer, the wild goats, jungle fowl and duck, pheasants and peafowl, which were abundant in Arakan. Bow and arrow, spear, net, pitfall etc. were familiar equipments.

Arakan's 360 miles long coast is rich in fish. The Bay of Bengal teems with fish of many varieties, as do the great rivers of Arakan with their many tributaries and connecting creeks. There was a wide variety of fishing net, fishing hook, and fishing trap used for catching fish in shallow water such as *luh*, *dope*, *Tawya*, *Zaak* etc.

Arakan is famous for its naturally grown world's best teak.

A hard timber, known as ironwood is very useful for making pillars of house and is exported for railway sleepers. Teak, *pyinkado*, *kamaung*, *kanyin*, all these trees were useful for house building, ship building and furniture. Bamboo and cane are plentiful. Arakan is also famous for its abundant best quality honey from beehives.

Mango trees are found everywhere in Arakan as it is said to be originated from Arakan Yoma. Beside rice, Arakan produces sugarcane, ground-nut, tobacco, chilli, beans, onion, mustard, sesame, coconut, garlic, ginger, betel leaves and nuts, rubber, carrots, cabbage, potato and many fruits such as mango, jack-fruit, papaya, banana, litchi, orange, lemon, lime, guava, water-melon, pineapples, cashew-nut etc.

Salt is produced from the seawater along the Arakan coast as well as from the rivers and streams. Salt is exported to sub-continent since long. Molasses is produced from sugarcanes manually. Crude oil was manually extracted from Kyauk Pru and Mayur Kole. Coconut and betel nut trees can be found at every places of Arakan, especially along the coast.

The economic condition of medieval Arakan seems to be cheaper than other part of the sub-continent. Dom Joao Leyme (1518 A.D.) writes: 'the country is very rich, ..... twenty hens and as many as sixty ducks sell for a tanga.'

Caesar Fredrick writes: "I bought many for the provision of the ship there for six shillings three pence (half a larine), and four wild hogs for a larine, a great fat hen for a penny; also a sack of fine rice for a thing of nothing, and consequently all other things for human needs were there in such abundance, that it is a thing surprisingly cheaper than other countries."

Pyrard de Laval visited the Arakanese port city of Chittagong in 1607 A.D. says, he saw no country in the East so abundantly supplied with the riches of nature and art, and were with safe navigation, it would be the fairest, most pleasant, fertile and profitable in the whole world.

The Arakanese rulers developed Arakan road. A Farinha, a Portuguese traveller (1634-40), gives a graphic description of the road as follows; 'the road from Dianga to Arakan is a royal road. It is a most delightful road landmarks indicate the distance. I do not think there is any road more pleasant and agreeable. In certain places rest houses have been built by the order of the king. Travellers find their shelter and food free of charge for it would be below the king's dignity to ask for money. Along the way there are several objects of great interest and well worth noticing .....(Manrique, 1, 172-173).

As they are the descendants of Arab traders, in early days, a Rohingya would not be eligible for marriage until and unless he made three to seven voyages of trade either by sea or land. Other wise, he would be looked down by the society and eligible females would regard him as cowardice.

Hence, Rohingyas are successful traders from the time of their ancestors. They are better of than their sister community, Rakhine, in trade and business. In 1958/59 Bo Htin Gyaw in-charge of Maungdaw township administration under Ne Win's care-taker regime let loose a reign of terror and gave crushing blow to the Rohingya traders, businessmen and shop-keepers in Arakan causing loss of millions of dollars. Many of them were arrested and sentenced to long-term imprisonment.

In 1991 Bo Naing Oo also carried out a reign of terror with the code name "*Pye Thaya*" dispossessing the Rohingya traders,

businessmen and shopkeepers. An estimated thousand had been detained and tortured them. A few of them died in custody including a newly married shopkeeper of Akyab.

Due to the perpetual severe persecution Rohingya youths nowadays travel to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan or at least to Bangladesh. They work there very hard. Some become shop owners or furniture producers etc.

When they return home the authorities in planned way use all means to make them empty handed and they have to go back to abroad again. Besides, the Rohingya youths would travel to Chittagong of Bangladesh to do small business. Goods from Chittagong would be taken to the interior side of Arakan to sell. Profitable items from Arakan are sold in Bangladesh. Unemployed youths have been target of regime's eye accusing them taking part with Mujahid if they go to forest, sea and to Bangladesh for trade or fishing.

