

# PHONETICS IN A PASSPORT.

BY PE MAUNG TIN.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the Burmese alphabet is based on the Indian alphabet and that five of the consonants are pronounced differently in modern Burmese from the Pali. These consonants are *c*, *ch*, *j*, *jh*, and *s*. As the sounds of *ch*, *j*, *jh* depend on that of *c*, it will be sufficient to discuss only *c* and *s*. The Burmese characters for *c* and *s* are  $\circ$ ,  $\infty$ . But Burmans now do not pronounce them as they are pronounced in Pali, *i.e.* like the English *ch* (as in *church*) and *s*, but pronounce them as *s* and *th*. We can account for this in two ways: Either the change in pronunciation was made from the first when the Indian alphabet was adopted, or else it is the result of a gradual phonetic process. I know of nothing whatever by way of evidence to show that the first alternative holds good. If then, according to the second alternative, the change is due to a gradual phonetic process, the question is, when did it first make its appearance? We can see the change in the forms of words from the time of the earliest inscriptions to the present day. Have we any similar evidence to show that the sounds *c*, *s* were changed into the sounds *s*, *th* at a particular period in the history of the Burmese language? Hitherto no evidence has been found, so that it was impossible to give the phonetic values of  $\circ$ ,  $\infty$  in an old inscription.

The accompanying document, which belongs to the Bodleian Library Oxford, throws light on the question. It is a Burmese Passport dated 1783 with a Portuguese translation. On the left top corner is affixed the Burmese Royal Peacock Seal which is very well preserved. The characters, especially the Burmese, offer no difficulty of reading. I pass over its historical interest for the present and will deal with its philological aspect. The Portuguese version renders the Burmese names and titles phonetically, *i.e.* as they are heard by the Portuguese ear, just as a Burman might write ၵုၵ်ႉတူၵ်ႉ for 'secretary.' How far can we trust this Portuguese version as giving the phonetic values of  $\circ$ ,  $\infty$ ? Take the following words:

For the Burmese	ၵိၵ်ႉတူၵ်ႉ	[Sikkèdawmin]*	the Portuguese has	
				Chitkeydohming
„	ၵာၵျေၵ်းတူၵ်ႉ	[Sayedawgyi]	„	Cheredohgry
„	ၵာၵ်းတူၵ်ႉ	[Thahkin Hpaya]	„	Saquem Purah
„	ၵုၵ်ႉတူၵ်ႉ	[Thlutani]	„	Sieltany
„	ၵုၵ်ႉတူၵ်ႉ	[Gulan Thatta]	„	Gulam Sattar

The Portuguese *ch*, *s* thus correspond to  $\circ$ ,  $\infty$ . *Ch* would normally be pronounced by a Portuguese as the English *sh*. And there can be no question of the initial *s* being a sibilant. It would thus follow that  $\circ$ ,  $\infty$  were pronounced *sh*, *s* in 1783 and not *s*, *th* as at present. But since this document is not a primer of phonetics, the evidence it affords cannot be final. Everybody knows how strange one's native words appear in a

\* The modern pronunciations are given in square brackets.

foreign garb, and how difficult it is for a foreigner to acquire certain sounds. In this case the Portuguese may have had a bad ear, or his Burman friends had some slight infirmity of the vocal organs or peculiarity of pronunciation such as a lisp. Or it may even be that both the speaker and hearer were at fault. Even if the right sound was heard, the writer may not have had a corresponding sound in his own language. Let us see how far such disturbing factors can have influenced our document.

