Chapter - II

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Arakanese Chronicles and Scripts

Going by the data incorporated in some recently published books on the early history of Arakan, one is inclined to believe that chronicles, written mostly on palm-leaves, abound in Arakan. There is nothing unusual in it. Because Buddha, Buddhism and art of writing convey an idea of a unified entity. Literary sources prove that it was the Buddhists who had first given due recognition to the art of writing. The Pali canon, Majjhimanikāya, compiled between 500-300 B.C., gives

1. Recent publications on the early history of Arakan are indicative of the fact that local chronicles written on palm-leaves are being increasingly used as source materials. For references to a host of chronicles, the following scholarly publications may be cited:

   (i) Forchhammer, E., Papers on Subjects Relating to the Archaeology of Burma including Arakan. Rangoon, 1891.
   (xi) Leider, Jacques, These Buddhist Kings with Muslim names.

2. An idea of the multifarious usefulness of the Arakanese Chronicles will be evident from the following: E. Forchhimmer's account on Mahamuni Pagoda is an excellent blend of religious and political history of Arakan, based on the Sappadānapakāraṇa. The two chronicles which Gutman found to be of some use are the Dhanvawaddy Razawanthaic and the Rakhine Razawanthaic. In describing the coin-types of Arakanese kings (in Burmese) San Tha Aung verified the names of some the kings referred to in the Chronicles such as Rakhine Razawan (1764), Rakhaung are: to pum, (1787), Medhapanyā Mawkwan (7th century A.D.) and Mahārāzawankit, etc.

   In regard to society and economy the chronicles also furnish important information. That metallurgy was an advanced and developed craft is testified by the casting of image of the Mahāmuni. Various objects of art made of bronze and metals speak of the craftsmen's important position in society. The name Dhamiyawody, one of the early capitals of Arakan is reminiscent of the developed state of agriculture in Arakan.

a list of good works or skills (Ukkatta Kamma) which include among others, *Lekha* or writing. The sermon might have made a great impact upon the Buddhists. Since the Majjhima in its narrative part did not state that only the Buddhists of the country of Buddha’s birth would get preference over others in adapting the skill of writing, then the Buddhists of Arakan, in their own right, decided to undertake the laborious task of compiling the early history of their country, besides reading and writing their own canon.

So writing came to be regarded as part and parcel of the process where the Śāmaṇa tradition made its presence felt. But scholars tend to deplore the fact that books or literary output in their written form could not be recovered before the commencement of the Christian era. Winternitz, however, admits to having traced the use of palm-leaves as a material for writing in the first century after Christ. It needs no mention here that most of the chronicles, discovered in Arakan till now, are written on palm-leaves. Scholars since the time of Forchhammer have been aware of the wealth of information contained in the chronicles of Arakan. Due to want of corroborative data in the shape of inscriptions and other archaeological remains chronicles have been accepted as an important source for the reconstruction of the early history of Arakan. By making a careful use of these sources, scholars have, over the years, succeeded in unearthing a fairly reliable politico-religio-cultural history of the Arakanese people. For instance, M. Collis in collaboration with San Shwe Bu contributed an excellent article on “Arakan’s Place in the Civilization

4. Śāmaṇa literally means a monk. Unlike a lay devotee who usually worships his personal god by being a householder, a śāmaṇa, on the other hand, had to renounce the world and live in a monastery along with his brethren. A very graphic exposition of the term “Mahāśāmaṇa,” found in the Yedharmā verses, has been given by San Tha Aung. By the use of this word, Buddha was referred to as a Great Monk and not as a God. Herein lies the essence of Buddhism, which, according to San Tha Aung, is “based on the teaching of the Buddha and not on the personality of the Buddha” (Aung, San Tha, op cit., p. 111).

5. Winternitz, however, cited several reasons as to why literature of any sort could not come out in their written form. See Winternitz, M., op cit. pp. 35 ff.


