

THE INDIGENIZATION OF THE RAMA STORY IN THE PHILIPPINES

The background of the introduction of the Rama story in the Philippines has been discussed extensively in Francisco (1969 Essay 4, this volume), where the story was presented in the context of Asia (*Ibid.* : 10-34). This discussion included the text and translation to allow the reader a better view of the subject (*Ibid.* : 39-63). The Rama story may have reached the Philippines between the middle of the 17th and the early part of the 19th centuries (*Ibid.* :33). This time frame will probably help visualize the length of time during which the story had become part of the folk-literary tradition of the Philippines. I will refer to the evidences of the story's entry into that tradition as I discuss the process of indigenization later on.

Further elaboration of the background of the *Ramayana* had been done in subsequent works of Francisco (1973, 1980). The 1973 paper was a discussion of Sanskrit in Philippine language, i.e. Maranao, that has in its literary tradition the Rama story. Maranao, as a language, has a relatively large corpus of Sanskrit words in its lexical collection. The people who speak the language are generally referred to as Maranao and inhabit an inland lake area in western Mindanao. The root word is *ranao*, meaning "lake," with the formative *ma*, hence Maranao, meaning "people of the lake."

The 1980 paper is not necessarily different from the 1973 paper, for it does not bring to light new elements in the discussion of the story. Rather, with very little additional information, it became part of the volume on *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia* (Raghavan 1980), which presents all the information available on the extent of the *Rama-*

yana tradition in Asia.

The Process of Indigenization

May I commence this section by looking at the word *indigenization* from its more basic meaning. The nominal form of the term is *indigenous*, meaning, "that which is native to a given place." *Indigenization*, therefore, is a process by which an alien idea, or concept, or artifact of culture has been made a part of the local culture or society into which it has been introduced. The use of the word *indigenization* in this paper, as applied to the whole concept of culture change, is arbitrary, although it can properly be substituted by the term *adaptation*. But I think *indigenization* is more appropriate for the process that is to be described shortly.

The process of indigenization presupposes cross-cultural borrowings; cross-cultural borrowings presuppose cultural contacts between two non-static societies, in the state of constant pulsation. In the context of contacts between the societies under study, the period during which the cultural interphasing occurred falls within the middle of the 1600's and the early 1800's or even earlier, which contacts were primarily precipitated by maritime trade and traffic (SPAFA on Shipping and Trade Networks, 1984, and ARCHIPEL 18:1979). Maritime trade and traffic involved shipping and trade networks between the Southeast Asian regions and the Indian subcontinent and between and among the former. It is to the credit of those mariners in pre-European colonial times that cultures came in contact with each other, a result which was not confined only to the exchange of goods (Manguin 1984, Suleiman 1984, Reid 1984). These included "artifacts" of culture, like literature, philosophy, belief systems, world view, etc.

At this point, however, the focus of our discussion is the maritime trade and traffic between India and Southeast Asia across the Bay of Bengal, which brought to Southeast Asia Indian cultural goods that became part of the life and culture of the societies that were infused with them. But, as these societies were Indianized, a process of *indigenization* occurred, which obliterated all knowledge of these cultural goods as alien material, becoming part of the whole fabric of the local

cultures. The process was long, sometimes painful, but perhaps more exhilarating for the cultures, because even though already rich as they were, they were further enriched by the new elements in their cultural life—to be more specific, the introduction of the Rama story into literary traditions of Southeast Asian cultures, more particularly the Indonesian and Malay.

Focus on the Indonesian (Javanese) and Malay becomes more meaningful to the introduction of the story into the Philippines and its subsequent indigenization. This is understandable in terms of the broad socio-cultural and, indeed, the more specific linguistic affinities between the Malay/Indonesian (Javanese) and the Philippines. Moreover, it is through either Malay or Javanese or both that the Indianisms in the Philippines have been borrowed. And, perhaps even the indigenization process may have already occurred there before reaching the Philippines and further indigenized to suit Philippines cultural perspectives and orientations.

The Indigenization of the Ramayana in the Philippines

The discussion of the process of indigenization will focus on three important elements in the *Maharadia Lawana*, the Philippine version of the Rama epic. These are (a) names of the principal characters, (b) place names and (c) episodes, events.

