



Tracing and Deciphering Mrohaung, Rohang and Rosang: The Toponyms Associated with the Ethnonym Rohingya

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Abstract: *The repeated persecution and outmigration of the Rohingya community can be attributed to a single factor: the denial of their identity by the Government of Myanmar. They are not recognized by the government as an indigenous race of Myanmar but rather labelled as illegal immigrants. They have been persistently denied the citizenship and associated rights in Myanmar. Rohingya claim of an indigenous ethnic identity basing on their connections with the ancient city of Mrohaung has been contested by some scholars upon the assumption that the toponym is an innovation of the British period. In retrospect, this paper traces the location, origin and meaning of the toponyms Mrohaung, Rohang and Rosang with a view to ascertaining their connections, if any, with the ethnonym Rohingya. Following a detailed historical, literary, etymological and phonetic analysis, the author finds credible evidences of the existence of the toponyms in ancient Arakan. The paper further confirms that the ancient cities bearing those toponyms were constructed by the Rohingyas ancestors. Rohingyas started living in ancient Arakan much before the arrival of the Burmans.*

Key Terms: *Rohingya, Identity, Mrohaung, Mrauk U, Rosang, Arakan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rohingya, the ill-fated community from the Rakhine state of Myanmar, has been the victim of forced migration since long. Though the mass persecution of the community by the Government of Myanmar captured wider global attention in 2017, they had been facing existential threats since 1784 when the Burmans invaded their homeland, the Kingdom of Arakan, now known as Rakhine. Following the invasion, thousands of Rohingyas fled into Chittagong, then a territory of the British East India Company (ICG Asia Report, 2014: 3). Since then, forced migration of the community continued intermittently taking a particular upturn after 1982. The post-1982 political regimes intransigently refused to recognize the Rohingyas as one of their indigenous races. The Rohingyas have been labelled as ‘*Kulaw Yakain*’ or ‘Strangers in Arakan’ (Zöllner, 2017: 6). They have been denied citizenship and associated rights in their own country. The 1982 Citizenship Law and its 1983 Procedures introduced by the Ne Win regime officially recognized 135 indigenous races in Myanmar. The Rohingyas are not included in this list (ICG Asia Report, 2014: 10). The Article 11 of Burmese Constitution issued on January 4, 1948 reserved citizenship for the ‘indigenous races’ only. The others can claim either associate or naturalized citizenship through a very complicated process of proving their eligibility. Besides, the expression ‘indigenous race’ has been used to refer to those racial groups who had “settled in any of the territories included in the Union as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1823 A.D” (Zöllner, 2017: 16). The reference to 1823 as a precondition for claiming indigenous identity is particularly significant given the British conquest of Arakan in retrospect. The popular anti-Rohingya narratives describe Rohingyas not as natives but as Bengali migrants, or ‘Chittagonians’, who arrived in the country following the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824 and the subsequent British colonization of Arakan (Tanenbaum, 2017: 2). Evidently, the repeated persecution and outmigration of the Rohingya community is triggered by one single issue: the refusal of the state to recognize them as an indigenous race of Myanmar. Therefore, there clearly is a

need to conduct an academic inquiry to identify the land to which the Rohingyas originally belong.

1.1. Background and Concept

In the past two thousand years, Arakan (now Rakhine) has been captured, ruled and expanded by rulers from multiple geographic origins (Hossain, 2014: 13). As they came, they added new people, language, culture, religion, identity and narratives to those existing. Amid the bewildering set of contending narratives, the historiographers today are divided into multiple schools, each with their own sets of assumptions and arguments pertaining to the original natives of the land. A pragmatic way to identify the natives of the ancient land could be to identify the names of the ancient kingdom and, particularly, the capitals established by the conquerors. The approach looks feasible on many accounts. Firstly, each new ruler of ancient Arakan celebrated his victory through the construction of a new capital (Gutman, 2001). Secondly, the rulers needed large workforce to build and maintain those cities. With each turn of political events, the rulers changed and so did the warriors. Nonetheless, the workforce who tilled the land and baked the bricks did not change. Over the centuries, this workforce formed the core element of the ancient population. It has been a common practice among many ethnic groups to associate their ethnonyms with the toponyms of the land to which they originally belong. Therefore, a threadbare analysis of the toponyms of the ancient cities of Arakan can help us identify who those ancient people were.

Mrohaung, *Rohang* and *Rosang* are some of the toponyms used by some scholars to claim Rohingya connections to ancient Arakan. *Mrohaung* was the capital of the great *Mrauk U* Empire established in 1430 by King *Narameikhla* alias *Min Saw Mon* with the military assistance from the Sultan of Bengal. Previously, King *Narameikhla* fled to Gaur, the capital of Bengal, to evade the *Mrâmmâ* invasion of Arakan. The dethroned king was allowed asylum by the Bengal King Sultan Jalaluddin Mohammed Shah. While in exile, *Narameikhla* served as a military officer in the Sultan's army. At one point of time, *Narameikhla* pleaded help from the Sultan to regain his lost kingdom. After two successive campaigns of Bengal Army, King *Narameikhla* was restored to his throne. A city named *Mrohaung* was founded and became the capital of the *Mrauk U* kingdom (Alam, 1999: 12). A group of scholars posited that the ethnic name 'Rohingya' was derived from the word '*Mrohaung*'. They argued that the name *Mrohaung* transformed in to *Rohang* over time (*Mrohaung- Rohaung-Rohang*) and its dwellers came to be known as Rohingya (Alam, 1999: 5).

