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SEDETAN MUSLIMS

Sir,

with your kind permission let me point out some of the seriously misrepresented facts put forward by Mr. M.A. Ghaffar in replying to your editorial "Sudetan Muslims" in your issue of 28th August.

The learned writer stated that the people of the Maungdaw Sub-Division were direct descendants of Arab travellers who settled in the 7th and 8th centuries and have no connection with India and Pakistan. He said that at a time when the other indigenous races such as Tibeto-Burmans, Mon-Khamers and Tai-Chinese and others were infiltrating into the fertile valleys of Burma these Arab travellers and warriors had found Arakan suitable land and the local chiefs who were few in number there favoured them by giving them high positions and ranks allowing them to marry with royal and common families. The descendants of these Arabs developed into a community of orthodox Muslims and came to be known as Kwangyas. He further stated that the religion of Islam in effect took root in this land (Arakan) since 7th century A.D. and became a living force in Arakan since 788 A.D., whereas the summons of Buddhism took root only in 1044 during the reign of King Anawrahta and so forth.

Sir, if you turn over the pages of history written by Arther Phayre, G.E. Harvey, Scott etc:- which you learned writer had referred to, you will find that nothing definite had been mentioned about the Arab travellers who settled in any part of Arakan or Burma. Again, if you only turn over the pages of more original and authoritative books about the ancient Arab Travellers by the name of "Ancient account of India China" by two Mohamedan travellers who went to those parts in the 7th and 9th centuries "Translated by Eusebius Remandot who was well versed in Arabic languages and literature and who did research works in the field of the accounts left by ancient Arab travellers, you will find that the Arab were good sailors and had travelled far and wide. But the names they given for the places they reached were disastrous and nothing could be located properly. Out of many such travellers the accounts of the two who could give the best records are mentioned in his book. One travelled in the 7th century and the other in the 9th century. The names of the places given there show clearly that the arrival of Arab travellers in Arakan had never been definite. The closest name they could was about the island of Ramani, which could lie anywhere between Ceylon and Achen in Sumatra. The people of that island were mentioned to eat human flesh. Will they dare to settle in such a notorious place if ever it happened to be near or in Arakan when

they could find plenty of other good and civilised places of which they have mentioned ? How could the learned writer say definitely that the Arab had settled in Maungdaw Sub-Division and were known as Rwangyas ? I really wonder.

And the famous Ibn Batula who spread Islamism in the far East also had never touched any part of Burma.

Now let us see how far other points which he mentioned are true. If we turn the pages of "Paper on subjects relating to the Archaeology of Burma" written by the well known Archaeologist Dr. Forchhammer, you will find that Mahamuni Image was made by King Sandathuriya not later than the 1st century A.D. close to the ancient city of Dinnyawaddy.

The remains of which can be traced even today. By this it is beyond doubt that Buddhism had reached Arakan not later than 1st Century A.D. You will get more light on the matter if you refer to the "Travels of Frair Sebastien Manrique" translated by Col. Luard and assisted by Father Hosten (Bakluyt Society Publication Series II, Vol. 59, 64). Here are some accounts written by the late Colonel Luard in connection with the subject. He wrote this introduction in 1927 only after consulting very closely with G.E. Harvey who wrote the History of Burma and published in 1925.

"The Arakanese actually of Mongoloid race. They probably came from western China. They speak a dialect of their own which branched off from Burmese at an early date had developed on separate lines. List of rulers are given from 146 A.D., but the Ninth Century we know nothing about them. It is, however, interesting to find that the early Kings had Hindu names e.g. Sandathuriya or Chandra-Surya, Thuryadipati or Surya Adhipati etc. which proves the prevalence of Brahmanica influence for Arakan cut off though it is by high ranges from the rest of Burma is easily accessible from the sea and by this sea-board came the Indian immigrants, bringing their religious customs and habits to be followed by a second stream later in which imported Buddhism.

The Great Image of Buddha at Mahamuni is traditionally ascribed to Sandathuriya's day (146-98) and it certainly date back to the early years of Christian era. The use of Devanagri script on the medallions of the early rulers also proves Brahmanical Influence.

Mohamedan influence came later. King Naramaikhla (1403-34) was driven out by the Burmese in 1404 and fled to Gaur in Bengal, where he was well received. After his reinstatement with the help of Bengal Sultan, the Arakanese Kings began to use Mussalman titles. Naramaikhla's brother and successor called himself Akikhán and his son Kala-Ma Shah.

This King seized Chittagong, which practically remained on Arakanese possession until it was retaken by Shayasta Khan for the Emperor Shah Johan ~~xxxxxxx~~ in 1666".

Thus you can easily follow how Brammanical, Buddhist and Mohamedan influence came into Arakan.