## 64. ETHICS AND ECONOMIC

A successful merchant in his younger years, the Prophet understanding of the market came from first-hand experience. The formative period of Islamic law, too, coincided with a period of lively commercial activity and some prominent jurists were themselves traders, thus imbuing the laws with flexibility and a sense of realism.

The Society was pure and Islamic ethic was in full force in pre-independence era of Burma particularly in Rohingya majority area of Arakan. Rohingya rich businessmen and landlord were kind



and distributed their earning to the near and dears and poor neighbours in accordance with the instructions of Islam.

The rebuke of the *Quran* against the accumulation of wealth among a privileged class, "that wealth would not circulate among a few" provides a sense of balance in the Muslim mind and lays foundation for the principle of distributive justice. Foremost *zakat*, a tithe on income, property, agriculture and business is distributed to assist those in need. Another unique institution of Muslim society is the *waqf*, a charitable foundation that finance education, mosques, health, poor, the needy, orphans and widows.

However, with the introduction of socialism in Burma coupled with severe hatred by the regime towards Muslims, the wealth of Rohingya changed hand-some to non-Muslims and some to the ruling junta. Today, not a handful of Rohingya has the means to distribute *zakat* (alms). Thus, poverty engulfs day after day.

## 65. RELIGION

All Rohingyas are Sunni Muslims. They are strict followers of Islamic traditions. In every village there is at least a mosque. Mosque is used for basic Islamic education if there is no separate Madarasa (religious school). Usually a rest house (*Dharmo Ghor*) is located in front of the mosque so that the devotees can take rest. There is a moazzen (caller for prayer) and an Imam (prayer leader) in every mosque. Almost all Rohingyas are devoted Muslims. They finger *tasbih*, a long amber rosary with ninety-nine beads on which they count off the corresponding the Most Beautiful Names of God

in the course of the supererogatory prayer they always perform after the ritual *salat*.

They prepare for Ramadan fasting from the month of Rajab, that is two months ahead. On 26th of Rajab, they observe *Mayraj Day*. On that night the Great Prophet of Islam ascended to seventh heaven and met Allah, the Almighty. On the 15th of Shaban (the month before Ramadan) they will fast and give 'fatiha' with "Luri Pira" and beef or chicken. At night they will visit graveyards for *ziyarat* and pray whole night at mosque or house.

In the month of Ramadan they fast whole month without break, if they are well and in good health, and enjoy '*Iftari*' and '*Sahari*'. They will send *Iftari* to mosques. They pray '*Tarabhi* prayer' with 20 '*rakats*'. *Salat-ul-Taravih*, is offered each night in the month of Ramadan only after the Obligatory *Isha* prayers.

Usually the whole Quran is completed by recitation of consecutive portions of it in each of the Rakats after the recitation of the Surat-ul-Fatiha, and thus finish the whole Quran by the end of the month of Ramadan. Rohingya is rich with *Hafises* who get the whole of Quran by heart. They lead the *Taravih* prayers in Arakan and abroad. 3000 Rohingyas lead *Taravih* in Saudi Arabia another 3000 in other Muslim countries representing Saudi Arabia. For this reason Saudi government is very pleased with Rohingyas and giving them a few facilities.

They observe '*Lailatul-Qader*' night on the night between 26th and 27th Ramadan with whole night prayers. The miracle of the night is encountered by many souls. One example is as follows; *Basubaraw para* is a poor village near *Nafitar Dale* Village of Maungdaw Township. A Hindu barber built a mosque for the villagers of *Basubaraw para*. In the month of Ramadan, the Hindu used to

visit his mosque at the time of 'Tarabih'. He used to sit outside the mosque. On a *Lailatul Quder* night the Hindu remained outside the mosque from evening to mid night. At mid night, while he was returning home, on the way, he suddenly found all the trees falling down on the earth as if in prostration.

The Hindu thought that when he would narrate the story to his fellow Hindus they would not believe it, so he tied his 'sadar' cloth at the top of a 'Shipa bash' biggest and longest bamboo. In the morning he gathered people, showed his 'sadar' and asked them whether it was possible of tying the *sadar* at the top of the bamboo. How could one reach the top? He narrated what he had seen previous night.

