

# **The Philippines and Southeast Asia**

**Man Mohini Kaul**

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and  
Southeast Asia,*

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RADIANT PUBLISHERS

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## *Preface*

Since President Marcos proclaimed martial law in the Philippines on 22 September 1972, many developments of considerable importance have taken place in Philippine foreign policy. The most dramatic of these developments has been the Philippine rapprochement with the Communist countries. There has also been a thorough-going reappraisal of US-Philippine relations. The latest trends in Philippine foreign policy reflect the "emerging realities" in Asia. The country is responding to the new power alignments by bringing to an end its exclusive dependence on a single power and by normalizing its relations with those with which it had no relations before.

This study limits itself to the study of Philippine foreign policy from 1961 to 1969, covering the administration of President Macapagal (from 1961 to 1965, the so-called "New Era" in Philippine foreign politics) and the first administration of President Marcos (from 1965 to 1969). Although the Asian orientation in Philippine foreign policy can be traced back to the time of the Baguio Conference of 1950, it became a definite trend only under Macapagal and grew in dimension and scope subsequently.

Philippine foreign policy provides an excellent example of the "align" policy that grew out of Philippine-American defence and trade relations. Though it took shape during the forties and fifties in the atmosphere of the politics of the era

of the Cold War, it acquired a certain degree of flexibility in course of time. One of the aims of this study is to examine the factors contributing to the Philippine desire to play an active role in Southeast Asia with a view to making a rational assessment of the political and economic forces that shaped the development of Philippine foreign policy.

The subject under study is of considerable importance as the relations of the Philippines with the rest of Asia have not yet been given the attention they deserve. Indeed it is a comparatively new field of study in Asian and international affairs.

The study relies mainly on primary source material and on the interviews I had with politicians, administrators, journalists, and students during my field work in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

Man Mohini Kaul

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# I

## *Historical Perspective*

In the early sixteenth century Ferdinand Magellan, a Spaniard landed in the Philippines. His countrymen hailed the event as the discovery of the Philippines. They were not, however, correct in implying that the Philippines had been unknown to the outside world before. Indeed, for centuries past, it had had trade relations with other countries in Asia.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that not much historical evidence is available about the pre-Spanish period of the history of the Philippines. This is partly due to the vandalism of the Spaniards, who destroyed all the books and manuscripts they could lay hands on. They were convinced that these writings were inspired by the devils.<sup>2</sup> The same feeling is to be found in the writings of many foreign scholars who wrote about the Filipinos before the Spanish conquest as though they were a people who stood outside the pale of civilization.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary Filipino historians have tried to reconstruct their past with material gathered mainly from the writings of

<sup>1</sup> Vicente Albano Pacis, "The Unconquerables," in *Founders of Freedom: The History of the Three Philippine Constitutions* (n.p., 1971), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> H. Otley Beyer, "The Philippines before Magellan," *Asia* (New York), vol. 21, no. 10, October 1921, p. 861.

<sup>3</sup> John Carroll, "Contemporary Philippine Historians and Philippine History," *Journal of South East Asian History* (Singapore), vol. 2, no. 3, October 1961, p. 24.

other countries with which the Philippines had maintained relations before the coming of the Spaniards.<sup>4</sup> They have also used archaeological discoveries wherever possible.

### *Pre-Colonial Philippines*

Recent archaeological discoveries indicate that the Philippines was one of the first places to witness the emergence of man. The "Dawn man" first appeared in 250,000 B.C. He is believed to have been a cousin of the "Java man" and the "Peking man" and hence among the earliest specimens of human beings to appear in Asia.<sup>5</sup>

Some 25,000 years ago the pygmies came. They came from Borneo and the Malay Peninsula by land bridges. The present-day Aetas, whom the Spaniards called "negritos," are their descendants.<sup>6</sup>

The land bridges were submerged by the time other immigrants came to the Philippines. The first to reach the Philippines in boats were the Indonesians.<sup>7</sup> They are supposed to have come in two waves, the first about 3000 B.C. and the second about 1000 B.C. According to Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Oscar M. Alfonso, the first wave of Indonesians came from Southeast Asia<sup>8</sup>; the second, from Indo-China and South China.<sup>9</sup> These Indonesians belonged to the New Stone Age. Their descendants are "the non-Christian Kalingas, Gaddangs, Apayaos, Igorots and Ilongots of Luzon, the Tagbanuas of

<sup>4</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, Gregorio F. Zaide, Cesar A. Majul, H. de la Costa, Hernando Abaya, and Eufonio M. Alip are some of the contemporary Filipino historians. For a list of contemporary Filipino historians, *ibid.*, pp. 25-35.

