



Mrauk U, Rakhine State, Western Myanmar

1997

ARAKANES PROVERBS IN COMPARISON  
WITH THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN BURMESE

By U Khin Maung Saw, Berlin

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Many thanks to Arakanese compatriots all over the world for encouraging me to write articles on Arakan (Rakhaing Pree) particularly to Flappingwings from Flickr - Fotosharing.

Special thanks to Ko Nyi Nyi Htwe who helped me transform the articles into PDF form and in printing them into Arakanese and Burmese scripts.

I also thank my wife Thanda Saw for typing and editing all my articles.

## FORWORD

The Arakanese (Rakhaings/Rakhines) belong to the Tibeto-Burmese Group and their "language" is only a dialect of the "Mranmar" Language which is popularly known as the Burmese language. During the Mrauk U Dynasty (A.D. 1430-1784), the last dynasty of the Arakanese Kings, the Arakanese used to called themselves "Mramar"<sup>1</sup>, and their term for the Burmese was either ပြူ "Pru" or အရှေ့သား "Ashay-tha" meaning Easterners or "our compatriots in the East". Some scholars regard Arakanese as archaic Burmese because it is very similar to the Mramar or "Myanmar" or the Burmese language used during the Pagan dynasty (A.D. 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>2</sup>. In fact, the language which is known today as "the Spoken Burmese" is only the "Irrawaddy Valley Dialect"<sup>3</sup> of the Mramar or Myanmar language based on the language used by the people of the Kingdom of Ava (14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century). However, since the people in the Irrawaddy Valley became the most dominant ethnic group of Burma, their dialect became "the main dialect" of the Mramar or "Myanmar" language. Hence, linguists must decide whether the modern Burmese is a dialect of the Arakanese language, the Archaic Myanmar (Mramar) or Arakanese is a dialect of the Burmese language. However, it can be said with impunity that both Burmese and Arakanese are the dialects of the "Mramar" or Myanmar language!!

There are many examples of Arakanese literature such as မဟာပညာကျော်လျှောက်ထုံး "Maha Pyinyakyaw Hlyaukton", ရနိုင်းမင်းသမီးချင်း "Rakhaing Minthami E-gyin" and ဧည့်ဝတီအရေးတော်ပုံ "Dhanyawaddy Ahaytawpon" which have played and still play a big role in the Burmese ("Myanmar") language and literature.

The "Father" of the Burmese Department of the University of Rangoon, the late Professor U Pe Maung Tin wrote in the page 31-32 of his book History of Burmese Literature: "It is amazing that the Burmese literature was more advanced in Mrauk U than that of in Ava at the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. According to the chronicles မင်းကြီးစွာစော်ကဲ King Swa-saw-ke of Ava, due to the request of Arakanese ministers, sent his uncle စောမွန်ကြီး Saw Mungyi (Saw Muangri) to rule Arakan. Many Burmese poets accompanied Saw Mungyi (Saw Muangri) at A.D. 1377. Most probably because of it Burmese literature was very advanced in Mrauk U at the 15<sup>th</sup> century".

According to the Burmese chronicles, when King Min Bilu (Man Bilu) မင်းဘီလူး of Longkyet (Longkrat) was assassinated by a minister called Si Tha Bin (Si Tha Ban) စည်သဘင် some Arakanese ministers went to Ava, the capital of the Burmese and requested the Burmese king for help. As mentioned before, the second king in the Ava

Dynasty, King Swa-saw-ke sent his uncle Saw Mungyi (Saw Muangri) to rule Arakan. Saw Mungyi (Saw Muangri) was wise and the Arakanese were happy, however, he had no heir. After the death of Saw Mungyi (Saw Muangri) the Arakanese ministers requested King Swa-saw-ke of Ava again for the heir. This time King Swa-saw-ke sent one of his disciples Saw Mee. Since Saw Mee was so stupid Arakanese revolted against him and one Arakanese prince, a relative of a late Arakanese king was chosen for the throne of Arakan.

At page 24 of U Po Hla Aung's 'A New History of the Rakhaing Nation (in Burmese) stated on the other hand that when King Min Bilu (Man Bilu) မင်းဘီလူး of Longkyet (Longkrat) was assassinated by a minister called Si Tha Bin (Si Tha Ban) စည်ဘင် some Arakanese ministers went to Ava and requested the Burmese king for help. As mentioned before, the second king in the Ava Dynasty, King Swa-saw-ke sent his uncle Saw Mungyi (Saw Muangri) to rule Arakan. However, he was so stupid and Arakanese revolted against him and he had to run away. The Arakanese ministers crowned the seven years old Arakanese prince Min Htee (Man Htee) မင်းထီး the son of a late Arakanese king for the throne of Arakan.

At page 29 of 'The Rakhaing' written by Maung Tha Hla where it was written: "True to the principle that offensive is the best means of defence, The Rakhaings often raided into the Burmese territory. The raid carried out in 1333, during the reign of Mong Htee, made its mark. The governor of Thayetmyo was taken captive with his family, and among them was his son. Saw Sawke, who was raised and educated in the court of Rakhaing. Later he became the king of Ava. In 1374, at the approach of some contending Rakhaing nobles, Swa Sawke placed on the throne of Rakhaing an uncle who was succeeded on his death in 1381 by a son of a former."

The period of the reign of Min Htee was stated differently in the books of U Po Hla Aung and U Tha Hla.

The Burmese Chronicle Maha Yazawingyi (Maha Razawangri) was written by U Kala in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. These incidents happened in the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Hence, one has to presume that the Arakanese version should be more exact than the Burmese because it was about their history. It cannot be ruled out that U Kala became confused because of the Arakanese king's name Saw Mun (Muan) and the Arakanese Ministers really came to Ava during the reign of King Min Gaung, son of King Swa-saw-ke to complain about their king,

Here, I would like to add one more point. There is a popular Burmese saying တရုတ်ကမိ ရှမ်းကအိ၊ ရှိသည့်မြန်မာ အနောက်မှာ။ which can be roughly translated as: "Because of the (military) pressure of the Chinese, the Shans (kingdoms) collapsed and they (Shan people) came down to us. So, we, the remaining Mramars or 'Myanmars' (Burmese) were forced to go west". I believe that this saying provides us with an accurate picture of the situation during the final days of the Pagan Empire. Since the kingdom of Nan Chao having been crushed by the Chinese, large numbers of Shans (Tai) emigrated towards Pagan and surrounding areas. After the fall of the Pagan Dynasty, many people from Pagan may have emigrated to Arakan. Three parallel kingdoms were established just after the downfall of the Pagan Dynasty. The rulers of these kingdoms, the Myinsaing, the Sagaing and the Pinya Dynasties, were Shan and not Burmese. Even Thadoe Minphyia, who established the Ava Dynasty, was a Shan-hybrid. Hence, it comes as no surprise that, during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, for a certain period, it was not Ava, but the Arakan City (Mrauk U) which grew to become the capital of Burmese literature.

Since the Arakanese, like the Burmese, are devout Buddhists and share the same language, there are many similarities between the two peoples with regard to their culture and their traditions. This shared culture also includes proverbs and folktales.

The Burmese/Arakanese word စကားပုံ *sa''ga boun* may be translated as proverb. However, it means literally "word picture". Some scholars have translated စကားပုံ *sa''ga boun* variously as "similar saying", "saying with an example story", "saying with a moral," "a saying, popular or otherwise, taken from a certain tale or story" and "a kind of picture, painted or drawn by words of mouth".