This is how *o*, *o* sounded to an English ear. Col. Symes in his 'Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava made in 1795', *i.e.* twelve years after our document, renders *o* by *ch* in the following words: *Chekey* စစ် [Sikké], *Chagaing* စင်ဂိုင်း [Sagaing], [*Chenguza* ငွေကူး [Singuza], *Chilenza* စလင်းဇာ [Salinza], *Chobwa* စောဘွား [Sawbwa]. The difference in sound between *o* and its aspirate *o* is negligible to an English ear for practical purposes, and so Symes as *ch* also for *o* in *Monchaboo* မုဆိုး [Moshsoo], *putchoo* ပုဆိုး [pahso]. I need not ask English readers how they would pronounce *ch* in these words. However, any doubt that might arise is dispelled by the rendering of *ချစ်* as *chop*, where Symes gives the phonetic value of *ch*, since the word *ချစ်* is pronounced with *ch* as in *church*. He cannot possibly mean *sh* since he has many examples of words with the proper *sh* sound, such as *Shoedagon* ရွှေတိဂုံ. He thus leaves no room for doubt that he heard *o* pronounced as *ch*. It is remarkable that both Symes and the Portuguese should render စစ် by *ch*: *chekey* *chitkey*. This shows that even though the Portuguese would pronounce *ch* as *sh*, he probably meant the palatal *ch* sound in စစ်, for how else could he have reproduced this sound, which does not exist in his own language?

As regards *o*, Symes has *Cassay* ဧသ [Kathè], *Persaim* ပုဆိမ် [Pathein], *Tenasserem* တနင်္သာရီ [Taninthayi], *Sandainguite* ဆင်းကျွတ် [Thadingyut], *Mahasee-soo-ra* မာဆာသီယူ [Maihathithuya], *Saloen* သံလွင် [Thanlwin], *piasath* ပြည် [pyathad], *Serec* သီရိ [Thiyi], *Sigeamee* သီရိမင်း [Thagyamin], *Sirriapmew* သီရိပျံ [Thayetmyo], *sunneka* သနဲ [thanahka] etc. There is no possibility of Symes mistaking a *th* sound for *s*, since an Englishman knows the difference between these two sounds as well as a Burman, so that if there was the slightest tendency in the Burmese words to a *th* sound, Symes would not fail to have noticed it. And the agreement between the Englishman and the Burman in this respect extends to the distinction that both make between *th* in *thin* and that in *then*. Symes thus confirms the Portuguese rendering of *o* by *s*. In his preface Symes says: 'In the orthography of Birman words I have endeavoured to express, by appropriate letters, the sounds as they struck my own ear' There is thus no reason to doubt that *o*, *o* struck his ear as *ch*, *s*. In some of the place-names he follows his friends, Dalrymple and Wood, who accompanied him to Burma. This only strengthens his evidence, since there were more English ears than two in consultation.

Let us take one more European writer, an Italian. Father Sangermano was in Burma for twenty five years from 1783-1808. Symes, who

met him in Rangoon, has left this testimony: 'He seemed a very respectable and intelligent man, spoke and wrote the Birman language fluently, and was held in high estimation by the natives for his exemplary life and inoffensive manners'. Sangermano's evidence therefore deserves attention. He has many words with *o* respresented by *s*. e.g. Sarekittà သရေတ္တေရာ [Thayehkittaya] suà si သွားသည့် [thwa thi], sabeit သိမ် [thabeit], sein သိမ် [thein], son သုံး [thon], sottau သုတ္တံ [thottan] etc. On the other hand he generally gives *o* as *ts* (Italian *s*), i.e. a transition from the palatal to the sibilant, as in sacchiavalà စကြာဠာ [sakkyawala], Avizi အိမ် [Awizi], Zaboà ဇင်ဘွား [Sawbwa], Mienzain မြင်စိုင်း [Myinzaing], Zinguzà စဉ့်ကူးစား [Singuca], sicchè စစ်စ် [sikké], saun ခောင်း [saung]. The aspirate *o* is also represented by *s*, e.g. saradò ဆရာတော် [hsayadaw], Mozobo မုဆိုးမို [Mos-hsobo] natò နတ်ဆိုး [nat-hso], sà ဆာ [hsa], san ဆန် [hsan]. Sangermano thus gives the transitional pronunciation of *o* and the old pronunciation of *o*

Examples of the modern sounds (*s*, *th*) of *o*, *o* occur also in Symes besides those of the old sounds given above. Thus for *o*—Seenghoo စဉ့်ကူ [Singu], sere ဓား [sare], Sunnay စနေ [Sane], soum ခောင်း [saung]; and for *o*—Thanluayn သံလွင် [Thanlwin], Rameethayn ရမည်းသင်း [Yamethin], Thagiamee သိကြားမင်း [Thagyamin].