However, the theory was not accepted by some other scholars in this field. Htin and Leider (2018: 73) contested that the city which was established as the capital of Arakan in 1430 was named *Mrauk U*, not *Mrohaung*. They claimed that the word *Mrohaung* which means 'old city' was coined much later following the colonization of Arakan by the British. Charney (2005: 25) also maintains the opinion that the name *Mrohaung* did not emerge until the British conquest of Burma in 1824. However, having consulted the sources of much earlier period, the author found credible evidences indicating the existence of a city named *Rosang* in early fifteenth century. Besides, there are other clues suggesting that one or more cities named *Mrohaung* might have existed even in as early as late tenth century. In this paper, the author has analyzed the toponyms- *Mrohaung*, *Rohang* and *Rosang*- their origins, transformation and connection with the Rohingya community.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research based on content analysis. Data for the research has been collected mostly from secondary sources. Available literatures, research publications, news reports, news analyses, seminar papers, historical documents, census reports, chronicles, and maps of ancient Arakan have been studied in details for collection and analysis of data. Given the historical roots of the debate, efforts were made to collect data from sources as old as

possible. The authenticity of data has been strictly verified through cross referencing. Literatures from local, regional and global sources of both recent and ancient period have been analyzed to address controversies surrounding the issue. The toponyms and ethnonyms found in different literatures have been etymologically scrutinized to confirm their transformations and variations.

2.1. Tracing *Mrohaung* and its Inhabitants

Dr. Emil Forchhammer, the first Pali scholar employed by the British administration in Arakan, and the pioneer in deciphering the Pali inscriptions of ancient archaeological sites, identified *Mrohaung* as the capital of once powerful *Myauk U* kings who ruled the country for four hundred years. Dr. Forchhammer even provided the precise location of the city, *Mrohaung*, “in 20° 44' N. latitude and 93° 26' E. longitude, at the head of a branch of Kaladan River, about 50 miles from its mouth, almost at the farthest limit of tidal influence, on a rocky plain surrounded by hills” (1891: 15). He further noticed that the Arakanese name of the city was *Myauk U*, or monkey's egg, the origin of which he was not sure about.

In Forchhammer's Monograph of Arakan Antiquities we find the reference to another town by the similar name- *Myochaung* (*Mrochaung* in Arakanese). His informers, following the same line of argument as that of Htin and Leider, told him that the name *Mrochaung* translated as ‘old town’ in English (Forchhammer, 1891: 63). If we agree to this, then we need also to agree that there might be many more *Mrohaungs* or *Mrochaungs* throughout Arakan as the dynasties periodically shifted their capitals from one valley to the other leaving behind number of old cities (Gutman, 2001: 14-5).

About the location of Forchhammer's second *Mrochaung*, we find two descriptions. At first he was told that the ruins of the town were located south-east of *Sandoway* and near the seashore. However, upon reaching the spot he found no traces of any old city. The second description narrated that in the 15th Century, the *Talaings* (people of *Pegu* in Lower Burma) had conquered Arakan from *Kwa* to *Launggyet* and *Mrohaung*. The mountain tribe *Myo* (*Mro* in Arakanese) retreated to the north of Kaladan, and stubbornly resisted further *Talaing* invasion up the valley. To mark their heroic act, the place is said to have been known as *Myochaung* or *Mrochaung* (Forchhammer, 1891: 63). Such precedence of naming a town after the name of a tribe obligates us to search for other evidences which might either validate or nullify any possible connection of this mountain tribe with the establishment or naming of other synonymous cities.

2.2. The City Ruled by Tribal Chiefs

If we examine the historical records of the rise and fall of the dynasties in Arakan, we find few periods of chaos when none of the known dynasties had effective control over the kingdom. The first period of confusion began in the year 957 after the demise of the ninth *Chandra* king of *Baishali*, the first city of ancient Arakan established by the *Chandras*. Following the King's demise, someone named *Amarathu* became the new king. *Amarathu* hailed from the *Mro* tribe who was somehow connected with *Chandradevi*, the Chief Queen of *Chandra* dynasty (Phayre, 1883: 45).

There is a legend about how a *Mro* chief became the king. When *Chandra* king *Culachandra* was drowned to death during a sea trip, the Chief Queen conducted a country-wide search for a person whose finger the ring of the late king fits. Incidentally, she found three of them, two brothers and the son of the younger brother, all belonging to the *Mro* tribe. The elder brother *Amarathu* was offered the throne. The younger brother *Amaraku* became the Crown-Prince and his son *Pei Phru* became a village chief (Aung, 2019).

About *Amarathu*, there are other historical descriptions beyond the legend. Forchhammer recorded him as the son of *Chandradevei* who was rather ‘raised’ to the position of Chief

Queen in the palace of *Culachandra* (1891: 15). Phayre assigned the title 'Chief Consort' to *Chandradevi* (1883: 45). Both the descriptions suggest that *Amarathu* did not carry the blood lineage of *Chandra* dynasty. Soon after being enthroned, *Amarathu* shifted the capital from *Baishali* to a spot 4 miles to the northeast of present day *Mrauk U*. Seven years later, his nephew who succeeded him as the king, shifted the capital to yet another place south-east of the current location of *Mrauk U* (Phayre, 1883: 45). Together they ruled the country for 36 years. We find no record of the names of the two new capitals they ruled from.

