Chapter - III

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Script in the Third Dhanyawady Age (580 B.C - A.D. 327):
(The Age of the Advent of Script in Arakan)

Dhanyawady, one of the ancient capitals of Arakan, was located six miles to the east of the Kaladan river. It was made the capital of the country for the third time in its chronicled history during the rule of Candāṣūrya in about 580 B.C. The two preceding dynasties were founded by Marayu and Kanrāzākri respectively. The two kings and their descendants ruled the country from this seat from about 3325 B.C. According to chronicles it was during the reign of Candāṣūrya that Arakan went on to make an intimate relationship with India. The Buddha visited Arakan and the king became a convert to the religion preached by the Buddha. All the descendants of Candāṣūrya who ruled Dhanyawady upto 327 A.D. were ardent followers of Buddhism.

At the present state of our knowledge we know of two inscriptions, the characters of which resemble those of Archaic Brāhmī. Both the inscriptions are written in Pāli language. Of the two, the earlier seems to be the Fat Monk Image inscription belonging to c. 2nd - 1st century B.C. As the inscription is not a dated one, we have to fall back upon the palaeography of the record. Discovered from the ruins of an old brick pagoda lying about three miles to the east of old Vesālī City, it contains a one-line inscription and is presently preserved in the Mrauk-U Museum.

Of a somewhat later date is the inscription discovered near the village of Taung-pauk-krī. The material, on which the inscription is engraved, is the natural rock known as Selāgiri, lying about two miles from Taung-pauk-krī. On the basis of palaeography it may be dated sometime between the 2nd century B.C. and 1st century B.C. The inscription, fragmentary in nature, contained a legible portion of...

1. See Shwe Zan, U, op cit, p. 149.
4. Information regarding the Taung-pauk-krī fragmentary inscription can be had as early as 1974 when U San Tha Aung's book 'Arakanese Scripts, 6th century and Before' (Burmese) was published. But, curiously enough, Pamela Gutman in her unpublished thesis did not take any notice of this inscription, though in the bibliography appended
five lines of writing, out of about twenty-five lines, the rest being
damaged. With the exception of a few alphabet and medial signs, these
two epitaphs then mark the advent of script in Arakan. The date
suggested for the two inscriptions on the basis of paleography is not in
conflict with the ones found in the adjoining regions of India. One can cite
the presence of similar script in a record recovered from the northern part
of Bengal (in the district of Bogra, now in Bangladesh). With the
discovery and decipherment of a number of new epigraphical materials,
we now know of certain latest information, which can be termed as an
advancement of our knowledge in respect of the following:

to her thesis, mention was made of Aung's aforesaid book. See Gutman. P., Ancient
1992 an Arakanese scholar referred to this inscription in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis,
History of Buddhism in Arakan. The eye-copy of the inscription, first mentioned in
Burmese books published since1974, is not, however, considered as evidence by
Ashin Siri Okkantha, See Okkantha, Ashin Siri, History of Buddhism in Arakan,
(unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Calcutta University) 1992, p. 41, n.1. We do not,
however, see any reason why the eye-copy of the inscription cannot be accepted as
evidence. In support of our conviction, the following points may be stated:

(i) The eye-copy of the inscription was made long before its destruction during
Second World War by San Shwe Bu, an eminent Arakanese historian and
U Tha Tun, one of the distinguished scholars of Arakan. If the eye-copy made
by these two learned men of Arakan cannot be taken as evidence; it then raises
a grave doubt about the integrity of these two scholars. This is unfortunate.

(ii) Only an expert epigraphist can testify to the accuracy or otherwise in
respect of writing the alphabet in the eye-copy of the inscription, though
unfortunately, the original inscription is now lost.

(iii) A comparative study of the letters of the Taung-pauk-kāff fragmentary
inscription with the Indian Brāhmī inscriptions of 3rd-2nd century B. C.
(Asokan Brāhmī inscriptions as well as the one found at Mahāsthān in Bogra
district, Bangladesh) on the one hand and the Fat Monk Image inscription
found in Arakan on the other proves that quite a few letters of the Taung-pauk-
kaṭ inscription bear a close similarity with the alphabet of the above noted
contemporary inscription from India as well as Arakan.