This conclusion is perhaps justified, that the pronunciation of *o*, *o* at about the end of the 18th century was in a transitional stage, the old sounds yielding to the new.

To show that such was probably the case, the slightly later evidence of two English writers, Snodgrass and another, who brought out their works in 1827 (Narrative of the Burmese War, and Two Years in Ava), may be given. In both we find *o*, *o* rendered by the old and new sounds. Thus *o* is rendered by *ch* in Chobwah ဇင်ဘွား [Sawbwa], Chagain စင်ကိုင်း Sagaing]; by *s* in Sykia စစ်စ် [Sikké]. *o* is rendered by *ch* in Monchaboo မုဆိုးမို [Moshobo]; by *s* in pussoh မုဆိုး [pahso], Shwesandau ရွှေဆံတော် [Shwehsandaw]. *o* is pronounced *s* in Cassay ကသဲ [Kathè], Seree သီရိ [Thiyi], Saluoen သံလွင် [Thanlwin], piasath ပြဿန် [pyathad] Sarrawuddy ဘာသာတော် [Thayawadi]. It is pronounced *th* in Thalueyn သံလွင် [Thanlwin] meouthogee မြို့ထွေး [myothugyi], Thuhah-thu သုဘသု [Thuhah-thu].

The change in the pronunciation of *o* from *r* to *y* is more obvious. The *r* sound survives in Arakan. And even Burmans still pronounce *o* as Hparah. The *r* occurs regularly in our Portuguese writer, Symes and Sangermano in such distinct forms as Seredohgry စာရေးတော်ကြီး [Sayedawgyi], Rhahaan ရဟန်း [Yahan], rua ရွာ [ywa], Rhoom ရုံး [Yon] Praw တရာ [Hpayay], tara တား [taya] etc. Notable instances of the *y* sound are, in Symes: Miamma မြန်မာ [Myanma], miou မြို့ [myo], Mayahoun မြန်မာောင် [Myanaung], Sigamee သိကြားမင်း [Thagyamin]; in Sangermano, Miemmo မြင်းမို [Myimmo], Mienzain မြင်စိုင်း [Myinzaing], Ion, Jon ရုံး [Yon], ioa ရွာ [ywa]. Thus though the *r* sound persists to the present day, at any rate in Arakan, it was being softened into the *y* sound at the end of the 18th century. This softening may have set in earlier, but our present evidence does not go beyond that.

There is one other important point I wish to mention in connection with the conjunct *ky*, Burmese ကျ. Whether the *y* here is the *y* proper as in *kya* ကျား or a softening of *r* as in *kya* ကြား, in modern Burmese *ky* is pronounced *ty* (now phonetically written *tj*) and not *ky*, i.e. it is produced in the front and not in the back of the mouth, or again it is a palatal and not a guttural. Now Symes represents this sound thus: *kioum*, *keoum* ကျောင်း [tyaung], *Keah*-subbeday ကြာသာပေး [Tyathabade]. Sangermano has *kiam* ကျမ်း [tyan], *zacchiavalà* ကြော့ဗွာ [Satyawala], *Chiozoà* ကျော့ဗွာ [Tyawzwa], *chiundo* ကျွန်ဆင် [tyundaw], *chiaun* ကျောင်း [tyaung], *chiaà* ကျား [tya], (Italian *ch=k*). The evidence of both writers is that they heard the *ky*, or back, or guttural sound. If the sound had been the front or palatal *ty*, the Italian would at once have recognized it, since it is practically the sound in his own *cento*. The Englishman also would not have failed to notice it, since he would have found it practically the same as his *ch*. It is therefore probable that ကြကျ were pronounced up to the end of the 18th century as a back or guttural sound, which has now been fronted or palatalised into *ty*. This view is strengthened by the old pronunciation of ဝ. If, as I have tried to show, this sound ဝ was a palatal and not a sibilant, there would have been confusion between it and ကြကျ, assuming the latter to have been the front or palatal *ty* sound. Hence ကြကျ must have been the back or guttural sound *ky* as represented by Symes and Sangermano. ကြ ချ, being dependent on ကြကျ would then have been *kh**y* and not *ch* as at present.