That was the only time ever that persons belonging to *Mro* tribe had the fortune to occupy the throne. Therefore, if they had the ambition to mark the glorious achievement by naming the capitals as *Mro-haung*, as they did after successfully resisting the *Talaing* invasion mentioned earlier, that may not seem unusual. Even if they did not, they only plausible way to designate an unnamed town could be to name it *Mrohaung*, meaning old town, one that has been abandoned.

2.3. The Unnamed Capital and Few Probabilities

These two *Mro* kings, *Amarathu* and *Pei Phru*, ruled the country for 36 years. *Pei Phru* was dethroned by the Shans who ruled the country for 18 more years. During all these years, except for the first seven years of *Amarathu*, the country was ruled from the capital established by *Pei Phru*. As a matter of fact, there is no historical record of any other capital until 1018 when a descendent from *Chandra* dynasty became the king with the help of the *Pagan* King *Anoaratha*, and established his capital at *Pingtsa* (Phayre, 1883: 46). So, here we have a city which boasted the status of capital for four and a half decade (964 - 1018) yet did not have any name.

For more than four hundred years, all the capitals of ancient Arakan were located in the *Lemro* river valley. The river was originally named as '*Anjanadi*' due to its unpredictable course. Later the name was changed to *Lemro* highlighting the four ancient cities that developed along its banks. The word *Lemro* (*Lay Myo* or *Leyomyit* in Burmese) translates as 'four cities' (Ullah, 2016). Forchhammer also referred to the cluster of cities that developed astride the *Lemro* River as '*Caturgamas*' or 'four cities', and later as '*Pancanagara*' or 'five cities' (1891: 15). Pamela Gutman (2001: 61) provides the list of five cities as *Sambawak* or *Pyinsa*, *Parin*, *Hkrit*, *Launggret* and *Toungoo Neinzara* (located on the opposite bank).

As mentioned previously, *Pyinsa*, the first among the *Caturgamas* or *Pacanagara*, was established in 1018 with the help of the *Pagan* King *Anoaratha*. Therefore, we find a missing link between the closing of *Baishali* as the capital in 957 and opening of *Pyinsa* in 1018. There is no name of the city that functioned as the capital of Arakan during that period. It is important to notice that *Pyinsa*, the first among the *Caturgamas* or *Pancanagaras*, became the capital in the beginning of eleventh century when the *Mrâmmâ* people started entering Arakan who would eventually rule the country (Gutman, 2001: 14). Since then, as the *Mrâmmâ* people started assigning the names of places using their own vernacular, it is possible that they found it convenient to refer to any previous city as *Myohaung*, *Mrohaung* or old city, including the unnamed capital established by a *Mro* king four and a half decades ago.

The second period of confusion erupted in the later part of eleventh century when a usurper killed the reigning king *Meng Bilu*. The heir-apparent took refuge in *Pagan*. It took twenty-five years for the *Pagan* King, *Alaungsithu*, to organize an attack against this usurper. 100,000 soldiers each were mobilized from the *Pyus* and *Talaings*. Despite this huge preparation and mobilization, it took one whole year for the combined army to restore the throne (Phayre, 1883: 46). Such was the resistance offered by the usurper whose identity could not be ascertained by the author. Nonetheless, the resistance looks similar to the one

offered four centuries later by a *Mro* chief against the *Talaings* at *Myochaung* or *Mrochaung* as mentioned by Forchhammer (1891: 63). We shall now extend our search to fifteenth century to find any possible evidence of an incident of similar nature.

The third period of great chaos began in 1373 when the king of Arakan died without leaving an heir. The Burmese and Arakanese history recorded this period differently. According to the Burmese history, the nobles of Arakan, finding no appropriate claimant from within, offered the throne to the king of Burma who in turn appointed a representative to rule Arakan. Arakanese description, however, recorded this as a period of great confusion when usurpers, one after another, became the ruler (Phayre, 1883: 76-7). Nonetheless, no fighting between organized armies was recorded until 1406 when the Burmese king dethroned the Arakanese King *Min Saw Mon*.

Since then and until *Min Saw Mon* was restored to the throne with the help of Bengal Sultans in 1430, Arakan was like an extended battlefield for the rulers of Upper and Lower Burma. The rulers of Burma and *Pegu* fought number of battles against each other on the soil of Arakan during this period (Phayre, 1883: 76-7). However, we find no historical mention of any local tribe taking part in those conflicts. Thus, Forchhammer's reference to the 'Fifteenth' Century notwithstanding, the incident of *Mro* resistance against *Talaing* invaders do not seem to have taken place during this particular period. It is more probable that the incident of defending and naming a city as *Mrochaung* by the mountain tribe *Mro* might have taken place during the second period of confusion, in the later part of eleventh century.

