

A SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ARAKAN

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THE MAP OF ARAKAN (RAKHINE) STATE



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INTRODUCTION

ARAKAN, once a sovereign and independent State, is now one of the states of the Union of Burma. The Arakan State comprises a strip of land along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal from the Naf River to Cape Negaris and stretches north and south touching Bangladesh on the Northwest. The river Naf separates it from Chittagong region of Bangladesh.¹ It is cut off from Burma by a range of near impassable mountains known as Arakan Yomas running north to south, which was an obstacle against permanent Muslim conquest. The northern part of Arakan, today called the “*North Arakan*,” was point of contact with East Bengal. These geographical facts explain the separate historical development of that area – both generally and in terms of its Muslim population until the Burmese king Bodaw Paya conquered it on 28th December 1784 AD.² Under different periods of history Arakan had been an independent sovereign monarchy ruled by Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims.

THE ETYMOLOGY OF ARAKAN AND ROHANG

The word Arakan is definitely of Arabic or Persian origin having the same meaning in both these languages. It is the corruption of the word *Arkan* plural of the word *Al-Rukun*. There exists some controversy about the origin of the name of ‘Arakan’ on which traditional and legendary sources differ. In fact, the name of Arakan is of much antiquity. In Ptolemy’s *Geografia* (150 AD) it was named ‘Argyre’. Early Buddhist missionaries called Arakan as ‘*Rekkha Pura*’. In the Ananda Chandra stone pillar of Chandra dynasty (8th Century) at Shitthaung Pagoda in Mrauk-U the name of Arakan was engraved as “*Arakades’s*”. In a Latin Geography (1597 AD) by Peta Vino, the country was referred to as ‘*Aracan*’. Friar Manrique (1628-43 AD) mentions the country as ‘*Aracan*’.³

In the work of Arab geographer Rashiduddin (1310 AD) it appears as ‘*Rahan* or *Raham*’. The British travellers Relph Fitch (1586 AD) referred the name of Arakan as ‘*Rocon*’. In the Rennell’s map (1771 AD), it is ‘*Rassawn*’. Tripura Chronicle Rajmala mentions the name of Arakan as ‘*Roshang*’. In the medieval works of the poets of Arakan and Chittagong, like Quazi Daulat, Mardan, Shamser Ali, Quraishi Magan, Alaol, Ainuddin, Abdul Ghani and others, they frequently referred to Arakan as ‘*Roshang*’, ‘*Roshanga*’, ‘*Roshango Shar*’, and ‘*Roshango Des*’. Famous European traveller Francis Buchanam (1762-1829 AD) in his accounts mentioned Arakan as “*Reng, Roung, Rossawn, Russawn, Rung*”. In one of his accounts, “*A Comparative Vocabulary of some of the languages spoken in the Burman Empire*” it was stated that, “ the native Mugs of Arakan called themselves ‘*Yakin*’, which name is also commonly given to them by the Burmese. The people of Pegu are named ‘*Taling*’. By the Bengal Hindus, at least by such of them as have been settled in Arakan, the country is called *Rossawn*. The Mahammedans who have long settled at Arakan call the country ‘*Rovingaw*’ and called themselves ‘*Rohinga*’ or native of Arakan. The

Persians called it ‘*Rkon*’.” The Chakmas and Saks of 18th century called it ‘*Roang*’. Today the Muslims of Arakan call the country ‘*Rohang*’ or ‘*Arakan*’ and call themselves ‘*Rohingya*’ or native of Rohang. The Maghs call themselves ‘*Rakhine*’ and call the country ‘*Rakhine Pye*’ or country of Rakhine.⁴

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The total area of Arakan is about 20,000 square miles. But Arakan Hill-tracts District (5235 square miles) and southern most part of Arakan were partitioned from Arakan. So, it has now been reduced to 14,200 square miles.⁵ The earliest inhabitants of Arakan belong to the Negrito group. They are mentioned in the Arakanese Chronicle as *Rakkhasas* or *billus* (cannibals). They appear to be Neolithic descendants of the people of Arakan but no trace of them has yet been discovered in Arakan. At present two major ethnic races, the Rohingyas and the Rakhines (Maghs) inhabit in Arakan. The Rohingyas are Muslims and the Rakhines are Buddhists. Its unofficial total population now is more than 5 million, both inside and outside the country. At present, the Rohingyas and the Rakhines stand almost in equal proportion inside Arakan. In addition there are about 2 lakhs tribal people [Saks, Dinets (Chakmas) and Mros (Kamais)] and 2 lakhs Burman people in Arakan.⁶ Polygamy and early marriage enhance the population growth of Rohingyas. The growth rate is much lower among the Buddhist population because of monogamy, late marriage and celibacy. The Rohingyas are mostly concentrated in the riparian plains of Naf, Mayu and Kaladan. Arakan is the only Muslim majority province among the 14 provinces of Burma. Out of the 7 million Muslim population of Burma half of them are in Arakan.⁷

THE EARLY HISTORY

Possibly the history of Arakan can be classified in the following manner into 10 periods: (1) 100-788 AD (Some Hindu dynasties), (2) 788-957 AD (Chandra Hindu dynasty), (3) 957-1430 (A Chaotic period of Mongolians, Buddhists and Muslims), (4) 1430-1784 AD (Mrauk-U dynasty of Muslims & Buddhists), (5) 1784-1826 AD (Burman Buddhist Rule), (6) 1826-1948 AD (British Colonial Rule), (7) 1948-1962 (Parliamentary Democracy Rule), (8) 1962-1974 AD (Revolutionary Military Government Rule), (9) 1975-1988 (One Party Socialist Programme Party Government Rule), (10) 1988-1999 AD (SLORC/SPDC Military Government Rule).

Under different periods of history, Arakan had been an independent and sovereign monarchy ruled by Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. According to A. P Phayer and G.E. Harvey, the Arakanese kings established alternately capitals in eight different towns, transferring from one to another. They were successively at Dinnyawadi, 25 kings (146-746 AD); Vesali, 12 kings (788-994 AD); First Pyinsa (Sanbawut), 15 kings (1018-1103 AD); Parin, 8 kings (1103-1167 AD); Krit, 4 kings (1167-1180 AD); Second Pyinsa, 16 kings (1180-1237 AD); Launggyet, 17 kings (1237-1433 AD) and Mrauk-U, 48 kings (1433-1785 AD).⁸

Buddhism would seem to have reached Arakan long before its arrival in the interior of Burma. The famous Mahamuni image of Lord Buddha, usually placed in the Shrine at Shiri Gupta hill of Dinnyawadi, an old capital and some 21 miles north

of Mrauk-U may be dated from the early centuries of the Christian era. Mahamuni image was built by the king Sandathuriya (146-198 AD). There was Hindu god, which indicated that Arakan was a Hindu land until 10th century AD. According to Morris Collis, the Hindu ruled Arakan from 1st century to 10th century. At that time Arakan was the gate of Hindu India to contact with the countries of the East. But the Arakanese Rakhine chronicles claim that the kingdom of Dinnyawadi was founded in the year 2666 BC, and contain lists of kings beginning with that date.⁹

Inscriptions mention a Chandra dynasty, which may have been founded as early as the end of 8th century. Its capital was called by the Indian name of Vaisali, and thirteen kings of the dynasty are said to have reigned there for a total period of 230 years.¹⁰ The city of Vesali was founded in 788 AD by king Mahataing Sandya. The ruins of the city are still to be seen on the bank of a tidal creek about 44 miles inland from the Bay of Bengal (from Akyab City). This city became a noted trade port to which as many as a thousand ships came annually. The Chandara kings extended their territory as far north as Chittagong; the dynasty came to an end in 957 AD being overwhelmed by a Mongolian invasion. Vesali was an easterly Hindu kingdom of Bengal. Both government and people is Indian similar to that of Bengal.¹¹

Before the arrival of Islam in Arakan, the people of Vesali professed Hinduism and Buddhism. Later they abandoned Hinduism and professed Buddhism and Islam. Inside the palace compound of Vesali there were many stone plates inscribed in Nagri. The Vesali kings also melted good silver coins. Stamped on them are the bull, Nandi, the avatar of Siva; Siva's trident; and shred of flowers melted with Bhraman civilization.¹²

THE ARRIVAL OF ARABS AND ISLAM IN ARAKAN

The Arab Muslims first came in contact with the Indian Sub-continent and South East Asia through trade and commerce. From the time long past, spices, cotton fabric, precious stones, minerals and other commodities from South and South East Asia were of great demand in the oriental and European countries. The Arabs as seafaring nation almost monopolised this trade between the south and South East Asia on the one hand, the oriental North Africa and European countries on the other. The Arab merchants carried goods to the ports of Mascot and that of Serif on the two side of the Persian Gulf, Basra, Yemen, Jeddah, Qulzum (Suez), for exchange with the goods of the merchants of the Middle Eastern, Central Asian, North African and European countries. For about eight centuries the Arabs monopolised the trade between the East and the West. The Arabs were born traders, and after the introduction of Islam they became a great maritime people. Their profound knowledge in navigation, in the Science of Latitude and Longitude, in astronomical phenomena and in the geography of the countries they visited made them unrivalled in mercantile activities in the Indian Ocean for centuries together. The Arabs used to write about the places that they had visited which indicate their arrivals at East and the West of the world.¹³

There are frequent references to the Arab Muslims settlers in the coastal regions of Arakan from the 8th century onward. On the basis of the various Arab and Persian sources Mr. Siddiq Khan states as follow: ¹⁴

"To the maritime Arabs and Persians the various ports of the land of Burma, and more specially the coastal regions of Arakan... were well known. Naturally, therefore, when from the 8th century onwards, Muslims traders and navigators were spreading over the eastern seas from Egypt and Madagascar to China, and forming commercial settlements at points of vantage, the coastal regions of Burma were not overlooked. Originally, the intention of these traders and sailors had not been to establish permanent colonies, but owing to peculiar circumstances these acquired the nature of permanent settlements."