If then ဝ, ခ (e, ch) were palatal sounds, ဝ, ခ (j, jh) would consequently be palatals and not sibilants as at present. It is interesting to find that Symes has *jee* ကျေး [je]; and Capt. White in his 'Political History of the Extraordinary Events which led to the Burmese War, 1827' has *Kiojou* ကျော့ဗွာ [Kyawzaw].

Thus all the above evidence tends to show that Burmese consonants were pronounced as written. That applies even to conjunct consonants as in *mro* မြ [myo]. As regards the final consonants which have been 'killed', the emphasis thrown on the finals in such examples as *Ming* မင်း [Min], *Saquem* ခင် [Thahkin], *Rangon* ရန်ကင်း [Yangon] in the Portuguese; and *kioum* ကျောင်း [kyaung], *Rhoom* ရုံး [Yon], *Pagahm* ပုဂံ [Pagan], *soum* ဆောင်း [saung] *Sandainguite* ဆင်းကျွတ် [Thadingyut] in Symes; and *kiam* ကျမ်း [kyan], *Salem* ဆင်း [Salin] in Sangermano may not be without significance. If these European writers had heard *Min*, *Pagan*, *Salin* etc. they would not have gone out of their way to write *Ming*, *Pagahm*, *Salem* etc. This consideration, that consonants, single and conjunct, were given their full phonetic values, is in harmony with the tendency of the language to soften down consonants which would combine to give a harsh pronunciation, as *mro* softened to *myo*. This softening is probably due to the difficulty of pronouncing as one sound the two conjunct consonants, which have suffered the softening. Thus it is less easy to say *mro* than *myo*. *Mro* would naturally be pronounced as *maro*, as two sounds. This suggests that the softening of conjunct consonants has produced monosyllables out of dissyllables. Many of the present day

monosyllables must have been dissyllables. This view to which I am led by a study of phonetics in the light of the early European representations of Burmese words and names is, I am glad to find, the same as the view at which Mr. Taylor has arrived after a study of the dialects of Burma<sup>1</sup>. A good instance of the formation of such monosyllables is afforded by ဆ်ဘျား [hkin bya], a contraction from ဆ်ဘျားဘျား : [thahkin bura]. This latter word, itself contracted from the trisyllabic *purahā*<sup>2</sup>, is softened into *buya* which then becomes *bya*. Notice how the spelling has kept pace with the change in sound.

That *o*, *u* were pronounced *ch*, *s* is also proved by Palaung, which gives these sounds in words, which, if not actually borrowed from the Burmese, are the same in Burmese. I quote the following examples from Mrs. Milne's Palaung Grammar and her manuscript dictionary : အစဉ်း ဝေဇ်၊ သေချာ၊ သေဌေး၊ နှစ်သက်၊ etc. The *o*, *u* in these words are pronounced *ch*, *s* in Palaung. Hence they must have been pronounced, *ch*, *s* also in Burmese before the modern sounds set in. This leads me to think that in other languages of Burma also survivals of the old pronunciation *ch*, *s* will be met with<sup>3</sup>.

PE MAUNG TIN.



