

NINE

Suspected Indian elements in Philippine Folk literature: The Case of Mindanao and Sulu

The result of a long-standing cultural encounter between the Philippines and India have been treated in four works by J. R. Francisco published between the years 1964 and 1973. The first (1964) is a study on the Indian influences in the Philippines on a pan-Philippine coverage, but focusing on the language and literature. The second volume (1969) is a result of a field study conducted in 1968 among the Maranao in the Lake region. It is a study in text and translation, with extensive notes as well as historical and comparative study, on a **Ramayana** version in Philippine literature. In 1971, a collection of articles, papers and brief studies earlier published separately (from 1961 to 1968) in various journals here and abroad but all dealing with the presence of Indian cultural elements in the Philippines, was put together under one title. The 1973 volume zeroed in on the suspected influence of Indian systems of writing in the historical development of Philippine paleography, i. e., the ancient system of writing.

These and other papers not included, particularly in the 1971 collection (i. e., 1963: Historical Review VII, 2) and others published in later dates (1977: Kerala papers; 1980: Muslim-Hindu interphase; 1979, 1983: Sri Vijaya) appear to have a wide coverage; the truth however is that there are still very important problems that need to be resolved, as well as require deeper study that have not been examined in these studies. The 1963 work (Essay 10, in this volume) is a brief study on Philippine customs, manners and traditions that are suspected to be related to the Indian. In brief, the paper covered a relatively wide range of the customs, manners and traditions that seem to belong to the phenomenon of intercultural encounter in the past. Let me cite an instance:

.....The Bukidnon's belief in the gods of the cardinal directions of the world resembles the Indian's belief in the guardians of the four desas (quarters) ... The gods of the four quarters are: at the North ---Domalongdong; at the South --- Ongli; at the East ---Tagolambong; at the West ---Magbabaya.

These gods in their power and wisdom have control over the world. Harmony is maintained by them.

Although the names of the Hindu guardian of the four cardinal points --- Pulastya, regent over the northern quarter; Yama, over the south; Indra, the east; and Varuna, the west -- are totally different from those of the Bukidnon's, the concept ... is perhaps similar.

The 1977 paper is not a work on folk literature; rather it is a brief statement on the Sanskrit elements found in the Tau-sug, which showed the extent of Indian cultural encounter with the Tau-Sug peoples. The language also indicates the extent to which the Tau-Sug perceives various phenomena in its environment. This leads us to the 1980 paper, which attempts to discuss the interphase of the two great traditions that had contributed to the enrichment of Southern Philippine culture. I refer to Islam and Hinduism. In this paper, the interphase of the two traditions becomes evident in the religious aspects, i. e., Hinduistic terminologies are used as identifying tags for Islamic concepts. For example, the term for "heaven", *suarga*, *sulga*, *suwarga* (Sanskrit *svarga*), which is also known in Javanese and Malay, is defined in Islamic terms. The same is true with "hell," *naraka*, *neraka* (Sanskrit *naraka*); "fasting," *puasa* (Sanskrit *upavasa*) and "fruit of action," *pala* (Sanskrit *phala*, "fruit"). These four religious terms are Maranaw, Maguindanao and Tau-Sug. This may be called folk-Islam or even folk-Hinduism, depending upon the perspective one takes.

The 1979, 1982 and 1983 papers discuss the cultural presence of Sri Vijaya in the Philippines. Sri Vijaya was a kingdom which flourished in the 7th through the 12th centuries A.D. in Sumatra, but its presence was also felt in the Malay Peninsula and Southern Thailand. While its political presence cannot be proved in the Philippines, its cultural impact cannot be ignored. It is now becoming evident that such cultural presence may explain the recognized Indian elements in the Philippine culture, since Sri Vijaya was a Hindu-Buddhist state. And, it may not be ill-considered to say that Indian elements filtered into ancient Philippine culture through the influence of Sri Vijaya by its extensive maritime trade and traffic at the height of its efflorescence. Sri Vijaya was recognized as an important kingdom during its time by Chinese and Indian kings.