According to Prof. Dr. U Hla Pe, geographical and historical factors including the political, physical, economic and human, all had a bearing on the birth of Burmese proverbs. (See: Hla Pe Burmese Proverbs, Introduction, page 1). I would like to add two more factors to this list, namely religion and culture. In page no. 11 of Prof. Dr. U Hla Pe's book "Burmese Proverbs" he comments: "As expected we shall notice that certain proverbs are common to two or more of these countries (i.e. Southeast Asian countries adjacent to Burma and those of China and Japan). In several instances some of these proverbs are almost identical both in ideas and implications; if there are differences, they are in the characters used in the proverbs. These similarities can be ascribed to three main reasons: (i) the proverbs have been derived from a common source; (ii) one of the countries has borrowed directly or indirectly from another; and (iii) the countries concerned have similar attitudes towards certain concepts".

The Arakanese and the Burmese, as stated earlier, are both devout Buddhists and share the same language, however, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they had different kingdoms. Since Arakanese pronunciation and some vocabulary differ from the "Irrawaddy Valley Dialect", it is possible that some proverbs may have been misinterpreted by the Burmese whenever they borrowed them from the Arakanese. Naturally, the same applies conversely.

In this article, the present author, an ethnic Arakanese born in "Upper Burma" who grew up in Rangoon, will present a variety of proverbs which can be divided into three groups. Proverbs, which are either identical or almost the same in both "dialects" will be identified as "Group One". Proverbs which have different meanings either as a result of variations in pronunciation or because of other reasons, are assigned to "Group Two". Synonymous proverbs, which are presented in different ways are assigned to "Group Three". Each proverb is labelled as being either (a) in Arakanese (Rakhaing Dialect), or (b) in Burmese ("Irrawaddy Valley Dialect" or "main dialect of the Myanmar language"). Pronunciation is supplied both in Burmese script and phonemic transcriptions. A word-for-word translation according to syntax as well as a rough translation in English and the background story will also be given.

### Group One:

1. (a) ကိုယ့်ထမင်းကိုယ်စားပီး ယောက္ခမနွားကိုကျောင်းရေ။  
( ကိုယ့် ထမင်း ကိုယ်စား ပီး ယောက္ခမနွားကိုကျောင်းရေ)  
(kou' tha'men kou 'sa 'pi yau'kha' ma'nwa kou 'caun rei)  
own rice own eat and mother-in-law's cow looking after  
One eats his own rice and looking after mother-in-law's cows.

(b) ကိုယ့်ထမင်းကိုယ်စား ကြီးတော့်နွားကျောင်း။  
(kou' tha'min kou 'sa 'cito'nwa 'caun)  
own rice own eat aunt's cow looking after  
One eats his own rice and looking after aunt's cows.

Both versions can be roughly translated as "He stands on his own feet, supporting himself and working free of charge for others".

This proverb warns kind-hearted and good-natured people, who can be exploited and misused by others, because the Burmese as well as the Arakanese are describe as a warm kind-hearted and good-natured people.

In other words, this proverb can be stated: "If you are so kind-hearted and good-natured you will be exploited by others".

Both proverbs are identical, except that in the Arakanese version, the aunt's cows of the Burmese counterpart are replaced by the mother-in-law's cows. This is probably because the Arakanese favour marriages between "cross cousins" (children of one's mother's brothers or of one's father's sisters), known as သမီးမျောက်သား (thamee myauk tha). Hence, in some cases, an Arakanese mother-in-law can also be an aunt of her daughter-in-law or son-in-law.

This custom of marriages between "cross cousins" is of Indian origin.<sup>4</sup> It was observed by some Burmese kings when they elected to marry their own half-sisters. Although marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters were and are taboo in the Burmese commoner society, marriages between first cousins are not a taboo, however, it is not encouraged. Moreover, the term သမီးမျောက်သား (thamee myauk tha) "cross cousins" is alien to modern-day Burmese society.

Background story:

Once upon a time there was a kind-hearted man. He was so helpful and found it impossible to say "no" to anyone. One day, his mother-in-law (or aunt, as in the Burmese version) requested him to do her a favour and look after her cattle for "just a few days". As usual, the kind hearted man helped her. In fact, the man did his job so well and the mother-in-law (or aunt in the Burmese version) was so happy with him that she decided not to bother to search for another cowherd. Hence, those "a few days" turned out to be never-ending. Since the kind-hearted man found it impossible to say "no", he was obliged to continue the job for a long time. Moreover, since the employer was his own relative he could not expect any salary or reward from her. Besides which, he would have been far too embarrassed to dare to ask for such things. His wife even had to cook his meals at home and brought them to where he looked after the cattle. Not only did he do this job for nothing, he even wasted his time and money in the service of others.

2. (a) ကိုယ်ခွီးရေမျောက်၊ ကိုယ့်ကိုခြောက်။  
(ကိုယ်ခွီးရေမျောက်၊ ကိုယ့်ကို ခရောက်)  
(kou 'mwi rei myau? kou' kou khrau?)  
self born/brought up attributive marker monkey me threaten

The monkey that I brought up tries to scare me.

(b) ကိုယ်မွေးတဲ့မျောက်၊ ကိုယ့်ကို ခြောက်။

(kou 'mwei te' myau? kou' kou chau?)

self born/brought up attributive marker monkey me threaten

The monkey that I brought up tries to scare me.

This proverb is used when one is very ungrateful. As devout Buddhists, both Burmese and Arakanese, consider ingratitude to be a worse sin than betrayal, crookedness and dishonesty. In other saying it is said that even a person who gives you a cup of water can be considered to be your benefactor. For this reason, an ungrateful person who turns against their benefactor is someone to be condemned.

Background story:

Once, a hunter found a small motherless monkey in the forest. Full of pity for the small starving monkey, he decided to take the monkey home, where he raised him as if he were his own child. However, the more the monkey grew, the naughtier he became and the hunter was obliged to punish him several times. Nevertheless, the monkey did better his ways and instead began to despise his foster father for punishing him. One day, the monkey was so insolent that the hunter was obliged to take the lash to him. All of a sudden, the monkey took a burning log from the kitchen, jumped on the roof of the hunter's hut and tried to set fire to it. The hunter had no other choice, but to shoot the monkey. And so it was that the ungrateful monkey was killed.

3. (a) ကုလားခတ်တော့ရီ ကုလားဖင်ဆေးဖို့တောင်မလောက်။

(ကလား ခတ်တော့ ရီ ကလား ဖဲန်ဆီး ဖို့တောင် မလောက်)

(ka'la ka? tei' ri ka'la phen hsi pho' taun ma'lau?)

Indian fetch attributive marker water Indian Arse wash for even not enough

All the water fetched by the Indian is not even enough for washing his private parts.

(b) ကုလားခတ်တဲ့ရေ ကုလားဖင်ဆေးတာနဲ့ကုန်။

(ka'la ka? te' yei ka'la phin 'hsei ta ne'koun)

Indian fetch attributive marker water Indian Arse washing and gone

All the water fetched by the Indian is gone by washing his private parts.

This proverb is used if someone squanders all of his income and finds it impossible to save money. In other words, he is living beyond his means.



By using this "word picture" Arakanese and Burmese condemn prodigal persons.

Background story:

There is no background story for this "proverb". I am of opinion, however, that this proverb is of Burmese origin and is merely borrowed by the Arakanese. It belongs to one of the many "sayings", "proverbs" and "slang" invented either by the "ultra nationalist" or the "clown" performers of the *Zats* ဧဝဝံ့ (traditional theatre) at the beginning of the twentieth century.