<sup>5</sup> Professor H. Otley Beyer, the eminent American archaeologist and anthropologist, has been quoted in Gregorio F. Zaide, *The Republic of the Philippines: History, Government and Civilization* (Manila, 1970), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Zaide has described the Indonesians as belonging "to the Mongoloid race with Caucasian affinities." *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> They, however, do not name the places in South-East Asia from where the first wave of Indonesians is said to have started. Classified by anthropologists as Indonesians, they do not represent the people of present-day Indonesia. Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Oscar M. Alfonso, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City, 1971), edn. 2, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Palawan, the Bagobos, the Bilaans, the Manobos, and the Tirurays of Mindanao.”<sup>10</sup>

Between 800 and 500 B.C., yet another wave of immigrants arrived in the Philippines. These were more advanced than the earlier immigrants, in that they made use of copper and bronze and belonged to what may be called the Bronze-Copper Culture.<sup>11</sup>

The Malays, who were the last of the races to settle in the Philippines, came in sailboats. More advanced than the Indonesians, they belonged to the Iron Age. They are believed to have come in three waves. The first wave arrived from 200 B.C. to A.D. 100, by way of the Celebes Sea.<sup>12</sup> The second wave began arriving in A.D. 100 and continued till the thirteenth century. These were the “alphabet-using Malays.”<sup>13</sup> The present-day Tagalogs, the Ilocanos, the Pampangos, the Visayans, and the Bicolos are some of their descendants. The last wave consisted of Muslim Malays. They arrived during the fourteenth century and continued to come till the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Sulu was the first region in the Philippines to accept Islam, mainly under the influence of Mudum, an Arab missionary.<sup>15</sup> Mudum came to Sulu about 1380 from Malacca. The Muslim princes who arrived from Sumatra and Johore in subsequent years established sultanates in Sulu and Mindanao. Islam gradually spread to the other islands of the Philippines as well. By the time the Spaniards came, even Manila was under a Muslim king, Rajah Sulayman.<sup>16</sup>

The settlement of so many peoples in the Philippines led naturally to a mixture of races. This mixture yielded a new race

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Zaide, n. 5, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Agoncillo writes: “All these migrations may be considered purely hypothetical, incontrovertible proofs being wanting to make them strictly historical.” Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines* (New York, 1969), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> An attempt is made to maintain uniformity in spelling Filipino names. As certain names are spelt differently by different Filipino historians, we have, in the interest of uniformity, adopted the spellings used by Agoncillo and Alfonso (n. 8), except where there are quotations.

<sup>16</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, n. 8, p. 26.

of people, the Filipinos.<sup>17</sup>

The pre-Spanish Philippines was culturally influenced by many Asian countries with which it had trade and commercial relations. The influence of China is evident in the language and customs of the Philippines. It is from the Chinese that the early Filipinos learnt the use of the umbrella, the gong, gun-powder, lead, porcelain, metallurgy, and mining techniques.<sup>18</sup>

Traces of India's influence are available in the Philippine language, customs, and dress; but in comparison with that of the other neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia, India's impact does not seem to have been significant.<sup>19</sup> Most Filipino historians believe that the

... paucity of archaeological or written documents to prove the existence of such relationship places in doubt the theory that there was, once upon a time, direct contact between the Filipinos and the Indians. More probable is the theory that the Filipinos imbibed some of the elements of Indian culture through the Hinduized Malays who came to the Philippines to settle permanently.<sup>20</sup>

When the Spaniards came, they found many Japanese settled in the Philippines.<sup>21</sup> Arab traders also visited the Philippines and left their mark on Philippine culture.<sup>22</sup> Several neighbouring countries such as Borneo, Cambodia, Java, Malaya, the Moluccas, Sumatra, and Thailand have also contributed to the development of Philippine culture.<sup>23</sup>

