



# The Marma from Bangladesh: A 'de-Arakanized' Community in Chittagong Hill Tracts



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## [ *Abstract* ]

The Rakhine (Arakanese) from present-day Rakhine State (Arakan) in Western Myanmar and the Marma from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Southeast Bangladesh originated from the same region, share the same culture and practice the same religion. However, the people from CHT have developed a distinctive identity and are individualized by a different name "Marma". This development raises a number of historical questions. This paper explores how the Arakanese descendants became "Marma" in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Rakhine, Arakanese, Marma, Arakan, CHT, identity

## I. Introduction

Rakhine State (formerly known as Arakan)<sup>1</sup>, situated in the western

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1) In this paper, I will alternatively use either "Rakhine State", "Arakan" or "Rakhine/Arakan" to refer to the region and "Rakhine", "Arakanese" or "Rakhine/Arakanese" to the people.

part of present-day Myanmar, is the home of people known as “Rakhine” or “Arakanese”. In the adjacent coastal areas and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of present-day Bangladesh and in Tripura State of Northeast India, there are people ethnically similar to the Arakanese from Western Myanmar speaking a similar language, sharing the same culture and practicing the same Buddhist religion. While the people from the Bangladesh coastal regions call themselves “Rakhaines” (Mustafa 2005), those from CHT and Tripura identify themselves as “Marmas” (Ahsan 1995)<sup>2)</sup> and “Mogs” (Krairi Mog 2011).

The “Rakhaine” people of coastal Bangladesh and the “Mogs” of Tripura consider themselves as descendants of Arakanese (Rakhine people).<sup>3)</sup> However, the people of CHT who identify as “Marmas” hold a different view about their ancestors. They claim themselves to be Burmese or Mon by origin and not Arakanese (Bernot 1960; Bernot 1967; Ahsan 1995). This development raises a number of historical questions. What circumstances have produced a differentiated identity in the CHT? How and why did the people of CHT become “Marma” instead of “Rakhine” or “Arakanese”? These questions are addressed and discussed in this paper.

### **1.1. Background**

Arakan was formerly an independent kingdom. In 1784 CE, it was conquered by the Burmese and became part of Myanmar. During the hey days of the Arakan kingdom, i.e., between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, parts of the present Chittagong Division and Tripura came under the control of the Arakanese kings (Qanungo 1988; Leider 2004; Van Galen 2008). Some historians claim that the people of CHT, now widely known as “Marma”, are the descendants of the Arakanese who controlled Chittagong in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. After the loss of the port-city of Chittagong to

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2) However, the “Rakhaines” and “Marmas” in Bangladesh are collectively called “Maghs” by the Bengalis (Khan 1999).

3) The Mogs from Tripura sometimes identify themselves as “Mraima” but consider that they are of Arakanese descent (See: Krairi Mog 2012).

the Mughals in 1666 CE, the Arakanese retreated to the jungles of CHT and settled there (Qanungo 1988: 21-38). Some argue that Marmas are the Arakanese emigrants of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century who fled to Bengal/CHT due to the Burmese conquest of Arakan in 1784 CE (Bernot 1967: 33) or a few decades earlier (Khan 1999: 44-50).<sup>4)</sup> The Mog inhabitants in Tripura are considered to be originated from Arakan (Menon 1975: 153) or Arakanese immigrants from the Chittagong area (Webster 1910: 28).

## II. Marma: a ‘de-Arakanized’ Community from CHT

Some Bangladeshi scholars write that “Marma” is used to refer to people of Burma/Myanmar (Khan 1984: 117) or the Burmese nationals (Ahsan 1995: 4).<sup>5)</sup> Others link the Marma people of CHT with the “Talaings”<sup>6)</sup> or Mons of Lower Myanmar.<sup>7)</sup> Some other scholars argue that the word “Marma” is simply the Arakanese pronunciation of the Burmese word “Myanmar” which means “Burmese” (Bernot 1953: 19; Bernot 1960: 142; Ahsan 1995: 4). Many Western, Bangladeshi and Arakanese sources reveal that the Marmas of CHT are Arakanese (Lewin 1869; Lethbridge 1893; Hutchinson 1909; Bernot 1967; Ishaq 1971; Sattar 1971, San Tha Aung 1980; Sakkinda 1996; Khan 1999). However, the Marmas of CHT nowadays claim that they are Burmese nationals or of Mon origins.