After the First Anglo-Burmese War which broke out in 1824 and ended in 1826, some parts of Burma (Arakan and Tenassarim Divisions) were annexed by the British and became part of the British Indian Empire. Hence, since 1826 people from the subcontinent were able to come to pass to Arakan without hindrance. Some of these migrants were brought by the British for various reasons. The same migratory waves occurred in Lower Burma after the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852), and to Upper-Burma after the Third War (end of 1885).<sup>5</sup>

The Burmese as well as all of the other indigenous races or ethnic groups of Burma are of Mongoloid stock. The people of the subcontinent, however, are either Indo-Aryans or Dravidians. The Burmese, the Arakanese, the Mons, the Shans, majority population of the Karens and the Kayahs (the Karennis), the Palaungs, the Taungthus (the Pa-os) and some of the other minorities in Burma, all together comprising at least 85% of the population of Burma are Buddhists. When Burma became a British Colony, at least 90% of the population of Burma were Buddhists. The people from the subcontinent are Hindus and Muslims; moreover, Indians observe caste. In contrast, the Burmese and all the other ethnic groups of Burma have never observed caste. In terms of race, physical features, complexion, religion, language, culture, civilization, way of life and mentality, the people of the subcontinent and the people of Burma are quite dissimilar.<sup>6</sup> As a part of their policy of "divide and rule", however, the British colonial authorities blatantly favoured their Indian administrators and populace. Some members of the populace from the Subcontinent and their offspring, in particular Indo-Burmese hybrids known as *Zerabardis* <sup>7</sup>, realised the inappropriateness of this policy and decided to join the struggle for independence alongside the people of Burma. Unfortunately, however, there were some people from the subcontinent who chose to behave as if Burma were their *de facto* colony and it were their divine right to do every thing, whatever they like. As a result, social tensions between the two peoples broke out and in addition to anti-British

feelings, an antagonism against the people from the subcontinent began to surface in Burma, particularly in Arakan.

In addition to harbouring ill-feelings, the Burmese, the Arakanese and the other minorities of Burma looked down upon the people from the Indian subcontinent. This was because many menial jobs in Burma were largely carried out by the people from the subcontinent (in fact this was the case, even well into the post-independence era), a situation which has brought the people from the Indian subcontinent into disrepute. Not surprisingly, some Burmese and Arakanese (even Shan, Mon and Karen) slang, "proverbs" and colloquial expressions as well as "proverbs" poke fun at the people from the Indian subcontinent. Many of these jokes and "proverbs" were invented either by "ultra nationalists" or by clowns performing in the traditional Burmese theatre.<sup>8</sup>

These "proverbs" and slang expressions could be said to have been formed in the same way as some slang in British-English such as "Dutch auction", "Dutch courage", "Dutch treat", "talk like a Dutch uncle", "take French leave", "Frogs" for the French people and "Sauerkrauts" or "Jerrys" for the Germans etc. were created.

4. (a) အမောင်လဲရောက်၊ ငါ့နွားလဲပျောက်၊ အမောင်နွားခိုးငါမယိုး

(အမောင်လဲရောက်၊ ငါ့နွားလဲပျောက်၊ အမောင်နွားခိုးငါမယိုး)

(amaun 'le rau? nga' 'nwa 'le pyau? amaun 'nwa 'khou nga ma"you)

you also arrive my bullock also disappear you bullock thief I not accuse

Just as you arrived my bullock disappeared, however, I am not accusing you of being a bullock thief.

(b) အမောင်လည်းရောက်၊ ငါ့နွားလည်းပျောက်၊ အမောင်နွားခိုးငါမယိုး

(amaun 'le yau? nga' 'nwa 'le pyau? amaun na"khau nga ma"you)

you also arrive my bullock also disappear you bullock thief I not accuse

Just as you arrived my bullock disappeared, however, I am not accusing you of being a bullock thief.

This proverb is used in cases of coincidence.

Background story:

The First Version:

One day, a stranger came to a village. It just so happened that, On that very same day one farmer's bullock disappeared. However, beyond this coincidence, there was no other circumstantial evidence to support the claim that the stranger had stolen the farmer's bullock. Since it was too embarrassing for the farmer to accuse the stranger, the farmer contented himself with commenting to the stranger: "Just as you arrived my bullock disappeared, however, I am not accusing you of being a bullock thief".

The Second Version: (Based on *Manu Dhammasat*)

One evening, in a village near the capital city of *Varanasi*, a lad visited an old woman farmer. Since the lad was a son of her good friend the old woman farmer treated him as if he were her own son. They chatted until late into the night. The woman forgot to close the gate of her enclosure and one bullock escaped. The woman farmer did not notice the bullock was missing until the next day.

The farmer said to the lad: " My dear boy, while I was entertaining you last night, I forgot to close the gate and my bullock disappeared. I am not accusing you of having have stolen my bullock, however, since it was more or less your fault that I lost the bullock, I think the best thing would be if you would give me some compensation".

Her friend's son, however, did not agree with the farmer's suggestion. The two people decided to go to a Judge named *Manu*. The Judge told the lad: "It is true that it was only a coincidence that the bullock disappeared while you were there. Unfortunately, however, it is also your responsibility to help the old lady. Therefore, I would suggest that you go and search for the bullock and return this to this old lady. Should you fail to find the bullock, you are obliged to pay her compensation."

5. (a) ငါ့သမီးတော်လှဆိုကေ၊ ယောက်မ မြင်းစီးလို့ ထွက်တေ။

(ငါ့သမီးတော်လှဆိုကေ၊ ယောက်မ မရနန်းစီးလို့ ထဝတ်တေ)

(nga' Da'mi to hla' hsou kei yau?ma' 'mran 'si lou' thawa? tei)

my daughter good very say wooden spoon horse ride and come

While I was praising my daughter's discretion, she came out ride-a-cock-horse on the wooden spoon.

(b) ငါ့သမီးတော်လှဆို၊ ယောက်မ မြင်းစီးထွက်။

(nga' Da'mi to hla' hsou yau?ma' 'myin 'si thwa?)

my daughter good very say wooden spoon horse ride come

While I was praising my daughter's discretion, she came out ride-a-cock-horse on the wooden spoon.

This proverb which can be translated as "My daughter, for whom I was full of such praise recently, has let me down", is used in situations when one is disappointed or disillusioned by a person of whom one has always had a high impression.

In the Burmese and Arakanese society, the bond between parents and children is much stronger than in the West. In Burma, the parents are regarded as a child's first teachers, hence parents are the ones to be blamed or praised because of the bad or good behaviour of their children. To illustrate the point I would like to quote from Prof. Dr. U Hla Pe, who said: "Burmese parents like to keep their children in their home as long as they can, and to share their possessions with them. They seldom disclaim the bad ones". ... "Children's love and respect for their parents is a rule rather than an exception in Burma. Grown-up sons and daughters repay, in their parents' old age, the care which was given to them when they were young". ... "Here it is significant that the good and the bad are confined to sons. The good one is likened to a precious gem and the bad one to 'a foal which wants to measure his hoof's mark against his sire's'. As for the daughter, she is portrayed as neither good nor bad, except that she is a source of worry to her parents, since they are afraid that she might marry a wrong man. In reality, however, a daughter in Burma makes greater sacrifices than ten sons to comfort and solace her parents in their old age".

Background story:

In one village there was a family. The parents were very proud of their teenage daughter because they thought she behaved well. One day, the parents were talking with friends and praising their daughter by saying how good she was when suddenly, they saw their daughter come out of the kitchen ride-a-cock-horse on the wooden spoon as if she were a young child playing alone. The scene was an awkward one since this was considered inappropriate behaviour for a teenage girl and, as a result, the parents lost face on her account.