The nature of the present paper calls for some remarks on the movements of culture in pre-and proto-historic or even in historic times. Also some remarks on the state of societies involved in this movement must be made. Regarding movements of culture, particularly those in the South and Southeast Asian regions, these were primarily maritime in orientation --that is, the seas were the avenues through which cultures in these areas/regions were cross-fertilized. Indeed, land masses were more barriers to the easy access and other amenities of life during these periods of human development. It was far easier to transport large groups of people on seagoing crafts across bodies of water than on land. It may not be ill-considered to refer here to the movement of Indian culture into Southeast Asia --in fact, that is the main theme of this paper, with particular reference to the Philippines, especially Mindanao and Sulu.

As to the state of culture and society in pre-and proto- historic times, the theory that cultures are never static but dynamic and pulsating was evidently true then as today. For culture as such cannot and will not survive if it did not provide mechanisms for its continuity and stamina. For there are several cultures interphasing with one another, and each stimulates the other to react in a manner that it may not be threatened, but enrich its own experience as it does the other. The entire process of encounter becomes a meaningful mechanism for that dynamism that is natural to culture or cultures.

With that as a theoretical framework, let me now proceed to give an account of the suspected evidences of the process of cultural interphasing vis-a-vis that of India and the Philippines. Antecedent to the phenomenon, however, let me warn the reader that there was no direct contact between the Philippines and India. Rather, the Indian overlay on Philippine culture must be understood in terms of its recognized development in the intervening regions, namely the Indonesian Archipelago, the Malay Peninsula as well as the Isthmian part of Southern Thailand. The nature of the present paper does not allow details to explain this, but it will be instructive to focus on the subject more sharply.

In the introduction to her study of Bagobo myths, Laura Watson Benedict wrote in very succinct and precise terms, as follows:

That the component part of the stories have been drawn from numerous and widely separated sources is apparent, even at a

cursory glance. Among these sources, the folklore material of Sanskrit writers seems to have left a distinctive impress upon the Bagobo mythical romance. Against a Malay background, and blended with native pagan elements, are presented chains of episodes, characteristic personalities, methods of securing a magical control of the situation, that suggest vividly parallel literary forms in the Sanskrit saga. Still more, one is conscious of a prevailing Indian atmosphere, that may sometimes elude analysis, yet none the less fails to make itself felt. But as to the line of ethnic contacts which has transfused the peculiar literary quality into Malay myth -- whether it is to be traced solely to the influence exerted by Hindoo religion and Hindoo literature during ages of domination in the Malay Archipelago, or whether to migration -- this is a problem of great complexity, for which no satisfactory solution has yet been offered. (JAFL XXVI, 1913, pp. 13-63)

Benedict could not have been forthright in expressing the view that the entire folk literature tradition of the Philippines is indeed very much infused by large mass of Indianism, if I may be allowed to use the term. And it is quite interesting to note that, apparently, Benedict even anticipated Maurice Bloomfield (Proceed. Am. Philo. Soc., LII, 1941) who wrote that "the individual motifs of a story of fairy tale, as found with other peoples, seem to hold a mass meeting on the great arena of Hindu fiction." He also stressed India's contribution to the enrichment of the world's literatures, adding that the "ancient treasury of narrative which India pours out lavishly from the time of the RV [RigVeda] to this day, passed freely beyond the bounds of India." Bloomfield further elucidated his view, thus:

It is at any rate, rather hard to find fable or traits of marked character which do not own an Indian analogon; many a time they may at least be suspected to be of Indian origin. As a corollary to this last condition, nearly all the more important motifs are intensely repetitious in Hindu narratives themselves, so that as a matter of external experience, there are neither absolutely no original fables or stories, or absolutely original collections of fables or stories. (ibid.)

problematic because there are a number of these to be accommodated in a paper for presentation within half an hour or so. But I will try my best to present what I consider to be representative. To do this, I would like to use thematic references, i. e., the concept of right and left in South and Southeast Asian societies; the third eye, the wind or WIND in literature, and as an anti-climax to all these paradigms, I would like to tell you a story from the Bagobos which shows us the extent to which Indian literature has penetrated the Islands of Mindanao, if indeed India had a significant influence here. But I should not forget that the Indian epic, the **Ramayana**, made itself felt among the lake people of Mindanao, the Maranaw, who calls the story **Maharadia Lawana**.