(iv) The claim in the book by Ashin Sandamalalinkara that "in an inscription the
Advent of Buddhism in Arakan had been fixed in the period of the Buddha"
(See Okkantha, A. S., Ibid.) may be contested, but what is certain is that
palaeographically, the inscription cannot be dated much earlier than 2nd
century B. C.

5. For a fuller list of the alphabet and the problem relating to its gradual development
a detailed discussion will be found in the following chapters.

(i) The date of the earliest inscription from Arakan is c. 2nd-1st century B.C.

(ii) Inscriptions of a later date found in Arakan were mostly written in Sanskrit, but the two mentioned above are written in Pāli.

(iii) The finds of two inscriptions datable to about c. 2nd century B.C. - 1st century B.C. show that their scripts bear affinity with Northern Indian or North-Eastern variety of Brāhmī, rather than the Southern one.

(iv) However, in a few later inscriptions the traits of South Indian scripts are discernible.

(v) There are instances of scripts where we can trace local development in regard to their formation. Again there are a few words in the inscriptions which can definitely be termed as Arakanese.

(vi) The use of imprecatory verses found in a few inscriptions may be compared with similar writings in Indian land-grant inscriptions.

7. With the decipherment of these two inscriptions, the theories put forward by earlier scholars that the 'earliest inscription bears a script used by the Guptas in the 2nd half of the 5th century' prove now to be wrong. See Gutman, P. op cit. p. 26.

8. See for instance, (a) Selāgārī Votive Stūpa inscription, Kyauktaw, (b) Vesāli Copper Plate inscription, (c) Vesāli Stone Plaque inscription etc.

9. See the Wanti-taung Pyū inscription, this inscription contains also a 16th century A.D. Arakanese inscription on the obverse.

10. See Vesāli Stone Slab inscription of Vīracandra, the Vesāli Stone Slab inscription of Queen of Nīticandra and the Vesāli Fragmentary Caitya inscription etc.

11. See the Vesāli Copper Plate inscription, Aung, San Tha, op cit. pp. 4-8.

12. Sandamini (Majjhima), U. "A Note on Linmontaung Inscription:" From Linmontaung range at Vesāli, Myat Pan Thazin Magazine, Yangon, 2002, pp. 194-197. The author in this article points out that an inscription discovered at Linmontaungtan (the range of Linmontaung) on the vicinity of Old Vesāli, contains in its last two lines imprecatory verses which are basically identical to that found in the inscriptions from the Gupta period onwards in India. Palaeographically, the Linmontaung inscription, which is engraved on a stone slab, may possibly belong to c. early 7th century A.D. The inscription is now preserved in the Mrauk-U Museum. See also the Copper Plate inscription, Aung, San Tha, op cit., pp. 15-20.
In studying the early epigraphs of Arakan one is inclined to find a close similarity with the ones discovered in India. It merely indicates that the people of these two contiguous regions had come into contact with each other since a very early time. If the Arakanese chronicles are to be believed the chief players in this drama of making a home away from home are not only the princes of Indian royal families and Buddhist missionaries but also traders who seemed to have before their eyes only those things which were simply materialistic. However, so far as epigraphical materials are concerned, this similarity can be traced in almost all the modes with which an inscription is brought out namely, (i) the script itself, (ii) the alphabet both vowels and consonants as well as the medial signs, (iii) language for writing, (iv) theme of writing, which is, however, predominantly, Buddhistic, (v) style of writing, e.g. to be noted in the imprecatory verses and last, but not the least, (vi) materials on which the writing is engraved.

However, a significant deviation happens to be the almost total omission of any reckoning, the reason for which cannot be easily ascertained. It may be that the usage of indicating the regional current eras in epigraphs had not yet become a regular feature among the Arakanese Buddhists. As a corollary, excepting a few cases we hardly get any inscribed reference to numerals in Arakanese inscriptions. The Indian epigraphs on the other hand, belonging to both early and later periods, tend to date the reckoning either in the regnal years of the reigning king or in any one of the popular current eras. A major source for the study of Arakanese script and its development is the innumerable number of coins, issued mostly in silver, though a few coins issued in other metals are also known. Palaeography of coin legends indicates that some of these

13. In the Copper Plate grant the 11th regnal year of king Bhūticandra or Bhūmicandra(?), probably the issuer of the grant was mentioned. See Ep. Indica, xxxvii, pp. 61-66. In regard to the question of omission of Saka Era in Arakanese inscriptions. See Sircar D.C. Indian Epigraphy. Delhi, 1996, p. 211. For the mention of a supposed date in numerals, See Gutman, P., op cit. p. 68.

