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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF SULU: AN OVERVIEW**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The progress of the state depends on how its nation is socialized to the country's history and the ideology. Sulu history is however presented unfairly in relation to the overall history of the Philippines and treated merely as local history with an insignificant role in the struggle for independence and nation-building. With this historical blur placed upon the historical truth, many common people could no longer see the historical reality. These people have become captive minds who cannot think freely as their minds and hearts are fed with historical distortions found in the textbooks and social media presentation. This is a kind of historical genocide imposed upon the Tausug by the foreign historians who wrote Sulu's history in accordance with the interest of the power structure of the state. At the top of the power structure, there is the Philippine nation-state paradigm that marginalizes further the political entity of the Bangsasug.

On the contrary, the history of Sulu is the real foundation of the Philippine history, and therefore it is a national history which already evolved hundred years before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers in 16<sup>th</sup> century. Seeing the Philippine history from this lens is the only way to give justice to the Bangsasug about their historic role in the defense of the country from the menace of western colonialism. The objective of this paper is to discuss the Sulu's historiography and the six divisions of the Bangsasug history with the view to reeducate the students about the first lines of historical development that took place in this country four hundred years ago. The rise of the Sulu nation in the 14<sup>th</sup> century represents the first line of historical development. The second line is the Filipino nation which rose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after 300 years from the first one.

This study is based on historical review of the Sulu historiography, interview with the local historians and the author's personal insight about the Sulu history. The techniques used in the interpretation of historical facts are the native point of view, comparison of past and present and ascertaining the root of the local civilization.

### **II. FRAMEWORK ON SULU HISTORY**

The first step in the formulation of history framework is to examine the Sulu historiography consisting of primary sources, selection of authentic from false and the synthesis of the differences into historical narrative. Abu Zayd Abdurahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun advised historians to be armed with speculative mind (keen judgment), thoroughness (careful scrutiny), and exposure to the root of customs, foundation of politics, nature of civilization, circumstances of human society, and knowledge of comparison of far with near, past and present. The major sources of Sulu historiography are the *Patikul Khutba*, *Kitab* of Hadji Butu, the *Sejara Melayu*, the Chinese Annals, *Swish* of the Kris by Victor Hurley, *History of Sulu* by Najeeb M. Saleeby, *Sulu Archipelago and its People* by Sixto Orosa, *Muslims in the Philippines* by Dr. Cesar Adib Majul, *Struggle for Identity* by Jainal D. Rasul, *Muslim Filipinos* by Peter G. Gowing, *Social*

World of the Tausug by Juanito Ali Bruno, Space and Identity by Abraham P. Sakili, and the Tausug of Sulu by Hannibal H. Bara.

Reviewing the Sulu historiography would bring us to the second step, the idea of periodization of the history of Sulu and the formation of the Bangsasug nationhood. This is the basic approach to historical analysis that helps us to determine the root of Sulu's national history.

The purpose of the review is to guide the Muslim students to understand the place and role of Sulu history in the overall history of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia, and its status in relation to the history of the Philippines. Sulu history is a national history. It is the foundation of the country's history. And the Philippines history is but a Spanish history. Many history books in which the Muslim students can discover how the images of the present Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu are misrepresented, distorted, excluded and isolated in the pages of history books and in the major symbols of the country. Without the knowledge of Sulu historiography, every Muslim student shall be misled by the notion that the Bangsasug have no history and culture to speak of. In fact, Sulu history is only portrayed as local history which is a systematic downgrading the historical status as the first independent state to rise in what is now the Philippines.

On the contrary, Sulu historiography reveals objectively that Sulu was an independent state which was shaped by Islam, *adat* heritage, and follows its own historical line of development. The Sulu's historical line of development is apart from the Philippines whose historical line was triggered by the Spanish conquest in 1565 and was further shaped by Christianity, and western heritage during the colonization period until these two lines were merged forcibly and illegally at the start of the US sponsored Philippine Commonwealth government in 1935.

In order to avoid historical errors and deception, Muslim students and historians must be guided with the following periodization of the Bangsasug history:

1. Pre-Islamic era comprising the period of Hindu and Chinese influence in Sulu
2. Introduction of Islam to Sulu in 1250 A.D.
3. Emergence of the Muslim ethnic groups and their culture
4. Evolution and formation of the Bangsasug nation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century
5. Rise of the Sultanate of Sulu in 1450 A.D.
6. The Bangsasug struggle against western colonialism, and
7. Contemporary Bangsasug struggle for right to self-determination.

### **III. THE SIX DIVISIONS OF THE SULU HISTORY**

History is field of discipline which is useful at all times particularly for the people who wanted to lead the country or wanted to launch a revolution for national liberation. It is a source of wisdom and guidance relevant to social transformation. Leaders who are exposed to the history of their nation, can effectively deal with the contemporary problems and issues, and can provide national direction for the nation. History can provide an important insight into the problems of the nation. It also serves as a political compass by which to view the opportunities lying ahead. With history the leaders will develop their foresight on what the future may unfold. The history of Sulu consists of six divisions: 1). Islam

came to Sulu, 2). Evolution of *adat*, 3). The rise of the Bangsasug nation, 4. The rise of the Sultanate of Sulu, 5. Bangsasug struggle against western colonialism, and 6). Contemporary Bangsasug struggle for right to self-determination.

## 1. ISLAM CAME TO SULU

The first wave of the expansion of Islam to the world began around 630 A.D. in the time of Umar ibn Khattab who brought North Africa, the Persian empire under Islamic rule. The second wave came around 750 A.D. in which Islam was able to reach India, central Asia and China. And from China, after a century the Arab missionaries arrived to Sulu in the middle of 13th century.

Professor Muhammad Fatimi of Pakistan concluded that there are two theories to explain the Islamization process of Southeast Asia. The first theory is called eastern line of Islamization which means Islam came to Sulu, Brunei and eastern side of Malay peninsula direct from China. The Arab missionaries came down to Sulu from China boarding the Chinese junk which used to come to Sulu centuries before the Arabs set foot in Sulu.

The shrine of Muqbalu at Bud Datu, Indanan, Sulu is the living historical fact to reinforce this eastern line theory of Islamization. The tombstone of Muqbalu was actually prepared and imported from China. The tombstone is a lotus design common to many tombstones of Muslims buried in China. Muqbalu's tombstone bears the following words: *Qala alayhi as-salam: Man mata ghariban fakad mata shahidan*. Said the Prophet (peace be upon him): "Whoever dies in far way Land dies as martyr." Allah has taken away the late blessed martyr Muqbalu on the date: The sacred, holy month of *Rajab*. May Allah increase its holiness. The year ten and seven hundred. The tombstone speaks for itself the identity of Muqbalu as Muslim foreigner.

In this country, Muqbalu's shrine is the only ancient shrine which bears the name of the buried person and the date of his death, Rajab 710 corresponding to 1310 in Gregorian calendar. If Muqbalu lived in Sulu 30 years before he died, it means Islam reached Sulu in 1280. Or we can theorize that there were Arab missionaries who came ahead of Muqbalu, and therefore we can conclude that Islam reached Sulu in 1250 A.D. or in the middle of 13th century.