(1) **Right and Left in South and Southeast Asian Societies.** In the Tuwaang (E. Arsenio Manuel, 1958), lines 248-255 and 269-275 relate the following:

Immediately, the maiden spoke
 And this is what she said
 "Aru, where shall I sit?
 For the custom sayeth that the place
 is the right side of the gallant
 and that the left side of a hero
 will cause misery to anyone
 ill luck to who ever sits there " (lines 248-255)

Tuwaang spoke:
 "Even if there were thousands
 and hundreds more
 supposed to be my sisters
 I never would like to receive them
 on my left side
 but always on the side of my right."

Immediately she sat down
 on the right side
 looking like
 a sitting white heron. (lines 269-275)

This reference to the left and right positions of persons in terms of their relation with people of high station seems to echo an Indian custom or perhaps an analogue of such a custom. In orthodox Indian society, the right side is associated with holiness, exaltation

and good omen. The right hand extended to bless, particularly by a holy man, is taken to impart holiness. At worship the Hindu walks around the deity's images with his right-hand side next to the object of worship, the hand extended to touch the image as a sign of reverence and respect for the deity. Similarly, the newly weds circumambulate the image with their right side next to it as part of the ceremony. The elders are circumambulated by the young to show their reverence to them. To do so with the left side next to them would be the height of irreverence and disrespect.

The right side of **maharaja** or a **rajendra** is an exalted point to stand or sit on when he is around. That is why in India during occasional audiences given by a monarch, the minister's rank and position is immediately seen from the side he sits on and his distance from the monarch.

A good omen from the orthodox Indians occurs on the right side of the body: the twitching of the right eye, the right arm, or the right leg is a good omen; and of the left eye, the left arm, or the left leg a bad omen. Correct breathing, particularly during an important ceremony, is effected through the right nostril.

In South India, according to the literature which found its way into Old Funan (now Cambodia) society, there is a vestige of the so-called left and right castes. K. A. Nilakantha Sastri discusses this kind of caste system quite extensively. He writes in part about the "distinction between what are known as right-and-left-hand castes, one of the most permanent divisions of South Indian society, which was well known among the officials of Funan." (BOR-Madras, X, 1936: 192-3)

(2) **The Third Eye. Still from the Tuwaang** (E. Arsenio Manuel *ibid*), read lines 926-934 ---

The maiden heard this
And she said to herself
"I believe it so
That he comes from Kuaman
Because as you look at him (line 930)
He is possessed of power from anitu
Imbued with virtue from the diwata
For one cannot gaze at
The middle of his forehead."

In a footnote (no. 96) to the last line cited above, Manuel wrote ---"This is due to the radiating light emanating from the forehead of Tuwaang ..." Compare this "radiating light" with the third eye of Siva in Hindu mythology. According to the myth, the third eye is difficult to gaze at because it breaks one to smithereens when one is subjected to its power, i. e. the rendering of Kama, the Hindu Cupid, bodiless for disturbing the penance of the god in answer to the pleadings of Parvati to help her implore the god to refrain from his penance, but instead performs his duties as lover.

Indeed these references cannot just be fortuitous resemblances or parallel developments in societies even in thousands of years past were not in the state of isolation; rather they were in constant flux, each interacting with the other.

(3) The Wind. In Indian mythology, there are a number of stories about Vayu, the wind, helping the hero ---from the Vedas through the epics and Puranas. The Vayu episode in the Mahabharata (Adiparva 72: 3) will suffice to illustrate this point.

...God Indra, fearing that he might be dislodge from his heavenly throne due to the austere penances of Visvamitra, sends to earth Menaka, the heavenly nymph, to tempt the latter from his rigid vows ...Menaka thereby comes down and sports around the vicinity of the rajarsi's tapovana ... and saluting the rsi, she then began to sport before him. And just at that time, Marut robbed her of her garments ..."

Marut, the wind (Vayu), is the willing accomplice who was summoned by Indra in his scheme to rob Visvamitra of his powers obtained by penances.

In the Bagobo myths, the hero has the wind for his vehicle (which compare Visnu, in Indian mythology, having garuda for his vahana "vehicle"): "Tuglay, the hero, embarks on his adventures, riding on the WIND, and on his warshield he rode and flew with the Wind until he came to the horizon ..." (Benedict 1913: 29). In the Tuwaang epic, a reference to the wind is similarly made when it is said to have spoken to the hero (E. Arsenio Manuel *ibid.*, line 380).