MOHAMMED HANIFA AND QUEEN KAIYAPURI

The Arab Muslim traders had good contacts with Arakan (*Rahambori Island*), Burma, Indochina, Indonesia, Malay etc. with their trade and they propagated the religion of Islam in those countries. The arrival of Mohammed Hanif son of Hazarat Ali (R.A) to Arakan is also narrated in a book written in 16th century by Shah Barid Khan named *Hanifa O Kaiyapuri*.

"In 680 AD after the war of '*Karbala*' Mohammed Hanofiya with his army arrived at Arab-Shah Para, near Maungdaw in the Northern Arakan, while Kaiyapuri, the queen of Cannibals ruled this hilly deep forest attacking and looting the people of Arakan. Mohammed Hanif attacked the Cannibals and captured the queen. She was converted to Islam and married to him. Her followers embraced Islam en masse. Mohammed Hanif and the queen Kaiyapuri lived in Mayu range. The peaks where they lived were still known as *Hanifa Tonki* and *Kaiyapui Tonki*. The wild cannibals were tamed and became civilised. Arakan was no more in danger of them and peace and tranquillity prevailed. The followers of Mohammed Hanif and Kaiyapuri were mixed up and lived peacefully."¹⁵ *The descendants of these mixed people no doubt formed the original nucleus of the Rohingya Muslims in Arakan.*

According to the British Burma Gazetteers, "About 788 AD *Mahataing Sandya* ascended the throne of *Vesali*, founded a new city (Vesali) on the site of old Ramawadi and died after a reign of twenty two years. In his reign several ships were wrecked on Rambree Island and the crews, said to have been Mohamedans, were sent to Arakan Proper and settled in villages. They were Moor Arab Muslims."¹⁶

The Shrines of "*Babazi Sha Monayem of Ambari*", "*Pir Badar Sha*" (*Badar-Al-din Allamah*), both situated on the coast of the Bay of Bengal at Akyab, all bear evidence of the arrival of Muslim saints in Arakan in the early period of history. In course of their trading activities in this part of the world, the Arabs colonised in and around Arakan first and afterward began to penetrate into interior part of Burma. They paved the way for the influx of Muslim saints, *Sufis*, *Fakirs* and sages in Arakan and East Bengal. Those sages used to visit the remote corners of the provinces only to preach their true religion Islam among the infidels and to dedicate their lives to the service of humanity and the oppressed and suppressed people of the land. The superior moral character and high missionary zeal of those followers attracted large number of people towards Islam who embraced it en masse. So,

they have played a very important role in the growth of Muslim population and development of a Muslim Society in Arakan. Moreover, Islam as a resurgent force vastly influenced the warring and Caste-ridden Society of Arakan with its spirit of equality, fraternity and oneness of all human beings. This concepts inspired the down trodden masses to accept the new religion Islam.¹⁷

THE ORIGIN OF ROHINGYA

Rohang, the old name of Arakan, was very familiar region for the Arab seafarers even during the pre-Islamic days. Tides of people like the Arabs, Moors, Turks, Pathans, Moghuls, Central Asians, Bengalees came mostly as traders, warriors, preachers and captives overland or through the sea route. Many settled in Arakan, and mixing with the local people, developed the present stock of people known as ethnic Rohingya. Hence, the Rohingya Muslims, whose settlements in Arakan date back to 7th century AD are not an ethnic group which developed from one tribal group affiliation or single racial stock. They are an ethnic group developed from different stocks of people. The ethnic Rohingya is Muslim by religion with distinct culture and civilisation of their own. They trace their ancestry to Arabs, Moors, Pathans, Moghuls, Central Asians, Bengalis and some Indo-Mongoloid people. Since Rohingyas are mixture of many kinds of people, their cheekbone is not so prominent and eyes are not so narrow like Rakhine Maghs and Burmans. Their noses are not flat and they are a bit taller in stature than the Rakhine Maghs but darker in complexion. They are some bronzing coloured and not yellowish. The Rohingyas of Arakan still carried the Arab names, faith, dress, music and customs. So, the Rohingyas are nationals as well as an indigenous ethnic group of Burma. They are not new born racial group of Arakan rather they are as old an indigenous race of the country as any others.¹⁸

THE ORIGIN OF RAKHINE

In the year 957 AD, a Mongolian invasion swept over Vesali, and killed Sula Chandra, the last king of Chandra dynasty. They destroyed Vesali and placed on their throne Mongolian kings. Within a few years the Hindus of Bengal were able to establish their Pala Dynasty. But the Hindus of Vesali were unable to restore their dynasty because of the invasion and migrations of Tibeto-Burman who were so great that their population over shadowed the Vesali Hindus. They cut Arakan away from Indians and mixing in sufficient number with the inhabitants of the eastern-side of the present Indo-Burma divide, created that Indo-Mongoloid stock now known as the Rakhine Arakanese. This emergence of a new race was not the work of a single invasion. But the date 957 AD may be said to mark the appearance of the Rakhine in Arakan, and the beginning of fresh period.¹⁹

The new English Dictionary states that the word *Mog*, *Mogen*, *Mogue* appear as names of Arakan and the people in 15-16th centuries.²⁰ Today the *Maghs* of Arakan and Bangladesh disown this name because the word Magh became synonymous with sea pirates. For more than two centuries the Maghs of Arakan were known as sea pirates in Bengal. 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. But

according to Phayre, the name *Magh* originated from the ruling race of Magadha and also a well-known poet of *Rosanga* (Arakan), Dault Kazi (1622-38) mentioned in his *Sati Mayna* that the kings of Arakan belonged to Magadha dynasty and was Buddhists by faith.²¹

According to the Maghs of Arakan, they are descendants of *Rakkhasa (billu)*, the aborigine of the land and the name of their country is *Rakkahpura*. Ethnically most of the Arakanese Magh belongs to the Mongoloid race. Ethnologists point out that north-western China, the cradle land of mankind between the upper courses of the Yang-Tse-Kiang and of the Hoang-Ho rivers was their earliest home. They entered the area, now known as Burma, through the upper courses of the Irrawadi and Chindwin in three successive waves. In making this entry they encountered the local Mon-Khmer and by defeating them they settled in Burma. However, Arakan Yoma Mountain separates the Arakanese Maghs from the parent stock. Though descended from the same stock, worshipping the same faith and speaking the same language as the Burmese, the Arakanese Maghs have a distinct culture and have preserved a distinct dialect. Hence the Arakanese Maghs of the northern section, close to Bangladesh, exhibit the original Mongoloid features in lesser and subdued degree than their southern brethren. Whether these ethnic differences are due to the intermixture of race or ecological and other factors it is not known. The Arakanese Maghs are short in stature, whose height rarely exceeds five feet six inches. The body seems to be stocky with relatively short legs and body; cheekbone is high and broad. Females are flat chested with thin lips. Black straight hairs, brown small eyes and flat nose are common features of the present-day Rakhine Magh population.²²

The spoken language of *Rakhine Magh* is not a separate language but pure Burmese with phonetic variation. Historians commented on the *Rakhine language* as follows:²³

“The question of the emergence of the Arakanese Rakhine language is more difficult. No inscriptions in the Burmese script are found in Arakan before 11th and 12th centuries. Whether it was the language of the Mongolian invaders of 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 country 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 solve. This question awaits judgement.”