The Marmas of CHT were migrated from ancient Burma (Myanmar) and their original and ancestral land was in the ancient Pegu city of Myanmar.<sup>8)</sup>

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4) Both Bernot and Khan retell Marmas’ claims (i.e., the Burmese/Mon origin). But, they conclude that these people are the Arakanese descendants.

5) Khan (1984: 117-118) states that the “Rakhaines” from Pataukhali (who were formerly known as “Marma”) in Bangladesh came from Arakan, a portion of Myanmar, but argues that “Marma” means people of “Myanmar”. Ahsan argues that their original home of the “Marmas” of CHT was the Pegu (Bago) city of Myanmar.

6) Now, “Talaing” is considered a derogatory term and is no more used in Myanmar.

7) See: “The Marma” (in Banglapedia). [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Marma,\\_The](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Marma,_The) (Accessed March 20, 2015)

The Marma community, led by the Mong Chief, were originally Burmese settlers who fled Myanmar to escape unrest in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>9)</sup>

Most articles written by Marma writers, especially those published by the Tribal Research Institute of Bandarban, support the “Talaing” ancestry.<sup>10)</sup> According to these conditions, a series of questions arises. What makes the “Marma” self-identify as Burmese rather than “Arakanese” or “Rakhine”? How and why were they ‘de-Arakanized’ to become Burmese or Mon people? In this article, I will invalidate the statement of Burmese or Mon ancestry by starting with an investigation on the original meaning of the word “Marma”.

## 2.1. “Marma”: an old name for the “Rakhine” people

Many scholars intuitively consider that the word “Marma” means “Burmese” (Bernot 1953; Bernot 1960; Bernot 1967; Khan 1984; Ahsan 1995). However, ancient Arakanese texts and old British records explain the term differently. These sources reveal that the Arakanese people in ancient times called themselves “Marama”. Even though this word is similar to *Mranmā* (Burmese), it would be difficult to conclude that “Marma/Marama” means “Burmese” in the past. It will be anachronistic if we make a conclusion based only on modern terminology.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century Arakanese texts such as *Dhaññavatī Are:taupum* and *Mahā Paññakyau Lhyokthum*: written in 1787 CE used the word *Maramā* to denote the people of Arakan (Kavisara 1967, 76) and the language and scripts used in the former kingdom of Arakan (Kavisara 1964, 54)<sup>11)</sup>. Another undated manuscript,

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8) <https://sites.google.com/site/voiceofjummaland/marma> (Accessed March 20, 2015).

9) <http://mongraja.com/history/> (Accessed March 20, 2015).

10) Personal communication with Mong Sing Neo, Flinders University, on September 21, 2015. For example, the articles written according to the Marmas’ point of view can be seen in: Maung Kyaw Shwe Nue 1998; Mong Sing Neo 2010; Mong Shanoo 2012. Mong Sing Neo later dropped this idea (Personal communication).

11) Khin Maung Saw (2014) explains this usage in his article “*Burma or Myanmar? Burmese or Burman? Rangoon or Yangon?*”.

*Natsamī: Suik Rakhuiñ Rājavanī<sup>12)</sup>*, frequently uses the term *Maramā* to refer to the people in Arakan.

In an old Western account published in 1799 CE, Francis Buchanan<sup>13)</sup> (1799: 223) writes:

The Burmese esteem themselves to be descended from the people of Arakan whom they often call Myanmawgyee, that is to say, great Burmas.