7. It is evident that a large number of chronicles or manuscripts, written on palm-leaves, still remain undetected, particularly those that are lying in private collections, for which carrying out a thorough search on the part of the interested scholars is a prerequisite.
of the Bay" to JBRS. The article is chiefly based on an Arakanese manuscript called "The True Chronicle of the Great Image," translated by San Shwe Bu, who in a note appended to the article points out that its calligraphy is older than that of the rest of the manuscripts in his possession. The article compares favourably with the one written by Forchhammer and published from Rangoon in 1891. But an added attraction of M. Collis and San Shwe Bu's article was that for the first time numismatic treasures of Arakan were used as source materials.

From what has been noted above, it appears that much of Arakan's early history, particularly the topics relating to political, religious and cultural history, has been gleaned from chronicles written on palm-leaves. But we would like to discuss a few points in regard to place names mentioned in chronicles, in particular, the "Sappadānapakārana." At the concluding portion of his papers Forchhammer noted that the list of 198 cities of Arakan would probably prove useful to students of ancient history of India. But we think that the list would probably serve as a pointer as to the languages which were used in naming those cities. Though Buddha himself popularised the use of Pāli in his conversation with other teachers or while delivering a speech to an audience and his disciples employing the language in the compilation of their canon, yet there are about a half of the place names in the list which shows that these were derived from Indian place names in Sanskrit, e.g. Dvāravatī (list No. 1), Pañcavatī (list No. 34), Kusavatī (list No. 92) etc.

U San Shwe Bu while writing "A Brief Note on the Old Capitals of Arakan" used, from tradition and recorded history, such words as 'Mahāmuni,' 'Śūrya,' 'Chandra' etc, which are invariably Sanskrit names. Besides the Sanskrit names in the above list, there were of course names used in Pāli and Arakanese. What is important to note here is that it is not only the Sappadānapakārana and other chronicles which use Sanskrit words, but most of the early epigraphs discovered in Arakan so far, are written in Sanskrit with an intermixture of a few Arakanese words in some cases. The script, however, is Brāhmī, with stages of its development in successive centuries.

9. Ibid. p. 35.
S. Leyden noted long ago that Rakhine language and script were derived from or coincided accurately with Pāli and the Devanāgarī system of characters respectively. We would like to moderate the above observation of Leyden a bit. Although the language used in early epigraphs of Arakan is found to be Pāli, the script necessarily happened to be Brāhmī, much akin to the Old Brāhmī noticed in an epigraph from the northern region of present day Bangladesh. Now, it is a moot point to ask from which route of the region this language and script penetrated deep into the heart of Arakan?

For a communication link between Arakan and India via the present Chittagong border region we have a few evidence in the shape of both numismatic and epigraphic sources, although belonging, albeit, to a later period. The numismatic evidence comes in the shape of Hārikela coins. A number of these coins have been discovered from Arakan. Palaeographical features of the legend "Hārikela" on these coins indicate that these were minted around 7th century A.D. Hārikela, as is well-known, comprised the present border-districts of Bangladesh, namely, Chittagong, Noakhali, Sylhet and Comilla and parts of the Indian state of Tippera. Forms of letters used in the legend indicates that these were written in Siddhamātrikā.

And when we speak of the script in which the legends on the early coins of Arakan are written, we may, here again, reasonably ask which variety of script was followed in the early inscriptions of Arakan? Our study of the scripts reveals that these closely resemble the letters found in the Mahāsthān plaque inscription discovered in the district of Bogra in Bangladesh. Some scholars held the view that the dominant position that Buddhism enjoyed and still enjoys in a number of south-east Asian countries is preceded by the ventures on the part of the trading communities from India. They would cite the literary references in which mention is made of certain route which passes through Assam and Manipur to China via Arakan in Burma.