14. A gold coin discovered from Vesāli, was issued by King Pṛūtacandra, the 11th ruling member in succession of the Candra dynasty of the Second Period. In August 1985 a hoard of about 50 silver coins, including two Pyu coins, was discovered at the village of Khayine, near Taunggouk, in the Southern part of Rakhine State. These coins were also issued by Kings of the Candra dynasty of Arakan, namely, Rājacandra, Devacandra, Yajñacandra and Bhūmicandra. See Shwe Zan, U. The Golden Mrauk-U, 1994, pp.52-53, 144-146. For a reappraisal of the coins of the Arakani Governors of Chittagong. See Vasant Chowdhury, 'The Arakani Governors of Chittagong and their coins.' Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. Hum, vol. 42, 1997, pp. 145-162, See also Gutman, P. op cit., pp. 12 off.
coins seem to have been issued from at least 5th century A.D. Later, different members of different ruling houses continued to issue coins till about A.D. 1784 when Arakan ceased to become an independent state.

As already stated, we do not have forms for all the vowels15 and consonants in the Fat Monk Image and the Taung-pauk-krī rock inscriptions. The medial vowel sign "au" is conspicuous by its absence. The respective vowels and consonants which cannot be traced in either of the inscriptions are i, ī, e, ai, au and ta, tha, da, dha, pha, sa and ha.16 The remaining letters that have been inscribed on these two inscriptions show little difference from Indian alphabet belonging to c. 2nd century B.C. to c. 1st century B.C., of particular interest is the letter "da" engraved on Taung-pauk-krī inscription. It is an angular type similar to the form found in the inscriptions of Asoka. "Tha" also probably belongs to the same age as that of "da". The letters "ka" and "sa" engraved on the backside of the Fat Monk Image inscription are akin to the ones found in the Mahāsthān inscription, Bogra district, Bangladesh. Again "na", "pa" and "ra" of the Fat Monk Image inscription resemble closely the letters found in the Taung-pauk-krī Fragmentary inscription.17

The theme of the inscriptions, discovered in Arakan does indicate, in most cases, a Buddhistic leaning. But surprisingly one of the inscriptions of the pre-Christian epoch speaks of the word

15. In this context, See the chart prepared by us on the 'Development of the Arakanese Script In Dhanwawady period. Chart. I, column. 1 & 2.

16. It must be pointed out here that the omission of these letters in these epigraphs is not the fault of either the engravers or the composers. The Image inscription is only a one-line inscription, while the Taung-pauk-krī inscription is a fragmentary one. A major portion of writing from the latter seemed to have been withered away due to the ravages of nature. At the time of copying the epigraph, the抄者 could manage to copy only five lines out of about twenty five lines of writing. So it is but natural that we could not have the entire alphabet from the state of both the inscriptions as such.

17. The script discussed in this section deals with the earliest variety of Brāhmī, first introduced in India during the reign of the Mauryan emperor Asoka. In Arakan this script gradually developed in a distinctive way with the passage of time, and till about the close of the Vesālī phase this script was in use in Arakan. But somehow we notice a transition during the course of tenth-twelfth centuries, in which period, the script, hitherto following an angular north Indian or north-eastern variety of Brāhmī, took the cue from a roundish south Indian alphabet. The present script in Arakan is derived from the latter model. See Dani, A.H. Indian Palaeography. New Delhi, 1997, p. 231; Sircar, D.C., op cit. p. 211.
"jina" implying some sort of Jaina connection on the part of at least the maker or donor of the image. However, according to a lexical definition "jina" means both Buddha and the Vedic god Visṇu. Since relics pertaining to Vaiṣṇavism and the god Visṇu are to be ascribed not earlier than seventh century A. D., it would be better to identify "jina" with Buddha. In that case the "sacca-kapari-bjāka" Fat Monk, whose image bears the present inscription might have been one of the early converts to the Buddhist faith in Arakan, the event probably taking place not later than 2nd-1st century B. C.