Muqbalu's shrine is now made as the basis of periodization of Philippines history. The periodization is as follows:

- a. Pre-Islamic Era - Before 1250 A.D.
- b. Islamic Era - 1250 to 1450 A.D.
- c. Sultanate Era - 1450 to 1936
- d. Colonial Era - 1565 to 1946
- e. Republican Era - 1946 to present

The second line of Islamization is known as the western line of Islamization. This means Islam reached western side of Indonesia and Malaysia direct from Hadramawt a city in Yemen. The Arab missionaries crossed Africa, America and Asia via sea routes.

Finally, with the discovery of sea routes the Arab missionaries launched the third wave of the expansion of Islam in the 11th century. Thousands of Arab missionaries left their homes and went abroad crossing land and sea routes for only one purpose, to deliver the message of Islam. Like Muqbalu many of those

missionaries died and buried in foreign lands. Many of them died on the sea on their way plying the Indian ocean for months before reaching their far away destination.

If 1250 A.D. is taken as the basis of periodization of Philippine history, a question can be raised. What was the condition of the Philippines before 1250 A.D.? And also, what was the condition of the Philippines after 1250 A.D.? Before 1250 A.D., there was no yet nation in this country except tribal communities. There was no yet religion. There was no yet centralized government except communal governance. The people were illiterate and ignorant about system of worship. But, after Islam gaining foothold in Sulu, the people learned how to worship Allah. They learned how to build nation. They learned system of writing. Islam did inspire the people to establish a centralized government known as the Sultanate of Sulu which Sayyid Abubakar founded in 1450.

The Islamization of Sulu is the greatest turning point in the history of this country. This was the period Sulu gradually moved away as a vasa province of Sri-Vijaya empire until it was succeeded by the Madjapahit empire in the 14th century. The rise of Islam in Sulu in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the decline of the Madjapahit empire – a development that led to the independence of Sulu from the Madjapahit empire. The Buranun who were the ruling elites of Sulu inherited a vast territory from Luzon down to the south.

The complete Islamization of Sulu, however, took for 200 years from the introduction of Islam in 1250 and culminated in 1450 with the rise of the Sultanate of Sulu. The extent of power of the Sulu Sultanate encompassed the area of what is now the Philippines. Sulu or Lupa Sug is the oldest name of this country. Had not the Spaniards conquered the northern territory of Visayas and Luzon in 16<sup>th</sup> century, the whole archipelago could have remained a single Muslim Sulu nation.

The spread of Islam from Sulu to Mindanao, then to Visayas and Luzon was described as the Muslim line of historical development in this country. While the colonization of Visayas and Luzon in 16th century by Spain was called the Christian line of historical development. In other words, there are two lines of historical development evolving in the Philippines. The first line or the Muslim line started from Jolo and moved to the north. It stopped only with the coming of the Spanish colonizers in 16th century, and eventually opened the Christian line of historical development.

The second line known as the Christian line began from the north and moved south very fast, which alters the socio-political landscape of the Sultanate of Sulu. The second line of historical development is fueled by the western culture and Christianity.

We need to present the opposite direction of these two lines of historical development so that we can picture out how the Sulu - Spain war happened that lasted for 320 years from 1600 to 1889. Dr. Cesar Adib Majul described the war as Moro wars.

The present conflict in Sulu and Mindanao is actually extension of the Moro wars. The two major Fronts of the Muslims including other non-state armed groups were organized as armed response towards the effect of the Christian line of historical development, particularly the defense of Islam and the remaining territories of the Muslims. Moro wars were also extension of the 11th century

European crusades to Middle East only the fight was no longer between the Arabs and the Europeans; it shifted to between the Bangsasug and the Spaniards and later with the American colonial forces as illustrated with the 1903 battle of Jolo, 1906 battle of Bud Dahu, 1913 battle of Bud Bagsak and 1927 battle of Bud Langkuwasan

After centuries of conflict between the Muslims and the Christians in this country, finally they are now nominally united under one Republic. Unfortunately, the Muslims do not find complete political satisfaction under the Philippines Republic. They still long for Islam to become the ideological force in the entire Sulu archipelago.

It was Islam that brought the Tausug to glorious past; the same Islam that awaits them for another glorious future, *insha* Allah.

## **2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE MUSLIM ADAT**

Before the introduction of Islam in Sulu in 1250 A.D., the *adat* or culture of the different groups in the whole Sulu archipelago was heavily influenced by the Indians who founded the Sri-Vijaya empire in Sumatra in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century wherein Sulu was gradually integrated into the empire. The early Sulu's political system like the governance of the rajah, traditional practices and belief like *panulak bala*, the value of *bakti*, the Batawi and Kuput attire, and folktale like the story of Sumayang Galura are among the cultural influences of the Sri-Vijaya empire. The Chinese culture had also left an influence as a result of long trading contact with the Chinese traders in early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

However, with the coming of Islam in 1250 A.D. the Sulu *adat* underwent transformation from Indian-centric to Islamic-centric. Foremost, Islamization started with the belief system of the Tausug and followed with the Islamization of many cultural practices such as the marriage ceremonies, death celebration, and other way of life.

*Adat* is the interpretation of the Tausug about the teachings of Islam, and consequently becomes the standard way of life of the Tausug. It is a form of social control that regulates the behaviors and action of the people. It is a set of standards by which the people view the world. The important role of *adat* is giving guidance to the society. It is the basis of the Bangsasug to exercise their right to self-determination. It is the people's distinct symbol for nationhood.

*Adat* is also the integrating factor that holds the society together. It persists and continues to further enrich itself with the teachings of Islam. Any nation whose *adat* is weak will surely perish. *Adat* will always become stronger because it is the need of the people who continually socialize themselves into it. Family education, *masjid*, *madrasa*, schools are effective instruments for socialization.

From the Tausug point of view, *adat* refers to the customary practices of the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu, which include belief, morality, ethics, arts, laws and government, which have been developed for a long period of time and become the social guidance of the society. It is an integrating factor as the people preserved and transmitted it from generation to generation.

*Bahasa* (language) is the greatest symbol of *adat* because the meaning of *adat* is embedded in the language, the medium by which the people understand

each other. *Sinug* is an example of the *bahasa*. It was the language of the ruling elites and owing to its dominant use it became the *lingua franca* of most diverse ethnic groups in Western Mindanao and Sulu archipelago until to this day. This *bahasa* is still preserved and used as medium either in public speech or literary. A Bangingi proverb says: “*Bang alungay na bahasa alungay na bangsa.*” “Once language is dead, it affects the nation.”

Under the *Shari’ah*, *adat* or *urf* is considered a source of law although inferior to *ijma* (consensus) but superior to *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). It is considered silent *ijma* of the community. Not all customs of the *jahiliyah* period were abrogated by the Qur’an. For instance, it was the custom of the Arabs before Islamic period to impose the following as forms of punishment: stoning to death, cutting off the hands of the thieves, flogging and payment of *diyat* or blood money. (Doi, 1986: 50)

The evolution of *adat* into the national culture of the Bangsasug could be traced back 500 years ago before Islam reached Sulu. Trading and migration were the two factors that helped the formation of the Bangsasug *adat* along the influence of the Indian culture. Indian influence filtered first into the Malay world in the 7<sup>th</sup> century then into Sulu archipelago.