(a) Names of the Principal Characters. Rama is Radia Mangandiri; Laksmana is Radia Mangawarna; Sita is Tuwán Potre Malano Tihaiia. Kusa/Lava is Laks[a]mana, who in the story assumes the character of Hanuman. Ravana is Maharadia Lawana.

Immediately, we are confronted by the retention or the use of a Sanskrit title like Radia (from Raja) to indicate high rank of the brothers Radia Mangandiri (Rama) and Radia Mangawarna (Laksmana) in the hierarchical structure of the society. The same is true of the use of *Potre* in Sita's alter-ego in the story; and that of *Maharadia* as the title of Lawana (from Ravana). Note also the name Mangawarna which, broken down into the word's morphemic structure, would yield *Manga* and *warna*, which in Maranao nominalizes a descriptive word, thus "one who is colorful" (maybe in speech or action); *warna*, being

perhaps Sanskrit *varna*, "color." *Mangandiri* is an indigenous term, which in Maranao means, "one who creates or invents by supernatural power."

Sita becomes, indeed, a character of legendary nature, following Maranao mythological accounts because her name is one known to belong to myth, hence the Lord (Tuwan) Lady (Potre) Malano (the one with a halo) Tihai (unknown meaning).

Maharadia (from Maharaja) as the title of Lawana places him on a level higher than Radia Mangandiri and Radia Mangawarna. Laksamana is of supernatural birth, but his role in the story takes on that of Hanuman in the *Ramayana*. Here *Laksamana* takes the meaning of "presumptive, one who arrogates first opportunity to oneself" which seems rather the opposite of the character of Hanuman. Moreover, the idea of an *admiral* as seen to assume the term *Laksamana* in Malay does not occur in the Philippine (Maranao) story.

These developments as they occur in the changes in the names and roles of the characters must not only be understood in the context of the story's entree into an entirely "alien" cultural milieu, but also of the changes that occurred in the intervening stories. These will be elaborated upon in the next section (IV).

(b) **Place Names.** Maranao mythological geography is indeed fascinating as one moves into the realm of the supernatural. Thus, we have here perhaps the process of the indigenization the most discernible in the place names, since we are dealing with an entirely different nomenclature of the *Ramayana* geographic names. For Ayodhya, there is *Pulu Agamaniog*, the legendary island (*pulu*) of Agamaniog. Whether or not *Agamaniog* could be broken up into morphemes, i.e., *Agama*, "village," and *niog*, "the coconut palm," it becomes meaningful to the understanding of the city/island, hence the "Coconut Grove Village."

For Lanka, there is *Pulu Bandiarmasir*, also a legendary island of Bandiarmasir. The term cannot be broken down into morphemes as we had done with the name of the other (*pulu*). It seems reminiscent of an ancient city port of Bandjarmasin in the southeastern coast of Borneo on the Indonesian side of the island. It is possible that in the folk-history of the Maranao *Bandjarmasin* (read Bandiarmasir) must figure

as a mythical island where a great king reigns—Maharadia Lawana, and supernatural events occur such as described in the following section.

(c) **Episodes, Events.** It seems that the whole story revolves around the events in the life of the heroine, Tuwan Potre Malaila Tihaiia (Sita), at least in four important episodes, namely (1) the winning of TPMT, (2) the abduction of TPMT, (3) the search for TPMT, and (4) the return of TPMT.

The playing of the *agongs* and the *kolintang*s presages an important event in the life of a young woman of high birth, coupled with exquisite beauty and charm, announcing to the world—the maritime world—that she is now ready for marriage. The game of the *sipa* is to be played among the suitors and whoever kicks the rattan ball to the *lamin*, where the princess lives with her retinue, shall marry her. Radia Mangandiri kicks the *sipa* to her *lamin*, and wins the hand of the princess—Tuwan Potre Malaila Tihaiia. But, alas, the Radia and the Potre do not live happily ever after right away.