Rohingya Muslims celebrate religious festivals with great joy and enthusiasm. Great rejoicings marked the two *Eid* holidays, *Eidul-Fitr* and *Eidul-Azha* (Qurbani Eid). *Eid* prayers are generally offered at *Eidgahs* or Mosques and the days are passed by serving sweet foods to the visitors and visiting the neighbouring houses. They also visit graveyards where their relatives were buried. They give *Eidi* to youngsters. *Zakat*-alms are paid 2.5 percent of there saving to the poor and needy people.

*Qurbani* meat is divided into three portions. One is taken by the owner, another is distributed among the poor and the rest is sent to the Society. The Society (*Samaj*) will collect 1/3 of all *Qurbani* meat in their locality and distribute among all the houses of their *samaj*-society. *Qurbani* is offered with cows, goats and buffaloes according to their financial condition. Haj pilgrimage is performed at least once in his life if he has means to do. *Eid-ul-Milad-u-Nabi*, the birthday of the Prophet is celebrated every year on 12th of *Rabiul-Awal*. The 12th of *Rabiul-Awal* is a red-letter day not only in the history of Islam but also in the annals of civilisation. It

was on this day in 570 A.D. that the Holy Prophet Mohammed (SM) was born as mercy and guide once for mankind nay for the entire creation. "The advent of this great Teacher, whose life from the moment of his Ministry is a verifiable record," says Syed Ameer Ali in the Spirit of Islam, "was not a mere accident, and unconnected episode in the history of the world.

The same causes, the same crying evils, the same earnest demand for an 'assured trust' in all prevailing Power, which led to the appearance on the shores of Galilee, in the reign of Augustus Caesar, of a Prophet operated with greater force in the sixth and the seventh centuries." There must be something so fascinating, so arresting in the personality of this great Arabian who without any standing army, without any palace, without any huge resources to fall back upon, without the slenderest human backing and against the heaviest material odd could so effectively revolutionise the social, political, moral and spiritual outlook of the wild hordes, the barbarous savages of Arabia, creating a new angle of vision giving a new direction to human thought, a new bend to world civilisation, a new interpretation of human life and destiny.

Alfred de Lamar tine sums up, "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with the Prophet of Islam .....? Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and one spiritual empire, that is Mohammed (SM). As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he? (The last and the greatest Prophet, by Syed Ashraf Ali.)

The holy *Ashura* is observed on 10th of *Muharram* month.

Barely forty years after the passing away of the Holy Prophet, *Yazid*, the despicable son of Amir Muawiyya, inhumanly butchered the seventy two souls at Karbala of Iraq including the eternal Hazrat Hussain, the prince of martyrs, the beloved son of Hazrat Fatima and an apple of the Prophets eyes, on this Ashura day. Gibbon, the eminent historian, wailed thus, "In distance age and climate, the tragic scene of Hussain's death would awake the sympathy of the coldest reader." With a slight variation in the words of Shakespeare, should not one exclaim! "O Religion! Thou art flown to brutish beasts while bloody treason triumphs over the hapless votaries". Shah Alawal recorded in his work "Saiful Mulk Badizzamal that, "A sinner Mirza, did harm to many men like Yazid, the son of a slave girl ...".

Rohingya Muslims during Manrique's times were so much enthused with their faith that it often caused a sense of religious superiority in their mind. He refers it on various occasions. On one occasion he writes:

"For they hold that none but themselves are agreeable to God, whence they are called Mussulamans or Mussuleymans, which according to the interpretation of the most learned expounder of their Alcoran means, "we are indeed a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a sacred nation, a people reserved (by God) to himself."

Steeped as they are in doctrine whenever they desire to show warrant for their faith or to justify themselves before a Christian or a Heathen, they say, swelling with pried and vanity, "I am a Mussuleymen", this appears to these (people) ample justification. Such is the blindness of these (people) that they style us Christian Caffares, which means, "a people without faith."

With regard to Manrique's remarks Dr. S.B. Qanungo wrote

that unfortunately Manrique's remarks lack propriety of thought and language, a characteristic of many fanatic Christians of his days. Restriction on marriage, violating Islamic norms, sending female outside without veil by order, restricting Tabling and repairing mosques are prohibited seizure of mosque, grave-yards, waqf lands, destruction of mosques and madarasas, ban on promotion of religious studies, forced entry into Muslims houses, etc. are hindrance to the religious freedom by the ruling junta.