In Indonesia, practically all people had been Indianized. One of the glaring evidences of the Indian influence was the rise of the Sri-Vijaya Empire in early 7<sup>th</sup> century, then followed by the Majapahit Empire in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. These two Empires became the instrument for the spread of the Hindu and Buddhist ideology across the sprawling islands of Southeast Asia. Indeed, the whole Philippine archipelago was not spared from the influences of the said two successive Empires. Our ancient social structure where the rajah, *pandita* or the *datu* as being the elite of the society, was actually the remnant of the Indian influence.

In the Bangsasug homeland, Indian influence was very much dominant in political organization and religious belief. At that time the rajahs were the ruling elite. They were the sovereign leaders of each village. They also functioned as chief of the religious ceremonies. They formulated and imposed laws upon the people.

*Guru* played also vital role in the overall guidance and education of the society. They were the teachers and advisers of the rajahs. Under Indian culture, the people should revere their leaders by paying *bakti* and special homage to them. Until to this day, this practice is still observed by the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu. During ancient India, the *sudra* (lower caste people) was always destined to serve or make *bakti* to the *Brahman* or the upper caste people. The *Brahman* were always the leaders and guide of the society.

Similarly, the *kadatuan* in Mindanao and Sulu were always held as leaders by the people. Why this was so? Because at that time only the *kadatuan* who had access to learning and knowledge of *adat*. Most people were ignorant of the traditional laws and various ceremonies. Whereas the family of the *kadatuan* always maintained the teaching of the *adat* to their children.

The *kadatuan* before were actually the forerunners in the long evolution of *adat*. Their behaviors, practices, ethics, morality and policies had made the development of *adat*. The *kadatuan* had both created and imported *adat* and later

became the cultural pattern of the succeeding generation. *Adat* as embedded means the formation of *adat* was the direct impact of the vision of the succeeding *kadatuan* who ruled from generation to generation. Then, in the course of historical development *adat* became further developed and spread nationwide.

*Adat* as imported is referred to adaptation of some norms and values of other societies. *Panulak bala*, death celebration for the dead and governance of the maharajah are all Indian origin, which then imported into our society. Likewise, today, we can see foreign values and norms being imported by the modern Muslim elites. The use of Western dress by the bride and the groom during the marriage ceremony, the so called “sponsors” who are invited to grace the occasion and even the adoption of English language in our legal and academic transactions are among the examples of imported values which now gradually reinforces if not endangering the present day *adat* of the Tausug.

In the past, however, with the introduction of Islam in 1250 A.D. (circa), *adat* underwent transformation from Indian centric or traditional centric to Islamic. This was the era *adat* began under the influence of Islam. Elements of un-Islamic practices in *adat* were gradually replaced or Islamized or re-directed to the spirit of Islam. The greatest triumph of Islam was the dissipation of the root of *shirk* or polytheism from the *adat* of the Bangsasug. Only some people who are slaves of the misguided *jinn*s still hold on to the old superstitious belief.

### **Cultural Change in the Tausug Society**

There are several forces that influenced the cultural change in the Tausug society. These are the natural environment, wars, ideology, man’s own family or social structure, the culture and the technology which provides comfort to life. But, the most crucial factor is the ideology, which the person learns from his parents during his early childhood growth. From age seven to adolescent is the period where the child forms his *aqida* or worldview. The Prophet said: “All children are born *fitrah* or Muslims but it is their parents that make them either Christians or Jews.”

However, the greatest factor which sets the road of negative transformation in the Bangsasug *adat* was the annexation of the Bangsasug homeland to the political geography of the Philippines since its independence in 1946. With the imposition of new superstructure upon the Bangsasug homeland, *adat* loosened its influence, particularly when the Sulu Sultanate could no longer wield effective sovereign power. Eventually, in this transformation the traditional leaders such as the *panglima*, the *maharajah*, and the whole *kapala* of the *Ruma Bitsara* were overpowered by the new leaders under the new political arrangement. The decline of the traditional leaders from political scene not only endangers the future of *adat* but at the same time provokes the birth of the Moro secessionist groups to launch a radical action.



## Social Structure

Social structure is the hierarchical arrangement of the members of the family; each of them has an assigned role to fulfill in order to maintain mutual cooperation and respect. Tausug society is patriarchal in which the father is the head of the family. The mother is the responsible of child rearing up to socialization of her children into the culture of the society. Moral values are usually taught in the family. Key-decision rests on the father or the well-grown son, however, consultation is to be done among the members. Generally, male assumes the heavy work; female for the light work or domestic activity.

*Pagbakti* represents the vital norm in the family and organization to which every member is ought to observe. Obedience to parents, helping the mother or giving financial assistance to parents are called *pagbakti*. Rendering service to one's *guru*, teacher, and leader is also part of *pagbakti*. Family is stable if all members render *pagbakti*.

*Kamataan* or family is the smallest unit of the Tausug social organization. The father acts as the head, bread winner and guide for the whole members. The mother takes care the domestic activities including child-rearing and moral teaching. All children are ought to assist or help in the realization of house activities.

The immediate relatives are known as *liud* (clan or family), which is composed of *usba* and *waris*. *Usba* represents the relatives from the father side, and *waris* for the mother side. Under the Tausug social law, the *usba* has a great role in the upbringing of the child. Any decision concerning the welfare of the ego like marriage and other problems shall always emanate from the *usba*. The *waris* is there only to assist.

### 3. THE RISE OF BANGSASUG NATION

In the pre-Islamic era, there was no yet nation, there was no yet a centralized government, and there was no yet system of religion. With Islam the people learned how to build a nation, and how to organize a government. The concept of *hula-bangsa-agama* is an example of the influence of Islam during the evolution of the Bangsasug nation.

#### Historical Origin of the Tausug

The Buranun were the earliest inhabitants of Lupa Sug. They were descendants of the Muslim missionaries and the ruling elites at that time. Owing to their Islamic knowledge and culture, the Buranun won the respect from other tribal people who later embraced Islam. They became the rallying point of solidarity as they gained upper hand upon the emerging political system, the governance of the *raja*. The Buranun foresaw the continuing increase of the Muslim population in this period and realized the need to consolidate the different ethnic groups into a Muslim nation.

The tribal peoples who accepted Islam in the hands of the Buranun were the Tagimaha from Basilan, Baklaya of Kalimantan and the Sama. Around 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Buranun leader led by older Rajah Sipad inducted the tribal chieftains, traders, farmers and fishermen who used to come to Buwansa for trading to join the establishment of founding a new Muslim nation. They came up

with the peace pact which gave birth to the Tausug or the Bangsasug as new Muslim nation. Tausug consists of two words, Tau and Sug. Tausug literally means people of the current. In legal terminology, Tausug are the groups of people who come together for establishing a nation and a political institution.

