

SHAH SHUJAH IN ARAKAN

(Origin of Muslims in Arakan)

by

BA THA (Buthidaung)

SHAH Shujah, 41 years old, was the second son of Mumtaj Mahal, popularly known as Taj Bi Bi, and Shah Jahan who was proclaimed at Agra as Emperor of India early in February, 1628, after his father Jahangir's death. He had been appointed Viceroy of Bengal by his father in 1639. He possessed intelligence and was a brave soldier, but his excessive love of ease and pleasure made him weak and indolent. He had three brothers and two sisters. The elder brother Dara Shikoh 43, Viceroy of Punjab, was a liberal man but ill-qualified. The younger brother Aurangzeb aged 39, Viceroy of Deccan, was industrious and profoundly diplomatic, and had a military skill and unquestionable capacity for administration. No doubt, the youngest brother Murad Baksh, 33 years of age, Governor of Gujerat, was a frank, liberal and very brave man. The two sisters were Jahanara who sided with Dara Shikoh, and Raushanara who joined with Aurangzeb, while their brothers were fighting each other for the throne when Shah Jahan was seriously ill in September, 1657.

The scramble for power among Shah Jahan's four sons was won by Aurangzeb who dethroned his father, imprisoned his brother Murad and made himself Emperor. Shujah did not recognise him. He then advanced to fight against Aurangzeb. On the way Mir Jumla, the general of Aurangzeb met and defeated him at Kajuah, west of Allahabad on the 5th January, 1658. Betraying Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb was officially enthroned in Delhi on the 21st July, 1658. Shujah then fled to Dacca, the capital of Bengal where he found no support. It made him unable to hold Bengal against Mir Jumla's attack early in 1660. In May he sailed for Arakan with his wife,

two sons, three daughters, a great quantity of treasure (six camels loaded with gold and jewels), and three thousand retinue who were all archers to take refuge with the Magh King. The two sons were Balend Aktar, 16 years of age, who was famous in the history of Arakan as Mohammed Baik or Mohammed Baksh, and Zinul Abuddin who was an infant. The three daughters were Amina the most beautiful one, Raushanara, and Gulkharaj Banu. On the way he met the Arakanese fleet which conveyed him to Dianga and a few weeks later he proceeded on to the capital of Arakan. He reached a village at Maungdaw Township in north-west Arakan and there rest for a few days took The village is still called after his name, "Shujah Para". Then he set out for Mrauk-U (Mrohaung), the capital of Arakan, built by Naramekhla in 1433.

His advertised plan was to make a pilgrimage to the Muslim Holy Place, Mecca in Arabia where he wanted to die in retirement. The king of Arakan, Sandathudamma (1652-84) received him very well and supplied him with all necessities of life, and made a promise to him to provide a ship for the purpose. But his promise was like a rope of sand when he heard of the news of the most beautiful daughter of Shujah and six camels loaded with gold and jewels. The Arakanese kings had never seen such wealth in their kingdom before. Aurangzeb, the Moghul Emperor demanded his extradition but Sandathudamma turned a deaf ear.

Month after month passed away, but nothing was said about the promised ship. Shujah sent messengers to the king to give him a ship in accordance with his promise. The king gave a deaf ear to them. He blamed and lost his temper with Shujah because of not paying him a visit. Shujah

It would seem quite natural that Arakan, being a border region of Burma and adjoining Pakistan, should have a fair part of its population appearing almost foreign to Burma. But U Ba Tha in this painstakingly written article explains how this phenomenon started only from the late seventeenth century.

was afraid to enter the palace for he was alarmed that the king would throw him into prison and rob him of all his wealth. So Shujah sent his eldest son, Balend Aktar, to apologise for his absence and to beg provide him with the promised ship, presenting the king with some rich brocades and some rare pieces of goldsmith's work. The young prince's visit was in vain, for Shujah's wealth had made the king very greedy, but it was unjust to take others' property by force.

After a few days the king hit upon a plan to get Shujah's treasure. He demanded his eldest daughter, Amina in marriage. Shujah refused it for he was a blue-blooded Royal Moghul, and a Muslim lady cannot marry a non-Muslim. The king then ordered Shujah to leave the country within three days. Trouble broke out in the country. Shujah had no ships and he was a prisoner. It is needless to say, therefore, that he urged the Muslim settlers in Mrohaung to take part in a rebellion. The historian Jadunath Sarkar writes: "Many dwellers in Arracan, Mogul and Pathan, ... showed themselves inclined towards him (Shujah). He planned an outbreak intending to slay the king and take his kingdom, and then advance once more to test his fortune in Bengal. The king of Arracan heard of the

plot and planned the assassination of Shah Shujah."

The palace was set on fire by some Muslims and some of Shujah's followers, in December. The Arakanese killed them. Shujah was spared because the king's mother pleaded for him and argued that it was unwise to kill a prince. Then Shujah was kept in custody. His wife and children were taken into the king's harem, and his wealth was seized.

Some of the Arakanese Ministers told the king that the Muslims would seize the throne as Wali Khan, the commander of Muslim force of Pathan race twenty thousand in number once had done in 1430. The king believed them. There was another massacre in the capital on the 7th February, 1661, when Shujah escaped from restraint with the intention of seizing the throne. He disappeared from the eyes of the world in the fighting. According to the Dutch merchant Jan Tak's report of February, 1661, Shujah escaped from restraint... with a few men, fled into the

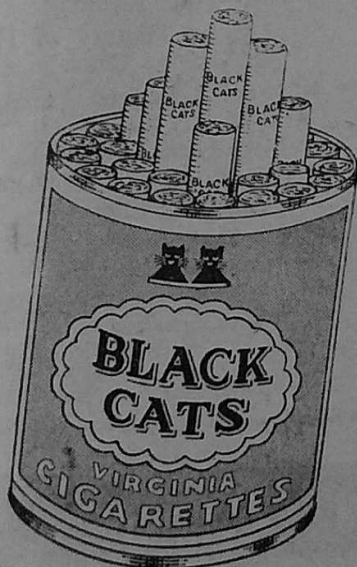
jungle...the Maghs pursued him... cutting his body into pieces. His wife and children were put in close confinement. In July 1663, some Muslims of Arakan attempted to free them. They succeeded in firing a part of the palace. But their attempt was fruitless. The Muslim young men were executed, and in the city there was a general cruel killing of Muslims including Rowengyas, the descendants of Arab merchants and Pathans. At the same time the princes were beheaded with blunt axes and the princesses were starved to death on suspicion of a plot when Sandathudamma's sons were hacked to death.