Another account of Buchanan, dated 25<sup>th</sup> March 1798 CE, tells us:

... that his nation are Ma-ra-ma-gre, or Great Burmas, which is the name given by the inhabitants of Ava to the people of Arakan (Van Schendel 1992: 33)

A Burmese compendium of traditional administration refers to the people of Arakan as *Mranmā-krī<sup>14)</sup>* (Tin 1963: 177). From these writings, it could be understood that people of Arakan were called *Maramā-krī*: (Ma-ra-ma-gri)<sup>15)</sup> or *Mranmā-krī*: (Myan-ma-gyi) by the Burmans in ancient times. On the other hand, the people of Arakan/Rakhine called themselves *Ma-ra-mā* (with three syllables) while the Burmese people of Ava from central Myanmar called themselves *Mran-mā* (with two syllables). It is noticeable that while *Mranmā* meant “Burmese”, *Maramā* (endonym) and *Maramā-krī*: or *Mranmā-krī*: (exonyms) were terms used for the people of Arakan. As Francis Hamilton (1820: 264) explains:

The people of Rakhain, however, write their name Marama, making

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12) My thanks go to Mong Sing Neo for pointing out this manuscript.

13) When he retired, he adopted the name of his mother whose property he inherited.

14) According to this *Mranmā-maiñ: Upkhyup-pum Cātam*: (Administration Manual of the Kings of Myanmar), *Mranmā-krī*: refers to “Arakanese” and *Mranmā-ñay* refers to the “Pyu” people.

15) The Barua Buddhists from Bengal who are also known as “Maghs” to the Bengalis (or, Barua Maghs) claim themselves to be “Marama-gri”. Phayre (1841: 683) states: “There is a class of people residing in the Chittagong District, who call themselves Raj-bansé, and in Burmese Myam-má-gyee or ‘great Myam-mas’. They pretend to be descendants of the kings of Arakan, a flattering fiction which they have invented to gloss their spurious descent”.

it consist of three syllables, while in the orthography of Ava, it has only two<sup>16</sup>), and the R in their pronunciation is changed into Y or J.

Hamilton (1825: 201) also reveals that people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts came originally from Arakan/Rakhine and called themselves “Marama”:

There can be no doubt that these people [Marmas from CHT] came from Rakhain, the language and customs of which they retain unchanged. ... The more intelligent among them acknowledged the name Marama, which the people of Rakhain assume.

In another account dated 18 April 1798 CE, a note by Francis Buchanan is found as follows:

Soon after my arrival I was visited by Kaung-la-pru [Bohmong Chief in CHT] ... He said that the proper name of the Joomeas is Mā-rā-ma, and that they have resided in this Country from time immemorial. (Van Schendel 1992: 87).

In a writing by J. Leyden in 1811 CE, it is stated that:

The national name of the Rukhéng [Rakhine] race is Ma-rum-ma (sic!)<sup>17</sup> (Leyden 1811: 231)

In sum, Arakanese, Burmese and Western accounts tell us that the people of Arakan/Rakhine were once called by the Burmans *Mranmā-krī*: while the people of Rakhine called themselves *Maramā*. Indeed, *Maramā* is an old word for the people of the country of Rakhine or Arakan. Therefore, the people who called themselves *Maramā* nowadays are the people from Rakhine/Arakan who have settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts a long time ago.

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16) This spelling can be no other than “Mran-mā” (with two syllables) and Mran-mā is pronounced Myan-mā (ya for ra).

17) However, Phayre (1841: 681) writes: “The Rakhoing-tha and Khyoung-tha are of the same race. Like the Burmans their national name is Myam-má”. Phayre might have confused the terms *Ma-ra-mā* (mentioned in old Arakanese texts, Hamilton's accounts of 1820/1825 and Leyden's writing of 1811) and *Mran-mā* (pronounced: *Myan-má*).

## **2.2. The Start of ‘de-Arakanization’**

In 1784 CE, the kingdom of Arakan was occupied by the Burmese. Due to oppression which happened some years after the Burmese conquest, many Arakanese fled to East Bengal which is under the control of the British. The Arakanese insurgency from the Bengal area against the Burmese rulers occurred a decade later (Pearn 1933). In some occasions, the Burmese troops invaded the province of Chittagong (Hamilton 1825: 201; Qanungo 2010: 14-17). Hamilton states that the old Arakanese community that had settled in CHT for a long time and the newly arrived Arakanese community following the Burmese invasion and subjugations formed two different communities. Hamilton argues that the old community did not want to associate with the newly arrived Arakanese. The reason he argues was that the former were frightened with the Burmese troops who could probably subdue them for their connection to Arakan/Rakhine. Hamilton (1825: 201) explains:

The invasion of the province of Chatigang [Chittagong] by the troops of Ava in 1794, and the giving up of the several refugees that had fled from Arakan (Rakhain) for protection, had occasioned a very general alarm among the Joomea Muggs [now widely known as Marmas]; for there can be no doubt that these people came from Rakhain, the language and customs of which they retain unchanged. This terror made them in general unwilling to acknowledge any connection with Arakan.