The word *ta* is the slang of *taga* equivalent to auxiliary verb has or have. While *u* means head. In short, tau is a person endowed with intellect and influence. In Sinama language tau refers to person that has intelligence and influence. Sug, on the other hand, has the meaning beyond sea current. It refers to seat of political power. Therefore, Tausug were the people who exercised power owing to their mastery of the sea and the land as well. But, to whom this word Tausug is referred to? This is referred to the leaders who formed the peace pact as mentioned above as they exercised power and had the mastery of the sea. By virtue of this pact the descendants of those leaders became Tausug and called their land as Lupa Sug encompassing the area of what is now called the Philippines. For more than five hundred years the Tausug exercised power and domination of the whole archipelago because of their mastery of land and sea. For example, other nations were used to call their leaders as Lord of the Arabian Sea, the Mistress of the Mediterranean Sea, etc. Arabs call their leaders as *rais* which means head. In the Qur'an, there was a great leader who used title Zul Qarnain which means Lord of the East and West.

At that time, the nation that has the mastery of sea, controlled the vast territories. Britain, France, and Spain excelled in colonizing many nations of the world because of their mastery of the sea. They had the knowledge of navigation and advanced political system. Similarly, the Tausug had also advanced knowledge on navigation as well as government – the edge that made them powerful over other tribes across the country from the southern islands up to Luzon. With the increasing power of the Tausug, the entire inhabitants finally embraced the nationhood of the Tausug.

Years went on, the term Tausug evolved into a political concept encompassing the whole aspirations of diverse groups. It is not a tribal concept. It was projected as national identity of all inhabitants of the whole archipelago from North to South. This was an illustration of the intellectual capacity of the founders of the Tausug nation. The people of the present Philippines have actually of the same political origin, the Tausug.

The Tausug today are those people inhabiting the Zamboanga peninsula, the Sulu archipelago, Palawan and North Borneo regardless of their ethnic origins. The Sulu Sultanate still consider these people in these areas as its *ra'ayats*.

#### **4. THE RISE OF THE SULTANATE OF SULU**

The rise of the Sultanate of Sulu in 1450 A.D. was the culmination of the Islamization of Sulu that started in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As soon as Islam spread to a distant land, the *Makhdumin* or the Muslim missionaries also introduced the concept of *sultaniyyah*. The idea was to solidify the unity of several people and communities under single political entity. By nature, the political system of Islam requires *khilafa* or *sultaniyyah* to enforce its laws. This was the logic that led to the rise of different *sultaniyyah* in different places of Southeast Asia such as in Southern Burma, Sumatra and Java of Indonesia, Malacca and the

rest of sultanates in the nine states of Malaysia, Brunei in North Borneo, Patani in Southern Thailand and also the birth of the Sultanate of Sulu in 1450 A.D, and the Sultanate of Buayan and Sultanate of Maguindanao 55 years later from the rise of the Sulu Sultanate.

Clearly, the rise of the Sulu Sultanate was part of the process of Islamization of the entire Bangsasug society. It was not accidental. It was part of the determined program of the early Arab missionaries. *Sultaniyyah* was seen as a guarantee for the survival of the infant Muslim communities in Sulu and the rest of Mindanao. It follows, therefore, that the strengthening of the *sultaniyyah* in Muslim Mindanao is necessity.

*Sultaniyyah* constitutes the main political norm of our ancestors. This is our highest political achievement. It is our bridge to the glorious past. It is a fundamental component of the Bangsasug society. The Sultanate of Sulu was not a success for the present Tausug alone. It is the success of the whole Muslim ethnic groups in the Sulu archipelago and Zamboanga peninsula. The Sama, the Yakan, the Kalibugan, the Jama Mapun, the Palawanin are all *gausbawgbug* and were at the forefront in the early years of the formation of the Sulu Sultanate. A great number of them became top officials of the *sultaniyyah*.

The Sultanate of Sulu was actually a multi-ethnic *sultaniyyah* founded on the basis of *asabiyya* or tribal solidarity. It is a legacy for the Bangsasug in their claim as the first people to organize a nation and a central government in what is now the Philippines. The Sulu Sultanate was the first island empire in this country. It has a territorial jurisdiction encompassing Zamboanga peninsula, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan. While Sabah came under the sultanate rule only in 1608 when the Brunei sultan ceded Sabah to Sulu Sultanate as a gift for the latter's help to crush the local revolt in the Sultanate of Brunei.

Sharif al-Hashim Abubakar was the first sultan of the Sulu Sultanate. He founded the *sultaniyyah* in 1450 after the death of his father-in-law Rajah Baginda a Muslim prince from Minangkabaw, Sumatra. The Sulu Sultanate is patterned after the Ottoman Empire. Its power is divided into three such as the *Ruma Bitsara*, the *Kawazilan* and the *Paghuhukuman*. The *Ruma Bitsara* represents the parliament of the sultanate. It is headed by the *panglima mahabassar* or speaker of the house as in the Western polity. The *Kawazilan* being the executive body is headed by the sultan. At the height of its power, particularly during the reign of Sultan Muizz ud-Din (1748-1763), the Sulu Sultanate has 10 *Diwans* or departments. Each *Diwan* is headed by the *wazir* or minister. While the *Paghuhukuman* or the judiciary is headed by the *Imam Muallim* or the *qadi*.

The history of the Filipino people is not complete without touching the historic role of the Sulu Sultanate. The political foundation of Mindanao and Sulu rest on the *sultaniyyah*. It was the Sultanate of Sulu, which led the struggle against Western colonialism. Had not the armed resistance undertaken by the Sulu Sultanate, the Muslim communities in Southeast Asia could have been uprooted one after the other. The Malay world was saved from the tide of Christianity 400 years ago; perhaps the Sulu Sultanate frustrated the Spaniards from their political dream to bring Southeast Asia under their sphere of influence.

### **Structure of the Sultanate**

The power of the Sulu sultanate was divided into three separate entities: the *Ruma Bitsara* (State Congress), *Kawajilan* (Executive body) and *Paghu hukuman* (Judicial body). The *kawajilan* is headed by the sultan. He is the highest chief executive of the state. He also served as both head of government and the state. He performed both political and religious functions.

At the bottom of the *kawajilan*, the power is devolved to the *panglima* (mayor) and the maharajah (village leader). The *panglima* is the head of the *binaybayan* (province) and the maharajah for the *lungan* (village). The common officials of the *lungan* were the *nakib* (police head), imam, *khatib* (preacher), *bilal*, guru and *laksamana* (runner/liaison officer).

The *Ruma Bitsara* (State Congress) is an institution representing the assembly of leaders. During the meeting, the sultan is the presiding officer. However, the management of the day-to-day of the *Ruma* is entrusted to *Kapala Mahabassar* who is also the speaker or head of the *Ruma*. The vital function of the *Ruma* is to elect successor in case of death of the sultan and to recommend policy that affects the interest of the state.

*Paghu hukuman* is the highest judicial body of the sultanate. It is sometime exercised by the sultan owing to his vast knowledge of the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law). The day to day affairs, however, was in the hands of the *qadi* (judge).

According to Thomas Kiefer an American anthropologist who did a study on the Tausug culture in the 1950s, the central functions of the state is duplicated at different levels of the traditional political system. The primary rights associated with the system were as follows:

1. Right to perform legal functions
2. Right to appoint and regulate religious officials
3. Right to control territory
4. Right to control subject people
5. Right to collect tribute and legal fees
6. Right to control markets, and
7. Right to mediate warfare and feud.