(1. 1) ဘုန်းတော်အလှူကြီးမြတ်တော် မူလှသော ဆင်ဖြူ ဆင်နီ ဆင်ကြားများသခင်။ ကုဋေထောင်ရာမရေတွက်သာများလှစွာသော အနိန္ဒ မာလွက်စကြာ ရတနာ လှပုံသခင် ရွှေတွင်း ငွေတွင်း (1. 2) ပတ္တမြား တွင်း ပယင်းတွင်းများသခင် တိုင်းကြီး ပြည်ကြီး ထီး တရုဆောင်း မင်းအပေါင်းတို့၏သခင် အသျှင် ဘဝရှင်မင်းတရားကြီးဘုရား ရွှေစက်တော်စုံကိုအမြဲဦးထိတ်ထက် ဘင်ရွက် (1. 3) ၍။ စီရင်လေ့ရှိသောရန်ကုန်မြို့ဝန်မင်း ရေဝန်မင်း အကော့ဝန်မင်း အမှန်ဝန်မင်း စစ်ကံတော်မင်း နားခံတော်မင်း စာရေးတော်ကြီးတို့မှာလိုက်သည် ရန်ကုန်မြို့ဆိတ်တော်သို့ဆိုက်ရော်လှာ (1. 4) သည် သင်္ဘောသား ကုလားကုန်သည် မည်သည့်အမျိုးသားမဆို။ ဆိပ်တော်သို့ဆိုက်ရောက်လှာသမျှ။ သင်္ဘောသားကုလားကုန်သည်တို့ကိုချမ်းသာငြိမ်ဝပ်စွာ အစည်ထုံစံရီရာစီရင်အုပ် (1. 5) ချုပ်ရမည်။ တရားများဒိတ်တော်မြတ်ကို ဦးထိတ်ထက် အမြဲဆင်ရွက်ရသည်အတိုင်း ဖောက်ကား ရောင်းဝယ်စေသည်နှင့် အညီ။ ရန်ကုန်မြို့ဝန်နေသင်္ဘောသျှင်ကြီးဘုတ်မာမက်သျှတ်သားမရား (1. 6) နှင့် အိမ်ချေတိုင်စွတ်ကိုသည်။ သင်္ဘော ၂ ပင်တိုင် ပွတ်တေညွှတ်တန်အမည်ခေါ်သည့် သင်္ဘောနှင့် ဝန်ပိုင်ကား ပြည်သစ် ဖရောင်း-ဆင်စွယ်-ခဲမဖြူ-ဆေးတန်-ရှားစည်း-အရပ် အရပ် ကိုများတင်၍။ လူ (1. 7) ပေါင်း ၄ ကျိပ်ခန့်မျှ ကိုသည် နေပီပါလူစုများ နှင့်။ သတ္တရစ် ၁၁၄၅-ခုနှစ်။ သဘင်းကျွတ်လဆန်း ၅ ကနေ့တွင်။ ဘင်လတာ ကော်သျှတာ ကော်ရမန်ဒယ် မာလာယူမည်သည့်မြို့ရွာဆိတ်မဆိုဖောက်ကားရောင်း(1.8) ဝယ်အလံတော်နှင့်ပင်လယ်စောင့်စားတံဆိပ်တော်ခပ်၍ ကဗိတံ ဂလေဝီကို သင်္ဘောသျှကြီး အရာနှင့်။ ဂုလံသတ္တာကိုသင်္ဘောစီးအရာနှင့် ပေးအပ်၍။ တကွန်းမြို့ရွာသို့ ဖောက်ကား ရောင်ဝယ် သွာလာစေမည်အကြောင်းကို (1. 9) အစီရင်ခံသည်အတိုင်း ရုံတော်က မင်ညီမင်စုံ ပင်လယ်ဆောင်စာ အလံတော်များ ပေးအပ်၍ သွာလာစေသည်။ လမ်းခရီးတွင်မှ စ၍အရပ်ရပ်ပင်လယ်မှာသင်္ဘော ဘိုင်ချုတ် ဘိုင်မှူး သူရဲ သူခက်။ ရမက် လွှက်ကိုင် မည်သည့် အမြို့ဝင်းသား (1. 10) မဆိုသဟာရရောက်ကျသည်နှင့်အညီ။ ၂ ပင်တိုင် သင်္ဘောကိုမဆီမတာ ချမ်းသာငြိမ်ဝပ်စွာနှင့် ဖောက်ကား ရောင်ဝယ် သွာလာစေရမည်။ တကွန်းမြို့ရွာ ဆိပ်များသို့ ဆိုက်ရောက်လျှင်။ မြို့ဝန်-ရေဝန်-အကော့ဝန်-ဆိပ်စား-ဆိပ် (1. 11) စာရေးတို့မှစ၍ ၂ ပင်တိုင် သင်္ဘောကို ချမ်းသာ ငြိမ်ဝပ်စွာနှင့် ဖောက်ကား ရောင်ဝယ်သွာလာစေရမည်အကြောင်းကို။ ရန်ကုန်မြို့ အရန်ပိုင်မင်များက ပင်လယ်ဆောင်စာ ပေးအပ်သွာလာစေရမည်။