King Anawratta of Pagan (1044-77 AD) conquered North Arakan, but it was not incorporated in his kingdom. It remained a semi-independent feudatory state under its hereditary kings. When Pagan fell in 1287 AD Arakan asserted its independence under the famous *Minhti*, whose regime, according to the chronicles, lasted for the fabulously long period of ninety-five years (1279-1374 AD). His reign is also notable for the defeat of a Bengali raid. After his death Arakan was for a

considerable time one of the theatres of war in the great struggle between Ava and the Mon kingdom of Pegu. Both sides sought to gain control over it. First the Burmese, then the Mons, placed their nominees on its throne.²⁴

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM SETTLEMENTS IN ARAKAN

The infiltration of Arabs to Arakan has started before Muslims conquest of India. The oft-quoted statements and records of Arab geographers and traders are important source to reconstruct the history of the coming of the Muslims to Arakan. The Arabs used to write about the places that they had visited which indicate their arrivals at east and west of the world. Referring to the early geographers, G.E. Hervay writes, “ *To the Arabs, whose shipping predominated in the eastern seas from 8th to 16th century, Burma was Arakan and Lower Burma.*” In addition, from the very beginning of Muslim commercial shipping activity in the Bay of Bengal, the Muslim trading ships reach the ports of Arakan just as they did the ports of Burma proper. And as in Burma so, too, in Arakan is there a long tradition of old Indian settlement.²⁵

Bengal became Muslim in 1203 AD, but this was the extreme eastern limit of Islamic overland expansion (although the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago were Islamized much later by missionaries and merchants who came by sea). In northern Arakan close overland ties were formed with East Bengal. The resulting cultural and political Muslim influence was of great significance in the history of Arakan. Actually, Arakan served to a large extent as a bridgehead for Muslim penetration to other parts of Burma, and also Muslims attained some degrees of importance elsewhere as they did in Arakan. The Islamic influence grew in Arakan to the extent of establishing Muslim vassal state beginning in 1430 AD. Muslim's rule and influence in Arakan lasted for more than 350 years until it was invaded and occupied by Burman in 1784 AD.²⁶

THE EMERGENCE OF MRAUK-U EMPIRE

This independent kingdom turned westward, toward Bengal, as a result of the growing power of the Burmese court of Ava. In 1404 AD, the king of Arakan, *Narameikhla* (1404-1434 AD), was forced to flee to Gaur, capital of Bengal Sultanate, which 86 years earlier had already become independent of the Mogul Emperor in Delhi. Ahmed Shah, Sultan of Gaur, welcomed the refugee king. Narameikhla remained at the court of Gaur, where he served as an officer in Ahmad Shah's army and fought in his wars. After the victory of the war, king Ahmed Shah handed over the throne of Gaur to his son Nazir Shah (according to Bengal History it was not Nazir Shah but Sultan Jalaluddin Mohammed Shah) in the year 1426 AD.²⁷

Then Naramaikhla pleaded help from the king to regain his lost throne at Launggyet in Arakan. According to *Rakhine Razawin* (Rakhine History), the Sultan of Bengal agreed to do so when Naramaikhla agreed to abide the following 6-point conditions. They are: - ²⁸

1. To return the twelve towns of Bengal.²⁹
2. To receive Muslim title for the kings of Arakan from Bengal.
3. The court emblem must be inscribed with *Kalima Tayuba* in Persian.

4. The coins, medallions must be inscribed with *Kalima Tayuba* in Persian and to mint them in Bengal.
5. To use the Persian as court language of Arakan.
6. To pay taxes and presents annually.

THE ARRIVAL PATHAN ARMY IN ARAKAN

As Naramaikhla agreed to six point conditions (Arakanese kings also followed and practised them while they were independent and under no obligation), in 1429 AD, Sultan Nadir Shah sent Gen. Wali Khan as the head of 20,000 Pathan army with Naramaikhla to restore the throne of Arakan to Naramaikhla. The Pathan army conquered Arakan from the control of Mon and Naramaikhla ascended the throne. Soon Wali Khan and Naramaikhla had a dispute over the No. 5 condition of introduction of Persian language as court language of Arakan. Gen. Wali Khan arrested king Naramaikhla and locked up at Balutaung fettering him. Gen. Wali Khan ruled Arakan for one year and introduced Persian in his court which continued as state language up to 1845 AD and appointed Qazis. But some time after that Narameikhla succeeded in re-conquering Arakan with the help of a second army supplied by Nadir Shah headed by Gen. Sandi Khan. The accession of Min Sawmon to the throne ushered a new era in the history of Arakan. Upon his return, Narameikhla founded a new city, Mrauk-U on the bank of the Lembro River, now known as Mrohaung, which remain the capital until 1785 when Arakan was conquered by Burma. Narameikhla's Muslim soldiers, who came with him from Bengal, settled in villages near Mrohaung and built the Sandi Khan Mosque, which still exists today. Muslim influence in Arakan, they may be said to date from 1430, the year of Narameikhla's return. As a result of the close land and sea ties between the two countries, which continued to exist for a long time thereafter, the Muslims played a decisive role in the history of Arakan Kingdom.³⁰

MRAUK-U A SULTANATE

Narameikhla ceded certain territory to the Sultan of Bengal and recognised his sovereignty. He introduced Nadir Shah's system of coins bearing the *Kalima* as used in Bengal since Muslim conquest of 1203 and its fellows that the coinage of Mrauk-U was subsequently modelled. Later on he struck his own coins which had the name of the king in Arakanese letters on one side and his Muslim title in Persian on the other. According to historian M.S Collis, it took the Arakanese a hundred years to learn that doctrine (Islam) from the Moslem-Mongolians. When it was well understood, they founded what was known as the Arakanese Empire. For hundred years 1430 to 1530 AD, Arakan remained feudatory to Bengal, paid tribute and learnt history and polities. Twelve kings followed one after another at Mrauk-U in undistinguished succession. They struck coins and some have been found. In this way Arakan become definitely oriented towards the Moslem State. Contact with a modern civilization resulted in a renaissance. The country's great age began. In 1531 AD Min Bin as Zabuk Shah ascended the throne. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Moslem studies and the great Arakanese Empire was founded.³¹ But according to Arakanese historian U Aung Tha Oo, all 13 kings including Min Bin received Muslim titles and state Emblem from the Bengal Sultans.³²

In 1434 AD, at the age of 53, Min Sawmon died leaving his kingdom at the hand of his brother *Min Khari as Ali Khan* (1434-1459 AD) as his successor. Min Khari was succeeded by his son *Basawpru as Kalima Shah* (1459-1482 AD). Taking advantage of weakness of Sultan Barbak Shah of Bengal Kalima Shah occupied Chittagong in 1459 AD. Kalima Shah was murdered in 1482 AD and his kingdom plunged into chaos and disaster. Eight kings came to the throne in succession but most of them were assassinated. At last in 1531 AD a capable young king name *Min Bin as Zabuk Shah* (1531-1553 AD) ascended the throne of Arakan and declared himself as a full independent monarch. During his rule stability came back in Arakan.³³ Even after becoming independent of the Bengal Sultans, the Arakan kings continued the custom of using the Muslim titles in addition to the Arakanese or Pali title. The fact that this practice continued even after they had shaken off the yoke of Bengal Sultan, goes to prove that there were some cogent reasons for this other than merely compulsion or force. The king had already a large number of Muslim subjects holding important posts in the court as well as in the field of trade and commerce possessing a far superior culture and civilization compared to those of his own people. Court ceremonies and administrative methods followed the customs of the Gaur and Delhi sultanates. There were eunuchs, harems, slaves and hangmen; and many expressions in use at court were Mogul. Muslims also held eminent posts in the court of Arakan. With the ever increasing Muslim influence in the court of Arakan and the subsequent subservience of the administration Sonargaon, Muslims of Gaur and particularly those from Chittagong infiltrated into Arakan in large numbers in search of fresh lands and new pasture. Henceforth Arakanese administration continued to bear definite Islamic stamp.³⁴

Dr. Muhammad Enanmul Haq and Abdul Karim (1869-1953) in their work *Bengali Literature in the Court of Arakan 1600-1700* state that “ the Arakanese kings issued coins bearing the inscription of Muslim *Kalema* (*the profession of faith in Islam*) in Arabic script. The State emblem was also inscribed Arabic word *Aqimuddin* (*establishment of God's rule over the earth*).” The Arakanese court also adoption of many Muslim customs and terms were other significant tribute to the influence of Islam. Mosques including the famous Sandi Khan Mosque began to dot the countryside and Islamic customs, manners and practices came to be established since this time. For about two hundred years Muslim domination seemed to have been completed.³⁵

The kingdom of Arakan had come in close cultural contact with the Muslim Sultanate of Bengal since fifteen century so much so that many of the Buddhist rulers of that country adopted Muslim names for themselves. They appointed Muslim officials in their courts and, apparently under the latter's influence, even inscribed the *Kalima* on their coins. Contact with a modern civilization resulted in a renaissance. The country's great age began. From this time onwards the relation of Muslims with the Arakanese became more intimate and for about two centuries Arakan was united in a bond of friendship with Islamic lands. As a result of the impact of the civilization of the Muslims, Arakanese culture also progressed and thus the ‘Golden Age’ in the history of Arakan. The end of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century were a period of political instability and transition caused by the break-up of the Afghan state in Bengal and gradual

advance of the Mughals. One of the social and demographic effects of this political change was the flight of a large number of Afghan nobles and other Muslims rank and position towards the easternmost districts of Bengal. Quite a few of these people found shelter at the Arakan court where they filled up important positions in the government. In this way Arakan became definitely oriented towards the Muslim State. By the end of 1500 AD Arakan region was Islamized and stood as an independent Muslim kingdom.³⁶ It was later absorbed by the Burmese king in 1784 AD.