Mir Jumla, the new Viceroy of Bengal, had sent urgent messages to the king of Arakan for the surrender of Shujah's family before the execution. The king paid no attention to them. The news of the last massacre of Shujah's family and the Muslims reached the ears of the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb through the Viceroy of Bengal. Sandathudamma had even gone so far as to imprison a Moghul ambassador.

Fearing reprisals, Sandathudamma encouraged the *feringhi* (Portuguese) of Dianga, the port just opposite to Chittagong, Noakhali, Bakergunj District, Sandwip island and Sunderbans delta south of Calcutta to conduct a raid upon Bengal. The Portuguese sailed up the river towards Dacca and destroyed 240 vessels of the Viceroy.

D.G.E. Hall writes, "The king had now burnt his boats. War seemed inevitable. Early in 1664 a great Arakanese flotilla raided Bengal. About seventy galleasses from Dianga, manned by the notorious *feringhi* sailed up the river towards Dacca, put to flight a Moghul flotilla of 260 vessels, destroying more than half of them..."

Aurangzeb made up his mind to destroy the pirate nest. He appointed his maternal uncle, Shaista Khan, to be Viceroy of Bengal. He prepared to fight against the Portuguese and the king of Arakan. He was badly in need of ships. He asked the Dutch for help.



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Sandathudamma also asked them (the Dutch) for their hands in help. The Dutch were neutral. Shaista Khan threatened to expel them from the factories of Chinsura, Kasimbazar, Patna, Hugli and Dacca if they did not leave Arakan, immediately, where they had built a factory. The Dutch Council at Batavia sent secret instructions to Daneil Six, the head of Arakan factory, to evacuate at once; and a secret letter was also addressed to Shaista Khan apprising him of the plan. Therefore one dark night in the month of November, 1665, the Dutch carried everything from their Mrohaung factory by four ships and joined with Shaista Khan. In the same year the Viceroy of Bengal built a fleet and attacked the Portuguese outposts in Sandwip island. "But the Portuguese there were formidable fighters, and in seamanship were far superior to the Bengal Moslems. Fortune, however, favoured him. A quarrel developed between the *feringhis* and the Arakanese. Shaista Khan therefore offered them good terms to enter the imperial service," writes D.G.E. Hall.

On hearing the news, fright ran through the king and he disbelieved the Portuguese. They suspected the king, that he would destroy their families. So they joined with Shaista Khan with their 42 war ships loaded with military stocks. In 1666 Shaista Khan captured Chittagong and occupied Ramu in 36 hours with a force of six thousand five hundred men and two hundred eighty-eight ships. They sold two thousand Arakanese into slavery. The escaped Arakanese troops were attacked, while they were running for home, by the Muslims of Bengal. Then a sick fright swept over the Arakanese. They were running for their lives from north to south. After that blow Chittagong or even Ramu was never recovered by the Arakanese. At the death of Sandathudamma in 1684 the country fell upon evil days.

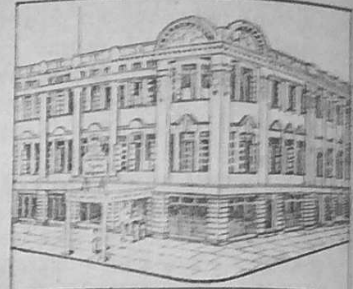
After the death of Shujah, some of his followers went to Burma to take refuge, for the Arakanese ill-treated them, and some of them remained in Arakan. In Burma they were not placed in a group,

because they were in great numbers. The King of Ava sent them to Toungoo, Yamethin, Yenangyaung, Meiktila, Myedu, Yando, Shwebo and Nge Ne, where their descendants are still found.

On the request of Prime Minister Magan, who was a Muslim, the king enrolled Shujah's followers, who had escaped the general massacre, to be the Kamans (Archers) of the Royal Guards like the Muslim (PATHAN) cavalry escort and eunuch swordsmen of the kings of Arakan. They drew Rs. 4/- per month, equal to forty rupees of the British Government. They increased their number by recruiting more of them from north-west India. It is said that as the distinctions of colour, race and creed are unknown in the ranks of Islam the two forces, PATHAN cavalry escorts and eunuch swordsmen, and the Kamans had united. They became so powerful that later they made and unmade kings at their will. In 1692 they burnt the palace and hunted upon the country for twenty years.

When the king, Sandawizaya (1710-31) ascended the throne he crushed them and later sent the Kamans to the islands of Akyab, Ramree and Sandoway town; and it is said that the other force was sent to north-west Arakan, (i.e. Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung), Kyauktaw and Minbya. The descendants of the Kamans are called Kamanchies who now call themselves Rakhaing Kaman Muslims, speaking Arakanese, whereas the Rowengyas speak an admixture of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Arakanese and Bengali. This admixture in their dialect came to be adopted as they are a border race, which generally happens with other border races of the Union of Burma. There are

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more than forty five thousand Kamans and more than five lakh Rowengyas in Arakan.

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