Drawing inferences from the foregoing analysis, the author opines with reasonable degree of certainty that the existence of a city named *Mrohaung* was not an invention of the British period as claimed by some scholars. Arakanese became familiar with the name as early as the later part of tenth century when *Baishali* ceased to function as the capital and new capitals were established by *Mro* kings. The name came to prominence once again in the later part of the eleventh century when a massive invasion of the combined forces of *Pyus* and *Talaings* was successfully repulsed by the warriors of *Mro* tribe. Finally, given the argument that the word *Mrohaung* means 'old city', the name must have been used every time a new city emerged as the capital and the previous capital became an old city, a phenomenon which started with the closing of *Dhanyabati* and the opening of *Baishali* in circa 6th century (Gutman, 2001: 10). However, considering that *Mrohaung* is a Burmese word, probably the use of the name became customary since the early eleventh century when the Burmans started crossing the *Yoma* and invading the territories of Arakan.

2.4. Identifying the Builders and Sustainers of *Mrohaung*

History records the wonderful deeds of the kings and rulers, often ignoring the identity of the ordinary people whom they ruled. This in turn leads to speculations and arguments among scholars, centuries later, about who the ancient people of the place were. Such is the case with Arakan. We will find a lot of references to the names and identities of the rulers and dynasties. But seldom shall we find references to the identity of their subjects. The rulers, as history of Arakan shows, would oftentimes bring their workforce, sometimes slave labours, from neighbouring regions. These people would then live in that land for generations after generations, and ultimately, after few centuries, become the natives.

It is evident from the previous discussions that the name *Mrohaung* is somehow associated with the mountain tribe *Mro*. They were one of the three indigenous tribes- *Chin*, *Sak* and *Mro*- who inhabited this ancient land before the development of the earliest urban cities. As legend goes, *Marayu*, the founder of the first urban city at *Dhanyabati*, was married to the daughter of a *Mro* Chief (Gutman, 2001: 5). However, despite being the locals of much antiquity, they did not have any contribution in the development of the earliest urban cities

and civilizations. Mountain tribe as they were, living in walled cities was not something they would be comfortable with. Neither had they the know-how to build urban cities. They might have been good warriors but certainly not good builders or sculptors.

Therefore, even if any ancient city was named after them to commemorate their heroic actions, it was built by people who knew the art of the trade. Large number of people had to be borrowed from elsewhere by the rulers to build and maintain these cities and to grow crops to feed the people. Ultimately, these builders, farmers, artisans and small traders became the significant majority of those old cities, not the small little ruling class or the warrior class. The mass people living in those old cities or 'Mrohaung' were not necessarily *Mros*.

Frochhammer provides a description of the common people of *Mrohaung* city. He mentioned that the famous temples and pagodas of *Mrohaung* were constructed through the inhumane labour of the locals from Indian origin (1891: 15). As a matter of fact, the trend of outsourcing skilled manpower from India, particularly from the *Samatata* region of ancient Bengal, to build and sustain the cities of ancient Arakan started since the construction of the first city of *Baishali* in the 4th Century AD (Singer, 2008: 7). This labor class of Indian origin who went to and got settled in the ancient city of *Mrohaung* eventually formed the core of the populace. Epigraphic evidences further substantiate this line of thinking. The findings of epigraphist Arlo Griffiths suggest that the builders and sustainers of *Mrohaung* mostly migrated from the Bengal region of ancient India. Griffiths observed:

It is indisputably with the first-millennium Bengal tradition that the neighboring tradition of Arakan shares the greatest number of features, such as language of epigraphic expression (Sanskrit), types of script used to represent this language (from late forms of Northern Brāhmī to Siddhamātrkā), the general structure of the texts, and the mentioned absence of absolute dates (Griffiths, 2015: 285-6).

We also find further evidences from the works of seventeenth century Arakanese court poet *Daulat Kazi* confirming that Bengali was the commoners' language in Arakan when the poet composed his famous romantic story- *Sati Moyna*. The poet wrote:

ঠেটা চৌপাইয়া দোহা কহিলা সাধনে।
না বুঝে গোহরী ভাষা কোন কোন জনে।।
দেশীভাষে কহ তাকে পাঞ্চালীর ছন্দে।
সকলে শুনিয়া যেন বুঝয় সানন্দে।।
তবে কাজী দৌলত বুঝিয়া সে আরতী।
পাঞ্চালীর ছন্দে কহে ময়নার ভারতী।। (Ahmad, 2017: 237-8).

Pronunciation (by the author):

Theta Chowpaiya Doha kohila shadhoney,
Na bujhe Gohari bhasha kono kono joney.
Deshibhashe kaho takey panchalir chhandey,
Shokoley shuniya jeno bujhoy shanondey.
Tobey Kazi Doulat bujhiya shey aroti,
Panchalir chhandey kohe Moynar bharoti.

Translation (by the author):

[You] narrated [the piece in] Theta Chowpaiya Doha [a dialect of Gohari language],
Some people do not understand Gohari language.

Tell it in native language following the rhythm of Panchali,
So that after hearing everyone happily understands.
Having realized that yarning, [Poet] Kazi Doulat [then],
Tells the Tale of Moyna in the rhythm of Panchali.