## 66. FATIHA

Surat-Al Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Holy Quran acquired special and wide ceremonial usage in medieval Rohingya Muslim society. It was used to be recited on various religious occasions, especially those at which offerings in the form of food were made.

## 67. INTER RELATION AMONG THE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

During the Mrauk-U rule, the Islamic culture gained predominance over other culture. The kings of Arakan must be graduated in Islamic studies. They used Muslim titles and Muslim coins. Politically and economically, the Muslims were in a superior position.

Muslims exerted a great influence on the social life, dress, manners, and language of the non-Muslims. Persian was state language and lingua franca of Rohingya Muslims. The people of

Arakan had to learn Persian to earn a job under the government. Rakhines of that time were also well versed in Persian.

The Muslim holy places were held in reverence by the Buddhists and Hindus of Arakan. Buddhists and Hindus used to pay homage to Badar Mokkan and Babaji Dargah of Akyab till today. Pirs or Muslim saints had also influenced the kings of Kunboun dynasty of Burma. The purdah system of Muslims of Arakan influenced the Rakhine females.

On Muslim festivals, like Eiddul Fitr and Eiddul Adhah, Rakhines visit their Muslim friends. On Buddhist water festival and Tan Zaung Dine Min Htun Pway (Buddhist lighting festival) the Muslims are invited to join their Buddhist friends. Rohingyas and Rakhines were like twin brothers till 1942 Muslim massacre of Arakan.

Exchange of seasonal snacks between Rakhine and Rohingya neighbour was a common practise and participation in funeral, marriage and other social function by people of both communities was a normal phenomenon even when the Burmese regime has been playing flute of division in full throat.

In the words of Sultan Mahmud (ex. Minister of Health) "I shall be failing in my duty and guilty of distorting History if I do not mention the noble efforts of some high-minded and far-sighted Rakhine gentlemen who intervened at the risk of their lives to prevent the massacre of Muslim were, Sayadaw U Seinda, U Tha Ban, U San Shwe Bu, U Maung Maung, Tun Aung Gyaw, Bagyi U Saw Hla Aung and later U Aung Zan Wai are names to be mentioned and remembered with gratitude.

"But all their pious efforts were in vain. There was absolutely

no attempt at retaliation even by way of self-defence by the Muslims and it was simply a one sided affair. Not a single Rakhine suffered even a scratch." .....The Nation of Rangoon, Sunday, April 12, 1959.

Following 1942 massacre of Muslims in Arakan, many Rohingyas took refuge at the refugee camps of Rangpur whereas Rakhines took refuge at the refugee camps of Dinajpur. Tun Sein, an inmate of Dinajpur camp missed Muslim friends of Buthidaung.

He set out for Rangpur. On the way he met Kalu of Buthidaung. They embraced and wept for a while. They sat dawn under the shade of a big tree and shared smoking a bidi cigar, which was unforgettable for U Tun Sein, who narrated the story.

Friendship between Muslim and Rakhine was so cordial that once Maung Ni was coming from Krarobyng Village of Maungdaw Township with a cow. On the way Hamid appeared from the jungle. He greeted Maung Ni and walked along with Maung Ni talking about his many friends of Maung Ni's village. He also asked Maung Ni to convey his remembrance to Maung Gri of his village Rwanyodaung. When they were near the village of Rwanyodaung, Hamid bid farewell to Maung Ni and went back to the jungle.

On the way Maung Ni realised that Hamid was drawn two months back. He was not buried according to Islamic rites. So his *Humzard* (ghost) came and talked to him, as he was a close friend of him. Maung Ni was afraid and fell ill for sometime.

Once in 1960/61 Maung Maung Ta (Mohammed Shofi), a renowned Burmese film actor wrote in The Nation English daily of Burma that the mothers of almost all Muslims of Burma were Buddhist. The grand father of Anwar's brother's wife was a Rakhine. The wife of Anwar's uncle is also a Rakhine. Two of

Anwar's cousins married a Shan and a Burmese. The cousin of Anwar's grandfather married a Daingnet. Anwar's nephew married a Hindu. Anwar's best friends are, Sayamagyi Daw Khin Htay, Sayagyi Kyaw Thein, Col. Kyaw Tha Tun, Maung Pho Hla, Maung Aye Tha, Tha Noe (M.P), Dr. Myat Thein (Burmese), Hran Hta (Chin) and Sao San Bu (pa-oh) and many Rakhine friends. Anwar's narration to this writer is one of the thousands of examples.