## **POLITICAL PRINCIPLES**

The political principles of the Sultanate follow the doctrine of Islam which kept together the political structure of the state. Traditionally, only the person who is grounded with the political principles of Islam, is eligible to become official of the Sultanate. Political principles are very important for the officials of the sultanate because no political system can be managed effectively without strong adherence to its own principles. The guiding political principles of the Sultanate are as follows: 1). Sovereignty belongs to Allah alone, 2). Observance of *shura* in all decision-makings, 3). Application of Islamic justice, 4). *Ta'at amir* or obedience to the leader, 5). Promotion of *Ukhuwwa* or Islamic brotherhood, and 6). Power and duties are *amanat* or trust of Allah.

## **Qualifications of the Sultan and his Leaders**

According to *adat* law, any person who wanted to become leaders of the community must possess the following qualifications:

1. *Bangsawan* (Royal lineage). The candidate for leadership should be *datu* who is descendant of the first Sulu sultan.
2. *Ilmawan* (Knowledgeable of *Shari'ah*). A leader should possess knowledge of *Shari'ah* and good wisdom.
3. *Altawan* (Wealthy). The leader is someone who has material or land possessions which are readily dispensable for the benefit of his community and people, if it is needed.
4. *Halimawan* (Courageous). The leader should be brave and bold enough to uphold justice and defend the state, and
5. *Rupawan* (Uprightness). The leader should be just and kind.

#### **FACTORS PUTTING THE SULTANATE OF SULU ON STEADY DECLINE**

Retracing and learning the great past are the way to understand the present. By knowing the present helps us to predict the future. The Tausug past history was rich and colorful. Their history has also been of wars which were not their own making but an imposed war to destroy the Sultanate.

It was a fact that the main objective and strategy of the Spanish colonization be it in Latin America or in Southeast Asia were always to destroy political institutions of a given nation. No colonization succeeds if the local political institutions like the sultanate had to paralyze first through successive military attacks as what the Spaniards did to the Sultanate of Sulu. Although the Spaniards failed to conquer the Sultanate but their 30 years occupation of Daira Sug known as Jolo had a ripple effect contributing to the steady decline of the Sultanate.

The Sultanate of Sulu was important as it was the symbol of sovereign power of the Tausug. The Tausug survived the three hundred years of national resistance was due to their Sultanate. Islam reached Mindanao, Visayas and Luzon was due to the Sultanate. Sulu was able to establish an island empire was due to the Sultanate.

On the contrary, the fall of the Sultanate or the steady decline of the Sultanate for the last 100 years was also the factor that caused the social stagnation of the Tausug as a nation. The question therefore which every Tausug should raise, why the Sultanate lost its power in the face of the disintegration of the western colonization in the 20th century?

The answer to this question is this. The Tausug political analysts in general classified the factors that brought about the decline of the Sultanate of Sulu into two. These are the internal and external factors. Among the internal factors that weakened the Sultanate were 1). The failure of the Sultanate to institutionalize the educational system. Throughout the Sultanate period, the system of learning was limited only to *lihal* approach. The Sultanate had never initiated something a political academy to provide training for the bureaucrats and the political leaders. 2). The second factor was the disunity and power struggle within the royal families. Some elites became collaborators with the Spaniards and later with the Americans. This was the action that kept many imam, *panglima* and maharaja stayed away from the sultan. 3). The third factor was the taking for granted the threats of the presence of the colonizers in northern territory as well as the presence of the Dutch in Indonesia and the British in Malaysia.

The above internal factors had taken much the political energy of the Sultanate of Sulu. Improving the welfare of the masses at that time could not be possible because there was no educational institution. There was actually a widespread of ignorance and illiteracy among the Tausug during this colonial period.

If the Sulu Sultanate was like a ship, the first defect started with the engine and the loss of compass to point out the direction and destination. While crossing the ocean en route to its political destination, suddenly the ship was hit by huge waves of Spanish invasion for 15 times. This is what we meant the external factors that turned the Sultanate upside down. At the approach of the modern time which began in the 18th century, the Spaniards modernized their weapons and their military vessels. The *paraw* of the Tausug and their *kris* could no longer match the steamboats and the advanced weapons of the Spaniards.

The political situation of the Sultanate of Sulu at this period had even worsened with the entrance of the Americans into the political scene. Through series of colonial policies and betrayals of the Tausug elites unnoticedly the Sultanate territory became illegally integrated into the Republic of the Philippines on July 4, 1946.

Today, what is in the horizon that can give hope to the Tausug. There are two legal options available for the Tausug today. The first legal option is to accept the national integration program of the Philippines. There are two ideas behind national integration. The first idea is that the Manila government granted all ethnic groups equal opportunity in terms of education and work in the government without discrimination. The second idea comprises assimilation and acculturation of all national minorities to the mainstream Filipino society. However, this second idea is bad for our Islamic faith.

The second legal option for the Tausug is to demand the creation of the Sulu Archipelago Autonomous Sultanate Region for the Tausug to restore the dignity of the Sultanate of Sulu.

In conclusion, the factor of decline of the Sultanate of Sulu is more on internal upheaval among the Tausug rather than the external factor. *Tawba* is the solution for this problem. If the Tausug especially the leaders will ask *tawba* for their sins Allah will guide them out of their present political predicament.

## **5. STRUGGLE AGAINST WESTERN COLONIALISM**

After the capture of Jerusalem in 1192 A.D. by Sultan Salahuddin Al-Ayyubi, the Muslim army expelled all European crusaders from the Holy Land. Once again, peace in the land was restored in all areas of the southern cost of the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey down to Syria and the whole countries of North Africa. The Muslim navy once again became the guardian of the Mediterranean Sea. Since then, the European power could no longer penetrate the Muslim world from the western side because of the strong presence of the Muslim naval force in the Mediterranean Sea.

It took centuries for the European power to rise beginning with the victory of Spaniards over the Muslims in 1492 A.D. Not long after in 1521, the king of Spain sent expedition to explore the eastern route. It was this expedition that

brought Ferdinand Magellan and his men to the Sulu territory after crossing the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans for about a year. Ferdinand Magellan, however, died in the battle of Mactan in the hands of the Muslims led by Lapulapu who at that time was *panglima* or governor of the area. With the defeat of the Spanish expeditionary forces, the remaining Spaniards left the area and proceeded with their voyage to the west until they reached back Seville, Spain in September 1522. It was only then the Spaniards realized that the world is round after the Spanish expeditionary forces circumnavigated the world.

Magellan's voyage gave idea to the Spaniards about the countries of what is called now the Latin America as well as the Far East. In 1542, the Spanish king sent another voyage led by Roy Lopez de Villalobos but failed to establish a colony. Finally, in 1665 Miguel Lopez de Legaspi arrived into the Sulu archipelago and managed to conquer the Sulu's central and northern territory within a few months. Since then, the Sulu-Spain war began and ended on May 1899. Dr. Cesar Adib Majul described this war as the Moro wars which are divided into six stages as follows:

The first phase of the conflict between the Spaniards and the Muslims in the Philippines archipelago began with the battle of Manila which was the city founded by Rajah Sulayman. With the help of the people of Cebu, the Spaniards defeated Rajah Sulayman and captured Manila which later became the seat of the Spanish colonial government for more than 300 years. The first stage of the Moro Wars ended with the Spanish invasions of Brunei in 1578 and 1581. The Spaniards destroyed the city of the Brunei and plundered its wealth.