The Taung-pauk-krī inscription, belonging to the pre-Christian epoch, significantly refers to the word "Bhikkhu-Samgha" implying thereby the monastic order of the Buddhists of Arakan. The monastery of the Bhikkhus happened probably to be situated close to the Gacchabhanadi, which was the ancient name of the river Kaladan. So this inscriptive evidence makes it clear that during the early centuries, preceding, probably, the Christian era, Buddhism must have become a popular religious creed in Arakan. If we take into account the numerous chronicles, traditions and anecdotes relating to Buddha's sojourn in Arakan during his lifetime, it would then appear that Buddhism gained an acceptance in Arakan during the 6th-5th century B.C. But as there is no cogent ground to support this tradition based hypothesis, it would be prudent to infer that the religion had become a dominant creed sometime during the 2nd-1st century B.C. This inference is quite in consonance with inscriptive evidence from Taung-pauk-krī, on the road between Selāgīrī and Mrauk U.

The advent of script in Arakan synchronizes with the period when descendants of Candasūrya, the earliest king of the

18. See Note II above; see also Sirca, D.C. Studies in the Religious Life in Ancient and Medieval India, Delhi, 1971, pp. 190-193.
20. See Note II above.
Sūrya dynasty, were ruling during the third Dhanyawady phase (B.C. 580 - A.D. 327). We have seen that the paleography of the two early inscriptions found in Arakan indicates a date sometime around 2nd-1st century B.C. Now, following the chronological arrangement adopted in Arakanese chronicles, the first Sūrya King seemed to have ascended the throne sometime in B.C. 580. By the 2nd century B.C. when we have, for the first time, the evidence of script in Arakan, the sixth or seventh king from Candasurya, namely king Suryacakka or his son king Sūryanātha might have been ruling over Arakan.

Incidentally, the chronicles speak of king Suryacakka as a contemporary of his famous Indian counterpart, King Dhammaśoka who issued numerous edicts throughout India during his reign (c. B.C. 269-232). If it was not during the reign of Suryacakka, then it was probably during the reign of his son Sūryanātha that we come across the first instance of script in the inscriptions ever discovered in Arakan. So in the early history of Arakan, the third Dhanyawady phase will be remembered for at least one innovation that it gave the Arakanese the first ever script with which to write down whatever they would think specially about their pious dedication in the name of the great Buddha.

Though we hear of the findings of a number of images of the Fat Monk from various ancient sites in the adjoining regions of Arakan, it was only during the rule of one of the later descendants of Candasurya, either Suryacakka or Sūryanātha that we hear for the first time of the existence of an early inscribed image of this Monk called Sacakaparibjākajīna. The name inscribed on the backside of the image is written in Old Brāhmī. Palaeographical features of the letters help us to arrive at an approximate date of the creation of this image, i.e. about 2nd century B.C. So the Sūrya dynasty of Arakan gave her subjects the first ever script, which, from now on, happened to be the medium of expression of the early Arakanese. Only two inscribed documents belonging to this period have been discovered which are engraved on stone. Before we go in for a detailed discussion on the script, found in the above-noted two inscriptions, it will be useful if, as a prelude, we take note of some important information as to the find spot, place of deposition, script, language, approximate date of composition of, and comments, if any, on each of the inscriptions concerned.

Uptil now the earliest datable inscription of Arakan is the **Fat Monk Image Inscription** (see Vol. II, Pl. I). It was discovered in 1922 by a Taungyā cultivator from the Panzeemraungphyar (the stream of green flower or flower market) about three miles to the east of the old Vesālī city. At present the inscription is preserved at the Mrauk-U Museum. The image of the monk, built of apparently a slab of sandstone, measures 4.4 inches in height, 2.4 inches in width, its thickness being 0.9 inches. The monk is shown as seated on a lotus throne, with a back-slab behind him. It is this back-slab that contains the one line inscription in Brāhmī script and Pāli language, which reads *Saccakaparibjakajina.*