Another land route lies through south-eastern Bengal to Arakan; whereas the sea-route connected eastern coast of India with

12. See Gutmann P, op cit., p.179; See also Mukherjee, B.N., op cit., p.81, n.116.
Arakan and Burma from a very early time.\textsuperscript{14}\ The though these routes were hardly the ideal ones to initiate a plunge, there was none in those early days to prevent merchants from making their presence felt in these countries at least during the 3\textsuperscript{rd} – 2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C.\textsuperscript{15}\n
It is interesting to note that the form for $ha$ (ං) in the coins of Hārikēla is found in the inscriptions of Arakan. This form is noted in certain epigraphs from the east Indian state of Assam, but does not seem to have been used in Indian inscriptions and coins from the north and west. It is apparent that a connection existed between Arakan and eastern India through which people or peoples from both sides travelled freely. Hsuan-tsang refers to the route from Pun-na-fa-tan-na (Pundravardhana or present-day Mahāsthāna) to Kia-mo-lu-po (Kāmarūpa or Assam) and thence to Sen-ma-ta-ta (Samataṭa).\textsuperscript{16} This is the old route which travellers followed from north Bengal to the eastern fringe of Bangladesh. All these testify to the fact that an overland route from the northern part of Bengal reaching up to the Chittagong – Arakan border via south-eastern Bengal was very much in use in those early days.

Since 1921 when Duroiselle published his "A List of Inscriptions of Burma, Part-I" much water has flowed down the mighty Kaladan. From the mention of a paltry five inscriptions\textsuperscript{17} in this List, we now possess a collection of well over two hundred epigraphs,\textsuperscript{18} which have been discovered in Arakan over the years. The importance of these epigraphs is immense because without these primary source materials, we could not have attempted a study on the origin and development of

\begin{enumerate}
\item See Dani, A.H, Indian Palaeography, New Delhi, 1997, p. 231.
\item Majumdar, R.C, (Ed), op cit., p. 655.
\item Duroiselle, Chas, A List of Inscriptions found in Burma, Part-I, Rangoon, 1921, p.II.
\item We take this opportunity of conveying our deep gratitude to the band of scholars whose untiring efforts helped us a lot to know about the inscriptions discovered in Arakan. Apart from the pioneers who made it a point to collect, study and edit the inscriptions for the benefit of the interested readers concerned, there were a great number of scholars who in recent years added much new information to those already known. San Tma Aung, op cit. pp. 29 ff; P. Gutman, op cit. pp. 24 ff; and U Shwe Zan, op cit. pp. 47-50, devoted many pages in their respective work to the study of epigraphs, edited or discussed by earlier scholars. A.S.Okkantha had also mentioned a list of important inscriptions in the bibliography appended to his book, op cit. pp. 271-276.
\item Quite a few of these inscriptions are recent finds and hence remain unpublished.
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\textsuperscript{14} See Dani, A.H, Indian Palaeography, New Delhi, 1997, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{15} Majumdar, R.C, (Ed), op cit., p. 655.
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Quite a few of these inscriptions are recent finds and hence remain unpublished.
Arakanese script. Another important source is the legend on coins issued by rulers of different dynasties in different periods of the history of Arakan. Issued in different metals mostly in silver, these are of a great help in tracing the development of Arakanese script, at least from the 5th century A. D.\textsuperscript{19}

In point of time, the two early epigraphs of Arakan unmistakably associate them with India, particularly with North or North-Eastern India.\textsuperscript{20} The language of the epigraph is Pāli and the script is Brāhmī assignable on paleographical grounds to c. 2nd - 1st century B. C.\textsuperscript{21} Most of the subsequent epigraphs were, however, written in corrupt Sanskrit, the script remaining the same as before, i.e. Brāhmī.\textsuperscript{22} Though there was a growing awareness among a section of the composers to insert local traits, and even local words,\textsuperscript{23} the script mostly remained tied to the paleographical features of Bengal. This trend continued at least up to the 1st half of the 8th century A. D.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} It was again Gutman, (op cit, pp. 120 ff) who made a systematic and extensive study of early coins of Arakan. U Shwe Zan also contributed a well-researched discussion on the coinages of Arakan in his excellent publication 'The Golden Mrank-U, pp. 52-53 and 144-146. Vasant Chowdhury of Calcutta initiated some lively discussions through a series of eminently readable articles he contributed in a number of leading journals, see Indian Museum Bulletin, 1996, pp. 35 ff. See also, below, chapter. III, note 14.