Here we find the audience appealing to the poet to tell the story in দেশীভাষে (in native language) so that everyone can comprehend. Then, the poet narrates the story in the form above, in old form of Bengali, the language of the common people of Arakan during that period. We also noticed similar appeal being made to Alaol, another court poet of Arakan, by the Chief Minister Ashraf Khan:

এহি পদ্মাবতী রসে রচ রস কথা।
হিন্দুস্তানী ভাষে শেখে রচিয়াছে পোথা।।
রোসাঙ্গেত আন লোকে না বুঝে এ ভাষ।
পয়ার রচিলে পুরে সভানের আশ।।
যেহেন দৌলত কাজি চন্দ্রানি রচিল।
লঙ্কর উজির আশরাফে আঙ্গা দিল।। (Ahsan, 2002: 5).

Pronunciation (by the author):

Ehi Padmabati roshey racho rosho kotha,
Hindustani bhashey shekhe rochiyachhe potha.
Rosanget un lokey na bujhe e bhash,
Poyar rochiley purey shobhaner aash.
Jehen Doulat Kazi Chandrani rochilo,
Lasker Ujir Ashrafe agga dilo.

Translation (by the author):

With such romanticism of Padmabati [you] compose a romantic novel,
[But] the novel has been composed in Hindustani language.
None in Rosang understands this language,
A new edition can satisfy the desire of the audience.
The way Doulat Kazi composed Chandrani [in native language],
Chief Minister Ashraf ordered [the poet to compose Padmabati in the same language].

Here the Chief Minister of *Rosang* (another name of *Mrohaung*) observes that the novel *Padmabati* composed in Hindustani language is not understood by most of the people. So, he instructs poet Alaol to use the language which his previous poet Daulat Kazi used for narrating the story of *Sati Moyna and Lor- Chandrani*, that is, in the old form of Bengali.

2.5. From *Mrohaung* to *Rohang*

The foregoing references clearly indicate that the ordinary citizen of *Mrohaung* or *Rosang* used the old form of Bengali in their day to day communications. Therefore, in order to fully comprehend how the term *Mrohaung* etymologically transformed into *Rohang*, we need to base our analysis on the old form of Bengali. The word *Mrohaung*, as identified previously, is essentially a Burmese word which does not have any phonetic parallel in Bengali. In the dictionary published by Bangla Academy, the apex body of Bengali literature, there is no

word that begins with the sound 'Mro'. The ordinary people of *Rosang* who used the Bengali vernacular must have had difficulties in pronouncing the sound 'Mro' in the beginning of a word. Supposedly, in the day to day conversation, they omitted this difficult phoneme and used the much simplified and convenient form of the word- 'Rohaung' or 'Rohang'. Though there are differences of opinion among the scholars about the origin of the word *Mrohaung*, none has disputed over the possible etymological transformation of the word *Mrohaung* into *Rohang*.

Literary References to the Toponym *Rosang*

In the Tripura Chronicle *Rajmala*, we find repeated reference to the city named 'Rosang'. Both volume 2 and 3 of the chronicle provide detailed account of the battles fought between the Tripura kings and the 'Rosang' kings. The very initial chapter of volume 2 titled 'Dhamyamanikya' begins with the description of a King who penetrated deep into *Rosang*, won victory, and dug a big pond there to mark the victory. Being pleased upon his own success, the King then takes on the prestigious title 'Rosang Mardan Narayan' (trans. 'the conqueror of *Rosang*') (Narayan, 1927: 24). The original text of *Rajmala* reads:

চাটিগ্রাম হতে ভঙ্গ দিল গৌড় সেনা।
রসঙ্গ মর্দদন নারায়ণকে বসাইল থানা।।
রাম্বু ছত্রসিক রাজা আমল করিল।
রসঙ্গ জিনিয়া কিল্লা পুষ্করনী খনিল।।
নিজ রসঙ্গ লৈতে নারে সেনাপতি।
রসঙ্গ মর্দদন নারায়ণ তার হৈল খ্যাতি।। (Narayan, 1927: 24).

Pronunciation (by the author):

Chatigram hotey bhango dilo Goudh Shena,
Rosang Mardan Narayan ke bashailo Thana.
Rambu chhatroshik Raja amol korilo,
Rosang jinia killa pushkarani khonilo.
Nijo Rosang loitey narey shenapati,
Rosang Mardan Narayan tar hoilo khyati.

Translation (by the author):

The Goudh soldiers routed from Chittagong,
The conqueror of Rosang established a garrison.
The King performed [certain rituals] at Ramu,
Having conquered Rosang [the King] established a Fort and dug a Pond.
The [enemy] General cannot [re]take Rosang,
[So, the King] becomes renowned as the Conqueror of Rosang.

According to James Long, a reviewer of *Rajmala*, King *Dhamyamanikya* reigned Tripura from 1404 to 1439 (Narayan, 1927: 175). That gives us a clue about the land being known as 'Rosang' among the rulers of Tripura since early fifteenth century.

Other famous literatures that made a mention of the name *Rosang* are those of the much celebrated 17th century Arakanese court poet Shah Alaol. Alaol had made plenty of mentions

of the old kingdom of *Rosang*. Alaol's account of the misfortunes suffered by Mughal Prince Shah Shuja upon his arrival at *Rosang* city reads like this:

তার পাছে সাহা সুজা নৃপ কুলেশ্বর।
দৈব পরিপাক আইল রোসাঙ্গ শহর।।
রোসাঙ্গ নৃপতি সঙ্গে হৈল বিসম্বাদ।
আপনার দোষ হন্তে পাইল অবসাদ।।
শতেক মুসলমান তান সঙ্গে আছিল।
নৃপতির শাস্তি পাই সর্বলোক খৈল।। (Bala, 2008: 251).