THE CONQUEST OF CHITTAGONG AND THE INFULENCE BENGALI MUSLIM CULTURES AND LITERATURES IN ARAKAN

Arakan, in fact, a continuation of the Chittagong plain was neither a Burmese nor an Indian Territory till 18th century of the Christian Era. Shut off from Burma by a hill range, it is located far away from the Indian capitals. Chiefly for its location, it had not only remained independent for the most part of its history, but also endeavoured to expand its territory in the surrounding tracts whenever opportunity came and Chittagong was the first country to be the victim of the territorial ambition of Arakanese monarchs.³⁷ The relation between Chittagong and Arakan is influenced by geographical, ethnological, cultural, and historical considerations. From 1575 till 1666 AD, nearly a century, Chittagong was under almost uninterrupted Arakanese rule which is undoubtedly an important period marked; a company of eight sovereigns successively ruled Arakan only with Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts with full despotic power.³⁸

After Min Sawmon, the successive kings of Arakan took initiative to evolve administration on the model of Gaur and the Muslims were given high posts in the government offices. It is also true that a large number of Muslim officials were employed in the civil as well as military establishments, who were mostly from Chittagong. As a result of the royal patronage, settlements of the Muslim community also grew upon the south-eastern neighbourhood of Mrauk-U; all these settlements are popularly known as *Kalapanzan*. Close to the Mrauk-U City, in course of time, a trading port named Bandar was developed. In Bandar there lived *qadis*, *muftis*, *ulama*, religious *fakirs* and *darvishes*. Those high ranking Muslims living there used to converse with the king on equal and friendly terms. At that place the Muslims crowded for business. The ruins of seven mosques and towers (some still standing) eloquently testify to the heydays of the Muslims in Arakan. Most of the Muslim settlements are found on the both sides of the major rivers namely Naf, Mayu (Kalapanzi), Kaladan and Lembro (Lemro). The impact of Muslim culture on the life of the people of Arakan had profound effect on the subsequent course of the history of Arakan. Like the Pathan Sultans of Bengal, the kings of Arakan patronised the cultivation of Bengali literature and many talented poets and writers from different regions thronged the court. With the royal support Bengali literature developed; learned men and men of high calibre received patronage from the kings due to the liberal policy. Many Muslim Bengalee poets dominated the court life.³⁹

Bengali became a favourite language and the Arakan kings encouraged the writing of a number of *Puttis*, which was then the only form of literature. Some *Putti* literatures to be mentioned of Arakan are: Shuja Qazi's *Roshanger Panchali* (*History*

of Roshang), Kazi Daulat's *Sati Mayna-O-Lora Chandrani*, Shamer Ali's *Razawan Shah*, Mardan's *Nasir Nama or Nasir Maloum*, Shah Alaol's *Padmabati, Tufa, Sati Mayna Lor Chandrani, Saiful Mulk Badiujjamal, Sikander Nama, Hatf-Palkar*, Abdul Karim's *Dulla Mailis, Hajar Masil, Tamam Anjari*, Qazi Abdul Karim's *Rahatul Qulub, Abdullar Hazar Sawal, Nurnama, Madhumalati, Darige Majlis*, Abul Hussain's *Adamer Larai, Ismail Saquib's Bilqisnama*, Qazi Muhammad Hussain's *Amir Hamza, Dewalmati, Haidar Jung*, and etc. Thus Arakan opened up a new field for expansion and exploitation for the Muslims of Chittagong. Except for the political barriers Chittagong and Arakan became one in all other respects and this continued for well over a century and to some extent lingered even up to the first half of the last century.⁴⁰

THE ARAKANESE KINGS WITH MUSLIM NAMES AND TITLES

According to former Chairman of Historical Commission, Burma, Lt. Col. Ba Shin's "Coming of Islam to Burma 1700 AD", Min Sawmon as Solaiman Shah, the founder of Mrauk-U dynasty and his successor were greatly influenced by Islamic culture. The practice of adopting a Muslim name or title by the Arakanese kings continued for more than two hundred years (1430 – 1638). This titles which appeared in Arabic script / Persian Kufic on their coins is given below: ⁴¹

SL. No.	Names of the kings	Muslim Names	Reigning period
1.	Narameikhla (a) Sawmon	Solaiman Shah	1430-1434 AD.
2.	Meng Khari (a) Naranu	Ali Khan	1434-1459
3.	Ba Saw Pru	Kalima Shah	1459-1482
4.	Dawlya	Mathu Shah	1482-1492
5.	Ba Saw Nyo	Mohammed Shah	1492-1493
6.	Ran Aung	Noori Shah	1493-1494
7.	Salimgathu	Sheik Abdullh Shah	1494-1501
8.	Meng Raza	Ilias Shah - I	1501-1513
9.	Kasabadi	Ilias Shah - II	1513-1515
10.	Meng Saw Oo	Jalal Shah	1515
11.	Thatasa	Ali Shah	1515-1521
12.	Min Khaung Raza	El-Shah Azad	1521-1531
13.	Min Bin (a) Min Pa Gri	Zabuk Shah	1531-1553
14.	Min Dikha	Daud Khan	1553-1555
15.	Min Phalaung	Sikender Shah	1571-1591
16.	Min Razagri	Salim Shah - I	1593-1612
17.	Min Khamauung	Hussain Shah	1612-1622
18.	Thiri Thudama	Salim Shah - II	1622-1637

THE ARRIVAL OF PORTUGUES IN ARAKAN

The Portuguese arrived in the Eastern waters about the year 1500 AD in search of trade. They were mariners and seamen of unique characters. An agreement with Portuguese was reached. When Min Bin as Zabuk Shah came to the throne he turned Mrauk-U into the strongest fortified city of the Bay, employing the Portuguese to lay out his walls and moats and to forge mount his cannon. He

appointed them as military officers to train and equip a mercenary army of heterogeneous races, foreign and domestic; and he built with their aid, a large fleet manned with his own men, who were hardy boatmen, but guided and stiffened by Portuguese. King Min Bin in this way became master of a powerful modern weapon.⁴²

In July 1538 AD, the Mogul king Humayon entered Gaur and displaced the Independent dynasty of Arab Hussein Shahi dynasty.⁴³ The pretender was Sher Shah. During the whole of Min Bin's reign the administration of Bengal was interrupted by that struggle and Eastern Bengal lay defenceless. For Min Bin, armed as the non-was, this was opportunity. With a combined fleet and army movement he occupied Eastern Bengal. That province remained to Arakan for the next hundred and twenty years, till 1666 AD. Its administration was left in the hands of twelve local rajahs, who paid an annual tribute to the Arakanese king's viceroy at Chittagong.⁴⁴ After conquest of Chittagong Min Bin struck coins on which Chittagong King and his Muslim name Zabauk Shah were inscribed. If King Min Bin founded the prosperity of Mrauk-U dynasty, *Min Rajagri as Salim Shah*, his successor of forty years later, may be said consolidated it.⁴⁵

THE ACTIVITIES OF MAGH AND PORTUGUESE PIRATES

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. The rest were sold on the market or forced to settle in the villages near Mrohaung. A considerable number of these captives were Muslim. 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.⁴⁶

Early in the 17th century the Portuguese reached the shores of Bengal and Arakan. At that time too, the raiding Arakanese ships reached the source of Ganges. They came into contact with the Portuguese and permitted them to establish bases for their operations and also granted them commercial concession. In return, the Portuguese helped to defend the Arakan boundaries. In 1576 AD. Akbar the Great, Emperor of Delhi, was efficiently ruling Bengal so that Arakan was now facing the Mogul Empire itself and not only Bengal. The Portuguese knowledge of firearms and artillery was more advanced than that of the Moguls, and Arakan profited much there by. Joint Arakanese-Portuguese raids on Bengal continued until the end of the 18th century and ceased entirely with the strengthening of the British naval force in the Bay of Bengal.⁴⁷