The Philippines became a busy commercial centre in course

<sup>17</sup> The Filipinos later intermarried with the Chinese, the Japanese, the Indians, the Arabs, the Spaniards, the Americans, etc. The dominant racial stock of the Filipinos is, however, Malay. Zaide, n. 5, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, n. 8, pp. 33-35.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 33. See Dharendra Nath Roy, *The Philippines and India* (Manila, 1930), pp. 1-81; Juan Francisco, "The Indian Intrusions," *Philippine Approaches* (New Delhi), vol. 1, no. 1, January 1968, pp. 12-16; and M. R. A. Baig, *In Different Saddles* (Bombay, 1967), p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> Zaide, n. 5, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

of time, with traders from a wide variety of countries competing for its market. According to Agoncillo:

This rivalry lasted up to the Madjaphit Period (1377-1478), after which the Chinese regained control of the Philippine trade. In the fifteenth century, when Islam began to infiltrate the southern tip of the Philippines, Chinese trade suffered a setback, and the Chinese traders, pressed back by the Muslims, sought new trading routes to other parts of the country where Islam had not yet gained a foothold.<sup>24</sup>

Pre-colonial Philippines consisted of distinct communities, each independent of the others. The country was mostly divided into settlements called "barangays," based on kinship.<sup>25</sup> The head of a barangay was known as a "datu." "The *barangay*, essentially a group of extended families, proved to be a durable institution. It was preserved intact as the basic unit of local administration throughout the period of the Spanish occupation, from 1565 to 1898. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

The barangays were economically self-sufficient. Since they produced the same commodities, they did not enter into barter trade with one another. Barter trade existed mainly with outsiders.<sup>27</sup> The main occupation of the Filipinos was agriculture; they also took to fishing, mining, lumbering, weaving, and ship-building.<sup>28</sup>

The early Filipinos knew how to read and write. Their written languages belonged to the Malayo-Polynesian language group. Tagalog and Pampangan, two of the Filipino languages, are very similar to Bahasa Indonesia.<sup>29</sup> Besides written literature, there was a tradition of preserving literary compositions

<sup>24</sup> Agoncillo, n. 14, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> The word "barangay" is derived from "balangay," a boat in which the Malays came to the Philippines. Agoncillo and Alfonso, n. 8, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Onofre D. Corpuz, *The Philippines* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), p. 23. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>27</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, n. 8, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

by oral communication.<sup>30</sup> A Filipino historian, describing the Filipino educational system during the pre-colonial times, remarks: "In ancient Panay there existed a regular *barangay* school called *bothoan*. In this school, the children were taught the Sanskrit language, reading, writing, arithmetic, the use of weapons, and *lubus* [i.e. the art of acquiring amulets]."<sup>31</sup>

Pre-Spanish Filipino architecture did not consist of heavy stone structures such as were found in other areas of Southeast Asia. Their structures consisted of bamboo and grass or palm. (Some of these exist even now in the Filipino countryside.)<sup>32</sup> The various peoples who came to settle down in the Philippines made their own contributions to the early Filipino art.<sup>33</sup> The Filipinos had some knowledge of science, engineering, and mathematics. They had their own calendar. They appear to have also been familiar with the art of minting coins.<sup>34</sup> Their ingenuity in irrigation methods is evident from the existence of the Banaue rice terraces.

The pre-colonial civilization was thus basically Malay with influences from other Asian countries. With the Spanish conquest the Filipinos were isolated from other Asians, which greatly facilitated the process of Hispanization. The change under the Spaniards is described by a great Filipino, Jose P. Rizal, thus:

Then began a new era for the Filipinos; little by little they lost their old traditions, the mementos of their past; they gave up their writing, their songs, their poems, their laws in order to learn by rote other doctrines which they did not understand, another morality, another aesthetics different from those inspired by their climate and their manner of thinking. Then they declined, degrading themselves in their own eyes; they became ashamed of what was their own; they began to admire and praise whatever was foreign and

<sup>30</sup> Regarding early Filipino languages, systems of writing, and literature, see Agoncillo and Alfonso, n. 8, pp. 59-66.