Pronunciation (by the author):

Tar pachhe Shaha Shuja Nripo Kuleshwar,
Doibo poripak ailo Rosang Shahor.
Rosang Nripoti shonge hoilo bishambad,
Aponar dosh hante pailo aboshad.
Shotek Musalman tan shonge achhilo,
Nripotir shasti pai shob lok khoilo.

Translation (by the author):

Thereafter the great king Shah Shuja
In a fateful event, came to the Rosang city.
An altercation took place with the King of Rosang,
[Shah Shuja] retired [from life] due to his own mistakes.
[About] a hundred Muslims were with him,
Having received punishment of the King [of Rosang], All were lost.

This literary account of the incident in the form of a *Puthi* (Ballad) perfectly matches the authentic historical accounts in this regard. Historical records show that the Mughal Prince Shah Shuja was appointed as the provincial viceroy in Bengal. In a family feud, Prince Shah Shuja was defeated by his brother Aurangzeb who became the Emperor at Delhi. Shah Shuja fled to Arakan along with the forces loyal to him and sought refuge at the Arakanese court. King *Sanda Thudhamma* allowed him asylum. However, soon afterwards, the king is said to have developed a yearning for the beautiful daughter of Shah Shuja. In a desperate attempt, Shah Shuja staged a revolution to dethrone the king but failed. The king then executed the Prince along with his family (Gutman, 2001: 21).

Daulat Kazi, another seventeenth century court poet of Arakan, precisely identified the location of the city called *Rosang* and the name of the king in the following manner:

কন্নফুলি নদি এক আছে এক পুরি।
রসাঙ্গ নগর নাম সর্গ অবতারি।।
তাহাত মগ বৈসে ক্রেমে বুধাচারি।
নামে শ্রীধর্মরাজা ধর্ম অবতারি।। (Kazi, 1995: 4).

Pronunciation (by the author):

Kannofuli nodi ak achhe ak puri,

Rosang nagor nam shargo abotari
Tahat Magh boishe Krema budhachari
Namey Sridhammaraja dhamma abotari.

Translation (by the author):

There is a river 'Karnafully' and there is a city,
'Rosang City' is the name, as if a [piece of] heaven.
There sits a Magh [King, who] gradually [becomes] a pastor [of moral],
Named Sridhammaraja, as if [the symbol of] religion.

Here, the poet refers to a city called *Rosang* which is situated across the *Karnafully* river of Chittagong, and which is ruled by a *Magh* king named *Sridhammaraja*. Plenty of such references to the old city of *Rosang* can also be found in the works of other medieval poets of Arakan like: Mardan, Shamsar Ali, Quraishi Magan, Ainuddin and Abdul Ghani (Alam, 1999: 5).

3. REFERENCE TO ROSANG BY THE FOREIGN SOURCES

Charney made a commendable attempt to accumulate the variations of the toponyms and ethnonyms of Arakan and its people from multiple sources (2005). Considering the relevance of this paper, the author has analyzed only two of the toponyms- Arakan and *Rosang* as extracted by Charney from various foreign texts. Charney began his search with the accounts of Nicolò de' Conti of Venice who recorded in circa 1430:

“And after that, sayling a whole moneth by sea, he came unto the entring of the river Nican, and sayling uppon it sixe dayes, he came unto the Citie also name Nican (Charney, 2005: 13)”.

However, referring to Kennon Breazeale and Mansel Longworth Dames, Charney claimed that the earlier Latin version of the text actually mentioned the name [*Nican*] as *Racha*, *Rachan* or *Rachani* (2005: 14). The next two references he made are from Portuguese sources. In 1515, Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires mentioned the name as *Raçam*, and in 1518, Portuguese writer Duarte Barbosa mentioned it as *Racanguy*. In Portuguese, the letters 'c' and 'ç' sound like English 's', and the letters 'ch' sound like English 'sh'. Therefore, phonetically *Racha*, *Rachan*, *Rachani*, *Raçam* and *Racanguy* would sound like 'Rasha', *Rashan*, *Rashani*, *Rasam* and *Rasangi* respectively. Anyone would see how closely the cross references from the regional sources (the chronicles of Tripura and the *Puthis* and ballads of Arakan and Bengal) and the Portuguese sources are aligned towards recognizing the land as 'Rosang' or 'Rosangi' from early fifteenth to late seventeenth century.

Portuguese sources claim better authenticity over the others as they maintained closest connections with *Mrauk U* rulers and are more familiar with the land and its people. About the intimacy of the Portuguese with *Mrauk U*, *Rajmala* narrates:

সিদ্ধান্তবাগীশ কহে কর অবধান।
রসাস্ত্রের যুদ্ধে রাজা করে অনুষ্ঠান।।
দ্বাদশ বাঙ্গলা সৈন্য চলিল সহিতে।
সর্বব সৈন্য লৈয়া গেল রসাস্ত্র যুদ্ধেতে।।
ত্রিপুরার সৈন্য দেখি মঘে বাসে ভয়।
ফেরাঙ্গীর সৈন্য সঙ্গে মঘেতে মিলয়।। (Narayan, 1927: 27).