King Mingphalaung as Sikander Shah (1571-93), worthy son of conqueror Min Bin as Sultan Zabuk Shah ascended the throne of Arakan in 1571 AD. He went up to Dacca and held all parts of Chittagong and ports of Noakhali and Tippera.⁴⁸ King Minphalung was succeeded by his son *Meng Razagryi as Salim Shah I* (1593-1612). In 1599 AD. Meng Razagyi attacked Pegu. In this expedition he employed a flotilla from Chittagong and the Ganges delta. The expedition was crowned with success. On the return journeys the wise minister Mahapinyakyaw, lord of Chittagong, died.⁴⁹

King Salim Shah I, called himself king of Bengal and Tippura, issued trilingual coins from Chittagong in Arabic, Nagari and Devanagri with his Pali and Muslim titles in 1601 AD. For a short period during the reign of Salim Shah I Arakan extended from Dacca and the Sundarbans to Moulmein, a Coastal Strip of a thousand miles in length and varying from 150 to 20 miles in depth. This considerable dominion was built up by means of the strong cosmopolitan army and navy organised by King Minbin as Zabuk Shah. King Salim Shah I was succeeded by his eldest son *Meng Khamaung as Hussain Shah* (1612-1622 AD). In 1609 AD the Portuguese occupied Sandip and established their independent base. From this base they conducted several hostile incursions in different parts of the Arakanese kingdom. So the Arakanese king decided to destroy the Portuguese bases. In early 1615 AD the Arakanese laid siege to the island of Sandip and later they occupied the island with the help of Dutch. The Arakanese capture of Sandip in 1615 AD shattered the Portuguese dream of establishing a maritime and religious empire in the region. King Hussein Shah proved to be a great and most successful king of Arakan.⁵⁰

The main source of information on that period is the Portuguese traveller, the Augustan monk *Sebastian Manrique*, who was in Arakan from 1629 to 1637 AD. Using not only his own memoirs but also ancient Arakanese sources placed at his disposal, Manrique in his book described the arrival of Muslim prisoners, and Muslim army units at the Arakan King's court. He also mentioned 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 themselves Muslims - a fact that did not trouble them in their profession, not even the fact that enslaving a Muslim stands in contrast with the Muslim Law, the *Shari'a*. Manrique gives a detailed description of such Muslim prisoners, which he accompanied. He even tried -without success to convert the Muslims to Christianity. Some of these captive slaves were settled in special areas guarded by Muslim soldiers.⁵¹

For nearly half a century, Chittagong was a breeding ground of the pirates who ravaged the whole of lower Bengal, depopulated it and turned it to wilderness. During the four years from 1621 AD to 1624 AD the Arakanese Maghs in alliance with the Portuguese pirates brought to Chittagong then in possession of the king of Arakan, 42,000 slaves captured in the various districts of Bengal. Only Portuguese sold their captives but the Maghs employed all of them they had carried off in agriculture and other services.⁵²

In 17th century the Maghs and Portuguese pirates brought Bengalee captives, both Muslims and Hindus, and sold at the ports of Arakan and India. Referring to 17th century historians G.E. Harvey writes as follows:-⁵³

"... With the Arakanese they (Portuguese pirates) made a dire combination, holding Sandwip island, Noahkali and Backergunge districts, and the Sunderbands delta south of Calcutta, and raiding up to Dacca and even Murshidabad, while Tippura sent them propitiatory tribute. After they had sacked Dacca, his capital, in 1625 AD the Moghul governor felt so unsafe that for a time he lived further inland.

For generations an iron chain was stretched across the Hoogly River between Calcutta and Sibpur to prevent their entrance. In a single month, February 1727 AD, they carried off 1,800 captives from the southern parts of Bengal; the king chose the artisans, about one-fourth, to be his slaves, and the rest were sold at prices varying from Rs. 20 to Rs. 70 a head and set to work on the land as slaves. This continued throughout the eighteenth century, decreasing when the English began to police the coast. But even in 1795 AD they were plundering the king of Burma's boats off Arakan, laden with his customs dues of 10 per cent in kind. Rennell's map of Bengal, published in 1794 AD marks the area south of Backergunge '*deserted on account of the ravages of the Muggs (Arakanese)*'. They had forts at Jagdia and Alamgirnagar in the mouth of the Meghna River, and here and there a few of them settled in the delta. They had also a little colony of 1,500, speaking Burmese and wearing Burmese dress, still survive on four or five islands in the extreme southeast of Backergunge district. They did not occupy the country administratively, they held it to blackmail."

"The Arakan pirates, both Magh and *feringhi*, used constantly to come by the water-route and plunder Bengal. They carried off the Hindus and Mahomedans that they could seize, pierced the palms of their hands, passed thin strips of cane through the holes and threw them huddled together under the decks of their ships. Every morning they flung down some uncooked rice to the captives from above, as we fling grain to fowl. On reaching home the pirates employed some of the hardy men that survived such treatment in tillage and other degrading pursuits. The others were sold to the Dutch, English, and French merchants at the ports of the Deccan. Sometimes they brought their captives to Orissa; anchoring a short distance from the coast they sent a man ashore with the news. The local officers, in fear of the pirates committing any depredation or kidnapping there, stood on the shore with a number of followers, and sent a man with money on board. If the terms were satisfactory, the pirates took the ransom and set the captives free with the man. Only the *feringhis* sold their prisoners. But the Maghs employed all whom they had carried off in agriculture and other services. Many highborn persons and Saiyads, many Saiyad - born pure women, were compelled to undergo the disgrace of slavery or concubinage to these wicked men. Mahomedans underwent such oppression as they had not to suffer in Europe. As they continually practised raids for a long time, Bengal daily became more and more desolate and less and less able to resist them. Not a house was left inhabited on their side of the rivers lying on their track from Chittagong to Dacca. The district of Bakla [Backergunge and part of Dacca], which formerly abounded in houses and cultivated fields and yield a large revenue as duty on betel-nuts, was swept so clean with their broom of plunder and abduction that none was left to tenant any house or kindle a light in that region. The governor of Dacca had to confine his energies to the defence of that city only and to the prevention of the coming of the pirate fleet to Dacca; he stretched iron chains across the stream The sailors of the Bengal flotilla were inspired with such fear of the pirates that whenever a hundred war-boats of the former sighted only four of the latter, the Bengal crew thought themselves lucky if they could save their lives by flights; and when the distance was too

short to permit escape, they – rowers, sepoys, and gunners alike – threw themselves overboard, preferring drowning to captivity. Many *feringhis* living at Chittagong used to visit the imperial dominions for plunder and abduction. Half their booty they gave to the raja of Arakan and other half they kept. They were known as the *Hermad* [Armada] and owned a hundred swift *jalia* boats full of war material ... Latterly the raja of Arakan did not send his own fleet to plunder the Moghul territory, as he considered the *feringhi* pirates in the light of his servants and shared their booty. When Shayista Khan asked the *feringhi* deserters, what salary the Magh king had assigned to them, they replied "Our salary was the Moghul Empire. We considered the whole of Bengal as our fief. We had not to bother revenue surveyors and ourselves about court clerks but levied our rent all the year round without difficulty. We have kept the papers of the division of the booty for the last forty years." (Year 1670 circ., *Shihabuddin Talish, soldier and historian*, see *Jadunath Sarkar "History of Aurangzib"* III. 224 and JAS Bengal 1907 his "The Feringi Pirates of Chatgaon" 422)

SOME MUSLIM PRIME MINISTERS, DEFENCE MINISTERS AND MINISTERS IN THE ROYAL COURT OF ARAKAN

King Meng Khamauung was succeeded by his son *Thiri Thudama as King Salim Shah II* (1622-1638 AD) in 1622 AD. According to the history, the coronation of Thiri Thudama was deferred for twelve years, in pursuance of an astrological prediction that the king would die within a year of his coronation. The great king knowing that his life would come to an end transferred the rule of the kingdom to the hand of his Chief and Defence Minister Sri Ashraf Khan. According to the Muslim Poet Daulat Kazi's book known as *Sati Mayna-O-Lora Candrani*, the king made Ashraf Khan his Chief Minister and the Commander of his army. He sat in court, and look after the day to day affairs of the kingdom. When the king felt that his end was drawing near, he celebrated the coronation ceremony and entrusted Ashraf Khan with the responsibility of governing the country.⁵⁴ Portuguese traveller Sebastien Manrique also refers to *Lashkar Wazir* when he says that the *Lashker Wazir* led the Muslim contingent of army in the coronation procession of the king Thiri Thudama in 1635 AD.⁵⁵ His son *Min Sani* in 1638 AD succeeded King Thiri Thudama, the unfortunate prince ruled for a brief period of 28-days. *Narapadigyi*, the dowager queen's lover, who occupied the throne of Arakan, murdered Min Sani.⁵⁶