## **2.3. The Emergence of Bohmong History**

Bohmongs are the Chiefs (also known as “Rajas”) of the Marma community from Bandarban Hill District. The creation of the history and genealogy of the Bohmongs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a key factor in linking the Marmas to the Pegu city and Mon people of Lower Myanmar. An embellished history of the Bohmong dynasty was presented to J. P. Mills in 1920s and Lucien Bernot in 1950s by the then ruling Bohmongs (See: Mills 1926-27; Bernot 1967: 85-96; Löffler 1968: 189). The earliest

history of Bohmongs in printed form can be found in Hutchinson's *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (1906). According to the Bohmong history, the city of Pegu, the capital of Lower Myanmar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was populated with Mon or "Talaing" people and conquered by a Burmese ruler from Upper Myanmar in 1599 CE with the assistance of the Arakanese king. In recognition of the help of the Arakanese, the Burmese lord gave him 33,000<sup>18)</sup> "Talaing" prisoners, a prince and a princess of Pegu to the king of Arakan.<sup>19)</sup> The Arakanese king married the princess of Pegu and went back to Arakan together with the 33,000 Mon captives to be settled in Arakan.<sup>20)</sup> Later in 1614 CE, the king of Arakan appointed the prince of Pegu as the ruler of Chittagong that belonged to the kingdom of Arakan (Hutchinson 1906: 109; Hutchinson 1909: 28).

The genealogy of the Bohmong Chiefs was reproduced in G. E. Harvey's article *The Magh Bohmong* (Harvey 1961). However, nobody really knows to what extent this Bohmong history is authentic in relation with the Mon people of Pegu. One scholar even doubts the authenticity of this Bohmong history. As Löffler (1968: 189) notes:

In his most remarkable book *Les Paysans Arakanais du Pakistan Oriental*, Lucien Bernot gives the fullest account of the Marma Chiefs of Banderban hitherto published. For his account Bernot had

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- 18) Contemporary European sources of 16<sup>th</sup> century said 5,000 Mons and Burmans headed by some of Nandabayin's son and his brother were taken with the princess to Arakan, the only person named is Ximicolia, one of the sons, on whose companionship (Harvey 1961: 35).
- 19) In *History of Burma*, G. E. Harvey writes: "the Arakanese deported 3,000 households of the wretched Pegu folks" (Harvey 1925: 183) and "were settled at Urittaung and along the Mayu river. Some of the Talaings were at Sandoway" (Harvey 1925: 141), not in CHT. Urittaung is located 21 miles to the Southwest and Sandoway is located 165 miles to the Southeast from MraukU, the capital of Arakan kingdom.
- 20) The *Mañ: Rājākrī: Cātam:* (MRCT), originally written in 1602 CE and extended in 1775 CE mentioned the exaggerated number, 30,000 Talaing captives and 3,000 *yui-da-yā:* captives. But it is stated that "Talaings" were resettled in Nga-zan-raing-kywan in Arakan (MRCT: f° 'kho'-v°), not in CHT. Nga-zan-raing-kywan is located in present Minbya township, just 16 miles to the south from MraukU, the ancient capital of Arakan.



mainly to rely on the oral traditions of the people, since the archives of the Banderban dynasty are said to have been lost. When J. P. Mills during his tour in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1926 wanted to see them, he was told that the archives had been destroyed by fire. Again, when L Bernot asked for them in 1952, he was informed that they had been stolen some years ago from the Chittagong station. Ought we may have been interested in the disappearance of these documents?

As traceable in printed books, the Bohmong history which links the Bohmongs to the “Talaing” or Mon of Lower Burma could not have appeared earlier than the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was only around 1906 that Hutchinson firstly mentioned the link of the Bohmongs with the Mon people (Hutchinson 1906: 109; Hutchinson 1909: 28).