As the images of this monk, made of stone, bronze, silver-gilt, plaster, terracotta etc. are being discovered from time to time from the well-known sites of Śrīśetra, Rangoon, Pegu, Mandalay, Pagan and so on, the question as to his identification, raises a mild controversy amongst a section of scholars. Duroiselle first surmised that the monk should be identified with *Jambhala* or *Kubera* but later on reverted to the opinion that he might be *Kaccāyana,* the noted scholar of Pāli grammar. Both U. Mya and Luce, however, said that the monk was none other than *Gavampati,* a revered saint of the Mons. It was left to San Tha Aung to identify him with the *Nirgrantha Jina* ascetic, who was a contemporary of Buddha and lived at Vesālī in India. The story goes that he invited both Mahāvīra and Buddha to a scholarly debate about whose philosophy was ranked as supreme. At the end the monk had to accept the superiority of Buddha's doctrine and become a convert to Buddha's religion.

We shall now discuss the characteristic features of the early script noticed in the Fat Monk Image inscription. Forms for initial vowels are not found in this inscription. Consonant form for *ka* is of the cross type with equal arms, being identical to *ka* in the Mahāsthān Stone Plaque inscription, Bogra district, Bangladesh. Consonant *ca* in *cca* is with semi-circular loop at lower base of the vertical but *cca* has an overlapping type as sometimes found in early Brāhmī inscriptions. *Ja* in the conjunct *bjā* is tilted under *ba.* Such tilted forms for the second member of a

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27. Ibid. P. 14.
conjunct are not found in early Indian inscriptions datable before the commencement of the Christian era.

The letter *ja* in *ji* as found in the plate has only two arms instead of either three arms or double curves, which is not found in Old Brāhmī. On paleographical consideration the forms of letters may be assigned to a later period, more probably to a transitional phase of Late Brāhmī. *Na* is of an early form with horizontal base while its straight vertical is shown as touching the mid-point of the base as seen also in the Mahāsthān plaque inscription and in the Taung-pauk-krī inscription (Kyauktaw). *Pa* approaches the angular type with its long vertical at the left, similar to the form found in the Taung-pauk-krī inscription. *Ba* in *bjā* is a square, a normal form in Brāhmī, used even in the early centuries of the Christian era, as seen in Radia pillar inscription.30*

*Ra* is twisted in the centre of the vertical, being quite the same form as found in the Taung-pauk-krī inscription. *Sa* is shown with a left hook as seen in the Mahāsthān plaque inscription from the Bogra district, Bangladesh. Of medial vowels, *a* in *bjā* is similar to that found in Taung-pauk-krī inscription. It was formed by a horizontal stroke at the right. Medial *i* has a short angle on the top of the letter, but *ji* is found only by adding a perpendicular on the top. The conjuncts of *cca* and *bja* are horizontally formed by juxtaposed letters, and the forms are noticed in Old Brāhmī inscriptions of India. The text31* of the Fat Monk Image inscription is as follows:

L. 1. Saccakaparibjāka32* jina

The only other inscription of this age until now is the *Taung-pauk-krī Rock Inscription* (see Vol. II, Pl. II). As noted above,33* this inscription was engraved on the natural rock, known as Selāgīri, which was located about two miles from Taung-pauk-krī village, on the road between Selāgīri and Mrauk-U. When San Shwe Bu and U Tha Tun, two eminent scholars of Arakan, went to the spot to make an eye-copy of the inscription, they discovered that a major portion of the inscription, 34 *

32. For "Paribbōjaka."
33. See above, n. 4.
excepting about five lines could not be copied out because of the damaged condition of the epigraph. They, however, made a true copy of the remaining legible five lines.34*

Unfortunately there is no trace of the inscription at present at the place from where the above mentioned two scholars prepared their eye-copy. It seems to have had been destroyed during the Second World War. Since the inscription cannot be presently located a section of scholars35* refuse to accept the inscription as an evidence. On consideration of the fact that the eye-copy of the inscription was made by two noted scholars of Arakan, we cannot altogether ignore them as totally baseless.36* The characters of the inscription are mostly similar to those found in the Brāhmī inscriptions from India between the 2nd century B.C. and 1st century A.D. Some of the letters do tally with the ones found in the Fat Monk Image inscription. Our study of the script of this inscription is based on a discussion by San Tha Aung.37*

Initial $a$ has the two left arms separated. Initial $ā$ has a bar on the top of the vertical to the right. Initial $o$ is like Roman capital letter 'Z' type. Of the consonants, $ka$ is cross-type with equal arms. $kha$ in kho, has a round loop at the foot of the vertical. $ga$ is of an angular type. $gha$ is flat-bottomed type with long vertical at the left. $ca$ is with a semi-circular loop at lower end of the vertical. $cha$ of gaccha has a double loop at the base. $ṇa$ has left vertical with the angular type at right. $ṭa$ is of a semi-circular type. $ṭa$ is an angular form with two lower arms appending towards the bottom. $thā$ is shown with a circle having a dot within.