According to Muslim Poet Shah Alawal of Arakan court, *Narapadigyi* (1638-1645 AD.) was king of Arakan after the death of King Thiri Thudama's son Min Sani. He was a paramour of *Natshinme*, the chief queen of Thiri Thudama and was great grand son of *king Thatasa* who ruled Arakan 1525-31 AD.⁵⁷ King Narapadigyi's War Minister or *Lashkar Wazir* was *Siri Bara Thakur*. After the death of Bara Thakur his illustrious son *Magen Thakur* became the *Lashkar Wazir* or War Minister of king Narapadigyi. According to Poet Shah Alawal, Magen Thakur was born of Siddique family or descendants of the Muslim first Caliph *Hazarat Abu Bakar (RA)*. He was not only a high born but also a learned man and he respected the learned people. He gathered the learned people of the country by his side and showed them much respect. King Narapadigyi had no son, but only a daughter. When the king became old, he appointed Magen Thakur, who was a minister, guardian of his daughter.

After the king's death she was married to Thado Mintar, nephew of the king. **Thado Mintar** (1645-1652 AD) became king in 1645 AD and the king's daughter became chief queen of the kingdom. During the reign of Thado Mintar and his queen, Magen Thakur was promoted to the Chief or Prime Minister of Arakan.⁵⁸ Poet Shah Alawal composed his famous poetical works *Padmavati* under the order of Prime Minister Magen Thakur and completed in 1651 AD during the reign of Thado Mintar. The king died in 1652 AD and was succeeded by his minor son **Sanda Thudhamma** (1652-1684 AD). As the king was minor, the dowager queen (Thado's queen and Narapadigyi's daughter) ruled the country as regent. She gave her guardian Magen Thakur the authority to rule the country on her and her son's behalf. Magen Thakur's power and influence was further enhanced. Prime Minister Magen Thakur later ordered Shah Alawal to compose *Saiful Mulk Badiujjalal*. Before the completing the book Magen Thakur died. Shah Alawal completed the book in 1658 or 1659 AD under the patronage of another Arakanese Prime Minister **Sayeed Musa**. It is thought that Magen Thakur died before 1660 AD.⁵⁹

After the death of Prime Minister Magen Thakur, Sayeed Musa was appointed the Prime Minister of Arakanese king Sanda Thudamma. Prime Minister Sayeed Musa was a great man and he used to patronise learned man and seeker of knowledge. He was a friend of Prime Minister Magen Thakur and was a minister under him.⁶⁰

Poet Shah Alawal composed *Satimaing-Lor Chandrani* in 1658 AD under the patronage of Minister Sulaiman of King Sanda Thudamma of Arakan. In 1660 AD under the order of minister Sayyid Mohammed Khan of king Sanda Thudamma Poet Shah Alawal composed the book *Half-Paikar*.⁶¹

SHAH SHUJA IN ARAKAN

Prince **Shah Shuja**, brother of the Moghul Emperor Aurangzib of India, being defeated in his struggle for the throne was forced to seek shelter with the king of Arakan. The Arakan King Sandathudamma (1652-84) consented, and Shah Shuja with his family and followers were brought to Mrauk-U, the capital city of Arakan, in Portuguese *gallases* from Teknaf. He arrived in Mrauk-U, the capital of Arakan on 26th August 1660 AD and was favourably received by the king who assigned him a residence near the city.⁶² According to G.E. Harvey's *Outline of Burmese History*, "Shah Shuja came to Arakan as the king promised to provide him with some of his famous ships to take him on the way to Macca; he wished to die in retirement at that holy spot. But when he arrived in Arakan with beautiful daughters and half a dozen camel loads of gold and jewels, the temptation was too great for King Sanda Thudamma. Such wealth had never seen in Arakan before. The king in order to seize all Shah Shuja's treasure had to find out a lame excuse. So, king Sanda Thudamma asked the hand of Shah Shuja's daughter Ameena, though he knew very well that Sultan Shah Shuja would never consent. As Shah Shuja refused the suit, the king ordered him to leave his country within three days. So, on 7th February 1661 AD, Shah Shuja fled to forest with some of his followers. The Maghs chased them like famishing wild wolves. Ultimately the Maghs caught Sultan Shah Shuja and chopped him into pieces. The king seized all his treasure, took his daughters into the harem, and imprisoned the rest of the family. Everyday the gold and silver, which the Arakanese have taken, are brought into the King's treasury to be melted

down. A year later he executed them all for so called plotting, including the unhappy princess.”⁶³

Sirimanta Sulaiman was Finance Minister of King Sanda Thudamma. At his request Shah Alawal composed **Tufa** (1662-64 AD) and completed the unfinished **Satimaina Lor Chandrani**. The first book was a book on **Fiqh**, while Qazi Daulat wrote the second at the request of Lashker Wazir Ashraf Khan. Before completing the book the poet died and the book remain incomplete. Shah Alawal completed the last part of the book. According to Shah Alawal’s **Tufa**: “**Roshang** is a blessed country. There is no sin there and Sri Sanda Thudhamma is the king there. So his minister Sri-Yut Sulaiman is a man of heavenly knowledge. God created him at an auspicious hour. He is kind, he is lucky and joyous. He is a singer and plays instrumental and works for other’s benefit, giving up his own works —. The poet says that Srimanta Sulaiman loved learned people so much so that he used to provide them food, clothes and shelter, particularly the foreigners on coming to Arakan received help and patronage from him.⁶⁴

According to Shah Alawal’s **Sikander Nama**, **Srimata Majlis** became a **Mahamatya** or Chief or Prime Minister of Roshang after getting Nabaraj: seems therefore that his name was **Srimata Majlis**. Nabaraj was his official title. It is possible that after the death of Prime Minister Sayyid Musa, **Nabaraj Majlis** obtained the job. It seems further that Shah Alawal was not acquainted with Nabaraj Majlis before; hearing the name and fame of Alawal, Nabaraj Mujlis called the poet to his court and gave him much support, so much so that Shah Alawal was able to clear the state dues. Once 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. In reply Nabaraj Majlis said that mosques 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 imparts education. Illiterate people became learned by reading books; books and poets are honoured not only in their own country but also out side, and books last until the day of resurrection. Shah Alawal in 1673 AD completed the book **Sikandernama**.⁶⁵

Nabaraj Majlis was not only the Prime Minister of the kingdom; he was so important a personality that he administered the coronation oath to the king Sanda Thudhamma. The king must have his Magh Ministers also, but the Muslim Minister got prominence. Shah Alawal says about this: “The great religious king had a Prime Minister known as Nabaraj Majlis. He was a great minister and chief of all Muslims of **Rohang**. Now, I will tell something about Majlis. When the king went to the heaven, the crown prince came to sit on the throne. Out side the throne, he stood facing the east. The Majlis wore his dress and standing before the prince advised him in the following words. ‘Treat the people as your sons, 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, then bade Salam to the Majlis and then all others of the family of his mother.” It appears from

the coin of the king that the coronation of the king was held for the second time in 1672 AD.⁶⁶

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ARAKANESE EMPIRE

In 1665 AD Moghul Empire Aurangzib ordered Shayista Khan, the viceroy of Bengal to build a fleet of boats. In 1666 AD Shayista Khan's force of 6,500 men and 288 boats took Chittagong in 36-hours and occupied Ramu. The fall of Chittagong caused indescribable rejoicing of Bengal. It was a terrible blow to the prosperity of Arakanese and with it their century of greatness came to an end. Sanda Thudhamma's long reign saw the power of his race passes its zenith, and his death is followed by century of chaos.⁶⁷ In 1685 AD the units of Muslim archers serving the king of Arakan, got upper hand and continually reinforced by new forces from upper India. From 1685 to 1710 AD (for 25-years) the political rule of Arakan was completely in the hand of Muslims.⁶⁸ Between the fall of Chittagong (1666 AD) and *Sanda Wizaya* (1710 AD) there were 10-kings averaging two and half years each. Three reigned only one year and two did not reign one month.⁶⁹ Sanda Wizaya died in 1731 AD and was succeeded by ten kings, all of whom except *Narabaya* had short reign. In 1777 AD one Aung Sun, a native of Rambree Island, dethroned the reigning sovereign king *Sanda Wimala Raja* and proclaimed himself king and having put down a rebellion which shortly broke-out, was succeeded, in 1783 AD, by his son-in-law *Thamada Raja*, the last independent king of Arakan.⁷⁰