\textsuperscript{20} That the hard facts of history can ultimately demolish the self-conceived myth, however, woven up with the thread of great passion and a false sense of conviction, is proved by the find of these two epigraphs from Arakan. For a criticism of the alleged theory of Indian cultural dominance over Southeast Asian countries and about the stated period of Indian contact, which is, however, much later than our sources indicate, see Hall, D.G.E. op cit. pp. 4 ff. p.16, p.152 etc.

\textsuperscript{21} Aung, San Tha, op cit., 1974, pp. 58-63, pl. 9.

\textsuperscript{22} Present information regarding scripts in inscriptions other than Brāhmī, namely Pyu, etc. though mentioned by earlier scholars among whom were Duroiselle (op cit. pp. III-IV ); A.H. Dani (See Indian Paleography, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 243-246); D.C. Sircar (See Indian Epigraphy, Delhi, 1996, p. 211 ); David Diginger (See The Alphabet, A key to the History of Mankind, New Delhi, 1996, p. 410 ); and even Gutman, P. (op cit., pp. 26-27), is that nobody knows the whereabouts of one of the surviving Pyu epigraphs of Arakan.

\textsuperscript{23} Aung, San Tha, op cit., pp. 114-5; P. Gutman, op cit., p. 94.

\textsuperscript{24} Scholars, however, found evidence of a Bengal connection till about the middle of 10th century A. D. as is revealed by the epigraph inscribed on the northern face of the Shitthanng pillar, See Gutman, P. op cit., p.69.
The early years of the 8th century A.D., to be precise, by about the beginning of the third decade of this century, an important landmark in the history of Arakan made its presence felt in the shape of an important inscription engraved during the reign of king Anandacandra, the greatest king of the Candra dynasty of the third period of Arakan. The inscription is written in Sanskrit language and it is composed in prose and verse. The script is Siddhamātrikā of about the 1st half of the 8th century A.D. The author of the inscription, besides referring to his royal patron’s immense charity to the cause of Buddhism, also referred to an important relationship, which he had established with the family of the king of Tamrapattana. The same script is discernible in another ninth century inscription, namely, the Kyīrāpran Fragmentary Stone Slab inscription of Mahārājādhirājā Candra.

From the latter part of the 9th century A.D. the epigraphs of Arakan begin to illustrate remarkable changes in the development of the script that seemed to be the precursor of the present Rakkhawana Akkharā. This trend of the Rakkawanna Akkharā is discernible from a set of two sources which are inscriptions. On palaeographical considerations,

25. In the inscription of Anandacandra an important clue in regard to Arakan’s relation with coastal region of Bengal as well as Orissa is furnished. In verse 62 of the inscription reference is made of the king of Tamrapattana. Anandacandra married the daughter of this king, whose name was Dhendā. So there is reason to suppose that during the early years of the 8th century A.D. Arakan had established a close relation with these parts of Bengal and Orissa.

About the identification of Tamrapattana with Tamluk we are thankful to A.S. Okkantha for he is the first scholar to put forward such a suggestion. But he did not explain how Tamluk came to be equated with Tamrapattana. We think the Prāṣasti of king Anandacandra does serve an important hint in this regard. Verse 45 of this inscription clearly shows that the composer of this Prāṣasti was very much familiar with the Mahābhārata episode. In this verse the poet of the Shitthaung Prāṣasti compared his royal patron to a number of epic heroes including Karna and Yudhiṣṭhira. Now in the Adiparva of the Mahābhārata we have reference to a number of kings who attended the Svayamvara ceremony of Draupadi in the court of king Drupada. In Sloka 13 of the Adiparvan we have the list of kings of a number of countries. The Sloka reads;

"Kalingas = Tamraliptaḥ = ca pattan – adhipatis = tathā
Madra – rajas = tathā Salyaḥ saha – putro mahārathahḥ" 13||

So in this verse we find reference to two rulers of two Pattanas, namely the king of Kalinga Pattana and that of the Tamralipta pattana in line 1. We think that Tamralipta pattana of the Mahābhārata Sloka came to be written as Tamra pattana by the composer of the Shitthaung Prāṣasti.
the date of this significant development can be placed around the middle of the 9th or early 10th century A.D. 26