<sup>31</sup> Zaide, n. 5, p. 39. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>32</sup> See Corpuz, n. 26, pp. 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, n. 8, pp. 70-71.

<sup>34</sup> Zaide, n. 5, pp. 40-41.

incomprehensible; their spirit was dismayed, and it surrendered.<sup>35</sup>

### *Colonization by Spain*

The Spanish connexion with the Philippines began on 17 March 1521 when members of a Spanish expedition under Ferdinand Magellan landed on the islet of Homonhon. It was a period of adventure, exploration, and founding of colonies under the auspices of the prominent ruling houses of Europe. A number of European Powers vied with one another in discovering new routes to new lands. The rivalry was particularly keen between Portugal and Spain, so much so that Pope Alexander VI was prevailed upon to divide the world between Spain and Portugal in 1493 for the sake of peace between the two countries. The division was effected by drawing a line of demarcation on a map of the world from the North Pole to the South across the Atlantic Ocean. Lands discovered in the regions east of the line were to belong to Portugal, and those discovered in the regions west of it to Spain. The Portuguese discovered the islands of Moluccas, rich in spices, by sailing east. Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese who had defected to Spain, believed he could reach Moluccas by sailing west; but instead of reaching Moluccas he arrived in Homonhon in the Philippines.

From Homonhon the Spanish expedition sailed to the islet of Limasawa. Later, on 7 April 1521, Magellan reached Cebu. The Chief of Mactan, Lapulapu, who refused to acknowledge Spanish suzerainty killed Magellan in a battle on 27 April 1521. Magellan failed to establish Spanish rule in the Philippines. Most of his men were killed. Of the five ships which participated in the expedition, only one was able to return to Spain, in 1522.

Spain sent another expedition under Ruy Lopez de Villalobos in 1542. The expedition reached Mindanao in 1543 but failed to conquer the islands. A member of the expedition named the Samar-Leyte region named Filipinas after Felipe (Philip II of Spain). In course of time the entire group of islands came to

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Teodoro Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City, 1970), edn. 3, pp. 112-13.



be known as *Islas Filipinas*.<sup>36</sup> The Philippines was finally brought under Spanish sovereignty by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi. He landed first in Cebu on 27 April 1565. Unlike Magellan he did not get himself involved in skirmishes with the Filipinos. He simply took advantage of the existing disunity among the local chieftains. According to a Filipino writer: "The tragedy of the natives was that none among them, whether chief or plain warrior, rose to the challenge of their times and showed a capacity for leadership by forming an alliance sufficiently broad-based to defeat the invaders."<sup>37</sup> Manila was taken after a bloody battle with Rajah Sulayman, the local ruler.<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, Legazpi conquered other areas of the Philippines, and by the time he died, on 20 August 1572, in Manila, the Visayas and Luzon were mostly under Spanish rule. The Spaniards, however, could not establish their sway over Mindanao. This island continued to be controlled by the Muslims, whom the Spaniards called *Moros*.<sup>39</sup>

#### *The Philippines under Spanish Rule*

The main aim of Spain in the Philippines, besides conquering the country, was to convert the people to Christianity. Five friars had accompanied Legazpi to the Philippines. Over a period of time, the majority of the Filipinos were converted to the Catholic religion.<sup>40</sup>

Spain administered the Philippines from Mexico through the Council of the Indies in Spain for more than 250 years. The Council performed executive, legislative, and judicial functions.

<sup>36</sup> Pacis, n. 1. p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Both Sulayman and Lapulapu, who defied the Spanish conquerors, are heroes of the Independent Philippines.

<sup>39</sup> "Moros" is Spanish for Moors.

<sup>40</sup> The missionary aspect of Spanish rule is obvious from the following statement by Philip II. He said: "I am an instrument of Divine Providence; the main thing is the conversion of the kingdom of Luzon, and God has predestined me for that end, having chosen me His king for that purpose, and since He has entrusted so glorious a work to me and my crown, I shall hold the islands of Luzon even so by doing I exhaust my treasury." Quoted in Cesar A. Majul, *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City, 1967), pp. 96-97.