*The Golden Book of India* compiled by Lethbridge in 1896 CE features the biographies of princely lords, nobles and chiefs of the Indian Empire. There, a biography of the then Bohmong, Tsaneyo Chaudhri (“Sana Yeo” in Harvey 1961: 38; local spelling: “Sa Nhine Neo”), is found. The Bohmong was mentioned as an Arakanese in this book (Lethbridge 1896: 20 & 545). Lethbridge retells a story about the Pakhong [Pegu] princess who married the Arakanese king and the coming of “Tong Bohmong”, son of the Pakhong (Pegu) king to Arakan sometime before 1776 CE. According to this account, the Bohmong dynasty did not start as early as 1614 CE as claimed in the above history of Hutchinson (Lethbridge 1896: 545). The story about the “Talaing” (Mon) people is not found in this account. The description in the golden book may be a reproduction of the memories of the then Bohmong based on the oral traditions and social memories of his ancestors. It is interesting to know how the embellished Bohmong history emerged within a decade in 1906 from their vague memories in 1896.

Until Hutchinson’s account on the Bohmongs, the Bohmong Chiefs considered themselves as Arakanese. In 1798 CE, Francis Buchanan met the then Bohmong Chief in CHT. At that time, the Bohmong told Buchanan that he and his people were *Maramā*, an old name for the people of Arakan (Van Schendel

1992: 87). The accounts of Captain Lewin reveal that the Bohmong considered his ancestors as coming originally from Arakan<sup>21</sup>). Lewin (1869: 53-54 & 1870: 134-138) retells what the Bohmong told him:

In former times, when the Moghuls were Rajahs in Chittagong, and Arracan [Arakan] was an independent monarchy, my ancestors lived on the Koladan River in Arracan. Now, the King of Burmah [Burma] was very jealous of the King of Arracan, and wished to take his kingdom from him ...

Then came the King of Burmah with an army and took Arracan, and our King was killed, and my grandfather took the tribe and fled away into the Chittagong Hills ...

However, conditions had changed up to 1926 and when J. P. Mills made his research, the oral history of the Bohmongs stated that the “Talaing” people were not only the ancestors of the Bohmong but also the ancestors of his people. In 1942-5 CE, some of the Burma officers who were friends of the British ICS administrator-historian G. E. Harvey met the then ruling Bohmong and they were puzzled at the latter’s insistence that he was “a warrior Talaing, descended from warrior Talaings” because the then Bohmong was using the name used by the foreigners, not by the Mons themselves. Harvey (1961: 36) noted:

He [the Bohmong] was echoing the anglo-vernacular idea, current in Bengal during the 1920s and 30s, that anything from Pegu was Talaing: Bayinnaung was a ‘Talaing king’ (sic!).<sup>22</sup>

The idea of “Talaing” ancestry has been established since Hutchinson’s time gradually evolving between the 1920s and 1940s. However, it is not very clear why the Bohmong Chiefs of the Marma people themselves switched their identity from Arakanese (Lewin’s time, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) to Mon descendants (Hutchinson’s time, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century).

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21) The Bohmong told a story to Lewin.

22) Bayinnung, King of Pegu, is a Burmese national, not a “Talaing” or Mon.

The history of Bohmongs noticeably influenced many writers, not only local Marmas but also Bengalis and Westerners. Under the influence of the Bohmong history, local Marma writers have adopted the “Talaing” (Mon) ancestry. However, Bengali and Western writers notice that Lower Myanmar is not only home for the Mons but that actually most people are Burmese. Then, they rationalize the Marmas’ ancestry as Burmese. The creation of a ‘de-Arakanized’ history of the Bohmongs and popularization of the history by local, Bengali and Western writers are the main reasons which confused the ancestry of the Marmas. As a result, Marmas in CHT prefer to self-identify as descendants of Burmese or Mon instead of Arakanese.