## POR ORDEM D'EL REY.

Nos Governador e mais Conselheiros Mrowin Meng Saquem purá Rewin Ming Awwn Ming [1. 2] Awnwun Ming, Chitkeydoh, Nawundoh, Cheredohgry Ming Myah assentado em Conselho de Runday, para fazer todos os bens que nos podemos aos todos navios estrangeiros que vêm contratar em nossos portos &c.

[1. 3] Pedimos aos Senhores Almirantes Vice-Almirantes das Frótas Chefes das Esquadras, Capitaes dos Navios das quaesquer [1. 4] Potencias que sijão nossos amigos alliados e demais todas as outras que sendo em alguma maneira potencias. De deixar passar livremente Brigantim chamado [1. 5] Fathe Sieltany do porte mais ou menos cento e vinte 120 toneladas, que pertence Dom Budan Mahomet Sahib habitante que mora abaixo de nossa jurisdição e que vai n'elle embarcado [1. 6] por capitão commandante Senhor Galoppe e para sobrecarga Gulam Sattar que porte d'este porto de Rangom para Bengala &c. e com nossa real bandeira e com sua Alutawins equipagem [1. 7] mais ou menos de quaranta pessoas diferentes nações 40 pessoas e com a carga de paos e tabôas Sirás Marphilu, Calun, Artal, Caihoo, e os demais mercadores passageiros e [1. 8] assim venhão anunciar a Vos e mandemos passar presente passaporte em nosso Conselho e assignamos e sellamos com sello das Armas Reaes &c.

[1. 9] Tambem pedimos aos Senhores Governadores e Commandantes dos Portos Maritimos que não ponhão nenhum impedimento nas ouas viagens [1. 10] que sejaõ servidos de favor para de ajudar em caso de necessidade assim nos não deixarém os de fazer o mesmo em semelhante occasião &c.

[1. 11] Demos presente passaporte à chegada do dito Brigantim a este porto Rangom vinte nove de Setembro de mil septecentos oitenta tres annos 27 7 mo. 1783.

ရန်ကုန်မြို့ဝန်ပင်သင်တန်း,	ရေဂွန်မင်	အကေ့ဝန်မင်	အခွန်ဝန်မင်	စစ်ကတော်မင်	နာခံတော်မင်
Principe Governador	Rewm	Awquwin	Aeuwuun	Chitkeydoh	Nawun
de Rangom	Ming.	Ming.	Ming.	Ming.	doh Ming.
					စာရေးတော်ကြိုမင်များစာ

Mrowin Ming Saquem purah.

Cheredogry Ming myah.

Secretario D'el Rey.

1. 'Many of the monosyllables of the present day are but poorly disguised dissyllables and there is now evidence that many of the undoubtedly monosyllabic words are but the result of phonetic decay acting on and disguising old words of two or more syllables', *J. B. R. S.*, Vol. xi, part ii.

2. *Epigraphia Birmanica* Vol. I, part 1, 26.

3. A Portuguese scholar tells me that the Portuguese version is so imperfect that he doubts if it was written by a Portuguese, at any rate an educated one. I do not think that the Burman or Burmans who composed the Burmese, also composed the Portuguese. For it is very unlikely that the Burman who begins the Burmese with the long string of glorious epithets of royalty, such as 'Lord of white Elephants, red elephants, striped elephants' etc., would leave them out of the Portuguese version. In any case, we must give Portuguese values to Portuguese characters, no matter who writes them.