As the couple, accompanied by Radia Mangawarna and a full retinue provided by the royal parents of TPMT, are on their way back to the groom's kingdom, Agamaniog, a great calamity befalls them. (To begin with, the journey is long and arduous: they have to spend complete cycles of seasons to produce their sustenance.) Thus,

while they watched the golden grains, their attention was caught by a deer with golden horns, grazing in a nearby cogonal area. Malaila Ganding, upon seeing it immediately harbored a craving for the rare animal, that if it were not caught she would die. Radia Mangandiri, to satisfy such desire, went forthwith to catch the animal with instructions to his brother Mangawarna not to leave Malaila Ganding even if he would call for help.

The deer did not prove elusive to Radia Mangandiri. Rather it met him, and fought back. Radia Mangandiri in his difficulty cried for help, but Radia Mangawarna did not leave his sister-in-law. However, Potre Malaila Ganding not being able to bear the predicament that Radia Mangandiri was in, threatened to die (to kill herself) if Radia Mangawarna did not go help his brother. So he went, telling his

window, and whoever knocks, do not open.”

When he reached the site where Radia Mangandiri and the deer were fighting, the deer divided into two and ran away. Each brother ran after one deer till darkness fell and Radia Mangawarna finally found himself back at their house. Radia Mangandiri had reached the forest and the deer was nowhere to be found.

Radia Mangawarna discovered the result of his action -- the women were wailing because Potre Malaila Ganding had been forcibly taken away by Maharadia Lawana, the wall of their house has been destroyed and everything in the house was in disarray. He said to himself, “That which we were running after was Maharadia Lawana who disguised himself as a deer.” (Francisco 1969 :20-21)

It is not the ruse of changing himself (Maharadia Lawana) into a deer with golden horns that becomes interesting in the indigenization process but (a) in the long journey home which take them through cycles of seasons to force them to grow food for their sustenance; (b) the challenge that the deer had thrown at the feet of the hero; and (c) the deception that the deer made to draw the younger brother, Radia Mangawarna, from protecting his sister-in-law, who was forcibly abducted from their provisional home.

After assessing their resources, the brother immediately launched a search for TPMT :

Radia Mangawarna, upon learning of the abduction of Malaila Ganding and seeing that Radia Mangandiri had not returned from his search for the golden horned deer, returned to the jungle to look for his brother. He found him unconscious (asleep).

Now Radia Mangandiri dreamed that he fought a carabao and was gored. One of his testicles was thrown where Potre Langawi, Queen of the East, swallowed it, causing her

to become pregnant and later to give birth to a monkey son named Laksamana. He awakened and saw his testicle missing. He thought to himself that his dream may be true.

Subsequently, the brothers discussed the plans for the search and recovery of Potre Malaila Ganding. They felt despair because there were only two of them; they had no arms, no army to pursue their search for the princess who had been brought to Pulu Bandiarmasir by Maharadia Lawana, who had deceived them.

Now, Radia Magandiri's dream was true; Laksamana, the monkey son asked his mother Potre Langawi who could be his father, since while growing up he had not seen him. She evaded answering the the question, for she knew that he "has no father." The monkey son being disappointed with such evasion, left home and went in search for his father. In one of his adventures, he fell right between Radia Mangandiri and Radia Mangawarna and addressed them father and uncle, respectively. Both were surprised to be addressed thus by a complete stranger and a monkey at that. After proper introductions, and a presentation of their problems, Laksamana offered to help the brothers to search for Potre Malaila Ganding. All their problems - weapons, soldiers, etc. - - were now within solution. Laksamana gathered all his subject carabaos to attack Bandiarmasir. He also asked his father and uncle to help gather rattan to be used for building a causeway between Pulu Bandiarmasir and the land where they now were.

Laksamana tied one end of the rattan to a tree, and holding the other, he prepared to leap to Pulu Bandiarmasir. He asked his father to support him on his (father's) palm. The leap was successful; he strung the rattan back and forth, and the causeway was finally constructed. They proceeded to cross to the other side.