(6) (a) မြစ်တဖက်မှာ ဝက်လက်ကင်ချေ။

(မရိုက်တဖိုက်မှာ ဝတ်လိုက်ကဲန်ချေ)

(ma'rai? ta'phai? ma wa?lai? ken re)

River other side on pig leg roast

(One is) roasting pig's trotters with the fire on the yonder bank of the river.

(b) မြစ်တဖက်မှာ ဝက်လက်ကင်။

(myi? ta'phe? hma we?le? kin)

River other side on pig leg roast

(One is) roasting pig's trotters with the fire on the yonder bank of the river.

This proverb is used when someone says nonsensical or impossible things.

Background story: (Based on a tale from *Lokapraryatti-kyam*)

Once there lived a rich man who had many employees, servants and slaves. He was so greedy that insisted on exploiting and cheating his workers as best he could. One day during the cold season he called all of his slaves together and declared "If anyone manages to spend all night in the water, that person will be made a free man or woman".

One strong and sturdy slave accepted the bet and entered the icy cold water. His teeth chattered and his body shivered, but he remained in the icy cold water. In the meantime, some fishermen on the other bank of the river made a fire in front of their hut either to warm themselves or perhaps to cook something. Early the next morning when the slave came out from the river and demanded his master to release him from slavery, the crooked master shouted at him: "Slave, you are a cheat. You took advantage of the fire on yonder bank. You have lost the bet by default and I will not let you go."

"But the fire is on the other side of the river and it cannot give me any warmth" replied the slave innocently.

"A fire is a fire" replied the crooked master, "and as long as it is visible, it gives you warmth".

The poor slave had no other choice but to accept his master's decision. A few weeks later, the master asked the slave to roast some pig's trotters. The slave sat down on the bank of the river and started to roast the pig's trotters using the fire from the other side of the river. After an hour, the slave's master asked him why there was no fire to roast the pork.

When the slave pointed out the fire on the other side of the river to his master, he cried out "You stupid fellow, how can you roast pork from fire which is a half mile away"?

"But master", replied the slave, "as you yourself have said, a fire is a fire as long as it is visible and surely if it was enough to give me warmth at that night, it is also hot enough for me to roast the trotters".

Realising that his slave had over witted him, the crooked master had no choice but to release the slave after all.

(A similar story appears under the title "The Boat master and the Boatman" in Prof. Dr. U Htin Aung's Burmese Folk-Tales page 116).

7. (a) လက်ညှိုးမကောင်း၊ လက်ညှိုးဖြတ်၊ လက်မမကောင်း၊ လက်မဖြတ်။

(လတ်ညှိုးမကောင်း၊ လတ်ညှိုး ဖရတ်၊ လတ်မမကောင်း၊ လတ်မ ဖရတ်)

(la?'hnyou ma"kaun la?'hnyou phra? la?'ma' ma"kaun la?'ma' phra?)

index finger not good index finger cut, thumb not good thumb cut

If my index finger is not good it will be cut. If my thumb is not good it will also be cut off.

(b) လက်ညှိုးမကောင်း၊ လက်ညှိုးဖြတ်၊ လက်မမကောင်း၊ လက်မဖြတ်။

(le?'hnyou ma"kaun le?'hnyou phya? le?'ma' ma"kaun le?'ma' phya?)

index finger not good index finger cut, thumb not good thumb cut

If my index finger is not good it will be cut. If my thumb is not good it will also be cut off.

This proverb can be roughly translated as: "Those ones who are without discipline will be punished, whether they are my relatives or my own blood".

This proverb, originally Arakanese and adapted by the Burmese, is generally used for the strict maintenance of law and order, discipline etc.

Background story:

King Man Hti မင်းထီး (Min Hti in Burmese pronunciation) of the လောင်းကြွတ် Launkrat (Launkyat in Burmese pronunciation) dynasty, who ruled Arakan from 1300 to 1370 A.D was a famous disciplinarian. His father, the king of Arakan died when he was very young. Whilst Man Hti (Min Hti) was still a minor his uncle had ruled Arakan as regent on behalf of the young prince. In this way,, his uncle also became his foster father and the child became very fond of his uncle. Later, when Man Hti (Min Hti) was sixteen years old, he became the king of Arakan. One day, the king discovered that his uncle

was involved in a bribery case. The uncle admitted his guilt, hoping that his nephew, the king might display clemency and spare his life. His hope proved illusory, however, because Man Hti (Min Hti) sentenced his uncle to death as an example.

In the court of Arakan during this time, many people chewed betel. Whenever their fingers were smeared with quick-lime, ministers, secretaries and officers rubbed the walls of the palace with their fingers. Their fingers may have been wiped clean, but the palace became very dirty. The king found this intolerable and issued a royal order: "Whoever smears quick-lime on the walls, columns and pillars will be punished by cutting off the finger". One day, the king himself smeared quick-lime on one of the pillars. One minister saw it, showed it to some ministers as eye-witnesses, noting down exactly, the day, date and time. A few days later, the king noticed the white smeared mark of quick-lime on the pillar. He asked the ministers who the culprit was. The minister who had recorded that "crime" reported all the details. The king's response was: "Law must be law, an order is an order. There is no exception because I am the ruler. You said, I did it with my index finger. If my index finger did it I have to punish it too". Then, taking up his own four-edged dagger (one of the five regalia) he cut off his index finger in front of all his ministers.

8. (a) ဆင်လားကေ လမ်းမလို။

(ဆဲန်လားဂေ လမ်းမလို)

(hsen 'la gei 'lan ma' lou)

Elephant go when road not need

When elephants walk they don't need a road.

(b) ဆင်သွား လမ်းဖြစ်။

(hsin 'Dwa 'lan pyi?)

Elephant go road become

When elephants walk (in an area), (that area) becomes a road.

Since elephants are so big they cannot pass down narrow paths, rather they have to clear bushes, plants and small trees blocking their path with their trunks and throw them away. They are also very heavy beasts and so whenever they pass through an area that area soon looks like a temporary road constructed by small bulldozers and rollers.

This "proverb" can be read as follows: "whatever big shots say becomes a rule and regulation and, whatever they do, goes smoothly".

## Group Two:

(1) (a) ကုလားမနိုင် ရခိုင်မေး ။

(ကလား မနိုင် ရခိုင် မီး)

(ka"la ma'nain Rakhain 'mi)

Indian not defeat Arakanese ask

If you are unable to defeat the Indians, please ask the Arakanese (what to do).

(b) ကုလားမနိုင် ရခိုင်မဲ ။

(ka"la ma'nain Rakhain 'me)

Indian not defeat Arakanese pitch

Unable to beat the Indians he pitches the Arakanese.

Here, the Arakanese version and the Burmese version have different meanings. I believe this proverb to be Arakanese in origin. The Burmese have adapted this proverb from the Arakanese, however, the Burmese must have misheard the Arakanese pronunciation and translated it incorrectly. The word မေး (to ask) is pronounced `mi in Arakanese but 'mei in Burmese. It is likely that, when the Burmese heard this proverb, they would have thought it was the same as the Burmese word မည်: which can be pronounced either 'mi or 'me. Later, the word's meaning deviated to become the homonym မဲ ('me) which can be translated as "to keep picking on some one". Thus, the original proverb's meaning made a 180 degree turn when it became a Burmese proverb.