#### **2.4. Marma: the early settlers in CHT**

Some scholars would like to emphasize that the Marma are the descendants of the Arakanese refugees who fled to Bengal when the kingdom of Arakan was occupied by the Burmese in 1784 CE (Bernot 1960: 143; Bernot 1967: 33; Ishaq 1971: 29; Khan 1999: 46-48). Bernot (1957: 49-55) acknowledges the migration of people at different moments from different regions as far south as “Talaing” or Pegu. However, he insisted that “the Marma had been settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts for one century and a half [counting back from 1960]” (Bernot 1960: 143). Khan (1999: 46-48) also holds the idea that most of the Marma migrated to CHT in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries although he mentions in one instance (Khan 1999: 45) the arrival of a group of Arakanese to Bengal in 1775 CE, ten years before the conquest of Arakan. It is not very clear what sources inspired these scholars to consider the idea. Captain Lewin might be one of the first writers to argue that these people have arrived and settled in CHT by the time the kingdom of Arakan collapsed. Lewin (1869: 28) writes:

A greater portion of the hill tribes, at present living in the Chittagong Hills, undoubtedly came about two generations ago from Arracan.

Two generations ago counting back from 1869 CE coincided

with the time of the Burmese occupation of the Arakan kingdom. For this argument, Lewin quoted a letter sent from a Burmese governor of Arakan to the British East India Company, dated June 24, 1787 CE. Lewin (1869: 29) states that the tribes of Arakan such as “Domcan Chukma, and Kiecopa Lies, Marring” ran away to the hills of Bengal when Arakan was attacked by the Burmese. They were identified by him as the Chakma and the Murung tribes of CHT. Ishaq (1971: 29) follows Lewin’s argument that they ran away from Arakan together with the Arakanese when the country was plundered by the Burmese invaders. According to Ishaq following Lewin, the Arakanese and other tribes in CHT were recent immigrants of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, Lewin might have misinterpreted his sources.

After comparing with some other letters of the East India Company, I observe that the individual names of the people who ran away to Bengal from Arakan were mentioned<sup>23</sup>). Among the names, “Lohwa Murung” (according to the Arakanese spelling: *Lakwè Mran*) was an important figure. *Lakwè Mran* was the honorific title of an officer at the Arakan court. Some sources mentioned that Lohwa Murung was one of the leaders of the Arakanese resistance forces who took shelter in the jungle in Bengal. In 1794 CE, a large body of Burmese troops entered the Chittagong Division and demanded the surrender of Arakanese rebels including Lohwa Murung (Qanungo 2010: 13-14). “Kiecopa Lies, Marring” quoted by Lewin could be this “Lohwa Murung” mentioned in other sources. While “Lies Marring” (*Lakwè Mran*, Lohwa Murung) was the title, “Kiecopa” would be *Kywan:-up*, meaning a village group chief<sup>24</sup>). Such an interpretation would invalidate Lewin’s earlier assessment.

Francis Hamilton (Buchanan) who met the Marama people in CHT in 1798 CE, seventy years before Lewin wrote his account, recorded that these people had settled there a long time before the invasion of Arakan by the Burmese. Hamilton (1825:

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23) For example, See: The Letter sent from the Magistrate of the Zillah of Chittagong dated November 30, 1798 CE. At that time, “Lohwa Murung” had well established in Bengal (BL/IOR/F/4/71/1583).

24) My thanks go to Dr. Jacques Leider for his explanation on this word.

201) writes<sup>25</sup>):

It is true, indeed, that they would appear to have retired from their original country about the middle of the last century, that is, between thirty and forty years before the conquest of Rakhain by the King of Ava, while the refugees that were delivered up were insurgents, who had risen against the government of Ava ten years after the conquest.

According to Hamilton, the Marma had already settled in CHT “thirty and forty years before the conquest” of Rakhine/ Arakan by the Burmese, i.e, in the 1740-1750s. Hamilton also mentioned that these people did not want to have any connection with the newly arriving Arakanese refugees of around 1794 CE. As said above, they feared possible Burmese repression if they were connected with the newly arrived Arakanese (Hamilton 1825: 201). There are other sources stating an earlier arrival of the Arakanese in Bengal previous to the Burmese conquest. In 1760 CE, Chittagong Division came under the control of the East India Company. At that time, the British attracted many people from neighboring countries to settle in the unpopulated lands in this region with an ambition to reclaim the waste lands (Serajuddin 1971a). In 1775 CE, ten years before Arakan was conquered by the Burmese, some 2,000 Arakanese came to the East India Company’s territories to settle there (Serajuddin 1971a: 126). This would mean that the Marma are not the descendants of the Arakanese refugees who arrived to CHT after the fall of the Arakanese kingdom.