As they walked, the bridge swayed and they fell into the sea, where crocodiles waited to eat them. But Laksamana

battled and defeated them. The crocodiles promised aid to the cause of Radia Mangandiri and Radia Mangawarna. They were to battle those subjects of Maharadia Lawana who would run to the sea for safety. They proceeded to the palace of Maharadia Lawana. At the palace, they witnessed Maharadia Lawana approach Potre Malaila Ganding, but fire appeared between them. They were surprised at such a phenomenon. Maharadia Lawana himself was perplexed by it and he was told by Laksamana that such a phenomenon occurred because she was abducted from Radia Mangandiri.

After this exchange, betel chew was prepared and exchanged between Radia Mangandiri and Potre Malaila Ganding. Then Laksamana took the princess' hand and led her to his father.

At this point, the battle between the forces of Maharadia Lawana and Radia Mangandiri led by Laksamana began. Laksamana commanded the carabaos to enter the village to fight Maharadia Lawana's army. Those who fled to the sea/water were eaten by crocodiles. Later, Maharadia Lawana entered into the fray and fought with Radia Mangawarna, who could not equal the strength and power of his adversary. Radia Mangandiri took over, but he could not wound Maharadia Lawana. Laksamana, seeing that his father seemed unable to cope with Maharadia Lawana's prowess, took the *kampilan* of Radia Mangandiri and sharpened it on the whetstone set upon a *naga* wood found in the palace. With this Radia Mangawarna wounded Maharadia Lawana, who fell, for according to the prophecy Maharadia Lawana, with the power he acquired while performing "austerities" during his exile, could only be subdued by any bladed weapon sharpened on the whetstone set upon a *naga* wood. Thus the battle came to an end. (Francisco 1969 : 21-22)

The episode contains a number of rather unusual events which can properly be part of the process of indigenization - - the dream of fight-

ing a water buffalo, his testicles being gored and thrown east where it is swallowed by a *potre*, causing her to be pregnant and later on giving a birth to a monkey son, named Laksamana; the son in search of an unknown father. The battle is fought between ML and RMw, then between ML and RMd, but ML cannot be wounded. Laksamana knowing the weakness of ML, takes his father's sword and sharpens it on a whetstone set upon a *naga* wood and hands it back to RMd. ML is wounded and falls, thus fulfilling the prophecy that he can only be defeated after having been wounded by a bladed weapon that is sharpened on a whetstone mounted on a *naga* wood. There are many other events in the episode. The above may be sufficient to illustrate what we started to say earlier on.

The return of TPMT shows very interesting events. A brief account is in order.

. . . Tarrying in Bulu Bandiarmasir after their victory over Maharadia Lawana, they made preparations for their return to Pulu Agamaniog. Laksamana told them that he could effect such an event. He called all the crocodiles on whose backs all the subjects may ride across the ocean to Pulu Agamaniog. The biggest crocodile with the broadest back became the mount of the prince, the princess, Radia Mangawarna and Laksamana. After travelling across the sea they reached the shores of Agama Niog, the waves created by all the crocodiles were like those created by strong winds; also the forest seemed to tremble at the footsteps of the carabaos.

The people of Agama Niog were frightened, but Laksamana announced to them that they should not fear, for Radia Mangandiri, with his bride Potre Malaila Ganding and Radia Mangawarna, were returning from the long travel. They were welcomed with joy instead of fear. Laksamana metaphorized into a handsome datu. (Francisco 1969:24)

No further elaboration may be made at this juncture because the

descriptions are quite vivid to show evident adaptations or localizations of the events in the episodes.

Maharadia Lawana as a major character in the story cannot be ignored at this point. Without him there would be no story. May I present here the most interesting aspects of his nature as a character and his role in the narrative.

Maharadia Lawana commences with Maharadia Lawana described as the son of the Sultan and Sultanness of Pulu Bandiarmasir; he has eight heads (seven heads, in Par. 61, Text and Translation). He is said to have caused the death of many a man in the realm because of his vile tongue – he intrigues. Then he is sent on a ship to Pulu Nagara on exile as a punishment for his false representations.