ARAKAN UNDER BURMESE OCCUPATION

In 1784 AD Burmese king *Boddawphaya* sent 30,000 soldiers to conquer Arakan at the request of Rakhine noble *Nagasandi* and returned in February 1785 AD with the royal family and 20,000 inhabitants as prisoner. Thousand of Arakanese Muslims and Arakanese Buddhists were put to death.⁷¹ The Burmese soldiers destroyed mosques, temples, shrines, seminaries and libraries, including the Mrauk-U Royal Library. As for Arakanese Buddhists, their revered Mahamuni Image of Lord Buddha was taken away to Burma. The fall of Mrauk-U Empire was a mortal blow to the Muslims for every thing that was materially and culturally Islamic was razed to the ground.⁷² During 40-years of Burmese rule (1784-1824 AD) rule two third or two hundred thousands (2,00,000) of the inhabitants (Rohingyas and Rakhines) of Arakan were said to have fled to Bengal (India).⁷³ The then British East India Company Govt. made no objection to the settlement of those people in the Southern parts of Chittagong region. The Mrauk-U City (Patriquilla) left in ruins. Today the indigenous Muslims found in and around Mandalay and Central Burma are descendants of those Rohingyas of Arakan. Similarly ethnic Inthas living in the Inle Lake in Shan Plateau are descendants of the Rakhines. However, before Burmese could consolidate their power over Arakan British occupied the Burma colony in 1824.

ARAKAN UNDER BRITISH RULE

In 1826 AD Arakan was annexed to the British India and it was almost depopulated. A few months after the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo Mr. Paton,

the Controller of Civil Affairs in Arakan, submitted to the British Govt. a detailed report about the character of the country (Arakan), its extent, history, population, production and manners and customs of the inhabitants. He stated the population of Arakan as 1,00,000 (Maghs - 60,000; Muslims - 30,000; Burmese - 10,000).⁷⁴ So on the date of conquest of Arakan by English, there had already been living thirty thousands Muslims i.e. 30 percent of the total population of Arakan. Arakanese Muslim who entered and settled in Chittagong region during 1784–1824 AD is known as *Roai* in Chittagong. When peace arrived in Arakan they started to return to their forefather's homes in Arakan. Actually, *Chittagonians* dared not to go to Arakan because they knew that Arakan was a “*Mugher Mulluk*” – *the lawless country*. The British completed the occupation of whole of Burma in 1885 and made it an administrative part of India.

According to 1911 Census the number of Muslim population in Akyab District is 1,78,647 and 33 percent of total population.⁷⁵ Taken an over-all view, the increase was not due to the import of the Muslim labours by the British from Chittagong.

There was large-scale conversion of Buddhists to Islam during 15th to 18th centuries. It may be mentioned that when the Dutch industrialists were ordered to quit Arakan they were also not a little worried because their children left in Arakan were brought up to be Muslims.⁷⁶ Muslim influence was also intensified when Moghul prince Shah Shuja, brother of Aurangzeb, fled to Arakan in 1660. King Sandathudama murdered Shuja, but his followers were retained at the court as archers of the royal guards in which role they frequently intervened as king-makers. The Rohingya population went on increasing from centuries to centuries and they were in clear majority in 1942.

Eventually, during the Second World War an estimated 500,000 Indians and Muslims fled Burma. Some were clearly following in the footsteps of the British government, but others allege that they were brutally chased out by the nationalists of Burma Independence Army or BIA. Thousands are reported to have died of starvation, disease or during sporadic military attacks in one of the darkest but least reported incidents in modern Burmese History. At that time in Arakan, many local Muslims and Buddhists said that, initially there was not really any serious trouble between two religious communities, but that it only flared up when the first BIA units entered the area (Arakan) with the Japanese Imperial Army. The BIA immediately began giving speeches about the on going expulsions of Indians and other alleged British supporters from the central Burma and asked why Rakhine nationalists were not doing the same. As a result, there was an outbreak of the first serious communal clashes from 1942 onwards.⁷⁷

THE MUSLIM MASSACRE OF 1942

On 8th December 1941, Japan declared war against British Government. On 7th March 1942, the Japanese invading forces occupied Rangoon, the capital city of Burma. On 23rd March 1942 Japan bombed the Akyab City of Arakan. The Japanese fighter planes again bombed Akyab on 24th and 27th March respectively. So, the British administration withdrawn from Akyab by the end of March 1942.⁷⁸ There was an administration vacuum in Arakan following the withdrawal of British troops from the area. The Rakhine communalists in connivance with Burma

Independence Army (BIA) led by Bo Rang Aung brought about a pogrom massacring about 1,00,000 innocent Rohingya Muslims, driving out 80,000 of them across the border to East Bengal, devastating their settlements and depopulating the Muslims in some parts of Arakan.⁷⁹

According to Mr. Sultan Mahmud, former Health Minister and Member of Parliament from Akyab district stated that, “I refused to accept that there was a communal riot in Arakan in 1942. It was a pre-planned cold-blooded massacre. On March 28, 1942 a group of 37 soldiers who are trekking their way to Burma was intercepted, persuaded and prevail upon attack and loot the Moslem villages. The cold-blooded massacre began with an uncontrollable fury in the Moslem village of Letma on the western bank of the Lemro River in Maybon townships. It spread like a conflagration in all directions and the unsophisticated villagers with the prospect of gain joined with guns, *dahs*, spears and all other conceivable contrivances of destruction. Some high-minded and far-sighted Arakanese gentlemen intervened at the risk of their lives to prevent the deadly onslaught. But all their pious efforts were in vain. There was absolutely no attempt at retaliation even by way of self-defence by the Moslem and it was simply one-sided affair. Not a single Rakhine suffered even a scratch. Maybon Township in Kyaukpru District and the six townships of Minbya, Myohaung, Pauktaw, Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun and Rathidaung in Akyab district were depleted of Moslem by murder and massacre and those who escaped evacuated through long tortuous and hazardous routes across mountains to Maungdaw. Twenty Two thousand Moslem reached Subirnagar Camp in Rangpur District in India but very large number had stay behind in Maungdaw owing to lack of facilities, disease and destitution. These refugees in Maungdaw who had lost their dearest one and all their property now turned against the Rakhine and fell upon them in retaliation. This is what exactly happened in 1942 and I leave it to your impartial readers to judge whether it could be term as communal riot. There were Moslem too who saved a good number of Arakanese Buddhists from the wrath of the Moslem and brutality of the Japanese but modesty forbids me from mentioning their names. I give below the number of Moslem villages totally destroyed in the various townships in 1942. They are: (1) Myebon in Kyaukpru District 30 villages; (2) Minbya in Akyab District 27 villages; (3) Pauktaw in Akyab District 25 villages; (4) Myohaung in Akyab District 58 villages; (5) Kyauktaw in Akyab District 78 villages; (6) Ponnagyun in Akyab District 5 villages; (7) Rathedaung in Akyab District 16 villages; and (8) Buthidaung in Akyab District 55 villages. Total 294 villages. All the villages in Buthidaung Township were re-occupied and rehabilitated by the original inhabitants and refugees after the War but not a single one in other townships.⁸⁰ Soon the Rakhine Buddhists were streaming in droves from the north as the Rohingya Muslims were streaming from the south, and Arakan stood divided into two distinct territories, a Muslim north and a Buddhist south one. Since then, the traditional relation between the two sister communities deteriorated.⁸¹

MUSLIM STATE AND PEACE COMMITTEE

On 9th June 1942 the Rohingya Muslims of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung area drove the BIA and Rakhine communalists from north Arakan. On 10th June 1942 the Rohingya Muslims declared North Arakan as *Muslim State* and

Peace Committee was entrusted for administration of the area.⁸² In December 1942 Brigadier C.E Lucas Phillips of British 14th Army came to Maungdaw to contact the leaders of the Rohingya Muslims. After hard negotiation, the Peace Committee formed by the Rohingya Muslims headed by Mr. Omra Meah and Mr. Zahir Uddin Ahmed allowed the British 14th Army re-entry through the Naf border town of Maungdaw. As per Public Notice No. 11-OA-CC/42 dated. 31st. December 1942, the British Military Administration declared the former Muslim State as “Muslim National Area”. During the Second World War, Rohingya Muslims helped the Allied Forces against the invading Japanese in Arakan Front. The Rohingya Muslims generally stayed loyal to the British and work with the under ground V-force, most Rakhine nationalists jointed either with the BIA or under ground Communist movement. The Rakhines only turned against the Japanese when the British re-invaded Burma in 1945. On 1st January 1945 Brigadier C.E Lucas Phillips became the Chief Administrator of the area and appointed members of Peace Committee as administrative officers of the area. This represents a landmark in the history of Burmese independence. The British recognised the Rohingya Muslims as a distinct racial group and the British officer-in-command promised the Rohingyas to grant autonomy in North Arakan.⁸³