The first of the above sources is the triangular Yedharmma plate inscription discovered from the vicinity of Vesali city. 27 A noteworthy feature of this inscription is that it gives us an idea about the combined testimony of old and new forms of letters. An old letter which remained unaltered in this epigraph is 'na'. Another letter 'pa' also retains the old form, without, however, the head-mark. The letters which show a development towards the present Rakkhawanna Akkhara are 'ga' 'dha' 'bha' 'ra' and 'ha'. But an almost current day Arakanese letters in their complete traits are discernible in 'ta' 'ma' and 'ya'. 28 The Vesali Bronze

26. The transitional phase in which scripts of old forms blend with new ones, is an all-India phenomenon and should not be viewed in isolation. From around 8th century A.D. began the process of the development of regional scripts and by 10th-11th century A.D. the process of the development and formation of independent scripts in most parts of India was complete. A comparative study of the development of the Bengali script shows that the letter 'na' kept intact the transitional form between the early Gupta period and the Nāgarī or Bengali in the Ghośrawa stone inscription of Devapala, datable to the first half of the ninth century A.D. But the letter 'ya' in this inscription shows the complete Nāgarī or Bengali form (see Banerji, R.D. The Origin of the Bengali script, Calcutta, Reprint, 1973, p. 60; See also Bhattacharyya, Amitabha, ‘Some Aspects of the Development of the Bengali script,’ Journal of Ancient Indian History, Vol. XIX, 1989-90, pp. 99 ff).

Another aspect needed to be considered at this point is that the final development of the Rakkhawanna Akkhara may have some connection with the scripts used in the immediate surrounding areas of Arakan, on the other side of the Roma. We have seen that the transitional stage from the early Brāhmī script to the present Arakanese script may be traced around 10th century A.D. when according to the chronicles, the Lemrot Kings were ruling over Arakan. It was during this age when internal disorder crippled the Arakanese, the capitals were changed at least four times, invasions from outside occurred too often and ties with Bengal were abruptly snapped (see Gutman, P., op cit. p.73)

Though all these happenings indicate a date posterior to 10th century A.D. yet the seeds of this sort of confusion seemed to have been sown sometimes earlier when in the cultural domain also a significant change was in the offing. The time was ripe for the introduction of Arakan's own alphabet and it was given a new fillip through the measures initiated by king Anandacandra towards maintaining contact with Ceylon. The immediate effect of this contact might have been geared to re-establishing bilateral religio-political relations, but it also ushered in a far-reaching consequence in the development of the Rakkhawanna Akkhara, some one and a half century later.


Lamp inscription, belonging to the same age as the preceding one, shows the developed form in respect of some letters. But 'ta' is almost similar to the present Arakanese 'id. Consonants 'ka' 'ra' and 'ya' seem almost developed forms from those used in earlier epigrahs.29

In the beginning of Lemrot period, an important source which shows the development of the Rakkhawanna Akkhārā at this early phase, dated A.E. 209, is the Buddha image inscription of the time of Manranphrū (Mag-ran-phrū in inscription) who ruled from c. A.D. 843 to A.D. 875. The script resembles that found in the Vesāli Lamp inscription. An unpublished inscription dated A.E. 452 corresponding to A.D. 1091 is the Bhū-taung-kwe Stone Slab inscription, found near the shrine of Bhū-taung-kwe, located at Man Aung town in Southern Arakan. The characters used in the inscription seem to belong to the old form of Arakan in Lemrot period. The object of the record is to notify the grant of some plots of land owned by the governor of Man Aung. Another Buddha image with an inscription of three lines on back side, now in the possession of Mr U Aye Phe of Yangon, was donated by Rannamanjū in A.E. 488 corresponding to A.D. 1126. The letters used in the inscription appears to be old forms in the Lemrot period.

The script of the succeeding Mrauk-U age, for which we have abundant epigraphic data, tended to be more refined and polished, with an inclination to present the alphabet in a roundish form. This is, as it should be, because the present Arakanese script is derived directly from the script of the Mrauk-U age.