The second phase of the conflict extends from the first Spanish attempt in 1578 to make vassals the sultan of Sulu and the sultan of Maguindanao to the failure of the Spaniards to establish a permanent colony in Maguindanao in 1596 and 1597.

The third stage of the conflict (1600-1634) began in a Muslim offensive against the Spanish presence in the North and ended in a Spanish counter-offensive. The Maguindanaon under Sultan Buisan contested the Spaniards in collecting tributes in central Visayas. In 1599, Datu Salikula of Maguindanao and Datu Sirungan of Buayan led 50 vessels with 3,000 warriors and attacked the coastal towns of Panay, Negros and Cebu. They captured 800 Bisayans who were supporters or fighters of the Spaniards. By 1600, Datu Salikula launched another attack to Ilo-ilo and captured 800 captives. Datu Buisan with his 50 war vessels also launched an attack to Dulag, Leyte in 1603. His forces burned down the church and the town and took up hundreds of captives. By 1604, the Maguindanaon attacked again the North and collected tributes from the people as symbol of the Maguindanaon Sultanate sovereignty. By April 1608, Rajah Buisan and his nephew the Rajah Muda led another attack of Leyte and Samar. It was at this time Rajah Buisan addressed the people of Leyte. The Maguindanao offensive ended with the signing of the March 1609 peace pact between the Spaniard governor general and the two Muslim leaders namely Datu Buisan and Datu Sirungan.

After seven years from the 1609 peace pact between the Maguindanaon and the Spaniards, the Sultanate of Sulu began to attack the Spaniards settlement in Visayas. In October 1616, Rajah Bungsu known as Sultan Mawalil Wasit

ordered his forces composed of 80 *paraws* to attack the shipyard at Pantao, Camarines. However, in 1624 the Sulu embassy led by Datu Atsi arrived in Manila as gesture for peace coming from the Sultanate of Sulu. Unfortunately, Datu Atsi was humiliated on his way home. This had prompted a response from the Sulu Sultanate. In 1627, a Sulu fleet composed of 30 *paraws* and about 2,000 men led by Rajah Bungsu himself attacked the new Spanish shipyard in Camarines. The Spaniards retaliated by sending expedition to Sulu in April 22, 1628 composed of 200 Spaniards and 600 Indios. In retaliation to this, Datu Atsi led his men in 1629 boarding 36 *paraws* which attacked Spanish settlements in Camarines, Samar, Leyte and Bohol. The Spaniards also retaliated in March 17, 1630. They attacked Sulu with one galley, few junks, and about 50 *caracoas* with 400 Spanish and 2,500 native allies. In response, the Sultanate of Sulu and Sultanate of Maguindanao launched a joint attack with 1,500 fighters in 1634 aimed at the area of Dapitan, Bohol and Leyte. On the same year, Sultan Qudarat the son of Rajah Buisan also attacked the areas of Visayas.

The 4<sup>th</sup> stage in the Moro wars began approximately with the Spanish fortification of Zamboanga in 1635 with the aim of final conquest of the Muslim lands. For about three decades the Spaniards used Zamboanga as the launching pad for their attacks on the stronghold of both the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao. The Spaniards however failed to conquer the two great sultanates and forced to abandon Zamboanga in 1663 because of the threat of invasion of Manila by the Chinese leader from China known as Koxinga.

The 5<sup>th</sup> stage of the Moro wars was the armed response of the Sultanate of Sulu on the Spanish reoccupation of Zamboanga in 1665.

The 6<sup>th</sup> stage of the Moro wars commenced with the Spanish invasion of Sulu in 1851 and ended only toward the end of the Spanish rule in the Philippines. This invasion was led by Governor-General Antonio de Urbiztondo whose forces arrived Jolo in the last week of December 1850. Two Spanish officials came to shore to have talked with the sultan. Upon their return to their ship, the two Spanish officials reported that there are 10,000 forces ready for battle. The invaders sailed away and along the way they bombarded the Samal settlements in Tungkil, destroyed about 100 *paraws* and captured many civilians who were transported to Cagayan Valley. They also invaded Basilan and took control of the island trading. However, by the time their reinforcement arrived Zamboanga by the second week of February 1851, the Spaniards came back to Jolo for final invasion. The battle took place on February 27, 1851. The sultanate's forces suffered much from this attack and had eight cottas destroyed that forced Sultan Pulalun and his forces to retire to the interior. But, after four days the Spaniards withdrew for fear of the counter attack. Seeing the strength of the Spaniards and their modern weapons, the Sultanate of Sulu was forced to sign a Peace Treaty with the Spaniards on April 30, 1851.

Using the 1851 Peace Treaty, the Spaniards used the opportunity to strengthen their military garrison in Zamboanga and to expand their influence and control in the whole Zamboanga peninsula and Basilan in preparation for the final invasion of the Sultanate of Sulu. Ramon Martinez Vigil a Spanish priest wrote the theory of a just war. He exhorted the war against the sultanate as a just war, a holy war in the name of Christianity. The Catholic hierarchy promoted the just war



in order to drum more support of the people. It took 25 years for the Spaniards to prepare large army, logistics and support of the Christianized natives for the final invasion of Sulu. On February 21, 1876, the Spaniards composed of 9,000 troops led by Governor-General Jose Malcampo landed in Sulu. They were accompanied by hundreds of priest and nuns with the belief that the conquest of the sultanate was just a matter of time. The invaders used 10 steamboats, 11 gunboats and 11 transports which enabled them to dominate the sea. The resistance of the sultanate's forces lasted for four months until a Peace Treaty signed on July 22, 1876. For the battle of 290 years to capture Jolo, the Spaniard colonizers had at last succeeded to occupy Jolo for about thirteen years from 1876 up to 1889.

## **6. STRUGGLE FOR RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION (RSD)**

*Adat* as a way of life law is always the basis of the Bangsasug to assert their right to self-determination. It represents the interpretation of the Bangsasug about the teachings of Islam. *Adat* can be likened to a social glue that holds the society together. It requires a political machinery to implement its provisions in order to ensure the protection of human rights and dignity. It is said that if *adat* breaks or is forgotten, the whole nation will perish. People's history and values as well as their aspirations are the reflections of the people's *adat*. National existence of a people will find their meaning in *adat* or culture because *adat* is the epitome of freedom and human development. Development of *adat* is also development of the people and vice-versa. The opposite of human freedom is oppression. *Adat* will cease to function and develop if there is oppression in the life of the people. Because *adat* is a force for unity and is the expression of human freedom, hence the people assert their right to national self-determination. This right is recognized under the United Nations resolution of December 14, 1960 which states that "All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

An example of *adat* law is the doctrine of *hula-bangsa-agama*. This doctrine is the ancient concept of state of the Bangsasug visualizing the ideal state to be composed of *hula* (territory), *bangsa* (nation) and *agama* (ideology). *Hula* can be likened to a farm; *agama* is its garden and *bangsa* is the guard. None can exist without the other. These are the following principles of *hula-bangsa-agama*:

*Hula* is a basic requirement for any people to exist. It is one of the fundamental elements of state. But, without the control of *hula* or territory, national life is impossible. Because, the principal source of national life of any nation is derived from its own physical resources, ideological system like Islam that provides cohesiveness among the people, and the free exercise of its national sovereignty. Therefore, the defense of *hula* is indispensable. Experience world-wide shows that losing control over *hula* shall make national existence of any nation difficult. Without effective control of *hula*, the practice of *agama* becomes also difficult.