According to Dr. S.B. Qanungo, Muslims of some parts of southern Chittagong who are known as Rohang or Rosang Muslims have a considerable amount of Magh blood in their veins owing to their intermixture with that tribe. These people are broad shouldered, thin-bearded, short stature with high cheekbones, flat nose and eyelids obliquely set, which reminds one of their ethnic relations with Magh. They are also called Rohai.

Among the Muslim population of Chittagong division two distinct groups are found, one is known as 'Chatganiya' and the other is Rohai, the latter form half the total population of Chittagong division, who trace their origin to Arakan. In 1785 A.D. when Burmese king Bodaw conquered Arakan their forefathers crossed to Chittagong district. 40 years of Burmese rule over Arakan was marked with unprecedented tyranny and cruelty. By 1798, two thirds of the inhabitants of Arakan crossed the borders into Chittagong district. Two third of them were Muslim Rohingyas or Rohai.

## 68. NATURAL CUSTOMER OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

In an article "The culture garden of JNU" by Faheem Hasan Shahed, who is doing M. Phil/PhD. course in English language Teaching Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), published on 30-9-2000 in the Independent Daily of Bangladesh stated about a Rohingya as a natural customer of cultural dimensions of three different societies as follows? "Let me conclude this article with a different kind of experience I encountered last month (August) in Delhi. This world is a tricky place to live in. it never allows us to forget for a second the uncertain mobility of our existence.

There were four of us, I being the only non-Burmese, hovering around Old Delhi. On our way back to the bus stop we took two rickshaws. Than Zaw and I were on one rickshaw. Suddenly Maung Maung and Tin Lwin shouted at us from the other rickshaw that their rickshaw-puller understood and spoke fluent Burmese! Naturally my friends were excited and happy as they kept chatting with him.

As the rickshaw-puller came to know of my nationality, to my utter surprise he started speaking Bangla with me with a slight Chittagong accent! We all asked him the mystery behind this. Abul Bashar, as he told his name, narrated his fascinating story as follows. Coming from Burmese region called Maungdaw near the Bangladesh border, Bashar studied up to class seven in a secondary school there. Unable to continue his studies, he crossed the border after two years and came to Chittagong with his brother-in-law.

They lived and worked together for five years. Then dispute took place, resulting his brother-in-law to attack him with weapons one night. Bashar fled to save his life until he crossed the border



once again, this time on the western side. He entered India and after a hell lot of sufferings and trauma, managed to arrive in Delhi. He is now quite content with his job as a rickshaw-puller for the last four years. He speaks fluent Hindi and so he hasn't got any problem.

We were touched by his as-if-nothing happened imperturbability of narration. He gave us his address writing in Burmese and English, yes, English-but not in Bangla, as he did not learn how to write it. Maung Maung gave him an additional 10 bucks as a mark of heartiness as he might be the sole exception of a Burmese speaking rickshawallah in Delhi.

In the twilight of Delhi as I boarded the bus for JNU, a stray thoughts engulfed my mind. Crossing our respective boundaries, we are here for high-level academic pursuits, and right from the word 'go' we have found favourable conditions to fulfil our aims. Mingled with the global cultures around us, we boast of being cultural ambassadors of our countries living in the carefree environments of our campuses. We are not devoid of artificiality.

But Abul Bashar, the rickshawallah, dwelling in his small world, lacking any 'international' friends, is a natural customer of cultural dimensions of three different societies-Burmese, Bangladeshi and Indian Culture has transmitted in his blood automatically because he had to pay the price for existence through struggles. We dared to do so, for there was no need of doing so.

Herein Bashar has a winning edge over us. He bears culture inside him at the cost of all his struggles for existence. He knows the value of his suffering."

## 69. CULTURE OF PEACE, PEACE FOR CULTURE

In the language of Abdus Selim, "The UN has declared the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. In observance of the event the United Nations Association of Bangladesh organised a three-day seminar between 14 and 16 November, where I was asked to speak on "Respect to Cultural Diversity and Peace".

It was not easy for me to define culture and it is no easier even now. It was not easy for T.S. Eliot or Robert Frost to state precisely the meaning of 'tradition and culture'. But I found the phrase 'Culture of Peace' really intriguing.

