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South and South-east Asia, 1945–1979: Problems and Policies

B. N. Pandey

(SOUTHEAST ASIAN REPRINT)

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First edition 1980

Southeast Asian Reprint 1982

Published 1980 by

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

London and Basingstoke

Associated companies in Delhi Dublin

Hong Kong Johannesburg Lagos Melbourne

New York Singapore and Tokyo

Filmset by Vantage Photosetting Co. Ltd.

Southampton and London

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Pandey, Bishwa Nath

South and South-East Asia, 1945–1979. –

(The making of the 20th century).

1. South Asia – Politics and government

2. Asia, Southeastern – Politics and government

I. Title

II. Series

320.9'54'04

JQ5

ISBN 978-0-333-04978-5

ISBN 978-1-349-16381-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-16381-6

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**For
my daughter Tara**

Preface

This work is a modest exercise in comparative contemporary history. It takes the whole of South and South-east Asia as a unit to study certain common problems which the fourteen countries of this region have faced since their independence, and the policies they have adopted to resolve them. It focuses mainly on political problems and policies, and poses and suggests answers to some basic questions. How differently were these countries conditioned by the differences in their colonial legacies? For what reasons did all the countries adopt democratic institutions at the beginning of the period? How and why did democracy come to be discarded by most of them? What indigenous surrogates for Western democracy were evolved and with what results? Under what constraints has democracy functioned in Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia and Singapore? What are the factors which have threatened national integration and how has each country managed to deal with them? Why did the communist insurgencies fail, and why has constitutional communism not succeeded so far in capturing the central power in any country outside Indo-China?

This study also surveys the bilateral conflicts and wars over disputed lands, and investigates the nature of minority problems. It assesses the roles these countries have played, individually and collectively, in bringing to an end the era of cold war and confrontation, and in sustaining the present era of *détente* and co-operation. It ends with an enquiry into economic and social problems. Here it traces the progress made by individual countries in handling the harrowing problems of poverty and illiteracy, and suggests a tentative answer to the often-asked question: can the gap between the haves and have-nots of the world ever be closed?

So far, no general work of this kind has been done. Scholars have abstained, perhaps wisely, from including South and South-east Asia within the scope of a single enquiry. The first and so far the only work of any distinction to deal with contemporary South and South-east Asia is *Politics in Southern Asia*, ed. Saul Rose (London, 1963). It includes some excellent articles, but is limited in its scope in so far as it focuses only on political problems and excludes some

countries from its treatment. Besides, it was published as long ago as 1963, since which date much has happened in that part of the world.

There was thus no 'model' in the field from which I could find guidance. However, I have been fortunate in having as my friend and colleague Dr Malcolm Yapp, who has in recent years promoted the cause of comparative history. Throughout the time that this book was in the making, I derived inspiration and support from him. Though the views expressed in this book are entirely mine, Malcolm has read the chapters and saved me from making many technical errors. I take this opportunity of expressing my very deep sense of gratitude to him. I am also deeply obliged to my wife, Valerie, who, as usual, made it possible for me to write this book in peace and seclusion without ever losing the warmth and togetherness of the family. I am grateful to my publishers, particularly to Derick Mirfin, his successor, Sarah Mahaffy, and the general editor of this series, who have treated me with infinite patience and the utmost kindness. I would also like to thank Janet Marks for typing the text. Without her co-operation I would not have met the deadline.

June 1979
London

B. N. PANDEY