*Bangsa* is the guardian of *hula*, and the pillars of *agama*. *Hula* is meaningless without *bangsa*, and neither *agama* nor *bangsa* can exist without effective control of *hula*. However, *hula* and *agama* are only passive agents. It is the *bangsa* who will organize society, establish leadership, and government; exploit and develop the

resources of *hula*, and implement the command of *agama*. But any *bangsa* whose nationalism is weak, is subject to ruin. Nabi Muhammad (S.A.S.) said: "I bid you to do five things: to remain attached to the *jama'ah* or main body (of Muslims), listen to your ruler and obey him, and migrate (to other land when the need arises), and fight in the way of Allah. And he who detaches himself from the main body of the Muslims to the extent of one span of hand, he in fact, throws of the yoke of Islam from his neck, and he who calls with the call of ignorance, he is one from the denizens of Hell beyond doubt, even if he observes fast and says prayers and considers himself as a Muslim."

*Agama* is the basis of unity of the Muslim ethnic groups in the Sulu archipelago into a distinct *bangsa*. Only *agama* can provide strongest bond among the Muslim ethnic groups within the Bangsasug homeland. The most reliable bond is expressed in the call of Islam: "*Wa'tasimu bihablillah jami'an wa latafarraku ..*" Hold fast, all of you together to the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves. Abul 'Ala Mawdudi considered this *ayat* as the basis of Islamic state. Like a rope, Islamic state is an encircling wall giving protection for its citizens. Anyone who turns back from the rope shall forever suffer from misguidance, and divine wrath of Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala*.

*Agama* is the only ideological system which projects global brotherhood for all Muslims throughout the world. Only *agama* can provide truth, and divine guidance. Ibn Khaldun said: religious coloring does away with mutual jealousy and envy among people who share in a group feeling and causes concentration upon the truth. Then, people with religious color come to have the right insight into their affairs, nothing can withstand them because their outlook is one and their object one of common accord. They are willing to die for their objectives."

"But, when hearts succumb to false desires and are inclined toward the world, mutual jealousy and widespread differences arise. But, when they are turned toward the truth and reject the world and whatever is false, and advance toward God, they become one in their outlook. Jealousy disappears. There are few differences. Mutual cooperation and support flourish. As a result, the extent of state widens, and the society grows." (Khaldun, 1975: 320).

*Agama* is the foundation of *hula* and *bangsa's* leadership. It is said that if *agama* is left upon the leaders, *agama* will become the foundation, and the guardian are the *bangsa* together with their leaders. Anything which has no foundation is destroyed. Anything which has no guardian is also destroyed. In reality, *agama* is the real foundation of the society, and the leaders are the real guardian.

*Hula-bangsa-agama* is the triangular basis of unity of the Bangsasug people. With this, they can create political will to press their demand for right to self-determination. The spirit of *hula-bangsa-agama* should become a means of political shield from the forces of acculturation, assimilation, and integration to other nationalism and ideologies other than Islam.

*Hula-bangsa-agama* is the common cause of every individual Muslim person who inhabits Mindanao and Sulu. The idea of common cause is the desire to establish a society based on justice and guidance of *agama*. It is therefore imperative the strong participation of the *ulama* and intellectual in the formation of effective governance and economy of the *hula*. It is also imperative that every *ra'ayat* should push for unity of the *bangsa*. The entire *ra'ayat* should unite behind national cause – the cause of *hula-bangsa-agama*. Every *ra'ayat* should support, sympathize, and identify with the

national cause – the liberation of *hula* and *bangsa* from all forms of oppression such as spiritual oppression, intellectual oppression, and physical oppression.

The concept of *bangsa* should be utilized only as instrument for national unity of the diverse peoples in the Sulu archipelago. It must not be used as an ideology to replace Islam as the ideological force of the Bangsasug society. There is no such national ideology in the eyes of Islam. Nationalism is only a means to bring Islam as an ideological force. This means our national cause is not espoused in the way – “right or wrong, my country.” It is not loyalty to one’s nation with hatred to other nations. Our national cause is the cause of Islam.

Bangsasug nationalism has to be guided by Islam. It must not exist as a threat to other nations. It has to be promoted and strengthened so that the Bangsasug will gain the respect of the community of nations, particularly within the Muslim *Ummah*. With their national unity, the Bangsasug can press their claim and defend themselves effectively from the menace of big nations. Big nations have always the tendency to dominate weak nations. Even big nations within the Muslim *Ummah* do the same. The situation of the Kurdish and the Bangsasug is a good illustration. Turkey, Iraq and even Iran are not happy to see a rising and strong Kurdish. The same story of Malaysia and the Philippines where these countries are not happy to see a rising and strong Bangsasug. Hence, the oppressed nations must strengthen their national unity so that they can effectively protect their own interests. The Bangsasug in particular should not abandon their past history because their heroic resistance against colonialism was an exemplary achievement in the history of *jihad*, which is a potential source of inspiration for the present quest for freedom and peace.

The *hula* which we claim as our homeland, is a gift of Allah to us. With our acceptance, the land automatically becomes a trust upon our nation, but with the condition we have to make use of the land a better place to live. Now, mischief is widespread in our land. “Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the work) that the hands of men have earned. That (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds in order that they may turn back (from evil). (Qur’an, 30:41). This mischief or *fasad* as the Qur’an describes is the handiwork of both the Muslims and non-Muslims. Following the *tafsir* of the *ulama*, *fasad* is the main tool used by the enemy to destroy the Muslims. *Fasad* takes in many forms including *riba*-oriented institutions like banks, cooperatives and pawnshop; promotion of sex slavery and prostitution, spreading violence and *fitna*, establishing political system other than Islam, business cartel and direct invasion of Muslim land. Thus, the Qur’an calls all the Muslims to eradicate *fasad* from the face of earth. The oppressed Muslims can only survive in the midst of *fasad* except to rise up. The Qur’an has promised: “And We wished to be gracious to those who were being depressed in the land to make them leaders and make them heirs.” (Qur’an, 28:5) In this case, we need to prove ourselves before Allah that we are worth for the trust. We are only required to do true worship of Allah and to do righteousness. An ancient saying says: “righteousness exalts a nation.”

It is in this context that revival of the Sultanate of Sulu becomes essential to the exercise of right to self-determination. Islam, sultanate and people can be likened to a tent. Agama is the roof; the pole is the sultanate, and nation is the roof and the pegs. None will do without the other. Our ancestors built the Sultanate of Sulu in order to preserve Islam. Islam is like a farm in which a fence

is needed to protect its plantation from the straying animals. This fence is referred to the sultanate. It is only through the power of the sultanate that Islam can be fully implemented. This was the reason for having the sultanate in order to solidify the unity of several people and communities under a single political entity.