Pronunciation (by the author):

Shiddhantobagish kahe karo abodhan,
 Rosanger juddhe raja kare onusthan.
 Dbadosh Bangla shoinyo cholilo shohite,
 Sharbo shoinyo loiya galo Rosang juddhete.
 Tripurar shoinyo dekhi Maghe bashe bhoy
 Ferangeer shoinyo shonge Maghete miloy.

Translation (by the author):

The one apt in decision-making says, behold!
 The King prepares for the battle against Rosang.
 Twelfth Bengal soldiers marched with him,
 Taking all soldiers [the King] marched on to fight Rosang.
 Seeing the soldiers of Tripura the Maghs get scared,
 [Therefore] the Maghs make a coalition with the Ferangee soldiers.

In the text, the word মঘ (*Magh*) refers to the Rakhine soldiers of রসঙ্গ (*Rosang*) and the word ফেরাঙ্গী (*Ferangee*) refers to the Portuguese. Still today, people of this region refer to the Rakhine raiders of *Mrau U (Rosang)* as *Magh* and the Portuguese as *Firingee*. A place in Chittagong is still known by the name *Firingee Bazar* and another place in Sandwip is still known as *Maghdhora*. Such was the connection of the Portuguese seafarers with this region. Therefore, variations of the names by which the Portuguese sources recognized old Arakan is of significance.

Other European references to the name of ancient Arakan, as identified by Charney, are listed in Table 1 below (2005, 13-5).

Table1: References to the Variations of Arakan in Foreign Texts

| Ser | Year | Name Used | Language |
|-----|--------|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1 | 1597 | Aracan | Latin |
| 2 | 1598 | Arkhang | Persian |
| 3 | 1611 | Arracam | German |
| 4 | 1620 | Arracan | Persian |
| 5 | 1620 | Arracan | Persian |
| 6 | 1640 | Arakan/Arakanders | |
| 7 | 1683 | Arrakan | English |
| 8 | 1687 | Aracan/ Rechanners | English |
| 9 | 1687 | Racan | English |
| 10 | 1689 | Arrackan/Arackan/ Raccaners | English |
| 11 | 1700 | Arraccan | English |
| 12 | 1701 | Araccan | English |
| 13 | 1704 | Arraccan | English |
| 14 | 1706-8 | Racke/Rackan | English |
| 15 | 1720 | Arackan/Arackaner | English |
| 16 | 1767 | Arracan | English |
| 17 | 1777 | Rekheng | Persian |

The names that appeared after 1798 have not been included in the list as Francis Buchanan, the physician employed by the East India Company, had already confirmed the existence of the names *Rossaum*, *Rossawn*, *Rovingaw* and *Rooinga* during his visit to Arakan in 1798 (Buchanan, 1799: 43-55). Of the 17 variations listed in the Table, only 2 [*Arkhang* (serial 2) and *Rekheng* (serial 17)] used ‘kh’ in the spelling which might phonetically sound a bit closer to the word ‘Rakhine’. The other 15 variations used ‘c’ (soft ‘K’) in the spellings which are phonetically much closer to the name ‘Arakan’. The evidences clearly suggest that until 18th Century the land was known as either *Rosang* or Arakan, not Rakhine. The name Rakhine started appearing in the Burmese narratives after the *Konbaung* rulers invaded Arakan in 1784 and brought an end to the *Mrauk U* rule.

Francis Buchanan made repeated references to *Rosang* and *Rohingya*, albeit with slight variation in spelling. He observed:

“By the *Bengal Hindus*, at least by such of them as have been settled in *Arakan*, the country is called *Rossaum* ... The *Mahommedans* settled at *Arakan*, call the country *Rovingaw* (Buchanan, 1799: 43)”.

He further wrote:

“I shall now add three dialects, spoken in the *Burma* Empire, but evidently derived from the language of the *Hindu* nation. The first is that spoken by the *Mohammedans*, who have long settled in *Arakan*, and who call themselves *Rooinga*, or natives of *Arakan*. The second dialect is that spoken by the *Hindus* of *Arakan*... They call themselves *Rossawn* (Buchanan, 1799: 55)”.

Why did Buchanan use the terms *Rossaum* and *Rossawn* instead of *Rosang*, and the terms *Rovingaw* and *Rooinga* instead of *Rohingya*? Again, we find the answer in his candid confession:

“In the orthography I have had much difficulty. Two people seldom write in the same way, any word or language with which they are unacquainted. I have attempted merely to convey to the *English* reader, without any minute attention to accent, or small variations of vowels, a sound similar to that pronounced; nor have I paid any attention to the orthography of the natives (Buchanan, 1799: 42)”.

Literary sources, particularly those originating from within the same geographic region, have greater authenticity with regard to the pronunciation and spelling of native words. The close proximity of ancient Bengal, Tripura and Arakan suggests that the old literatures of this region represent the most original form of words used by the natives. Therefore in case of any ambiguity, it is always wise to fall back to local references than to search the literature of foreign authors who came from another part of the world, spoke a different language and had difficulties in pronouncing and spelling local words. As the literary sources of the region clearly indicate, the name ‘*Rosang*’ or ‘*Rohang*’ existed since the very early days of the fifteenth century.