ARAKAN AFTER INDEPENDENT OF BURMA

After 40 years of Burmese king Bodaw Phaya’s tyrannical rule, the British colonialists annexed Arakan to British India. In 1937 the British separated Burma from India and made Arakan apart of it. A significant measure of “*Home Rule*” (internal self-administration) was given to her. The territory of Arakan became merely a division of the central government dominated by Burmans in 1948 under a plan pre-arranged before independence between Burman leaders and the opportunists and self-seekers in Arakan. Thus Arakan remained under colonial rule forever, with a change in her masters from the Burman to the British and then again to the Burmans. According to the London Agreement of October 7, 1947 power was handed over to the government of the Union of Burma on 4th January 1948.⁸⁴ From independence in 1948 Arakan – like many other regions of Burma – was rocked by political violence. The political demands of both Muslim and Buddhist communities were both over looked by the Burmese central government in Rangoon and Arakan was not even granted ethnic statehood – although, as evidence of strong constituency support, four Muslims did win seats in elections to the new parliament. As a result, while the communists and armed Rakhine nationalists seized control of many of the towns throughout Arakan, hundreds of Rohingya armed supporters flocked to joint the popular Muslim singer, Jafar Hussain (Jafar Kawal), who had formed the first Mujahid Party in Buthidaung township in December 1947 to press for a Muslim Autonomous State in north Arakan. When the Rohingyas armed resistance movement gained momentum in 1950’s against the tyranny of the Burmese regime, the Burmese government appeased the Rohingya public by offering some governmental positions and a special district called “*Mayu Frontier District*”.⁸⁵

On 1st May 1961, the Burmese government created the *Mayu Frontier District* covering Maungdaw, Buthidaung and the Western part of Rathidaung

townships. It was a military administration, not autonomous rule, but as it did not involve subordination to Arakan authorities, the arrangement won the support of the Rohingya leaders, particularly since the new military administration quickly succeeded in restoring order and security to the area. When, early in 1962, the government drafted a bill for Arakan statehood, the Mayu Frontier District was not included in the territory of the projected state. After the military coup of March 1962, the new military regime led by General Ne Win cancelled the plan to grant statehood of Arakan, but the Mayu Forntier District remained under its separate Military Administration.⁸⁶

ARAKAN UNDER MILITARY RULE

The military regime called them the *Revolutionary Council (RC)* and abolished the Constitution and dissolved the Parliament of Burma. All powers of the State – legislative, judiciary and executive – had fallen automatically under the control of RC. In February,1963 the RC regime nationalised entire banks and business enterprises all over the country. In Arakan, most of the major business establishments were in the hands of Muslims. The Rohingya Muslims of Arakan were hardest hit in the economic crackdown by the new military regime. In Arakan even small grocery and rice shops of Muslims were not spared. The RC banned all political parties and floated a new political party known as Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). In Arakan only Rakhine Maghs were inducted to new political party. Notifications were sent by RC to Arakan Division authoiries to restrict the movement of Rohingya Muslims. On 1st February 1964, the Revolutionary Council of Burmese military regime abolished the Mayu Frontier District and put the area again within the jurisdiction of Akyab District under the Home ministry. All Rohingya welfare and socio-cultural organisations were also banned in 1964. The military regime cancelled the Rohingya Language Programme broadcasted from Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS), Rangoon in October 1965.In 1974, the BSPP Government convened the first Peoples Congress (Pyithu Hlut Taw) which ratified the constitution drawn by BSPP. The new constitution granted State to Arakan in the Unitary structure. The new name of the state was **Rakhine State** and was manned by hundred percent Rakhine and Burman Buddhists. ⁸⁷

Since 1948, up to 1999, there have been no less than **20 major operations** of eviction campaigns against the Rohingyas carried out by the successive Governments of Burma. In pursuance of the 20-year Rohingya Extermination Plan, the Arakan State Council under direct supervision of State Council of Burma carried out a Rohingya drive operation code named **Naga Min or King Dragon Operation**. It was the largest, the most notorious and probably the best-documented operation of 1978. The operation started on 6th February 1978 from the biggest Muslim village of Sakkipara in Akayab, which sent shock waves over the whole region within a short time. News of mass arrest of Muslims, male and female, young and old, torture, rape and killing in Akyab frustrated Muslims in other towns of North Arakan. In Mrach 1978 the operation reached at Buthidaung and Maungdaw. Hundreds of Muslim men and women were thrown into the jail and many of them were being tortured and killed. Muslim women were raped freely in the detention centres. Terrified by the ruthlessness of the operation and total uncertainty of their life,

property, honour and dignity a large number Rohingya Muslims started to leave their hearths and homes to cross the Burma-Bangladesh border.⁸⁸ Within 3 months more than 3,00,000 Rohingyas took shelter in makeshift camps erected by Bangladesh Government. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognised them as genuine refugees and started relief operations. The presence of large number of Rohingya Muslim refugees attracted the attention of the world, particularly the Muslim countries. Although Burma denied, initially to accept back her people she was bogged down under international pressure. A bilateral agreement was signed on 9th. July 1978 in Dhaka between the two countries paving the way for return of the Rohingya refugees in 1979 after more than 9 months stay on the soil of Bangladesh. About 2,00,000 refugees returned home while 40,000 died in the refugee camps.⁸⁹ According to Human Rights Watch/Asia reports about 30,000 Rohingya refugees were integrated locally in Bangladesh and the rest left for Middle East countries.⁹⁰

ARAKAN UNDER SLORC/SPDC MILITARY RULE

On September 18, 1988 in dramatic turn of events a Ne Win orchestrated so-called military coup removed civilian BSPP Govt. President Maung Maung. The military in the name of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) headed by Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Saw Maung, took over power. The SLORC massacred more than 3000 pro-democracy demonstrators before gaining full control of the situation. Students and political activists were hunted down and either thrown into torture cells or killed. A large number of them fled across the border into neighbouring countries or joined anti-government revolutionary groups based along the border. The Rohingya Muslims of Arakan have to bear the brunt of SLORC's wrath. The SLORC started to take vengeance on the Rohingya Muslims. SLORC held a General Election on May 27, 1990. The opposition NLD won bulk of the seats. So, SLORC refused to recognise the results of the General Election. When the masses are becoming restive as a result of the refusal to hand over power, the SLORC employed the old method of diverting the attention of the masses from the real burning issues by creating a new Rohingya drive campaign.⁹¹

In 1991-92 a more dreadful Rohingya drive extermination campaign code named "*Pyi Thaya*", had been launched on 18th July 1991 by deploying thousands of brute troops by SLORC in Arakan. A new wave of violence and persecution fell upon the Rohingyas such as killing, raping of women, destruction of Muslim settlements, holy places of worship, religious institutions, and Muslim relics, confiscation of land, detention, portering and slave labour and various other atrocities rose sharply in early 1991. As a result, again Rohingyas began to leave their homeland in the thousands to seek asylum as refugees in neighbouring Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee crisis that began in September 1991 with 10,000 refugees entering Bangladesh had reached its peak by mid-1992 when the refugee population rose to more than 2,68,000. Rohingya Muslims who fled into Bangladesh as refugees were mainly sheltered in 20 camps with a few residing outside the camps. The camps are located mainly on both sides of the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway, popularly known as the Arakan road. Despite its meagre resources, Bangladesh provided food and shelter to the Rohingya refugees. This time the

refugees came mainly from Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathidaung and Akyab townships of Arakan State.⁹² International agencies and NGOs later on came to their help. Under Bangladesh-Burma bilateral agreement signed on 29th April 1992 a total of 2,29,877 Rohingya refugees were repatriated to Arakan. More than 20,000 Rohingya refugees are awaiting repatriation with deep frustration because of the slow pace of their repatriation.⁹³

The history of Arakan on the whole is not at all a complicated one, but it has been made to be so by some interested intelligentsia in Arakan and Burma proper. Above all, the Burman king Bodawpaya who plundered Mrauk-U in 1784 AD is basically responsible for the destruction of every things that was Islamic in Arakan. He is also responsible of getting the History of Arakan written by U Kala, on the basis of two unauthentic Magh chronicles which were absolutely devoid of everything about the Rohingya Muslims. Universal man cannot forget his history. So, we cannot abandon and cynically consign the past history of Rohingya people to oblivion. Whatever so far has been found written about the Muslims of Arakan are merely collateral and mostly corrupted. Anyway, truth cannot be suppressed for long. It will come to light sooner or later.

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