Clearly, the rise of the Sulu sultanate was part of the process of Islamization of the entire Bangsasug society. It was not accidental. It was part of the long-term goal of the early Arab missionaries for they knew only through the sultanate that could guarantee the survival of the infant Muslim communities in Sulu and the rest of Mindanao. It follows therefore that the re-strengthening of the sultanate in this present time is necessity.

Sharif al-Hashim Abubakar was the first sultan of the Sulu sultanate. He founded the sultanate in 1450 after the death of his father-in-law Rajah Baginda a Muslim prince from Minangkabaw. Before the rise of the Sulu sultanate, the governance of the *datu* was the earliest form of government among the people in Mindanao and Sulu. The *datu* and the *sharif* represent the ruling group. They were the people who were best educated in Islam and owing to their knowledge the power of the government was used to be entrusted to them. But not with today, most royal heirs are object of obloquy. They are powerless, less educated and economically marginalized.

Until to this day, the Tausug still pin their hopes on the royal people being an heir to royal authority. The achievement of our forefathers, such as the Sulu sultanate always remains a living inspiration. According to Alexander Dalrymple a British official based in Madras, India who was in Sulu in 1761 and 1764 described the territorial jurisdiction of the Sulu sultanate as so extensive, which includes the Northwest and Northern part of Borneo from Keemanes northward with the islands of Palawan, Banguay, Balambangan, etc. to Sulus.

The Sulu sultanate is a proof that the Bangsasug were once a sovereign nation. It is an indisputable fact that our society had reached the level of statehood. There were 36 treaties that the Sulu sultanate had entered into with other nations such as Spain, Great Britain, United States, Netherlands and China. These are examples demonstrating the sovereign status of Sultanate of Sulu. Our sultans became sovereign leaders because they implemented the Qur'an, collected *zakat*, punished the wrongdoers, maintained peace and order and above all they exercised royal authority over the people.

The history of the Bangsasug is not complete without touching the historic role of the Sulu sultanate. The political foundation of Mindanao and Sulu rests on the sultanate. It was the Sulu sultanate which led the struggle against Western colonialism. Had not the armed resistance undertaken by the Sulu sultanate, the Muslim communities could have been uprooted one after the other. The Malay world was saved from the tide of Christianity 300 years ago, because the Sulu sultanate spoiled the Spanish conquest of Southeast Asia.

But, what gave strength to the Sulu sultanate? It was due to the *Diwan* or code of laws based from the *Shari'ah*. The *Diwan* consists of five rudiments such as the 1. court procedure 2. regulatory power 3. social laws 4. remedial laws and 5. inheritance. Indeed, the *diwan* is a living proof how our sultans enjoyed and exercised their sovereign power in this land. The existence of the *diwan* attests the kind of civilization that our forefathers had achieved. We had indeed the Sulu sultanate with its own laws that holds the Tausug society together.

#### **IV. IMMEDIATE ACTION: THE SULU STUDIES**

The establishment of the Institute of Sulu Studies is an immediate action for the Tausug leaders to consider. Academic institutions in particular have the primary task to spearhead in the preservation of the cultural heritage and its transmission to the next generation. Culture is the foundation of peace. If culture is left without guarding it and sustaining its own development, it will cease to function as a way of life, and this marks the beginning of cultural breakdown. A society with weak culture shall suffer from anarchy and disunity. The thread that strengthens the society is the culture itself. It is the culture of the people that holds the society together. Sulu studies is the key to keep the Tausug culture from deteriorating.

It is more than ever the need to institutionalize the Sulu studies as the Tausug society is plunged into chaotic transformation. We need Sulu studies in support to the present effort of different sectors making Sulu to rise into strong society.

Most countries have their own respective institutes which concentrate on area studies. We can always come across with the so-called Malay studies, Chinese studies, Nigerian studies, American studies and many others. Area studies are established in a country having diverse populations like Indonesia and United States, India and the Philippines. In Mindanao, there is an Institute of Bangsamoro Studies located at Cotabato city.

Today most leaders in the aforementioned countries are products of area studies. To cite a few, we have former Malaysian minister, Anwar Ibrahim who has master degree in Malay studies, Senator Francisco Pangilinan whose college degree is Philippine studies from the University of the Philippines.

Our concept of the Sulu studies is aimed at enrolling the young generation into the Islamic ideology and the historical legacies of the founding fathers of the Sulu empire. Sulu studies is envisioned to produce a new breed of Tausug leaders and to promote Islamic leadership orientation. This will concentrate on four areas:

1. The Bangsasug society and culture
2. The principles and structure of the Sulu sultanate
3. Ethnic relationship within the Sulu archipelago
4. External relations with the Muslim ASEAN nations, China and the Arab world, and
5. The Sulu sea and its environment.

Each of this area is to be led by competent people who are grounded with Islam and the Tausug culture. They will build data bank, facilitate seminar, symposia, and write about the Sulu history.

As a gigantic program, Sulu studies require the pool of resources from humans, financial to material. Support of the grassroots is therefore indispensable to make this vision into reality. Sulu studies will be the principal means toward accelerating the Tausug intellectual revolution.

We will soon organize a brainstorming session with key Tausug leaders and intellectuals on how can the Sulu studies be institutionalized? This post is made in order to solicit ideas from the public. We need more inputs coming from the people who are concerned with the future of Sulu. In particular, we want also to listen to reactions and feedback of the Tausug who live abroad.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Sulu history is the foundation of the Philippine history but visible only if the whole Filipino people will look history beyond Spanish period. Seeing the Philippine history from this lens will put the Bangsasug historic role in the struggle against western colonialism at the center of historical presentation. The rise of the Sulu nation in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is central to the overall Philippine history as the first line of historical development. The second line is the Filipino nation which began only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after 300 years from the first line. The six divisions of Sulu history attempt to connect the past with the present with the objective to clear the Sulu history from blur and biases so that we can see the future of Bangsasug as a nation.

Therefore, the knowledge of Sulu historiography is indispensable in writing the history of Sulu. Without the knowledge of Sulu historiography, every Muslim student shall be misled by the notion that the Bangsasug was only a local history despite the fact that Sulu was the first independent state to rise in what is now the Philippines.

The greatest turning point in the history of the country as well as in the whole of Southeast Asia was the introduction of Islam to Sulu in 1250 A.D. The period of the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century is very significant as it has become the basis of periodization of Philippines history into the following: 1). Pre-Islamic Era - Before 1250 A.D. 2). Islamic Era - 1250 to 1450 A.D. 3). Sultanate Era - 1450 to 1936 4). Colonial Era - 1565 to 1946 5). Republican Era - 1946 to present.

In the pre-Islamic era, there was no yet nation, there was no yet a centralized government, and there was no yet system of religion. With the introduction of Islam, the people learned how to build a nation and how to organize a government. The birth of the Bangsasug nation was actually connected to the introduction of Islam in 1250 A.D.

Organizing further the history of Sulu however should be backed up by an institution. The creation of the Institute of Sulu Studies can serve the purpose. Our concept of the Sulu studies is aimed at enrolling the young generation into the Islamic ideology and the historical legacies of the founding fathers of the once mighty Sulu empire. Sulu studies is envisioned to produce a new breed of Tausug leaders and to promote Islamic leadership orientation.

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