In Pulu Nagara, he gathers leaves and wood, ignites these and climbs a tree over the fire. He cries that the world is chained . . . thereby, Diabarail (Angel Gabriel), hearing it, appears before the Lord (Tohen), informs the latter that Maharadia Lawana cries because the world is in chains. The Lord (Tohen) instructs Diabarail to tell Maharadia Lawana to desist sacrificing himself, because nothing can cause his death, except when he is cut with any tool (knife, sword, etc.) that is sharpened upon a whetstone mounted on *naga* wood in the palace of Pulu Bandiarmasir. (Francisco 1969 :25-26)

Whether or not ML's death by means of a sword sharpened on a whetstone mounted on a *naga* wood is a local development, it becomes meaningful in terms of the rather wide distribution of the motif in the area. Moreover, whether or not this is an indication of indigenization, it can be said of the borrowers that they possess a natural inclination for creating motifs for their enjoyment and appreciation.

The interpolations and accretions which were discussed in ML (Francisco 1969 :27-31) may be identified properly within the process of indigenization. At least three major accretions and interpolations have been pointed out: The birth of Laksamana, the monkey son of

Radia Mangandiri. He was born of Potre Langawi after she has swallowed RMd's testis thinking that it was precious stone. The testis was gored out of Mangandiri by the carabao which he fought in his dream and it was thrown out far towards the east.

The question about Laksamana's father becomes significant here in the light of the structure of Maranao society, because he could have been sired by his grandfather, in whose house his mother lived, an act of incest, an irreverent taboo in the society. Thus, there was the very deep, if congenital, concern for genealogy, the *salsilah*, that was employed not only in the establishment of what was recognized as correct uncorrupted bloodline. Thus, there was the strengthening of kinship ties.

b) The exploits of Sugriva, Bali and Hanuman in the ML were all done by Laksamana. One of the exploits was his leap between Pulu Nabandai and Pulu Bandiarmasir to enable him to tie rattan vines on both shores to form a causeway for RMd's army to cross to the island redoubt of ML. But his leap had to be from the palm of his father and not from the summit of Pulu Nabandi, for it crumbled at the pressure of his takeoff.

(c) The death of ML presaged peace and prosperity in Bandiarmasir, and for many years the heroes remained there. Laksamana promised RMd, TPMT and RMw that they would return to Agama Niog. The promise was fulfilled for Laksamana called upon his subjects, the crocodiles, the biggest and longest among them to transport RMd, TPMT and RMw, as well as all their retinue across the ocean. They reached Agama Niog safely, a maritime voyage that in the epic past was a feat of great courage. Upon reaching Agama Niog,

(d) Laksamana (in the ML) metamorphosed into a handsome *datu*. Thus, the story ended.

Role of the Malay Versions

The events in the story that have been related in the previous sections are indicative of the very interesting, if significant, role of the Malay versions of the epic story in the changes that occurred in the

Philippine version. Perhaps, it is not even ill-considered to propose here that the process of indigenization may have already begun in the Malay Peninsula. In other words, certain events and elements in the story had begun to take on characteristics of the local folkliterary traditions.

If the appearance of Islam as the religious orientation in the *Hikayat Seri Rama* (HSR) and the *Hikayat Maharaja Ravana* (HMR) is an indication of the process of indigenization because of Islam's widespread influence in the lives of the Malay (as well as the Indonesian), then it is of great significance to our view that changes to suit the contemporary culture patterns have been internalized already in the society. Let me read portions of the story to underscore my point:

/5/ . . . He gathered all the leaves under the tree, which he piled higher (exceeded the height of) than the highest (tallest) tree in Pulu Nagara. He climbed (and mounted a) branch of the tree; from there he threw (built) fire below (the leaves) and started a fire and smoke. When the leaves (ian) were [already] burning, he cried that the world is chained.

/6/ Diabarail (Angel Gabriel) heard (the cry of Maharadia Lawana), and he (Dia.) appeared before the Lord (Tuhen). He said, 'My Lord! Why does Maharadia Lawana burn himself in Pulu Nagara, and (why) he cries (because) the world is in chain: Alkamundo lilia i laila, hi laila ka ilala, Alaho Akbar, alakaola o alakoatiil, adubila hi Allah Alim. (Francisco 1969:40)

One cannot escape the view that there were substitutions in the narration of the story. But the fact should not be overlooked, that the farther away in time the Indian period of Malay/Javanese culture moved, the greater have been the possibilities of the occurrence of change. While we have lost, perhaps, much of the cultural essence of India in the story, yet we are confronted by the very presence (if in another clothing) of the substance of that earlier culture. Nonetheless, the nuances or perhaps the concept expressed in the passage remains inter-

nalized in the people.