### Background story:

There is no background story to this proverb, however, there is an historical explanation. The Kingdom of Arakan shared a border with India. The Arakanese used to fight wars against Bengal and some parts of Bengal were in fact Arakanese territory until 1660. This could easily be the reason why the Arakanese saying: "If you are unable to defeat the Indians, please ask the Arakanese what to do, (because they know how to beat the Indians) came about and still exists. On the other hand, there is no historical evidence of any wars between the Burmese and the people from the Indian subcontinent, much less any wars which the Burmese lost against India. Moreover, the Burmese did not torture the Arakanese because they could not defeat the Indians. In fact, Bengal was a vassal state to the Pagan Empire of the Burmese<sup>9</sup>. This was also recorded by Marco Polo, who came to China two hundred years after the death of King Aniruda (Anawratha), the founder of the Pagan Empire.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, the meaning in Burmese version of this saying would seem to have no foundation.



Prof. Dr. U Hla Pe, a retired professor of Burmese Language and Literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, on the other hand, has provided his own explanation as follows: "There are no historical records of Burmese armed forces wreaking their vengeance on the Arakanese people because they had been defeated by the foreign forces. Probably this is a reference to one of the instances when ill-treatment was meted out to the Arakanese by the Burmese when they were engaged in war with the British between 1824-26".<sup>11</sup>

For his interpretation, Prof. Dr. U Hla Pe has interpreted the word ကုလား *Kala* not as Indian but as ကုလားဖြူ *Kalaphyu* meaning "White Indian" or "European" (here, British).

Some Arakanese supported Prof. Dr. Hla Pe's view. During the First Anglo-Burmese War many Arakanese helped invading British armed forces with the hope that they could liberate their country with the help of the British. Because of that the Royal Burmese Army lead by the famous Field Marshal Maha Bandoola had a great amount of savagery and war crimes in Arakan. Maha Bandoola was the national hero for the Burmese but for the Arakanese he was noted as a barbaric warrior. <sup>12</sup>

There would have been some credence for this interpretation if this proverb were created by the Arakanese after 1826, however, I believe it existed long before this date and probably dates back to at least two hundred years before the First Anglo-Burmese War. I would like to point out the following in order to substantiate this belief:

(i) The Burmese would not have had any occasion to create such a proverb during the whole history.

Even if the Arakanese had invented such a proverb during the First Anglo-Burmese War, and even if they meant to say: "Unable to beat the Indians/foreigners they pitched the Arakanese", as mentioned before, the meaning in Burmese might have changed as a result of the different pronunciations in both dialects.

(ii) Even Prof. Dr. U Hla Pe himself once wrote: "*Sagaboun* are at least as old as, and almost certainly older than, the written language. Ever since Burmese was first put into writing, perhaps during the early part of the 12th century A.D., they have enriched and embellished the literary as well as every-day styles" (see page 10 of his book, *Burmese Proverbs*).

(iii) There are many similar sayings which can be found in Arakanese literature such as မဟာပညာကျော်လျှောက်ဝံ့: "Maha Pyinyakyaw Hlyaukton" and ဓညဝတီအရေးတော်ပုံ "Dhanyawaddy Ahyaytawpon".<sup>12</sup>

2. (a) ရခိုင်နဲ့မြေပွေးတွေက ရခိုင်အရင်သတ်မြေပွေး နောက်ကျသတ်။

(ရခိုင်နန့်မိပွီး တွဲကေ ရခိုင် အရန်သတ် မိပွီး နောက်ကျသတ်)

(Rakhaing nan' mwee 'pwee twee' ke Rakhaing aran tha? mwee 'pwee nau? ca' tha?)

a type of banana called Rakhaing and viper meet if, Rakhaing first cut viper later hit

If one sees a type of banana called Rakhaing and a viper simultaneously, cut the banana stem first and hit the viper later (because vipers cannot stand the smell of the latex of that banana, their skin will be burnt by that latex, they will run away before one needs to hit the snake).

(b) ရခိုင်နဲ့မြေပွေးတွေရင် ရခိုင်အရင်သတ်မြေပွေး နောက်မှသတ်။

(Yakhaing nei mwe 'pwei twei' yin Yakhaing ayin tha? Mwei 'pwe nau? Hma' tha?)

a Rakhaing and viper meet if, Rakhaing first kill viper later kill

If one sees a Rakhaing and a viper simultaneously, kill the Rakhaing first and kill the viper later (because an Arakanese can be more dangerous than a viper).

Here too, the Arakanese version and the Burmese version have different meanings and the Burmese version became a racial proverb.

Background story:

The verb သတ် (tha?) in Burmese is either 'to kill' or 'to fight', however it means 'to hit' or 'to beat' or 'to cut' or 'to kill' in Arakanese. I believe this proverb to be a traditional medicine ပိန္နဲသေးကျမ်း (baindaw hasy kyam) in origin. Buddhists are not supposed to kill a being. Vipers are very poisonous, however, since they are afraid of the latex of Rakhaing banana and they will run away in any case. So they can be chased out by that method. One does not need to kill a being unnecessarily.

The present author sincerely believes that some Burmese who did not know the traditional medicine ပိန္နဲသေးကျမ်း (baindaw hasy kyam) must have translated it incorrectly and misinterpreted unscholarly.

However, some ultra nationalist Arakanese too supported the Burmese version. They stated this proverb was invented or created by the soldiers of the Royal Burmese Army lead by Field Marshal Maha Bandoola during the First Anglo-Burmese War because many Arakanese helped invading British armed forces with the hope that they could liberate their country with the help of the British. Because of that the Royal Burmese

Army lead by the famous Field Marshal Maha Bandoola had a great amount of savagery and war crimes in Arakan.

**3. (a)** ရခိုင်ဧကဒွေးမရ။

(ရခိုင်အိက ဒွီးမရ)

Rakhaing `i ka´ `dwee mra´

Rakhaing only one, two not possible

(Positive interpretation) Rakhaings are first class people, nobody is comparable to them.

(Negative interpretation) Rakhaings are so selfish that a Rakhaing has to stay alone.

(In other words:)

Two Rakhaings cannot stay together (because they will fight each other).

**(b)** ရခိုင်ဧကဒွေးမရ။

Rakhaing `e ka´ `dwei ma ya´

Rakhaing only one, two not possible

Rakhaings are so selfish that a Rakhaing has to stay alone.

(In other words:)

Two Rakhaings cannot stay together (because they will fight each other).

Here, even the Arakanese version has both positive and negative interpretations. Most probably the Burmese took the negative interpretation.

Background story:

There is no exact background story. Most probably the Arakanese version is the original and it came from the moral teaching and preaching of the Arakanese elders to the younger ones for the unity among each other, because the Arakanese kingdom was abolished by the Burmese at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were three Burmese invasions in the history and if one really analyzes these invasions, all three Burmese invasions were ‘invited’ by the Arakanese themselves. Whenever they were not happy with their rulers, some members of Arakanese court went to the Burmese kingdom and ‘requested’ the Burmese king that the incompetent Arakanese king be overthrown. Finally, the Arakanese lost their kingdom.

**Group Three:**

1. (a) ကြောင်ကကြီစပ်၊ ကြွက်သီတတ်။  
(ကရောင်ကကရီစပ်၊ ကရွတ်သီတတ်)  
[ကြောင်ကကျီစယ်၊ ကြွက်သေတတ်တယ်။]

(kraun 'ka krisa? krua? Di ta?)  
cat tease/play mouse die can

When a cat plays with a mouse, it can injure the mouse fatally.

(b) ဆင်ကျီစားရာ၊ ဆိတ်မခံသာ။  
(hsin ci 'sa ya hsei? ma' khan Da)  
Elephant tease/play goat unbearable

When an elephant plays with a goat, it can harm the goat irreparably.