Sir, the learned writer also mentioned that there were mosques in various parts of Arakan and claimed as if only Islamism was worshipped other than Buddhism. He should remember that due to the religious tolerance of the Buddhist kings who ruled Arakan not only Mohamedanism but also Christian faiths are allowed to worship and not only Mosques were allowed to build out also Christian Churches. Moreover, it was just to please the foreign Mercenaries and merchants of various faiths who served under those Kings. During the 17th Century we could definitely know that the Kings of Arakan Portuguese, Japanese, Burmese and Moguls Mercenaries at their service. (see Manriques' travels). Sir, the learned writer may not believe if I cite the above facts from History Books written by Burmese or Arakanese Historians. So let us look through more accounts written by European travellers who definitely reached Arakan in 16th and 17th centuries.

".....that river reaches the sea at two points, at the port of Orizetan (Writtanung) on one side and in the other at Dobazi, where there are settlements of merchants of various nationalities, most of them being Maumetans with a captain of the same faith". (p.207 Manrique travels Vol. I.)

"The farther upon reaching Arakan went in search of the Christians. He found them divided into three Bandels. One was called the Bandel of the Portuguese. There they live alone and had a church, in which the Father said Mass. The second was the bandel of the Japanese. Having been kindly received by the king, they had settled there in large number with their families, all were Christians. The third Bandel was that of foreigners, including Dutch, English and French Settlers". (Journey of Father A. Farinha, S.J. from Diagna to Arakan, 1639-40 by Father Mosten published in Catholic Herald of India, Calcutta, 1907, p.p.59-60).

If you refer "Behontens' Voyages Vol. I 167 ff" and "a letter from Father John Cabral, S.J. about the fall of Hugli. The Catholic Herald of Calcutta 1918". You can find the same facts. Although there was such religious tolerations, both Mohamedanism and Christianity were not able to induce Arakanese Buddhists to their faiths. Arakanese remain staunch Buddhist up to the present day with famous Pagoda all over the country. That is why the foreign writers found most appropriate name Arakan as "The Land of the Great Image" See Mauric Collis "The Land of the Great Image and D.G.S. Halls' Europe and Burma.

we can divide in General about the Arakan Muslims as follows:-

- (1) Arakan Muslims before Sayista Khana's refuge in Mrauk U.
- (2) Arakan Muslims after Sayista Khan's refuge and
- (3) Arakan Muslims after British occupation.

During the reign of Minkhamsung a big battle was fought near the present town of Noakhali with the Moguls in which due to the teaching of Goncalves Tibas, the notorious Portuguese the battle was lost and the Chittagong District was depopulated. (see the Portuguese Asia by Faria D. Sousa translated by Stevens. Book 3 Tom III Part II Chap VIII.) Portuguese Mercenaries were kept by the King at Diagna near Chittagong. Purposely to check the encroachment of the Moghuls. "But this idolatrous Magh well understood the intention of the Kaumetan Mogul, and like Elze Porter took steps to secure the principal doors of the state, through which that powerful foe could most easily enter." So the Portuguese from the Magh country consistantly make war on these people, entering their territory in their fleets, with occasionally a few Magh Galias following in their wake. They usually made these general attacks three or four times in the year irrespective of minor raids during the five years I spent in the Kingdom of Arracan, some eighteen thousand people came to the Fort of Diagna and Angaracale. (Vol. I p.283,p.286. Manriques' travels)

The Chittagong district was thus repopulated by Portuguese Mercenaries (see Vol. I.P.144 Manriques' travels). Moreover Chittagong is very close to the Viceroyalty of Bengal in Mogul Empire whose history shows that their Islam religion came first with Afgan dunssty and then with Moguls. From these facts it is crystal clear that the Mohamedan faith in that area does not come with the Arabs. And the present Islamism which prevails in Arakan definitely spread from those of Bengal.

Muslims of Maungdaw Sub-Division according to the historical facts were neither decendants and followers of those Moguls who came along with King Narameikhla on the Kammas who were followers of Shah Shuja. In his merchant settlements were found as cited above only near the city of Mrauk U. If the learned writer insists on saying that there had been Muslim settlement in Maungdaw Sub-Division they are probably either the decendants of those who were brought down by the Portuguese as slaves to repopulate Chittagong.

Muslim problem had never cropped up in Arakan before the British Occupation. Only after that period this problem came in the whole of Akyab District especially Maungdaw Sub-Divition. Due to the open door policy of the British, fertility of the soil, hardship in Chittagong

District and the closeness of the border which is easily accessible, Chittagonian immigrants came into Arakan and settled mostly in that Sub-Division. It can be clearly seen if we look through the census reports. (see B.R. Fearn's Mixed Races of Burma also). And the Mujahid problems came in demanding for the separation of Akyab District into two parts comes in headed by Mr. A.Ghaffar and Sultan Ahmed. From all the facts cited above we can see that the great majority of the Muslim settlers of Maungdaw Sub-Division are definitely neither the descendants of the Arab settlers nor the followers of Moguls who came along with King Narameikhla not the Kammans.

In conclusion I am definitely with all the Arakanese Buddhists and most of the real indigenous Muslims and against the move of some Muslim leaders of Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships to divide the Akyab District into two parts as it will certainly create more complicated problems affecting the integrity and unity of the Union of Burma.

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