In an earlier work (Francisco 1964:143), I had the occasion to write that

Perhaps these episodes in Philippine literature are survivals of a mythological concept concerning a natural phenomenon, the wind. [This refers to the Lam-ang.] Since it is the only instance found in the literature, it cannot be ascertained whether, in the first place, the phenomenon had an anthropomorphic personality, as it is evident in the Indian concept of the Wind....

However, with our reference to the Wind as having spoken to the hero, in the Tuwaang epic, it is evident that the Wind had an anthropomorphic personality. And it may not be ill-considered to say that given more time, we might in the long run find more data to substantiate this view. [The Iloko Lam-ang. There are four episodes where the wind is an accomplice of the hero (see Francisco 1964: 141).]

(4) **The Brahman and the Tiger.** The story I am to relate to you sounds like it is a Bagobo renarration of the tale of the Brahman and the Tiger (Kathasaritsagara), viz.,

An old man was fishing in the brook, but the water kept getting muddy, and he did not know what was the matter. Then he went away, and he walked and walked. After he had gone some distance, he saw in the mud a big lion that eats people. The lion had been sleeping in the mud. He said to the man, "If you will pull me out of the mud and ride me into town, I will give you many things."

Then the man drew the lion from the mud.

The lion stood a while, and then said, "Now you must ride on me."

So the man mounted the lion, and rode until they came a large meadow, when the lion said, "Now I am going to eat you."

The man replied, "But first let us go and ask the carabao."

The lion consented, and they went on until they reached the Carabao.

"This Lion wants to eat me," complained the man.

"Yes, indeed, eat him, Lion," answered the Carabao, "for men are all the time riding on my back, and whipping me."

There were many carabaos in the field, and they all agreed to this.

Then the man said to the Lion, "You may eat me but first we

will go and tell the Cows."

Soon they reached the Cow's home, and the man told them that the Lion wanted to eat him.

At once the Cows exclaimed, "Yes eat him, Lion, because all day long the people drive us away from their fields."

"All right," assented the man; "but first let us speak to the Dogs."

When they came to the Dog's home, the man cried, "The Lion is going to eat me."

The Dogs said to the Lion, "Devour the man; for every time, when men are eating, they beat us away from the food."

At last the Man said, "Sure enough, you will eat me up, Lion; but let us go to the Cat."

When they reached the Cat's home, they found her sitting at the door, after sweeping her nice house. It had groves of coconut palms around it. The Cat lived alone.

The man said to her. "This Lion wants to eat me."

"Yes, Lion," the Cat replied, "but first you make a deep hole on the ground. We will race each other into the hole. If you jump in first, then I shall loose and you will win."

And the Lion ran, and jumped into the hole. Then the Cat covered him with earth and stones until he was dead.....

This is one paradigm which I wished I had also the text in the original language, for it would have been most exciting to know the names of the animals in the Bagobo language. For example, the word LION, the common English name of one of the large species of the feline family, is not certainly an animal indigenous to the Mindanao region. It would have been interesting also if we knew the Bagobo terms for carabao, cow, dog, and cat. A kind of lexical analysis could be undertaken to enable us to get a much sharper picture of that relation. We can at this moment operate on the level of the general theme, which I would like to use in order to compare the two tales (the Indian and the Bagobo.)

BAGOBO

Man and Lion

Man fishing, finds a

INDIAN

Brahman and Tiger

Brahman, on a journey through
forest came upon a
Tiger caught in a trap

Lion in the mud
Lion taken out of the
mud by man
Man rides Lion, then
prepares to eat man

Carabao tells Lion, Man
rides of its back and
whips him, hence Lion
can eat Man
Man ask Cow

Cow tells Lion, Man drives
them away from the field,
hence Lion can eat Man
Man ask Cat

Cat challenges Lion to a
race to a big hole.
Lion won the race, fell
into the hole and buried
alive by Cat.