Both proverbs demonstrate the inequality. It can be roughly translated as: "A man travels as far in a day as a snail in a hundred years"

(2) (a) တနှစ်လုံးလယ်ထွန်ရေ၊ နွားထီးမှန်းနွားမမှန်းမသိ။  
(တနှိက်လုံးလယ်ထဝန်ရေ၊ နွားထီးမှန်းနွားမမှန်းမသိ)

('ta hnai? 'loun le thwan rei 'nwa 'thi 'hman 'nwa ma' 'hman ma' Di')

Whole year ploughing ox cow not knowing

He ploughed for a whole year without knowing whether he was using a bull or a cow.

(b) မြင်းစီးလို့၊ အထီးမှန်း အမမှန်း မသိ။  
(myin 'si lou' a' 'thi 'hman a' ma' 'hman ma' Di')

Horse riding male or female not knowing

He doesn't even know if the horse he rides is a stallion or a mare.

These proverbs are used to describe stupidity, ignorance or some one who is unenlightened. Since both proverbs are self-explanatory, there is no need to describe the background story.

(3) (a) အားနာကေ ဝမ်းကြီးရေ။  
(အားနာကေ ဝမ်း ကရီးရေ)

('a na gei 'wan 'kri rei)

embarrassing if be pregnant

Any woman who is too embarrassing to say "no" is bound to wind up pregnant.

(b) အားနာတတ်ရင် ခါးပါတတ်တယ်။

('a na ta? yin 'kha pa ta? te)

embarrassing can if waist lose can

Anyone who is too embarrassed to say "no" will end up losing the lower part of their body.

These proverbs are designed as a warning to kind-hearted and good-natured people, exhorting them to avoid being exploited, taken advantage of and misused by others.

### Background story:

#### The First Version:

Once upon a time there lived a pretty young girl in a village. She was so very nice and helpful that she found it hard to say "no" to any one. For this reason, she was taken advantage of and misused by others ever since her childhood. When she grew into a young woman, many men came to visit her and courted her. Although she did not like them, it was too embarrassing for her to say "no" and so she elected not tell them any thing. Her parents and relatives warned her but all their efforts were in vain. One evening an aggressive lad took advantage of her weakness and begged her to go to bed with him. Since she was too embarrassed to say "no", she gave in to his pleas. They went to bed together several nights in succession and later she became pregnant. Unfortunately, the lad who made her pregnant refused to marry her, saying that he could not be sure whether he was the only one who had slept with her, because she could not say "no" to anybody. Hence, the poor girl became a "single mother", was expelled and made an outcast by her parents and relatives.

#### The Second Version:

There once was a ရုက္ခစို: *Rukkhadeva* (tree god). He was so agreeable and helpful that he could not say "no" to any one. Whenever villagers from nearby villages came to his tree and asked for help, he never said "no" but fulfilled their wishes on the spot. There were two rich men who were good friends. One of whom lived in "East Village" and the other one in "West Village". When their wives became pregnant they made a promise that their children should one day marry each other. Unfortunately, both men had a daughter. However, the family from the East Village kept it a secret and informed the other family that they had had a son. This family brought up their daughter as a boy, allowing her to dress like a boy from her earliest childhood. It was such a well-kept secret that nobody

except her parents and herself knew the truth. When the children turned eighteen years of age the parents set up the date for the wedding. But the "boy" from East Village was desperately unhappy about the situation. The girl's parents advised her to go to the kind-hearted tree-god *Rukkhaso* and ask him to transform her into a real man. The girl did as her parents suggested and went to the tree to ask the god for help.

"My dear girl, I pity you very much, but, alas, I can not turn you into a man", replied the tree-god "because every body comes to this earth as masculine or feminine according to their *Karma*".

However, the girl continued to plead with the kind-hearted god to transform her into a man at least for a month so that the planned wedding could go smoothly.

Finally, the god took pity and said: "As I told you, I can not transform you to a man even for an hour because I can't change your *Karma*. However, I offer the following solution: I can lend you my body for a month because I can do any thing I wish with my body, and it will not interfere with your *Karma*. We can exchange our bodies for one month so that you will become a male and I will become a female. After one month has elapsed, however, do not forget to return to this tree in order to exchange our bodies once more".

Naturally, the girl was delighted and promised to do as the god requested. All at was, the girl became a male and the god became a goddess: the real man went home and explained everything to his parents. The parents were overjoyed and the wedding was celebrated as planned.

In the mean time the "tree-goddess" found she being seduced by other gods or *Devas*: "Hey friend", they proposed "you have already known the sexual pleasure of a male having fooled with goddesses or *Devis*. However, the sexual pleasure of being a female was denied you until now. Why don't you give it ago? Since this is not your own body, it is a most fortunate moment". Unable to say "no", "the tree goddess" gave in to their entreaties, allowed herself to be seduced and enjoyed the sex as a female.

Meanwhile, the girl-cum-man was more than pleased with "his" life as a man: he enjoyed not having the burden of monthly periods, and sexual pleasure as a man. For this reason, he decided not to return the body of the god and never returned to the tree. The "tree goddess", however, waited for him to return with his body, day after day month after month. In time, the "goddess" became pregnant as a result of all "her"

fooling around with gods and soon became known among the gods and the goddesses as "the male god who became pregnant". "His" sex-change became "his" *Karma*. The goddess could not change back into a god. This "god" became goddess for the rest of "his" current life. Miserable, the tree-goddess bemoaned her destiny until death finally called her.

(4) (a) နောက်ကျကေ လဒမှာအရိုး။

(နောက်ကျကေ လဒ မာအရိုး)

(nau? ca' gei la'da' ma a"you)

late come when vulture at bone

The vulture who arrives late will only find bones.

Vultures feed on corpses and dead bodies, they appear on the scene immediately whenever they see a dead body and eat up all the flesh. Should a vulture arrive late, however, this vulture will have to make do with that is left over, mostly bones.

This Arakanese saying condemns those who are not punctual.

(b) နောက်ကျ နွားချေးနှင့်သလဲ။

(nau? ca' nau? 'ci ne' Da"le)

late come cow-dung and sand

The one who comes late will get cow-dung and sand only.

Both (Arakanese and Burmese proverbs) are roughly equivalent to their English counterpart: "time and tide wait for no man".

Background story: (A Burmese Folk-tale)

Golden Rabbit and Golden Tiger were friends. Golden Tiger was a good-natured old thing but Golden Rabbit was very crooked and cunning. One day Golden Rabbit went to Golden Tiger and asked Golden Tiger to help him collect thatch the next day. Golden Tiger, being a kind-hearted old thing, was pleased to help his friend; he cooked rice and meat, wrapped it in a bundle and proceeded to the thatch fields. Golden Rabbit, being a wily animal, also brought a bundle with him, but it contained no more than some cow-dung and sand.

When they arrived at the thatch fields, Golden Tiger, being an industrious creature, started to reap. However, Golden Rabbit, the lazy bones, suggested they take their meal

before they started working. Golden Tiger replied that he preferred to continue reaping and would eat later.

"As you wish," said Golden Rabbit "but don't forget the old saying ...." "What old saying is that?" asked Golden Tiger.

"He who comes first gets meat and rice, he who comes late will get nothing but cow-dung and sand" answered Golden Rabbit. With that, the rabbit ran quickly to the bundles and ate up Golden Tiger's meal of meat and rice. Afterward his meal he found a shady bush where he lay down and slept.

A few hours later, Golden Tiger felt hungry. Since he could only find the one bundle, he opened it. When he saw cow-dung and sand he was angry and asked Golden Rabbit whether he had eaten the rice and meat he had brought and replaced it with the other bundle.