Laksamana's search for his father (in the ML) and Kra Kechil's (in HSR), impelled by the desire to cleanse both of the stigma of a possible incest committed by their mothers with their grandfathers, is quite Malay and Philippine in character. While incest taboo may also be found in other societies than Southeast Asian, this seems to me very significant, for insinuations of incestuous relations do not seem to be known in the *Ramayana*.

Bali, Sugriva and Hanuman remain simians even as the *Ramayana* ends. But their counterparts in the ML and the HSR metamorphose into human beings and become part of the society into which they were 'born'. This metamorphosis seems to have been influenced by a very important literary tradition (or is it motif?) in Indonesia which found its way into Malay literature at various dates (Poerbatjaraka in Winstedt 1941:235; 1949:53-60). I refer to the Panji Tales whose hero in the course of his adventures changes his name in every important episode in the story (Francisco 1969:34). But of course we have not noticed the change of the name of Sita in the ML, which at the start of the story was Tuwan Potre Malano Tihai. Towards the middle and at the end, she is called Tuwan Potre Malaila Ganding. Indeed, this is indicative of the changes within the society, evident perhaps from the earlier influence of the Panji tales.

Concluding Remarks

In discussing a problem like indigenization of a given cultural element, and in the case of the present essay, that of a piece of literature in a given cultural milieu, it is inescapable that problems will arise in the process. Nonetheless, it is to my mind a valid exercise in the attempt to understand the phenomenon of changes that occur in the process of borrowing and subsequent adaptation, hence the internalization of a cultural element into the fabric of a given society.

The ML is a case in point. What we have just undertaken in the previous pages is such an attempt. Perhaps one of the recognizable

problems is that as the ML becomes a part of the literary or cultural tradition of the Maranao (or the Philippines for that matter), acceptance of an alien cultural element/elements that may be in conflict with those already internalized in the society becomes inevitable. It seems to my mind that the process of internalization of the new elements resolves this inherent conflict that attends the adaptation of such elements.

In concluding this essay, let me advert back to an earlier point, which was referred to, but which I would like to emphasize in the discussion of indigenization. With the introduction of Islam, and its subsequent acceptance as well as internalization into the culture, the introduction of cultural elements into that milieu will have to conform with those of the local systems. Concepts in the literature that would seem to conflict with Islam will have to be modified and assume the aspect of Islam, hence the introduction of Diabarail (Angel Gabriel) in the prayers. Of course, it must be construed at that point in time when Islam had 'made' itself a 'native' element of the culture. Let me illustrate.

In an essay, I discussed the introduction of Islamic literature in the Philippines (Francisco 1976:6-45), in which I posed the view that Islam was indigenized by the Islamized Filipinos, namely the Magin-danao, the Maranao and the Tausog. There followed after that a significant process of islamization of every cultural element, including the literature, i.e., "which are attempts to infuse in them Islamic thoughts because the religious leaders frown upon these stories which do not carry with them such teachings as would help propagate the faith." (*Ibid.*: 39; cf. Abdullah & Siddique 1986 :1). Furthermore,

In the long years of encounter between Islam and the indigenous cultures, as well as the culture that was introduced by Spaniards and the Americans in the later years of Philippine history, conflicts were inevitable. But in the process certain adjustments had to be made by each to be able to co-exist peacefully later on. These adjustments, one of which is

seen in the development of the song or hymn as part of the Islamic literature in the Philippines, are important and meaningful. For the indigenous and the alien -- Islam, and Christianity -- shall be in constant contact in the years to come. The alien had come to stay, and yet it has to draw its nourishment from the soul and soil of the indigenes. (*Ibid.*: 43-44)

And, indeed, it become itself an inndigenous element, becoming a reason for the indigenization of cultural elements that came later.

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