Arakanese sources claim the establishment of Arakan people in the regions of Bengal, CHT and Tripura as early as the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (Kyaw Mra Than<sup>26</sup>) 1993: 3; Sakkinda 1996: 92). An undated Arakanese manuscript entitled *Thoñtaññ Mau-kvan:* (TTMK) explains the establishment of various *thoñ* or “communities” in the Chittagong region in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (TTMK: fo

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25) Francis Hamilton visited to CHT in 1798 CE when he was known as “Francis Buchannan”.

26) I would like to thank Mong Sing Neo for sharing “*The Extraction of Rakhine Divisional Establishment Gazetteers*”.

'ka' to 'khi'). With regard to the first wave of settlement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, TTMK claims that the Arakanese king captured 900,000 "Talaings" and 900,000 Pyus, together with the Princess of Pegu, during his Pegu expeditions in 1599 CE (TTMK: ƒo 'kā'-v<sup>o</sup>). The king allegedly established those one million and eight hundred thousand people in Arakan but they later reportedly ran away to Myanmar proper. Then the Pegu princess requested the king to establish *thoñ* (communities) in the plains of Chittagong and CHT around 1612 CE in order to keep the remaining deportees in Arakan (TTMK: ƒo 'ki'-r<sup>o</sup>; Sakkinda 1996: 93; Kyaw Mra Than 1993: 4). A similar account about the establishment of communities in this region is also found in J. P. Mills' notes with a lower figure "33,000 Talaing subjects", as stated by the Bohmong at the time. One may speculate if the Bohmong speaking to Mills in the 1920s may have had accessed the text of TTMK and, based on this text, reinforcing his belief of the connection with the "Talaing" people. However, another undated manuscript entitled *Rakhuiñ Jātivamsa Mau-kvan: Cā* (RJMK) originating from the CHT mentions the Pegu Princess and the 900,000 "Talaings" and 900,000 Pyu people as well. This RJMK text relates another story regarding the settlement of those people on the upstream of the rivers (Sakkinda 1974: 137-8). The place is not mentioned as Chittagong plains or CHT in the RJMK. In these texts, we find thus a trace about the "Talaing" (Mon) people from Pegu and resettled in Arakan or Chittagong region. Contemporary Western accounts of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century stated that the Arakanese king took 5,000 Burmese and Mon captives to Arakan (Harvey 1961: 35). *History of Burma* reports that the Arakanese deported 3,000 households of the "wretched Pegu folks" and were settled in central and southern Arakan (Harvey 1925: 141, 183). An Arakanese palm-leaf manuscript *Mañ: Rājākrī: Cātam:* (MRCT) (written in 1602 CE and enlarged in 1775 CE) states that those "30,000 Talaings" were resettled in Nga-zan-aing-kywan in Arakan (MRCT: ƒo 'kho'-v<sup>o</sup>). The numbers indicated here are doubtful, and, the place of their resettlement is not clearly known. We are not sure if the resettlement took place in Arakan or in the CHT or in the plains of Chittagong.

The second wave of settlements in the CHT and in the plains of Chittagong in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is also mentioned in *Tho'ntaññ Mau-kvan*: (TTMK) by way of the date as 1613 CE (Kyaw Mra Than 1993: 4; Sakkinda 1996: 94). Another wave of settlements in Chittagong region happened again in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to the TTMK, some *tho'ñ* (communities) were successively established by the Arakanese king in the region in 1711 CE and 1724 CE respectively (Kyaw Mra Than 1993: 4; Sakkinda 1996: 94). As mentioned in the TTMK text, those later settlements of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries only concern Arakanese people.

Although we are not quite sure if the claims in the Arakanese sources are correct, we have to bear in mind that the region of Chittagong was controlled by the Arakanese kings in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries until the fall of Chittagong in 1666 CE. It is true that even after the fall of Chittagong to the Mughals in 1666 CE, the people in CHT still considered themselves to be under the control of the Arakanese kings. In 1711 CE, a “Raja” or Chief in CHT was appointed by the Mughals, but he still had to be confirmed by the king of Arakan (Serajuddin 1971b: 52). This context makes Arakanese settlements in the region likely. The statement of Hamilton (1825: 201) on Arakanese who had settled in CHT before the exodus of Arakanese refugees confirms this hypothesis.