$Da$ is angular type similar to the form found in inscriptions of Aśoka. $dha$ looks like the Roman capital letter 'D'. $Na$ has horizontal bar at base with a straight vertical upwards. $pa$ is angular type. $ba$ of bba, is square type. $bha$ has the straight vertical with the angle at left. $ma$ has a loop at the bottom with triangle upwards. $ya$ of yā, is tripartite type with a little long vertical upwards from the centre. $ra$ has an angular

34. San Tha Aung, U, op cit., p. 63.
35. See Okkantha, A.S, op cit., p. 41, n. 1.
36. See above, n. 4.
37. San Tha Aung, U, op cit., p. 63.
break at the centre of the vertical. \textit{La} is rounded type at bottom with a little curve outwards to the left. \textit{Va} is with a circle dangling from vertical. \textit{Sa} has a hook outwards at left. \textit{Ha} is angular type with a bar at right vertical outwards but longer vertical at the left than the right.

Amongst medial vowels, sign for \textit{ā} in \textit{kā}, \textit{cā}, \textit{tā}, \textit{tvā}, \textit{pā}, \textit{bā}, \textit{mū}, \textit{yū}, \textit{lā}, \textit{vā}, \textit{sā}, and \textit{hā}, is of a uniform pattern similar to that used in India before the Christ, showing its horizontal mostly at the top to the right side. Medial \textit{i} of \textit{cchi}, \textit{ti}, \textit{di}, \textit{bhi}, \textit{mi}, \textit{ri}, and \textit{hi}, is formed by a short angle on the top while two short verticals are put for \textit{ī} in \textit{gī}, \textit{ū}, and \textit{di}. \textit{U} is seen in dangling angle downwards in \textit{kkhu}, \textit{mu}, \textit{ru}, and \textit{vu} while two dangling verticals are used for \textit{ū} of \textit{pū}. \textit{E} is formed by a horizontal at the top to left. \textit{O} is crossed bar as in \textit{kho}, \textit{to}, \textit{no}, and \textit{ro}. The \textit{Anusvāra} is always a dot over the letters as in \textit{kaṁ}, \textit{ghaṁ}, \textit{taṁ}, \textit{daṁ}, and \textit{sam}. The conjuncts are formed by juxtaposing two consonants vertically as in India before the Gupta period as we see in \textit{kkha}, \textit{gga}, \textit{ccha}, \textit{nca}, \textit{itta}, \textit{tva}, \textit{ddha}, \textit{bbha}, while only \textit{ssa} is formed by putting them horizontally appended to each other. None of the letters bears any head-mark or serif.

Then the form for \textit{om} and the punctuation mark are not seen here possibly because most parts of the inscription were badly damaged. In conclusion we may point out that the characters of the natural rock inscription from Taung-pauk-krī, therefore, are similar to those found in the Fat Monk Image inscription from Panzeemraungphyar. Palaeographical features of the Taung-pauk-krī inscription indicate that it may probably belong to a period shortly before or about the beginning of the Christian era. The deciphered section of the text\textsuperscript{38} of the inscription is as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
L. 1. Athakho bhagavā bhikkhu saṅgaṁ pāśaṁdaṁ āruhuṇpetvā
L. 2. Pañcāpasāda sata parivuto dhānaṁvatīrataṁ ākāsamaggena cārikatā caramāno
L. 3. Dhānaṁvatā mahānagarassā pacchimadisabhāge
L. 4. Gacchapanadīyā pūrattimatiye selāghṛi pabhathamuddhami
L. 5. Orohitvā patitṛi
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{38} From photograph of the book \textit{Arakanese Scripts, 6th century and Before} by San Tha Aung, p. 64.