"We have been talking about peace for such a long time – though we all long so much for peace, none of us really knows how to achieve it on this earth – but this is for the first time we feel that peace is a culture that has to be nurtured. To be immersed in the culture of peace one has to believe in democracy and be aware of the diversity of opinion, culture and tradition.

Most of the conflicts that disturb world peace result from personal, cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic egocentricity. It is really a difficult task to get out of this kind of ego and coexist peacefully. For this we need a long arduous practice of "Culture of Peace".

"I which to mention here is that, in Bangladesh we have been able to found a spontaneous tradition of stage theatre, a very powerful branch of world culture, we have in reality, established a strong bond with the UN declared slogan: 'Culture of Peace'.

We are ready to go to any length for its proper manifestation and expansion. We have firm conviction to traverse towards a 'Culture of Peace', as well as 'Peace for Culture', and condemn violation of our right to 'Culture of Peace' by any autocratic regime, especially, the military junta “.

Burma for them is for Burman nation and their one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of their military pride. Thus nationalist patriots are only those who glorify the Burman military and their practices. Others are traitors and enemies to the nation. The only way out for the Muslims and other nationalities in Burma, as it has been suggested, is to adopt the Burma culture and language, and entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Burman race and culture.

Burma is home of the many different people, but the junta encourage the national culture of Burma. This of-course is a conspiracy against the minorities. The fact that in such multi-cultural country remains undefinable. Burma is a country of various cultures and those cultures have their separate identities. The notion of the Burman culture implies rejection of the multi-cultural and multi-religious nature of Burmese society. Such a concept of national culture ignores not only the hundreds of years of the Muslim rule in Arakan and the contribution they made to the Burmese societies, but it also negates the true composite nature of Burmese culture. This is in fact a great crime against this country. Muslim has been told to discard Islamic names. Those who do not adopt Burman names are despised and discriminated against.

Muslim culture, Muslims relic and monuments have been destroyed. Everywhere Muslim and Islamic, including mosques and religious schools are razed to the ground. The Muslim names of the places have been changed to Rakhine Pray and Sittwe, which are

unknown to history. There are instances that many monasteries and pagodas have been built on the Wakf land of the mosques throughout the country.

Language is one of the important aspects of culture and religion is in the most cases it has its origin in some early religious documents. The official languages used in Arakan for many centuries- such as Bangla, Persian- have been banished from this country. Also Urdu was widely used by the Muslims in Burma. Thus the people of Arakan, both Rohingyas and Rakhines, lost their languages.

The children of the national groups have been kept unaware of their primary education in their own mother tongues. Particularly the Muslim students have been brainwashed in primary schools where anti-Islamic materials are being taught to them in the nature of cultural heritage and Burmese nationalism. It is generally been said that the Muslims or the Rohingyas in preserving their cultural languages do not only cut themselves away from the mainstream but also this extra burden hinders their way in competitive education system. This view also suggests that Muslims should forget their past, feel satisfied with present condition and stop talking about their culture and language. This attitude simply ignores the fact that a community ceases to be a community when its religious, cultural and linguistic identity is at stake.

It is also desirable to note the way in which Islam and Islamic culture are being projected through the media. The cultural issues like personal law, status of women in Muslim society, Muslim way of worship and Islamic missionary's activities and projection of all this present different picture of Muslims from what actually it is. Either it is TV film, radio or the press; Islam has to be presented in distorted form.

Nevertheless, the Muslims, especially the Rohingyas of Arakan want to retain their cultural identity so as to be Muslim in every sense of the word; but they meet with scores of difficulties in practising Islam in a society with state policy of national integration or *de-Muslimisation*.

The Almighty Allah through the Prophet of Islam directs the Muslims to be harmonious with other people of different religious groups and protect them from evil and tyrannical rulers. Being staunch Muslims, Rohingya wants peace in their land and readily sacrifices many in exchange for peaceful living. It is the culture and tradition of Muslims in Arakan today. Never in the history of Arakan, did Muslim ever force the followers of different religious to enter into Islamic fold but only at one's own will.

There is nothing to be felt that the culture and tradition of Rohingya Muslim would endanger any living soul of Arakan if all remain on the basis of fraternity, equality and respecting one another. Their unique culture is, however, being under process of adulteration for many reasons and so is the culture of other Arakanese. It needs to be preserved and promoted till eternity.

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