There were different waves of Arakanese migration to Bengal. The last wave of migration took place around 1794 CE after the conquest of Arakan. The Arakanese settlements during this period can be seen especially in the coastal areas in present Bangladesh such as Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali regions (Khan 1984: 119; Khan 1999: 46-47). Now, these Arakanese from coastal Bangladesh (both from Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali) consider themselves as “Rakhaines” (Rakhine) or Arakanese. For example, the Arakanese from Cox's Bazar always identify themselves as “Rakhaine”, not as “Marma”. However, Patuakhali people do not have any problem in identifying themselves as either “Marma” or “Rakhaine” (Ahsan 1995: 8). In ancient times, the Arakanese of Patuakhali called themselves “Marma”. Recently, some youths

from Patuakhali identified themselves as “Rakhaine” (Khan 1984: 117). Khan (1984) argues that it was an effect of the rise of “Rakhine” nationalist movements from Arakan in post-independence Burma/Myanmar. However, it can be observed that the Arakanese descendants of CHT were unaffected by the “Rakhine” nationalist movements. The Arakanese descendants of CHT identify with reference to different ‘clan’ names such as “Regre tha”, “Khyong tha”, “Maro tha”, “Kokkadain tha”, “Longadu tha” as well as maintaining the ancient term “Marma”. Due to the geographical isolation of CHT, the “Rakhine” nationalist movements from Arakan could not affect the old Arakanese community in CHT which migrated there a long time ago<sup>27</sup>). In 1951, the East Pakistan government started to use the term “Marma” in the censuses (Sattar 1971: 197). After that, the “Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act 1998” (Act 12 of 1998, Bangladesh) included the term “Marma” and the term became fully legalized officially identifying the people. As a result, the Arakanese from CHT are seen as the “Marmas” nowadays.

### **III. Conclusion**

As discussed above, the newly arrived Arakanese community in Bengal around 1794 CE and the old community that had settled in CHT for a long time formed two different communities in what is now Bangladesh. The unwillingness of the old community to associate themselves with Arakan (Rakhine), the creation of the Bohmong history supporting the “Talaing” ancestry, the popularization of the Bohmongs’ claim in local, Bengali and Western writings and the legalization of the term “Marma” by the Bangladesh government strengthened the ‘de-Arakanization’ of the Marmas. However, ethnographic and linguistic studies show that the Marmas of CHT are of Arakanese descent. Shared culture is prevalent among the Rakhines from Arakan and the Marmas from CHT. Old Arakanese folk songs, dances, folk tales, literature, oral traditions, and customs still exist in the Marma community. Nowadays, the

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27) Online discussions with Mong Sing Neo on September 21, 2015.



language of the Marmas can be considered as a slight variation of Arakanese/Rakhine (Davis 2014). However, studies show that Marma is an archaic form Arakanese. In ancient times, Arakanese from Arakan and CHT might speak an earlier form of Arakanese language. After Arakan became part of Myanmar in 1784 CE, Arakanese/Rakhines came under a greater influence of Burmese. Linguistic studies of early 19<sup>th</sup> century show that the language spoken by Rakhines/Arakanese from Arakan at that time was almost exactly the same as the language spoken by present-day CHT Marmas (See: Leyden 1811)<sup>28</sup>). Closer analysis of the vocabularies in the Marma language sheds some light about the time when they had already settled there. The name of their community “Marma”, which is an archaic term for the people of Arakan, also shows that they came originally from Arakan. In conclusion, one may reasonably assume that the Marma of CHT were present in the area long time before the conquest of Arakan by the Burmese in 1784 CE.

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28) For example, Rakhines from present-day Arakan pronounce “Chaung tha” referring to the “Chaung tha” community in northern Arakan. But, in ancient time, Rakhines from Arakan pronounced “Khyong tha”. The Marmas of CHT are still maintaining this archaic form of pronunciation (cf. Leyden 1811 and Davis 2014).

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