Tiger released from trap

Tiger prepares to eat Brahman

Brahman protest, and convinces
Tiger they should ask
the Gaja

Gaja says Tiger can eat
Brahman because Brahman
performs ritual for
catching/trapping Gaja

Brahman protests, convinces
Tiger they should ask the
Bullock

Bullock says Tiger can eat Brahman
because he whips him
when too tired to pull cart
Brahman, protests again,
convinces Tiger he should ask
Jackal

Jackal says Tiger can eat Brahman
because he should be
chastised for being selfish

Brahman protests, convinces
Tiger they consult King
Cobra who was told of the
circumstances of the dis-
pute. But King Cobra, be-
ing fair-minded, wanted to
start from the beginning
and wanted furthermore
to see how Brahman released
Tiger from trap.

Tiger demonstrates his being
in the trap, and when the
trap was shut and locked,
King Cobra said that as the
Tiger did not fulfill his
promise not to eat the
Brahman and having
demonstrated his untruth
so he must remain caught
in the trap, till the hunter
comes to claim his catch.

(5) **The Ramayana in the Philippines.** The Rama story is, indeed, a very popular tale in the whole of Asia, particularly East Asia and Southeast Asia. Its popularity is seen in the two international congresses held in 1969 in Jakarta and in 1975 in New Delhi (V. Raghavan 1980). Each of these congresses produced two volumes. However, the volume that is available to me is the 1975 proceedings which includes my contribution to the congress, namely a paper on the Rama saga in the Philippines. The story is a narrative, rather almost miniature in comparison to the original Sanskrit **Ramayana**.

The Rama tale in the Philippines is popularly known as **Maharadia Lawana**, a Maranaw narrative which I "discovered" for the world of Rama scholarship in 1968, and published in 1969. I must publicly acknowledge the role of the late Professor Dr. Mamitua Saber for leading me to the text of the story. The published work is available in reprint with the Philippine Folklore Society (Quezon City 1969). This was originally published in *Asian Studies* (1969), but has been reprinted in the *Sarawak Museum Journal* (1969) and in the *Ramayana Traditions in Asia* (New Delhi, 1980. V. Raghavan, Ed.)

For the purpose of this paper I would like to refer to the fact that the **Maharadia Lawana**, though in very condensed form in comparison to the **Ramayana**, still contains the major episodes of the latter. These are (1) the winning of Sita, (2) the abduction of Sita, (3) the search for Sita, and (4) the return of Sita. These four episodes as they are narrated in the **Maharadia Lawana** correspond to the five *kanda-s* or songs or chapters of the **Ramayana**, viz. *Balakanda*, *Aranyakanda*, *Kiskindhakanda*, *Sundarakanda* and *Yuddakanda*.

To give you an idea on how the **Maharadia Lawana** and the **Ramayana** compare, I give you a comparative table of the major characters and place names. In these tables are included those in the Malay Fairy Tale (Sri Rama) and the *Hikayat Seri Rama* (HSR) and *Hikayat Maharaja Ravana* (HMR).

Table A. MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mah. Law.	Fairy Tale	HSR/HMR	Ram.
Pulu Agama Niog	Tanjong Bunga	Mandu Puri	Ayodhya Nagara/Man durapura
Pulu Bandiamasir	Kachapuri		Bukit Serindib

Lanka
(Later,
Lankapuri)
Lankapura

This paper certainly does not call for conclusion; rather it tells us that there is so much more to be done in the area of encounters between cultures and societies. Apart from the study of the results of these encounters through the ages, the study of routes of these movements is still in the seminal stage particularly along those through which the Indian cultural overlay has passed. In the attempt to put the *Maharadia Lawana* in historical perspective, for instance, I indicated with some difference that it must have reached the lake area via the Malay version, namely the Fairy Tale - Sri Rama. However, it is also possible to say that the HRM and/or the HSR may have been basis of the *Maharadia Lawana*. The most likely route of the narrative may have been through the Malabang-Ganassi axis, then around the lake on the west side. Or it may have been traditional route of Islam into the lake region, that is, through the Parang-Butig stretch, then around the lake on the east side.

These two possible routes have yet to be checked and in the process we have to work out also the routes through which it passed outside these points of entry. The route of the entry of the Indian cultural overlay in Southeast Asia, particularly the peninsular, isthmian and archipelagic areas, had been definitively established. But the routes from these points on to the Philippines are yet to be delineated. At the moment, we can only surmise.

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