"Of course not" lied Golden Rabbit, " but I can guess what has happened" he continued; "the wise old saying came true and your meal simply turned into cow-dung and sand because you were late".

Golden Tiger, the simpleton, accepted Golden Rabbit's explanation and continued to be cheated by Golden Rabbit for the rest of his life.

(A longer version of this story entitled "Golden Rabbit and Golden Tiger" is included in Prof. Dr. U Htin Aung's. *Burmese Folk-Tales* page 22).

(5) (a) ပါးစပ်ကယျား ဝမ်းကမ္ဘား။<sup>၁၃</sup>  
(ပစကယျား ဝမ်းကမ္ဘား)  
(pa'sa'ka' 'pya 'wam ka' 'mya)  
mouth honey belly/womb arrow

His words are as sweet as honey, however, inside, his real thoughts are as dangerous as an arrow.

He is a fake.

(b) ပါးစပ်ကယျားသကာ ဝမ်းထဲက ခါးတမာ။  
(pa'sa?ka' 'pya Da' ka 'wun 'the ka' 'kha ta' ma)  
mouth honey and palm sugar belly/womb inside bitter margosa (*Azadirachta indica*)<sup>14</sup>



His words are as sweet as honey, however, inside, his real thoughts are as bitter as margosa (*Azadirachta indica*).

He is a fake.

Both proverbs can be roughly translated as: "Flatterers are cats that lick before, and scratch after".

### Conclusion:

One saying is that folk-tales travel. It is therefore very difficult to say, whether similarities between certain folk-tales of two peoples - especially those of the Burmese and Arakanese - have occurred as a result of borrowing or have come about purely by coincidence, because these two people do not have different languages, rather their languages are in fact different dialects of the same language.

In this article I have sought to compare three groups of proverbs and their background stories in Arakanese dialect with their Burmese counterparts. Whilst it was relatively easy to find several proverbs for groups one and three for group two, however, I was only able to find three examples. Naturally, there may well be other proverbs which could be contained in this group which are beyond my knowledge. I can only encourage my Arakanese compatriots to point out such examples, because it would be highly useful for the comparative study of both dialects.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The "Mramar" were subdivided into (a) ရနိုင်းသား: Rakhaing-tha or people of Rakhaing, referring to the people of the capital city ရနိုင်းမြို့. "Rakhaing-mro" or "Dhanyawaddy" (Mrauk U), (b) ရမ်းဗြဲသား: Rambree-tha refers to the people of ရမ်းဗြဲကျွန်း: Rambree Island or "Rammawaddy", (c) သံဝဲသား: Thandwe-tha refers to the people of သံဝဲ Thandwe (Sandoway) or "Dwarawaddy", known at the time as the "second city" and its province, (d) မန်အောင်သား: Man-aung-tha means people of မန်အောင်ကျွန်း: Man-aung or "Megawaddy" (Cheduba) Island, (e) အနောက်သား: Anauk-tha means "our compatriots in the West" and refers to the Arakanese (Rakhaings), who lived in what was then the western part of the Arakanese Kingdom and is now the Chittagong District of Bangladesh and Tripura of India. There are still many Arakanese (Rakhaings, of course Buddhists) living in the Chittagong Hill-tracts of Bangladesh and in Tripura in India, and they are still called အနောက်သား: "Anauk-tha" by the Arakanese (Rakhaings) of Burma, (f) အရှေ့သား: Ashay-tha means "our compatriots in the East" at the time would have included all "Bama" or

the Burmese living in the Irrawaddy Valley. The Ashay-tha are subdivided into ပုဂံသား Pagan-tha meaning the people of the ancient city of Pagan, အဝသား Awa-tha meaning the people of the Kingdom of Ava, ပြည်သား Pre-tha meaning the people of the Kingdom of Prome and တောင်ငူသား Toungoo-tha meaning the people of the Kingdom of Toungoo, and (g) ထားဝယ်သား Dawei-tha (literally: the people of ထားဝယ် Tavoy, however, this also included all the people of the southern provinces of Tenasserim, also known as ထားဝယ်ခရိုင် Tavoy District and မြိတ်ခရိုင် Mergui District, all of whom also use different dialects of the Myanmar (Burmese) language.

<sup>2</sup> The Pagan Empire was invaded by the Mongols in 1287 during the reign of King Nara-thiha-pate and Burma was split up into small kingdoms. However, Burmese Chronicles also regard King Kyaw Zwa (son of King Nara-thiha-pate), King Sawnit (King Kyaw Zwa's son), and King Saw Munnit (King Sawnit's son) also as the kings of the Pagan Dynasty.

<sup>3</sup> The Tavoyans ထားဝယ်သား and Merguians မြိတ်သား still refers ဗမာစကား the Burmese language as ပုဂံစကား "Pagan Dialect"!

<sup>4</sup> The ancestors of Lord Buddha -five sisters and four brothers- the four brothers married four of the sisters.

Prince Siddhartha, who was later to become Lord Buddha, married his "cross cousin" Princess Yashodhara who was the daughter of his uncle King Suprabuddha (the younger brother of his mother Queen Maya).

Buddha's father King Suddhodana and Queen Amitta, mother of Princess Yashodhara, were brother and sister. Therefore, Prince Siddhartha and Princess Yashodhara were "cross-cousins" from either paternal or maternal sides.

This practice, whereby some Burmese kings even married their own half-sisters, was and is taboo in the society of Burmese commoners. Marriages between first cousins are not taboo in Burmese society, however, they are not encouraged.

Marriages between half-brothers and half-sisters and/or between "normal first cousins" (children of one's father's brothers or of one's mother's sisters) are also taboo in the Arakanese society, however, marriages between "cross cousins" are still tolerated and even encouraged.

On page 64 of "Freedom from Fear" Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, writes: "...there are many similarities between the two peoples. There is, however, one Arakanese custom which is very alien to the Burmese. The Arakanese favour marriage between cross-cousins. (Children of one's mother's brothers or of one's father's sisters are known as cross-cousins.) This is a reflection of **Islamic influence**.

Although I have a great respect for Daw Aung san Suu Kyi's scholarship and her politics, the present author does not share her view. As I have mentioned above, this practice was even followed by Prince Siddhartha who later became Lord Buddha, and also by his ancestors. Lord Buddha was born at least one thousand years before Islam came into being. It is my opinion that this practice can **absolutely not** be a reflection of Islamic influence. Indeed, this custom had already established itself before the birth of Buddhism!!

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi may even have forgotten that there was a marriage between her own paternal first cousins in the late 1960's!!

<sup>5</sup> The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 marked a turning point in the economic and administrative history of British-Burma. The British government wanted to export Burmese rice and they extended rice fields throughout Lower Burma, Arakan and Tenessarim Provinces; they also constructed railway lines. Since they needed peasants and "coolies" they imported tens of thousands of Indians.

<sup>6</sup> In the Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill. 1919, III, Clause 41, it was written that "Burma is only by accident part of the responsibility of the Governor General of India. **The Burmese are as distinct from the Indians in race and language as they are from the British**".

The Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the "Simon Commission", headed by Sir John Simon, vol. II, # 224, London, 1930, states: "We would add that Burma's political connection with India is wholly arbitrary and unnatural. It was established by the British rulers of India by force of arms and being maintained for the sake of administrative convenience. It was not an association of two peoples having natural affinity tending towards union. **There is nothing common between the two peoples.**"

<sup>7</sup> Hybrids of Indian-Muslims and women of any indigenous ethnic groups of Burma (ie, either Burmese or Shans or Mons or Karens or Arakanese etc.) were called *Zerabardis* by the Indian community in Burma; the Burmese called them (in their own pronunciation) *Zedabaris*. Children from such unions (as well as the mother) were obliged to be Muslim according to Islam and only then were they accepted in the Muslim society. Unfortunately, it was not tolerated for an Indian-Muslim woman or even a *Zerabardi* woman marry a man from any indigenous ethnic groups of Burma and change her religion. In such cases, the woman was expelled and made outcast by Indian-Muslim community and society. Taking this to be an insult, the natives (Burmese,

Arakanese, Mons, Shans, Karens etc.) retaliated by not accepting the *Zerabardis* in the native society but considered them to be one of the Indian races living in Burma, i.e. they were regarded as foreigners. In colloquial language they were called either ဒေသာရီကုလား: *Zedabari-Kala* meaning Zedabari-indian or ကုလားကပြား: *Kala-Kapya* meaning Indian-hybrid. The *Zerabardis* did not want to be called *Kala* (Indian) and named themselves "Burmese-Muslims" and most of them joined the Buddhists for "Burmese Independence Movement". Members of this group were happy to be addressed as U --- rather than Mr. ---, in order to demonstrate that although they were Muslims and had Muslim names their attachment was to Burma and not to the subcontinent. From this time they have been known as "Burmese Muslims" by the natives (Burmese, Arakanese, Mons, Shans, and Karens etc.). Some "Burmese Muslim" leaders like U Razak, U Rashid, U Pe Khin and U Latiff *alias* U Khin Maung Lat were highly respected by the Buddhists and Christians in Burma because of their supreme efforts during struggle for Burmese Independence against the British. U Razak was assassinated together with General Aung San, Burma's national hero and his cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1947. Following the Rangoon University Strike of 1936, U Rashid became a good friend of Gen. Aung San and U Nu, the first Prime Minister of Independent Burma. Later U Rashid became a minister in U Nu's government. U Pe Khin became the first Burmese High Commissioner to Pakistan in 1947 and after 4.1.1948 (ie. after Burma regained her independence from Great Britain and left the British Commonwealth) he became the first Burmese ambassador to Pakistan. U Latiff *alias* U Khin Maung Lat was Minister of Judicial Affairs in U Nu's cabinet until May 1958.

Nowadays most of "Burmese Muslims", (amounting to some 4% of the total population of Burma) are the descendants of those *Zerabardis* and they have already been assimilated into native (Burmese, Arakanese, Mons, Shans, Karens etc.) society. Only in Indian (subcontinent or South Asian) features and complexion do they differ from the natives of Burma (Burmese, Arakanese, Mons, Shans, Karens etc.) who have Mongolian (Southeast Asian) complexion and features.

<sup>8</sup> See also Axel Bruns & Hla Thamein, *Birmanisches Marionettentheater*, Berlin 1990, where it was written: " Hsaik-Ka-la wird als ein Inder mit dunkler Hautfarbe, oft mit einer Jockeymütze auf dem Kopf, dargestellt. Er ist ausnehmend häßlich mit seinen hervorstehenden Augen und dem gebleckten Gebiß. Besonders auffällig ist seine Beinbekleidung, ein kurzer Lun-gyi, der vorn offen ist und des öfteren einen auf seinen großen Penis frei gibt, was natürlich schallendes Gelächter auslöst. Diese häßliche Karikatur eines Inders ist vielleicht im Zusammenhang mit den starken Spannungen zwischen den einheimischen Birmanen und den Indern zu sehen, die von den britischen Besatzern zu Tausenden als billige Arbeitskräfte ins Land gebracht werden".

<sup>9</sup> Bo Ba Shin, *History of Burma*, Rangoon, 1950, p.58.

<sup>10</sup> See Myo Min, *Old Burma*, Rangoon, 1948, p.2, where it was written: "In writing about the Kingdom of Mien (i.e., Myan-ma) Marco Polo made no claim to have visited the country itself, though he seemed to have got as far south as the western part of Yunnan. His description of the battle of Nga-Saung-gyan, which marked the beginning of the disruption of the Pagan Empire in the reign of King Narathihapate is wonderfully vivid and accurate. Marco Polo called it a memorable battle by which the Great Khan effected the conquest of the Kingdom of Mien and Bengala, apparently because some outlying eastern parts of Bengal were part of the Burmese Empire then".

<sup>11</sup> Hla Pe, *Burmese Proverbs*, London, 1962, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> See and compare: Maung Tha Hla, *The Rakhaing*, NY, U.S.A, 2004, P 18.

<sup>12</sup> See ဧည့်ဝတီအရေးတော်ပုံ "Dhanyawaddy Ahyaytawpon" § 10: ။ကုလားနှင့်သက်၊ ငှက်နှင့်သားရေ အနေမယွင်း၊ ချက်ချင်းမကြာ အောင်ပါမည်အကြောင်း။ § 11: ။ကျိုးနံ့ကုလား၊ ဗျိုင်းကားမြန်မာ၊ နံ့မှာအလို၊ နဂိုယာယီ၊ ကိန်းနှစ်လီတွင်၊ ယာယီကျိုးကန်း၊ ပင်ပန်းကုလား၊ ထွားထွားကျေညက်၊ ပျက်မည်အကြောင်း။ § 22: ။ကုလား ကိုနိုင်လို၊ စားဖိုမှာမီးထည့်၊ ဝသဲ့တောင်ကိုထီးတင်၊ ကုလားကိုရှင်ပြု။

<sup>13</sup> The correct Burmese orthography of the word "arrow" is “ma: which is pronounced 'mra in Arakanese but 'hmya in Burmese. Here, I took the liberty of using the Arakanese orthography များ as for the pronunciation of 'hmya.

<sup>14</sup> Margosa (*Azadirachta indica*) is also known as neem tree.

### **Appendix:**

In this paper I have used the word Indian to represent not just the people of India, but rather all the peoples of the subcontinent or South Asian Region i.e. (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Afghans, Sri Lankans and Nepalese) for these are the people described as *Kalas* by the Burmese, the Arakanese and many other ethnic groups of Burma. Both words Burmese and Burman refer only to the most dominant ethnic group in Burma, the *Bamas* and do not include all the peoples of Burma. However, whenever other scholars have been cited, the definitions of Burmese, Burman etc. will be accordance with their own definitions.

The present author has also taken the liberty of using "Burma" rather than Myanmar for the name of the country though the latter is the real and correct word used in the Burmese (Myanmar) language. Moreover, other names such as Rangoon instead of the technically correct name of Yangon, Tavoy instead of Dawei etc. are used because these names are internationally known and have been established for centuries.

**Bibliography:**

1. Hla Pe, *Burmese Proverbs*, London, 1962
2. U Tin Htway, *A Glimpse of General Observations on Burmese Puns*, in *South Asian Digest of Regional Writing*, Vol. 9, Heidelberg, 1980, pp 11-27.
- 3 ရခိုင်စကားပုံများ၊ အေးကြာညွန့်၊ ရခိုင်ညွန့်ဖူး၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ 1965"
4. မြန်မာစကားပုံ၊ လှသမိန်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ 1966"
5. မြန်မာစကားပုံ၊ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ 1991"
- 6 မြန်မာစကားပုံ ဝတ္ထုပုံပြင်များ၊ တက္ကသိုလ်တင်အေး၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ 1955"
7. U Aung Htut, *Famous Proverbs of the World*, Rangoon, 1967
8. Maung Htin Aung, *Burmese Folk-Tales*, Oxford University Press, 1951.
9. Maung Htin Aung, *Thirty Burmese Tales*, Oxford University Press, 1952.
10. Maung Htin Aung, *Burmese Law Tales*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