We now need to resolve one more question about the toponym of ancient Arakan. Was the ancient land known to its natives as Arakan, *Rohang* or *Rosang*? Before answering this question, we need to imagine how the ancient land looked like. We are talking about a time when the modern concept of nation-state or country did not develop in this part of the world. Looking at Arakan littorals, one would find one small walled city-state surrounded by vast expanse of jungles, mountains or marooned beaches. It is in these small cities where the civilization developed. That is why we find repeated references to city, city-state, *Nagara*, *Nagaram*, *Puri* and *Pura* in the historical and archaeological accounts of ancient Arakan (Gutman, 2001; Singer, 2008; Kazi, 1995). *Mrohaung* or *Rohang* was one of the city-states like *Dhanyabati*, *Baishali*, *Pyinsa*, *Parin*, *Hkrit*, *Launggret* and *Toungoo Neinzara* which

developed in the *Kaladan* and *Lemro* River valleys at different points of time. Arakan, on the other hand, was the name of the entire littoral. Confined within the city limits as they were, the natives would identify with the name of the city where they lived while the seafarers arriving from other parts of the world would know the entire littoral as Arakan. Therefore, the city-state of *Mrohaung* or *Rohang* being located within Arakan littorals does not create any ambiguity.

4. PHONETIC LINKS BETWEEN ROSANG, ROHANG AND ROHINGYA

In both old and modern form of Bengali, as in any other language, there are phonetic differences between the formal and colloquial forms of expression. Differences exist in the written and spoken forms of words. Dialects also vary from region to region. We cannot expect every ordinary person to pronounce a word as accurately as the poets, novelists and academics do. The literary resources we have from the ancient Arakan were composed by the court poets using the richest form of words, phrases and expressions. Certainly, the ordinary people did not use the same rich form of expression in their daily life. Colloquial accents would often add phonetic impurities and modify the words. The working class of Arakan who formed the vast majority of the populace barely had any formal education to pronounce the correct form of the words. Using colloquial accent they would pronounce ‘S’ (স, ষ) and ‘Sh’ (শ) as ‘h’ (হ). Table 2 below will exemplify how the accent changes the pronunciation of various words from pure to colloquial form.

Table2: Variations in Bengali Pronunciation between Pure and Colloquial Form

| Pure form of Bengali | Colloquial form of Bengali | English Meaning |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| সাতরাইয়া (Shatraiya) | হাতরাইয়া (Hatraiya) | By Swimming |
| সকলে (Shokole) | হগলে (Hogole) | Everyone |
| সেইটা (Sheita) | হেইডা (Heida) | That one |
| সকাল সকাল (Shokal Shokal) | হগাল হগাল (Hogal Hogal) | Early in the morning |
| শাক (Shak) | হাগ (Hag) | Spinach |
| শরীর (Shorir) | হইল (Hoil) | Body |
| শালা (Shala) | হালা (Hala) | Brother-in-law |
| রসুন (Roshun) | রহুন (Rohun) | Garlic |

The last word in the table is particularly noteworthy. It clearly demonstrates how the pure form of the word ‘*Roshun*’ (Garlic) is pronounced as ‘*Rohun*’ in the colloquial accent. Following the same pattern of phonetic variation, *Rosang* would be pronounced as *Rohang* by the ordinary people of *Rosang*. While the educated elites of ancient Arakan pronounced the name of their capital city as *Rosang*, the grass-root people called it *Rohang*; both essentially referring to the same city, not different ones.

By the same argument, we can also explain why the people of *Rohang* would call themselves Rohingya. Here again, the age old connection between the toponym and the ethnonym has a role to play. In English, people of a particular land are often identified by adding ‘ish’ after the name of the land. For instance, people of England are English, those of Scotland are Scottish and those of Ireland are Irish etc. Similarly, in both old and modern form of Bengali, people hailing from a particular place are identified by adding ‘ya’ after the name of the place. For instance, someone from Dhaka would be called *Dhakaya*; one from Barishal called *Barishailya*, from Noakhali called *Noakhailya*, from Chatga called *Chatgainya* etc. Therefore, calling the people from *Rohang* as Rohingya makes perfect sense.

5. CONCLUSION

The historical accounts of ancient Arakan confirms the existence of a city named *Mrohaung* since early Fifteenth Century. The city served as the capital of the *Mrauk U* rulers for about

four hundred years. Besides, given its etymological connection with the mountain tribe *Mro*, reasonable evidences have also been found suggesting that a city by the name *Mrohaung* existed between 964 A.D. and 1018 A.D. when the tribe was in the political power of ancient Arakan. Literary references from local, regional and global sources confirm beyond ambiguity that a city named *Rosang* existed in ancient Arakan since the beginning of the Fifteenth Century. Findings from etymological and phonetic analysis further suggest that both *Mrohaung* and *Rosang* essentially refer to the same city. The toponym *Mrohaung* phonetically transformed into *Rohang*, and was widely used by the common people the ancient land. Use of *Rosang*, on the other hand, was confined within the educated elites only. Conforming to the toponym *Rohang*, the people of the ancient land identified themselves with the ethnonym Rohingya. Neither *Mrohaung* nor Rohingya is an innovation of the British period. Both existed in ancient Arakan much before the Burmans started crossing the *Yoma* and invading their territory.

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